

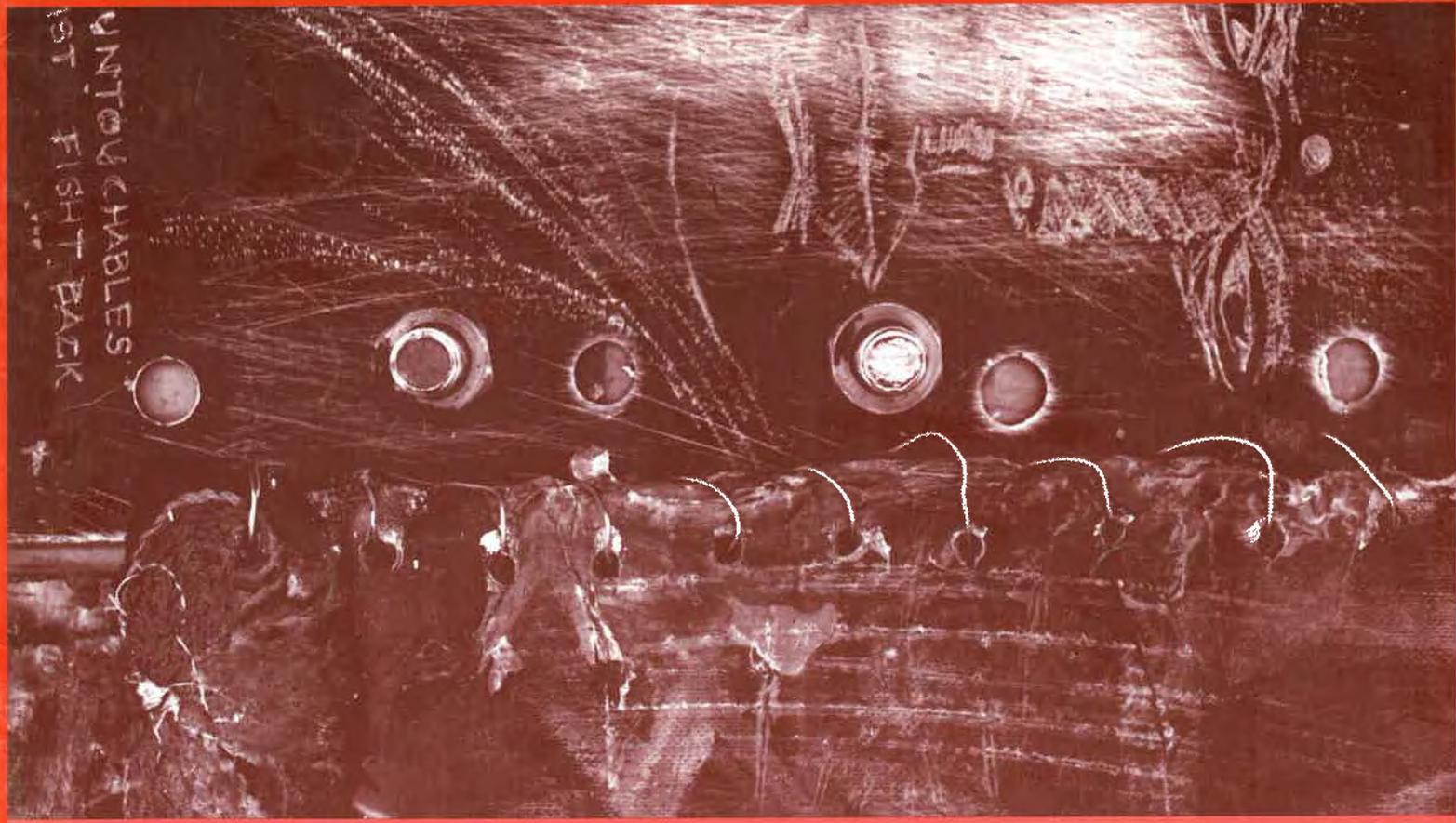


# BOTSOTSO

CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN CULTURE

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BOTSOTSO No 11

# IMMIGRANT AT HOME

by Sikhulu Lennox Mantyi



t this age of sixty years, with the free roving of the native people, I am obliged to tell tales, especially about my life experience.

Starting school in 1940 at the age of six years, I was informed by my mother to tell the mistress that I was born in 1935. To confirm the message a letter was written to the lady teacher. At the beginning I enjoyed school but in the course of time, I became weary and lazy of the mandatory lessons. Moreover, I was constantly beaten by the lady teacher. My parents also forced me to look after livestock on certain days. I passed standard four at the local primary school. For standard five and six my father sent me to Decolgne higher primary boarding school near Umtata in 1952. This was to avoid the influence of my local playmates, who were always disturbing my attendance to school as they were not going to school. They were enjoying a leisurely life, roaming the area as they pleased in winter, looking after cattle and sheep in summer.

In 1953 I passed standard six under the Cape Education Department. In 1954 I started junior certificate at St John's College, Umtata as a boarder. The three year course comprised forms I, II, III. It took me four years because I repeated form II. I was not a bright student.

I only passed by working very hard at my studies.

Unfortunately, towards the end of my final year in form III, in September 1957, senior students – mainly matrics – provoked a strike. They forced all the students at the college to participate. Those who tried to refuse were marked as people jeopardizing their lives. All students at the boarding school joined in the strike. Even day scholars were told not to attend classes as the situation was heinous.

For that incident the college senate expelled some of the students. The majority were suspended until the following week, others until the following year. I was among those who were expelled.

Because of that event I decided to look for work and continue my studies by correspondence. I was eager to get employment in the golden city of Johannesburg. Under difficult restrictions of influx control and apartheid, as a black person, I tried strenuously to get to the city. By sheer chance, in January 1959, I received a contract from the district magistrate's office at Mqanduli to proceed as a migrant worker to work for the city council of Johannesburg. There were a hundred of us, a group of males of diverse ages and qualifications.

On arrival at Selby hostel we were allocated to various hostels in the city suburbs. I was to stay at Waterval hostel, which today is Santa hospital, between Albertsville and the then Sophiatown. For work I was assigned to Newclare cemetery to dig graves. In the allocation nobody was asked about his standard of education. Literates and illiterates were all

graded the same. In the cemetery our foreman was an old white man with no formal education. I reluctantly worked there for two weeks. The second week I tried every way to get a transfer from the cemetery.

I was transferred to the gas works at Auckland Park, though I was earning two pounds a week, which is now R5,10. I paid rent, bought food, clothing and travelled to work on that meagre income. Occasionally I sent some money to my mother at home through my father, who was also working in Johannesburg at Hubert Davies in Fox Street which now is Udaco at Tulisa Park in Germiston. I started a correspondence course for my junior certificate at Union College.

It happened in March 1961 that black employees were not paid their Easter holiday pay. At that juncture I approached the white supervisor with some of the workers. Instead of giving us a satisfactory explanation he insulted by calling us stupid black kaffirs. I was annoyed and led a delegation to the city hall, walking on foot to lodge our complaint.

When we arrived there we discovered that the supervisor had notified them by telephone that we were on our way. At the city hall we were welcomed by a native clerk, who took us to a white gentleman who received us with courtesy. First he gave us seats on chairs opposite his table and greeted us with respect. After we had stated our complaint he attempted to convince us with lies, saying in Xhosa: "Madoda, siyavakala isikhalo senu. Le nto ayenziwanga sithi ngabelungu abakhulu abaphethe imali abakhulu abaphethe imali. Kwaye futhi asinini nodwa abangahlawulwana le mali. Bonke abasebenzi abamnyama bakwamaspalata bayihlawulwanga. Ngoko ke ayikho thina into esinokuyenza, lalani ngenxeba madoda."

I was the only person able to speak English and Xhosa fluently. My colleagues were Vendas, Bapedi and Shangaans. I questioned the officer thoroughly, expressing our dissatisfaction, but could not get him to agree with us. In despair we left the office and went back to our place of work. We arrived there at knocking off time.

The following day I was transferred from my job to a lower, dirty, general one, without any reason having been stated. I asked the supervisor who was behind the transfer. He said: "Senior boss told me to do this." There was nowhere to appeal because black trade unions were prohibited then and were operating illegally. I went to do the job unwillingly. After a few days I decided to quit, hoping that I would be allowed by Native Affairs to seek work in other industries.

The second week I called at Johannesburg railway office. I heard that they were looking for people who had passed standard eight to train them as ticket examiners. Fortunately I was chosen along with other seven guys. We were given a note to take with us to Native Affairs in Albert Street. When we arrived there, we delivered it together with our dompasses to the native clerk who was issuing orders to people who were standing outside the offices. He told us to wait outside and he went into the offices with them.

At noon he came back for the third time carrying a bunch of dompasse, and called out the names. Among them he shouted my name. I responded by saying "yes" and went to

take it. Turning the pages I found that a permit had not been granted. Instead it had been endorsed with a red stamp: "You are not permitted to reside in the proclaimed area of Johannesburg, you are requested to leave within seventy-two hours." I had moved my place of residence from Waterval in the middle of 1960 to my aunt's house in Orlando. I decided to go back to it, and found myself an immigrant at home.

What really agitated me was to see white and coloured people travelling as they pleased without any fear of being asked to produce a *dompas*. Driven by hunger I emerged from hiding and tried to walk in corridors to seek temporary jobs in town. That landed me in jail on several occasions for failing to produce my *dompas*. Black policeman who were hunting black people, demanding that they produce *dompasse*, arrested me. Even people who were permitted to reside in the city were not quite safe. Their *dompasse* had to have the following stamps: permit to work in the area, monthly employer's signature, annual tax payment and a lodger's permit. If one of the above requirements was not met the person was liable to be arrested.

After that I was the victim, getting in and out of jails, having committed no offence. At last I was escorted from Newlands back to my district, handcuffed, and taken to the police station. We met a black policeman in the office with Mr Makhapela, my escort. The police warned me not to go to Johannesburg again without a permit. Such permission was unobtainable except to proceed under contract as a migrant worker. That was the end of labour service in the metropolis of my country, where I had been enthusiastic to make my living. The only chance that was left was to take a contract from Teba recruiting depot to work on the mines and be paid the lean wages which were disbursed to native labourers.

## I WILL MOVE WHEN I WANT

by Mbongeni Khumalo

**B**rand-new day, brand-new morning; the weather was pleasant. It was the first day of the year 1999. Thul'ebona rose from the sofa on which he had slept uncomfortably the whole night and hastened to the front yard. There he found paper tubes of exploded crackers. He knew he would find them, for he had heard them being exploded at midnight. He heard only too well the voices of the sadistic conspirators (the lady next-door and girls from the neighbourhood). The explosion had woken him up from his dream land. Needless to say, he knew he was the target of affront. "He thinks he's smart! Plus we don't want Zulus in this neighbourhood!" So said Kedebone, the lady next-door. The crackers were fired from midnight till dawn, just to kick the hell out of him. He stood staring at the exploded crackers, arms akimbo. He shook his head and felt sorry for his petty neighbours. "What have they achieved by this? What have they achieved save to perpetuate the futile conflict between me and them? What have they?"

He kept on staring at the paper tubes as though he had not anticipated them. Sadness filled his heart. He strongly felt that all that Kedebone had said was nonsensical. "If smartness means to insist on my right to be different, I admit I am smart! If smartness means to prefer the company of the library to that of the shebeen, then I admit I am smart! If smartness means refusing to associate with drug-addicted debauchees (who happen to be related to my persecutors), I admit I am smart... As for the assertion that because we are Zulu-speaking we must move, that argument is hardly sensible enough to hang a fly upon!" Thul'ebona and his family had suffered much persecution and isolation in the Sotho section of Klipspruit. Yet the ambivalence in Thul'ebona's mind prompted a desire to

move and to stay at the same time. The desire to move was not because of social pressure, but because his family was unwilling to give him moral support against the tyranny of the society. Even if he could endure the rudeness and opposition of the whole of mankind, he would still not enjoy being let down by his own family.

Yesterday morning he was arguing with his elder brother over a pint of inkomazi sour milk. "How greedy of you to consume my sour milk without even asking me!" As usual, his only response was to pull a face, so weary is he of petty arguments. He customarily responds to conflicts with diplomatic neutrality.

Thul'ebona had become a stranger to everyone. A few weeks back he was working in the warehouse of one of the leading retail stores; he felt as alienated as ever. He tasted the vulgarity of the labourers at close range. Their pettiness was close and inescapable, so much so that he had to settle for a *modus vivendi*, agree to disagree on a separate togetherness. He had to listen to their ribakdry and at the same time make a conscious effort not to hear it. He proved to have the energy and resistance required; he worked with them, yet he stood alone.

His fellow workers interpreted his behaviour as arrogant. They failed to sense that his aloofness was the outcome of a long, painful existence, painful because no kindness had ever been shown to him since he was born. Not that he was snobbish really, he had simply assimilated the unkindness of society, which made him perceive everything with cold indifference. "Uzenz'usisi, ama-chips awuwadli, I-fish awuyidli...kahle-kahle yini oyidlayo? (You think highly of yourself, you don't eat chips, you don't eat fish ... actually, what is it that you eat?)" a fellow worker asked. Calmly he responded, "Look, brother, it's not that I don't eat fish and chips. I simply don't eat pork, and I shun whatever has

been fried in the same cooking oil in which pork has been fried for both health and religious reasons." "Oh-h-h!" another exclaimed, "I also don't eat pork, but I don't think food which has been fried in the same pan as pork is disagreeable to eat." Thul'ebona stopped his tongue from retorting to this counter argument, for he knew the ignorant are incapable of advancing a sound argument; when they are cornered, they simply resort to clamour.

With each day that passed Thul'ebona became more misanthropic. In the neighbourhood he was always seen walking alone with a book for company. He walked alone, lived alone; he did everything alone. "Yilez'ezithand'uk'unda kakhulu! Bheka khona manje, izincwadi seziyamhlanyisa! (He is the studious type! Look now, books are driving him insane!)" he heard a group of smokers gossip as they puffed a dagga roll. In spite of hearing them, Thul'ebona never bothered to confront them (nor did he fear them); such remarks were too banal to move him. He himself was conscious of his mental deterioration, the kind that is conducive to lofty poetry. True, he wrote great poetry, almost every day. He even carried a pen and a notebook wherever he went, for most of the poems came to him in awkward places. He was often seen scribbling as he walked. This made everyone damn sure he was mad.

More and more he felt a need to banish himself from society. But this was futile, because he had never belonged to society in the first place. He had always been a lamb among goats. Even if he were to forsake the community, to which he had never belonged, there was virtually nowhere to go. He had to make a resolution, no matter what: "I will move when I want!"

## ALL OF YOU

by Peter Vakuntu

One afternoon, after receiving letters from their headmaster suspending them from school because their fees hadn't been paid, three teenagers named Oupa, Kupa and Mampa decided to do something about it. They agreed to look for a means to make

money in order to pay for their schooling.

There was a baker, Jonas Seabela, who bought firewood in order to bake bread. The boys went up to him, explaining their problem and offered to sell him firewood. Jonas accepted their offer and promised to buy for as long as they were able to supply.

The next morning, the boys were on their way to the forest. It was a long way from the village. To kill time, they agreed to tell stories.

Mampa told a story about a penis tree which he had heard from his grandpa.

"In our Shangaan culture, when a boy is born, a tree is planted in the yard," said Mampa.

"What type of tree?" the others asked curiously.

"The penis tree, Vuka-vuka in Tsonga."

"What... what for?" Kupa wanted to know.

"To control the growth of your penis. Some substance from the tree is injected into your body. As a result, your penis grows at the pace of the tree."

"What if the penis tree continues to grow? Will your penis continue to grow as well?" Oupa asked.

"No, once your parents are satisfied with the size of your penis, they chop down the tree and your tool stops growing."

"But, suppose after planting the vuka-vuka, a rainstorm came at night and washed the tree down the river. What would happen to your penis?" Kupa questioned.

"And even worse, what if the river carried the tree far away and threw it on a fertile river bank somewhere and the vuka-vuka continued to grow and grow?" Oupa asked.

"Good question! If that happened, how would my parents stop the growth of my penis, seeing that they wouldn't know where the tree was?" Kupa asked.

Mampa's eyes widened and he touched his own penis, probably wondering if his runaway father had remembered to chop down his vuka-vuka.

"Honestly, buddies, I've never thought of that. I'll ask my grandpa next time I visit him."

When it was Kupa's turn to tell a story, he talked about an old woman aged 80, who was so mean that she wouldn't even offer you a cup of ordinary water to drink.

"Mma Reneiloe was a terrible woman," Kupa said.

"How so?" the others asked.

"Would you imagine that this old woman would hide her food under the bed each time she was eating and heard a knock on her door?"

"I think that's shameful, especially for a woman her age. I believe that mothers should be kind and generous," Mampa said.

Then it was Oupa's turn to tell a tale.

"Once upon a time, the king of the sky gave a feast to which he invited all the birds," Oupa began.

"What was the feast for?" Mampa cut in.

"To celebrate the beginning of the new year."

"And you say all the birds were invited?" Kupa asked.

"Yes, all the birds. In fact, it was a feast for the birds."

"So even the bat was invited?" Mampa asked.

"Yes, indeed. And you know what happened to the bat?"

"No, tell us," the others answered.

"The bat had no feathers to fly to the sky."  
 "So what did he do?" they asked curiously.  
 "The bat is a very clever bird, believe me. He went from one bird to another crying and begging for a single feather from each one."  
 "Did they give him one?" Mampa asked.  
 "Yes, of course. Birds are very generous creatures. In the end, the bat's body was covered with feathers and he flew to the sky for the great feast. And d'you know what happened in the sky?"  
 "No, no, tell us," the others shouted.  
 "When all the birds were assembled, the king of the sky went from table to table asking their names and shaking hands with everyone. And when he came to the bat, d'you know what he told the king?"  
 "Not at all, please tell us."  
 "Bat, he said, is called ALL OF YOU."  
 "Eee, eeeh, what a name!" the others mocked.  
 "Don't laugh," Mampa said. "Bat had a good reason for choosing his name."  
 "Really?"  
 "Oh, yes. When it was eating time, the king called his servants and asked them to serve food for his guests. And to the surprise of all the birds, each time a servant came with food, he announced this is for ALL OF YOU. And it was pushed over to the bat."  
 "Aah! Aah! So the bat ate all the food?" Kupa asked.  
 "Yes, he ate all the food, drank all the wine and fell asleep. And while he was still sleeping, each bird plucked off the feather he'd given to the bat and flew away."  
 "Tcho! Tcho! So what did he do when he woke up?" Mampa asked.  
 "He screamed, and hung from the roof of the sky with his claws, looking down to see if he could spot his companions. But they had all gone. And that's why the bat still hangs upside down to this day."  
 "I hope the bat learned a lesson," Kupa said.



## Apologia

forgive me for i dont enjoy staring at things forlong  
 anymore  
 than you  
 do  
 forgive me for the times that i look down on  
 you  
 you  
 forgive me for the things that i have come awayfrom  
 having to had not  
 had to enjoy looking for  
**give me** one good reason to forfuckinggive anyone of you  
 for what we have  
 done



## Dunn Khaya

I should Know  
 have I not been to your ancestral home  
 along the moat of the Southern River  
 strung we have walked the shallows  
 each in our shadows past  
 wetting our dredds on opposite ends  
 Have we not stolen from each other?  
*me casa e su cetra..*/ soaping the shores  
 in stranger colours than these  
 Sharing impossible gifts across  
 the bridges we came  
 torches and brands in hands on hearts  
 On open flowing waters run  
 off facing slopes  
 I should Know our valleys are one  
 Our story a crossing of oceans  
 our promise the parting of Canaan.  
 I should Know –  
 Severence in a clarity comes closer  
 than truth and a unity in an urn of  
 Remembrance.

RICHARD FOX