

WRITING INVISIBILITY

CONVERSATIONS ON THE HIDDEN CITY

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FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID HARRISON

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Foreword

Tanya Pampalone
and Darryl Accone,
Mail & Guardian

When the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand approached the *Mail & Guardian* about this project — an e-book that would attempt to cover the subject of “the invisible city” and those who live in it — we jumped at the opportunity. It was a way for us, as a publication, to explore cities in ways that we don’t often have the time or resources to do.

The timing was perfect. Migrancy had been a topic we had been planning to tackle in various ways — what with Marikana and the 2008 xenophobic attacks so fresh in our minds; it is a subject so integral to what it means to live in contemporary South Africa. Most exciting, though, was the ability to offer writers the chance to dig into a topic; to spend the time and the words they needed and are all too often denied in the fast-paced, occasionally word-deprived digital world that is increasingly making up much of modern journalism.

It was an opportunity to tell stories in a deeply reported, nuanced way; a way that was long on form not just for the sake of spilling words on to a page, but also as a way of truly exploring, introducing rich characters and satisfying, slow-moving scenes that would keep the reader engaged all the way through, and all the better for it.

Choosing the writers was a collaborative effort — several were regular *M&G* contributors, including one our

own reporters, Kwanele Sosibo, and others were brought into the group through a vetting process that took into consideration a mix of skills — journalistic as well as academic — and topics that would take us from the slums of Nairobi to the port of Cape Town.

A team of experienced editors was chosen — Barbara Ludman, Shaun de Waal, Phillip de Wet, copy editor Pat Tucker and proofreader Maureen Brady — as well as the two of us spearheading the project with the team at ACMS. Pulling it all together in the end were the still and video photographers who collaborated with the writers so the visual impact could be as strong as the text. Our internal *M&G* team, including Madelene Cronjé, David Harrison, Oupa Nkosi, Delwyn Verasamy, Lauren Clifford-Holmes and Demelza Bush, together with Nick Kozak in Kibera, were able to accomplish just that.

The result, we think, is a solid attempt to explore the invisible, to take a subject that might normally sit quietly in an academic environment and thrust it into the public domain in a narrative in which it can live a deeper, richer, more accessible life. We hope you agree. ■

Introduction

Jackee Budesta Batanda,
Caroline Wanjiku Kihato and
Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon,
African Centre for
Migration and Society

Writing *Invisibility: Conversations on the Hidden City* is a journey into the spaces of the city often bypassed in public debate and public storytelling: the shipyard, the slum, the wall, the marketplace, the church, the mine and the rooms of sex workers.

Eight writers and journalists from South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and the United States have contributed stories drawing on themes within social science research. These stories cover a range of topics from immigrant African sex workers in Belgium to patterns of urban survival among Tanzanians in the Durban Point area, the story of a bookseller in Nairobi's Kibera slum, urban prophecy among immigrants in Johannesburg, how immigrants turned an empty square into a vibrant flea market, how marginal South Africans in Cape Town resist cultural oblivion and a tale about the security of tenure of miners who worked in Marikana.

The e-book — stemming from a collaboration between the University of the Witwatersrand's African Centre for Migration and Society and the *Mail & Guardian*, and supported by the Max Planck Institute — aims to bring to the fore the importance of linking narrative non-fiction and social sciences. Social scientists were invited to respond to the narratives at a workshop at Wits University in June 2013. The book is an attempt to display how narrative writing and the social sciences can complement each other, how

their ways of writing and thinking overlap and where they depart. It is an effort to bring the sometimes overly academic study into a more accessible realm with the use of storytelling, character and movement. The academic responses are included here both to illuminate the narratives and to interrogate the project itself — its contradictions and limitations, its own invisible elements.

Invisibility — as emerged from the discussions — is not the same as marginality, poverty or vulnerability, though it overlaps with them. The lives of politicians or police may be invisible to the public while the lives of the poor remain very much exposed. Invisibility can be used to hide or repress the adversity and suffering of city life by denying certain groups opportunities to participate meaningfully in public debate and decision-making. Yet it can also be a form of power for marginalised groups. It can be a strategy to evade detection: for example, undocumented migrants may wish to remain invisible from police or immigration officials, or graffiti artists to make their message public while remaining invisible themselves.

Invisibility may also refer to the occult or spiritual elements in city life. In Filip de Boeck's classic work, *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City*, "invisibility" stands in for the occult or spectral elements of the city; the peculiar play between what is seen and what is unseen but spoken of or whispered. Yet the invisible is not simply the secret or occult: it may be the everyday or the banal that is not given recognition in the public sphere.

The conversations here are extensions of the conversations that take place in the city, that are written on the city — on its walls, surfaces, shores and boundaries — but that are rarely acknowledged by those in power — be they politicians, property owners, executives, or editors — as expressions of life and thought deserving of recognition and reflection.

Hence, the conversations revealed in *Writing Invisibility* are not just about making visible what is unseen but about questioning the ways in which certain groups and ways are life made invisible. What is invisible to some may

be perfectly apparent to others. The conversations are as much about the ways things become hidden in the city, and from whom, as about unearthing secrets. Through narrative and analysis we aim to chart the lines between the visible and the invisible.

Using the format of the e-book in collaboration with the printed newspaper poses new challenges and questions. We are providing something that is freely available but still has limitations — particularly in terms of those who can access the technology required to download and read the book. The internet is another public sphere that is visible to some and invisible to others. Our challenge here (and we hope you, as the reader, will join us) is to experiment with the form and to open new lines of sight and new conversations about the city. ■

Contributors

JACKEE BUDESTA BATANDA is a Ugandan-born journalist and writer. Her short stories have been published in various anthologies, including *The Thing that Ate Your Brain*, *Holding on to the Memories* and *Dora's Turn*, among others. Batanda's stories have won awards, including the Commonwealth Short Story Competition, and have also been shortlisted for the Macmillan Writers Prize for Africa. Batanda has written for *Foreign Policy*, *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Latitude News*, *The Global Post*, *The Star* (Africa edition), the *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Vision* and *Sunday Monitor*. In 2006, Batanda worked as a peace writer at the Joan B Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego. In 2008, she was awarded a research fellowship with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town. She has been writer-in-residence at Lancaster University and was the international writer-in-residence at the Housing Authors and Literature Denmark in 2010, where she commenced work on her novel, *A Lesson in Forgetting*. She was received a Ugandan 2010 Young Achievers Award and in 2012 was a Elizabeth Neuffer Fellow, based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for International Studies. She was featured in the London *Times* alongside 19 other women shaping the future of Africa; that same year she was also a finalist in the 2012 Trust Women journalism Awards.

VE FAIRBANKS's sketches have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy* and other publications. She covered the 2008 presidential campaign for *The New Republic*, where she was a staff writer from 2005 to 2009. In 2009 she won a two-year writing grant from the Institute of Current World Affairs to write about the Afrikaner and received a Fulbright grant to write about aspiring black farmers in rural Limpopo. The book of

these stories, entitled *The Inheritors*, will be published by Simon & Schuster in early 2015.

CAROLINE WANJIKU KIHATO is a visiting researcher at the school of architecture and planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2011, she received a MacArthur grant on migration and development and spent a year as a visiting fellow at the Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Her career has involved both teaching and conducting research in the academy and the nonprofit sector in South Africa. Between 2006 and 2013 she worked for Urban LandMark as its Southern African programme co-ordinator. She was previously a policy analyst at the Development Bank of Southern Africa and a senior lecturer in the school of architecture and planning at Wits. She also worked for six years as a policy analyst at the Centre for Policy Studies. Her research and teaching interests are migration, gender, governance and urbanisation in the Global South. Kihato has published widely on urbanisation for both academic and popular readerships. She is the co-editor of *Urban Diversity: Space, Culture and Inclusive Pluralism in Cities Worldwide* (Johns Hopkins) and author of *Migrant Women of Johannesburg: Everyday Life in an In-Between City* (Palgrave Macmillan and Wits University Press).

TARYN JEANIE MACKAY is a writer, scholar and cultural activist who focuses on the role story can play in healing and socially transforming communities in the global South. She completed a bachelor of social science: gender and politics at the University of Cape Town in 2004. In 2012, she graduated from the University of Witwatersrand with an honours degree in journalism. During this time she was invited to present her research paper at the International Association for Media and Communication Research-

ers conference in Istanbul, Turkey. She was awarded the Anthony Sampson grant for writing, which saw versions of her story “Beautiful, Radiant Things” published in the *Mail & Guardian* and the New York-based *Liberator* magazine. She is now studying for her master’s in journalism at Wits. Since its formation in 2003, she has played a leadership role in Imbawula Trust, focusing on Kgantsa Ho Ganye, a community arts project growing a media centre at Thabisang Primary in Johannesburg. Originally from Cape Town, she lives and works in Orlando West, Soweto.

FILLY MARGARETTEN is an assistant professor of anthropology at Ripon College in Wisconsin, United States. For more than ten years she has been conducting ethnographic research among a group of older street youth occupying a condemned apartment building in the city centre of Durban. Margaretten has published her research in academic and popular journals such as *City & Society* and *Transition*, and is writing a book, *Street Life under a Roof*, which documents youth homelessness and “shelter-hopping” in South Africa. More recently, after living and working in Tanzania for five months, Margaretten has begun an anthropological research project with Tanzanian immigrants in the Durban metropolis.

KWANELE SOSIBO was born in Durban, where he began his career as a journalist at Independent Newspapers. In 2005, he joined the *Mail & Guardian*’s internship programme and worked briefly as a reporter between 2006 and 2008. Sosibo has also freelanced for publications such as *Rolling Stone*, *Y Mag* and the *Sunday Times*, writing mainly on music and the arts. In 2011, he was the *M&G*’s inaugural Eugene Saldanha fellow in inequality and social justice reporting, which is supported by CAF Southern Africa. His interest in social investigations and reporting

on mineworkers deepened during this period, especially after covering a story on the plight of workers who were still unemployed years after their dismissal for participating in an unprotected strike. He currently works as a general reporter for the *M&G*.

DR CHIKA UNIGWE is an award-winning Nigerian writer. She is the author of fiction, poetry, articles and educational material. Her latest novel, *Night Dancer*, was published in Dutch in 2011 (as *Nachtdanser*) and in English in 2012. She was recently awarded the Nigerian Prize for Literature for her book, *On Black Sisters Street*. She is on the TEDxEuston steering team.

MATTHEW WILHELM-SOLOMON is a researcher based at the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand. He has a doctorate in Development Studies from the University of Oxford completed on a Rhodes scholarship. At present is working on a book project on migration and the “regeneration” of inner-city Johannesburg, along with a study of migration and religion in Johannesburg as part of the Religion and Migration Initiative (RMI) at the ACMS and funded by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. The research for this article was conducted with the assistance of Melekias Zulu, associate researcher at the RMI, and with the support of Lorena Nunez and Peter Kankonde Bukasa, whose work on prophecy has informed it.



The seafarers

Eve Fairbanks

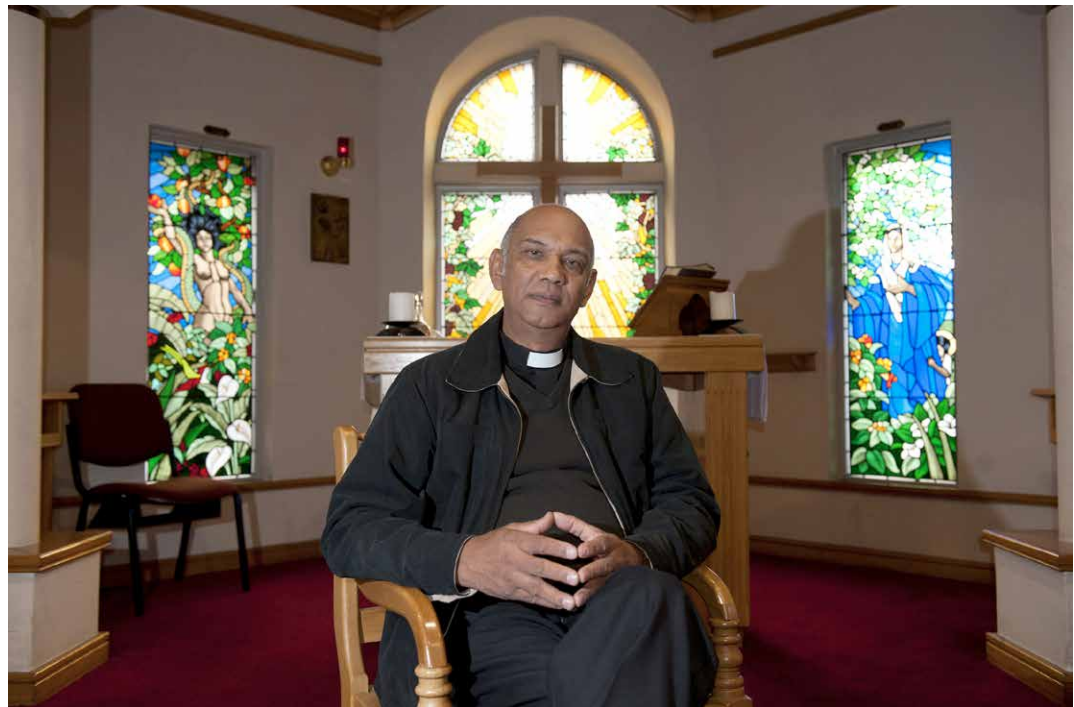
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID HARRISON



Foreign fishing vessels in Table Bay harbour.
Lawyer Alan Goldberg and ship inspector
Cassiem Augustus at the pier (previous pages).



Cassiem Augustus (above)
at the harbour and Chaplain
Charles Lange of the Mission
to the Seafarers (right).





Dockhands Joema Meyer
(above) and Arthur Jones
(right) at the V&A Waterfront.





hen I first moved to Cape Town, in 2009, I looked for people who could take me onto the water. I grew up near the Chesapeake Bay, on the Atlantic coast of the United States, around boats and crab-catchers; in my early adulthood I moved to Boston, one of the US's biggest port cities, where everybody — prince or pauper — owns a sailboat and digs for their own clams and oysters. I have always loved sailing and the ocean. It's why, in moving to South Africa, I at first chose Cape Town over Johannesburg.

But I couldn't find anybody who had a deep relationship with the sea. It was strange: Cape Town is South Africa's original port city, yet very few Capetonians seemed to have been on the ocean, other than to surf in False Bay. A few friends thought they knew of a group that went sailing out of Hout Bay, but they never had a trip planned when I called. The Royal Cape Yacht Club was said to have regattas, but when I showed up, the only old salt available to sail decided the weather was too poor. My barber, Emile, had coloured relatives who had once been fishermen, but they could no longer compete with big foreign trawlers and never went out anymore.

I came to think of Cape Town as a mountain city that happened to have a port, rather than a port city graced by a mountain. Everybody hiked. Very few sailed. Nobody knew sailors. It was at night, oddly, that I felt the presence of ships more than mountains. As dusk falls, Table Mountain, Lion's Head and Signal Hill fade to black and melt into the velvet of the sky. The ships lying in Table Bay harbour, though, undergo the opposite transformation: they're only faintly visible in the haze of the day, but at night their lights go on and they shine out of the dark water like a handful of stars.

Often I walked on to Lion's Head or to the top of a hill in Vredehoek and sat and watched them. They looked so peaceful and serene. I wondered who was aboard them and what life aboard was like. In time I moved away from Cape Town. But I vowed to return one day and discover life aboard those ships. I imagined them as romantic floating islands populated by sea-lovers with a life calling to roam

the oceans. In dreamier moments I even imagined the boats as a kind of flank of protectors. Their lights formed a loose and twinkly cordon around the shore of the city; they seemed to be sentries or night watchmen, buffering Cape Town from the black and tremendous sea.

It was four years before I came back. When I did, I found the lives of the seafarers aboard the foreign ships that call at Table Bay harbour were not what I had expected. Many are desperately unhappy; the sailors aboard the deep-sea fishing trawlers, in particular, see their boats as floating prisons. The ships I imagined as peaceful can in fact be volatile cauldrons brewing despair, anger, even violence: there are mutinies, there are knife battles. These past few months, as Capetonians have busied themselves fretting over Guptagate and the Democratic Alliance, the other, unseen world of the harbour has been embroiled in the virtual imprisonment of a dozen Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi seamen aboard an indebted Taiwanese tanker several kilometres offshore, and the trial of another dozen seamen, this time Indonesian, for murder.

Capetonians used to know the foreign seamen who passed through their port. The city, of course, began its life as a refreshment station for foreign ships. In the 19th century many of the businesses in town catered to boats: reprovisioning them, repairing them. In the first half of the 20th century dock labourers were Cape Town's largest group of unskilled workers. Even after World War Two, up until the 1970s, many Capetonians — particularly coloured men — worked at the docks, communing with the sailors who came through on cargo ships, naval vessels, or the giant Union Castle Line ships that ferried letters as well as passengers from English ports down to South Africa.

Joewa Meyer and Edward George Jones — who goes by his last name — were dockworkers in Table Bay harbour's postwar heyday. Jones, a giddy and impish 70-year-old, lived in District Six, and Joewa, the heavier

and more reflective of the two, lived in De Waterkant. Over fish and chips at one of the larney restaurants that now line Cape Town's V&A Waterfront shopping mall, the two men — now retired and living in the Cape Flats — reminisced about their salad days, when the Cape was still all about ships and sailors and dockside culture bled all the way up into De Waterkant and down into Woodstock.

Many families in the Bo-Kaap did a stint hosting a British sailor in their homes and in Woodstock practically every other house was a "*suikerhuisie*" — a "sugar house", staffed by prostitutes catering specifically to sailors. "We called them the 'nice-time girls'," remembered Joewa, smiling a bit sheepishly; some lucky ones even got invited to live aboard ships while the ships lay in harbour. Local boys rubbed elbows with sailors at the oodles of pubs that lined Lower Long Street and De Waterkant, and the locals got to know their cultures. "We were so proud of the black Americans" for shuffling off slavery, Jones recalled.

In part because of these experiences, "young coloured guys — oh! They all wanted to work by the sea." Jones and his buddies worked in "gangs" of 12 men responsible for loading by hand the huge holds of the cargo ships that called at Table Bay. Sometimes loading one ship took ten days. Technically they weren't supposed to carouse with the foreign sailors during this time, but in reality, lasting bonds were forged at the interface between the shore and the sea.

Joewa was part of a gang that scrubbed the docks of the northbound mail ships, which stayed in port for five days and carried up to 700 holidaying passengers as well as 200 crew. "I had so many friends aboard the mail ships," he remembered. He procured local dagga (marijuana) for the English crewmen, joined them in doing "naughty things" with Dutch cruise-liner stewardesses, and received for his efforts "a bottle of whisky or some English cheese and biscuits to take home for the kids".

Even for those Capetonians who didn't work there, the port was a focus of the city. Families, both white and

coloured, made a ritual of going to the docks to watch the mail ships sail, and curious schoolboys plied the docks on weekends with their bicycles. Brian Ingpen, now Cape Town's foremost maritime historian, credits these dock bike rides with instilling in him a love of the ocean and an appreciation for the cosmopolitanism of the port city. "You saw Oriental people eating with chopsticks and hanging the shark fins out to dry. The Russians had these huge trawlers." Some sailors even invited him aboard their boats to meet the captain. "Your whole knowledge was broadened by the people you saw. [The dock] was a floating window on the world."

But, starting in the late 1970s, explained Jones, "everything changed. Everything changed."

Three changes in the past few decades utterly transformed maritime culture worldwide — and thoroughly ended the engagement between Capetonians and foreign seafarers. The first was the rise of air travel. In 1971 the first Boeing 747 arrived in South Africa. Within a mere five years the era of travelling to and from South Africa by ship — a tradition since Jan van Riebeeck's days — drew to a close and, with it, the tradition of Capetonians turning out to meet the mail ships.

Second, ocean shipping became "containerised". Instead of packing cargo into unusual-sized boxes that had to be loaded by hand, shipping companies sealed it in big standard-sized shipping containers that could be loaded and offloaded by a mechanised crane. Increases in efficiency meant fewer dockworkers, fewer sailors, and less time spent in port. Sailors now had a day or two, or sometimes even less, to roam the Cape Town nightclubs and *suikerhuisies*, hardly enough time to form local bonds.

The attacks of September 11 2001 in the US put the final nail in the coffin of Cape Town's dock life. In the months that followed countries wishing to trade with the US had to implement stringent port security. Three-metre-high metal fences and barbed wire went up all around the docks and the days when Capetonians could wander down

and visit the boats were over. Sailors now need complicated permits to get out of the harbour and town-dwellers need equally complicated permits to get in.

And thus Cape Town's port was riven from Cape Town proper, as completely as a lifeboat whose rope to the main vessel is severed. The old lively interchange between sailors and locals ended. Capetonians, Ingpen believes, lost their sense of themselves as residents of a port city. Their gaze turned inward, away from the harbour.

It was a tragic blinding, because just as people looked away from them, the sailors who call at Cape Town were needing more attention. But because it takes place behind barbed wire, nobody sees the need — save for a band of Capetonians who have made it their calling to keep looking harbourwards. There's the chaplain who ministers to sailors, the lawyer who acts for them, the ship inspector who checks boat conditions. And there are still a few "nice-time girls" who know the sailors better than anyone else.

But even for those who still strive to look, obstacles to witness rear up at every turn. After our lunch Jones took me to a spot where he thought we could look at fishing trawlers, only to find a new barrier manned by a heavy-set, angry-mouthed female security guard in ostentatious badges and reflective gear. "On Sunday people used to walk here from District Six to look at the boats," he reminisced. He paused for a moment, then shook his head sadly. "Guess we can't do that no more."

Clues to life behind the barbed wire can occasionally be found in short items in the newspapers. *Cape Times*, May 7 2009: "Crew of vessel hijacked by fellow fishermen say they were ill-treated". June 10 2010: "No salary for six months at sea; foreign crew to return home amid abuse claims". March 10 2013: "An Indonesian merchant sailor was found dead on board a ship in Cape Town harbour."

Many of the stories deal with the travails of, in par-

ticular, Taiwanese-owned fishing vessels and with fights between men of various different Asian nationalities that crew them. Bangladeshis attack Chinese, Indonesians stab Vietnamese and — in one 2009 case that produced several newspaper articles — a group of ten Vietnamese sailors staged a proper mutiny aboard a fishing boat anchored in Table Bay harbour, tying their Chinese captain and first officer to the mast and taunting them with knives.

One chilly, misty, recent morning, Alan Goldberg and Cassiem Augustus began to demystify these turf battles for me. Goldberg and Augustus are an odd couple, who look out for sailors' rights: Goldberg, a jolly, bright-eyed, jubilant maritime lawyer, helps foreign sailors who berth at Cape Town bring legal claims against their employers, and Augustus, a thin, soft-voiced union representative, serves as the Cape Town ship inspector for the International Transport Workers' Federation's Seafarers Section, an international labour union that has represented sailors since the late 1800s.

They have been working closely on the case of the indebted Taiwanese tanker that has been placed under arrest in Table Bay harbour because its owners cannot pay their creditors. The 15-man Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani crew has been stuck aboard the tanker a few kilometres outside the port for more than a year and the sailors are not allowed to come ashore. For nine months they were paid — but then they stopped receiving wages. It became a scenario out of Kafka. "They became extremely edgy," lamented Augustus. "You had these seafarers virtually imprisoned aboard the ship, but even as they weren't receiving pay, they had to [do maintenance] work to keep their own prison afloat."

The morning I met Goldberg and Augustus they had gone to sit in on the trial of 10 Indonesian sailors who had murdered a Vietnamese sailor in December after a fight broke out at a sailors' nightclub. Neither man was directly involved in the case: the Indonesians had a defence lawyer supplied by the Legal Aid Board. But, through nearly two decades of working passionately together on behalf of sail-

ors, they have essentially anointed themselves the sailors' Cape Town guardian angels. They wouldn't miss a case like this.

Over coffee at a small café near the Cape Town Magistrate's Court, they tut-tutted about the sailors' plight. The men had been held for months without being brought to trial, they lamented. But more than that, they suggested it was actually the fishing vessel's owners' fault that conflicts arise among sailors of different nationalities.

"Seventy percent of vessels [that call at Cape Town] have a mixed crew," Goldberg said, as cappuccinos were delivered to the table. On some deep-sea trawlers 40 men, representing up to four or five different Asian nationalities, would bunk up together in a tiny space. Male territorial conflict is almost inevitable.

Why, I asked, do the owners create this situation?

"It's normally a recipe for disaster," said Augustus, the ship inspector. "But what owners want is to create confusion." Crews comprising a single nationality can band together more easily and protest against their working conditions, which are increasingly execrable. When nationalities are mixed, they can hardly communicate with each other, cannot act collectively, said Goldberg. They fight among themselves instead of against their employers. Divide and conquer.

Asian-owned fishing trawlers began to dominate the Cape Town port in the second half of the 20th century. At any time there might be between five and 25 in Cape Town harbour, along with a few mining ships, a few tugs and European tankers, and the odd naval vessel or Pirates-of-the-Caribbean-style "tall ship" catering to tourists.

At first the Asian trawlers were mainly Japanese-owned and staffed by Japanese crew. In the 1960s and 1970s the Japanese economy was growing at between 5% and 10%, fuelling an increasing appetite for freight trade and luxury proteins such as swordfish and tuna, the biggest specimens

of which are caught in the deep sea. As the Taiwanese economy surged in the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwanese ships got into the game, too.

Meanwhile, in the 1990s, Southeast Asia was entering a full-blown economic crisis. Rose-Liza Eisma-Osorio, a lawyer who works with Filipino fishermen from her base in Cebu City, the Philippines, explained to me that young Indonesian, Filipino, and Vietnamese men became available for work at a low price, particularly as their own coasts became overfished. It started to make economic sense for trawler owners to hire poor Southeast Asians to crew their boats, using local “agents” who would recruit men from rural villages or urban colleges with the promise of lucrative pay.

Most of these Southeast Asians have no training or prior experience at sea before they begin a two- or three-year contract. It’s generally agreed that working on a Japanese ship is OK: the captains are honourable, the food is decent, the crews are generally from the same country — typically Indonesia these days — and wages are paid regularly.

“If they’re on the Taiwanese trawlers, though, it’s hell.”

Those are the words of Patty Lange, a volunteer who has worked for 19 years at the Mission to Seafarers on the edge of the harbour. Part of a network of Anglican-affiliated missions at ports all around the world, the Cape Town mission is an airy, cheery, multilevel complex that provides ministry, classes, internet access, entertainment, and a full restaurant and pub to the foreign sailors who come through the Cape. Patty’s elegantly dressed brother, Charles, is the chaplain. It was his idea to serve beer. “There are those who will question why we have a pub,” he said, explaining that he wanted to provide a “safe space” as an alternative to the Lido — the sailor’s nightclub where the fight broke out that ended in a murder. “Jesus wouldn’t have turned water into wine if it was wrong!” he added, laughing.

The three of us sat around a polished wooden table in

the mission’s bookshelf-lined upstairs room, which also houses a foosball table. Both Patty and Charles said conditions for sailors aboard the fishing trawlers appear to be worsening. The Taiwanese trawlers are known as “cockroaches”, reflecting the dirty conditions aboard.

“The majority of people out there, they think, ‘Oh, a sailor? Wine, women and song!’” Charles said. “And it’s so untrue. I term it modern-day slave labour. I’m not afraid of saying that.”

The food provided is often just plain noodles or rice. On some boats, crewmen have to buy their own fresh water. They sleep in tiny, stacked beds and work for up to 22 hours a day. There may be one toilet aboard for up to 35 employees. Sometimes the only bathing water is seawater. If they make a minor mistake they are sometimes beaten by the captain or first mate. Occasionally the mission assists in flying back home a sailor too crippled to work.

According to Charles, “everybody” who walks into the mission’s door “wants to go home”. “It’s amazing to see the fear in their eyes when they tell you they don’t want to go back to their vessel,” said Peggy.

And, of course, there’s the confusion and tension of being confined with unfamiliar men from other nations. With their cramped bunks, difficult working hours and volatile mix of cultures, the boats are not too different from floating mine hostels, with all the mine hostels’ characteristic stress- and testosterone-fuelled social problems.

The difference is that sailors may be trapped inside their floating hostels for years on end, with the only way to escape being to ride off aboard the back of a dolphin. Fishing trawlers sometimes spend up to two months in port, but in between they can spend a year or more on the deep seas. One Indonesian sailor who passed through the mission recently said he had spent 37 consecutive months — more than three years — on the open sea. Not all on the same boat, he explained: at one point, he was “sold” from one vessel to another, but the transfer was done in the middle of the ocean.

There was a time when life at sea was, indeed, wine, women and song — or something closer to that vision. Jones, the retired dockhand who regaled me with tales of dock life in the heyday of Cape Town's port culture, saw it. After some years working on the dock, in 1969 he got the itch to go to sea. In the course of nine months he trained to be a ship's fireman. In the subsequent decades, he sailed to Jeddah, the Philippines, Morocco, Mexico, Barcelona, Italy, Glasgow, Liverpool and Brazil, where "the people were too beautiful!" He even sailed five times to Antarctica — "the most beautiful place I ever saw".

"I really loved the sea," Jones enthused, smiling at the memories. Being a sailor had been a powerful identity for him. There was a strong culture aboard the ships — every kind of sailor had his own nickname, from the "tiger" (the male nurse) to the "donkeyman" (the man who operated the boilers) and the "rats" (the new sailors) — and the sense of being part of a mystical brotherhood. The sailors caroused together during their long port stays and played with each other on deck, chasing their officers with the fire hose in joyous jest. He remembered that the whole crew had wept when one of their number had died of blood poisoning en route to Walvis Bay. In Antarctica, the sailors even "baptised" Jones in the frigid water — "it's like a whole lot of needles going in your body!" — and gave him a playful certificate initiating him into the "Order of Antarctic Fellows" presided over by a mythical "Emperor Neptune Rex".

The sailor's life Jones lived no longer exists, though. On container ships, the disappearance of the deck means the diminution of camaraderie aboard the cargo vessels. Fewer, shorter stops in port mean fewer opportunities for bonding and play. "On the sea it feels like you're working all the time," Jones explained. Changing global economics means sailors on the fishing trawlers don't get the kind of intensive training he received, making them seafarers only by temporary circumstance and not by trade. "Now it's contract work," said Jones. "And it breaks you into small pieces."

One Wednesday evening, I went to the Mission to Seafarers to sit in on a weekly "life skills" class offered for sailors by a 53-year-old Indonesian Bible teacher named Nimrot Rajagukguk. Rajagukguk, an earnest, slightly stout man in a windbreaker and round glasses, has lived in Cape Town with his wife and three children for 13 years. They are a missionary family, teaching at a Bible college in the city and helping to promote "spiritual upliftment" through the Students' Christian Organisations at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape. In 2011 the Indonesian consulate in Cape Town — whose new consul general, Sugie Harijadi, had taken a passionate interest in the wellbeing of Indonesian seafarers — asked him to start teaching classes at the mission twice a week. On Saturdays he teaches sailors about the Bible and on Wednesdays he and his wife teach them basic English, basic Mandarin — so they can communicate with their captains, gain "self-esteem", and how to be "sterner with their rights". He does all this on a volunteer basis. "My burden as an Indonesian is to see my countrymen really neglected," he told me.

The way the sailors are recruited in Indonesia particularly troubles him. "It's difficult to find a job in Indonesia. Because it's so difficult, it is easy to believe an agent who says he will pay you in US dollars." The Indonesian agents who recruit for Japanese- and Taiwanese-owned ships often quote a salary in dollars, suggesting to rural Indonesians unfamiliar with exchange rates that "you will be a millionaire". But in reality the money isn't a windfall — between R18 000 and R30 000 a year for back-breaking work — and it sometimes doesn't materialise for a year or more.

The 20 boyish-looking Indonesians who gathered for Rajagukguk's class were eager to share their individual tales, though they asked that their real names be kept private for fear of offending their employers. Arranging the mission's orange plastic chairs in a circle, they spoke to me through Rajagukguk of their recruitment and subsequent labour aboard the fishing vessels.

“We had no training,” explained a man I’ll call Bambang, a tall 32-year-old with a jaw so square and eyes so luscious and dark he could have been a model in another life. He was studying at a technical college in Jakarta when he saw a notice on the college’s bulletin board advertising the lucrative-sounding job. Another sailor had been visited at the cigarette factory where he worked by an agent who “promised something much better”. A third had met an agent in his rural village in the region of Aceh, which was devastated by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. A fourth had been taken to a recruitment office and shown a video of a sleek cruise liner slicing through turquoise waters. “And then he found himself on a squid boat!” Rajagukguk translated, with a wry grimace.

Many of the men were angry at the way they were subsequently paid and treated aboard ship. They had all been quoted monthly salaries by the agents but Rafi, a 17-year-old with a flat-top haircut, said he hadn’t seen any money for a year. Arif, a long-haired 20-year-old, attested that his captain aboard the *Taisei Maru*, a Taiwanese vessel, forced him to eat pork even though he is a Muslim. Hari, a red-faced 28-year-old, said he had been struck by his captain. “He beat me. He hit me. He kicked me,” he spat, raising a left hand swollen with injury.

I asked whether any of them “loved the sea”, as Jones had. At the translation of the question, they all shook their heads sadly. “They all want to go home,” said Rajagukguk.

Why don’t they? “To break the contract would be very difficult,” explained Arif, the 20-year-old.

I wondered why it would be difficult to break a contract when it sounded as though the agents and ship owners were acting in bad faith themselves. But it turned out that delayed payment and mistreatment is often explicitly written into the sailors’ contracts. Rajagukguk showed me a few sample contracts he had collected from sailors in the past year. The labour terms for the sailors were laughably poor. One contract stipulated that the sailor’s monthly salary would only start to be paid after 12 months. If his boat suffered a mishap and broke down, which is a common

happening, no salary would be paid at all. Another contract mandated “working hours 18-22 hours daily ... without any overtime pay”. None promised medical care. Several of the contracts required total “obedience” to the captain and gave the captain full authority to cut pay if he decided a crewman was “lazy”.

I asked the sailors why they had signed such terrible contracts. Many said they had been handed them moments before boarding the boat, after they had travelled far from their villages and made lavish promises of money to their families. “They said: ‘Sign, quickly!’” attested Hari. “Then they took my passport away until I signed.”

I understood why Rajagukguk compared the sailors’ situation to “human trafficking” — or at least unwilling indentured servitude, which is illegal in terms of the United Nations’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Most of the sailors had left a large cash deposit — up to R10 000 — with the agents, which they would forfeit if they broke their two- to three-year contracts early. Other contracts stipulated heavy fines upon breach of contract. The sailor from rural Aceh told me he feared his agent would pursue him, like the Devil in Faust, all the way back to his village to collect the fine.

I phoned a shipping agent based in Cape Town, who represents a number of Taiwanese-owned ships. “The story always has two sides,” he insisted, though he declined to allow me to print his name as backing the other side.

“Some crew members borrow a lot of money from their [local] agency,” he said, by way of explanation as to why the agents withhold pay for up to a year. He also pleaded for pity for the ship owners, saying global warming and the rising cost of fuel meant the companies could barely operate at a profit. “Taiwan is an island country. They don’t have many resources on land. So they’re fishing all over the world. But the temperature has gotten too high. That makes the fish stay deeper. You can’t catch the fish you used to.”

Strangely, though, after that defence was out of the way, he undermined his own case by launching into a vigorous account of all the ways ship owners and agents can mistreat and bamboozle their crews. “I know they complain about the conditions of the ship. Okay — it’s true. Compared to South African fishing vessels, it might not be as good. Once these ships stay out [on the ocean] for a long time, the condition gets bad.” As for the agents, “sometimes they will trick them! These agents show them footage of a Maersk [container ship]. Then they get to the wharf and it’s this small fishing boat! They freak out. Sometimes they scream.”

“Is it unfair to say the conditions aboard your fishing vessels are abusive?” I asked.

“A lot of times I do see owners being very snaky,” their representative said. “I can tell you the thing you say is not fair, but I can also say it’s not completely not the case.”

The family of Capetonians who follow the lives of the trawler crewmen believe South Africa should be doing much more to regulate or ban the trawlers — or at least to crack down on “hubbing”, the practice whereby a ship returns to Cape Town regularly to refuel and do repairs while claiming its official home port as somewhere else.

Earlier this year South Africa ratified the International Labour Organisation’s Maritime Labour Convention of 2006, requiring strict labour standards aboard boats, including a provision that seafarers must work no more than eight hours in a 24-hour period. But foreign-owned fishing trawlers flying another country’s flag aren’t subject to these regulations even if Cape Town actually seems to be the port they use most frequently. It’s a loophole Cassiem Augustus, the International Transport Workers’ Federation inspector, thinks is unfair. “A lot of unions regulate our own fishing industry,” he said. “Why not the foreign fishing boats that use Cape Town as a base?”

For Augustus and Charles Lange, the Mission to Seafarers’ chaplain, the frustration about seafarers’

working conditions is especially keen. As coloured men active in the anti-apartheid struggle they had placed much hope in South Africa’s political transition bringing broad change.

“The old government had a good relationship with Taiwan,” Lange said. Whenever he complained about the treatment of the seafarers he saw coming through the mission, “they told me to shut up”. So he had hopes for the new government. And yet “the government is doing the same thing today! It’s forever going through my mind. We say we have the best Constitution in the world, yet we allow these atrocities to visit our shores.”

For his part, Augustus said his difficulties in fighting for justice for seamen are increasing. “For the last two years I’m fighting to get into the port,” he said. At one time he had a standing permit to enter the harbour to inspect boats but now, thanks to added security measures, every time he wants to get in he has to apply for entrance through a shipping agent — the people who directly represent owners. The notion that Augustus needs permission from ship owners to expose conditions aboard their ships is, of course, ludicrous. “They’re the first that want to keep me away!”

“I’m proudly Capetonian,” he added, “but my harbour, I can’t be proud of it. Behind those gates there are no human rights.”

At least there is that small family that cares for the sailors. Most Capetonians who have spent extended time ministering to them — be it spiritually, emotionally or legally — have ended up so moved by their situation that they’ve opened their homes or their wallets. Alan Goldberg, the maritime lawyer, recently braved a harrowing ride on a dinghy-sized motorboat in bad weather in order to bring sailors aboard the indebted Taiwanese-owned petrol tanker DVDs, cricket gear and table-tennis bats he had bought with his own money.

Patty and Charles Lange, the proprietors of the Mission to Seafarers, have brought Filipino sailors to their house for home-cooked meals and have marvelled at their gratitude at having the chance to wash their hands clean at a tap.

Augustus and his wife Mariam have organised with their local mosque to host meals for the sailors. Once the Indonesian consulate helped them organise a banquet featuring traditional Indonesian delicacies. The sailors who attended couldn't stop thanking everybody for making them feel respected. "When I think about it again, I feel I am there," Mariam told me, "and I want to cry."

There's one other sector of Cape Town fully dedicated to making the sailors feel respected: the sailors' nightclubs. There used to be a number of them dotting the Foreshore, but the diminution in sailor traffic at the harbour has left just two — Club Med, the smaller one, and the Lido, the bigger one, where the fight broke out in December that ended in a sailor's murder.

I visited the Lido one Monday evening, typically its hottest night of the week: the night a new crop of ships usually comes into the harbour and exhausted crews tumble into town for a little R&R. The gritty stretch of Riebeeck Street off which it is located was forlorn and abandoned, but inside everything was polished, Technicolor, buzzy, and catering specifically to sailors.

A piece of paper with exchange rates was posted on the wall. Anchor motifs decorated the wall behind the long wooden bar. There were karaoke booths. The dance floor looked like nothing you'd find anywhere else in Cape Town, but rather like a vision of a hot spot in Tokyo or Bangkok: two disco balls, strobe lights and a smoke machine. Groups of women in short-shorts danced together, lounged at the wooden bar, or sat at tables with their arms slung around overjoyed-looking young Asian men.

"On the boat, it's just eat, sleep, fish, eat, sleep, fish," one of the ladies at the bar, an older woman in a short black dress and a long string of black beads, told me. "Here there's something different for them. It's called jiggy-jiggy." She laughed.

Henry Trotter, a historian and writer based at the Uni-

versity of Cape Town, did years of research on the women who work at the sailors' clubs for a book called *Sugar Girls and Seamen: A Journey into the World of Dockside Prostitution in South Africa*. He spent 150 nights at clubs in South Africa's port cities; in Durban he went to clubs for 30 nights in a row. "I just went every single night," he told me in a recent telephone interview. From this immersive method he gained a deep and nuanced understanding of a very distinctive subculture.

About 60 prostitutes specialising in sailors work full time or part-time in Cape Town, he said. They often live together in boarding houses in Woodstock or Rugby, on the fringe of the harbour. They're mostly coloured, with a few black and white women rounding out the crew. Trotter estimated that between 70% and 90% of them have a child fathered by a sailor, creating a set of half-Asian children raised by "matriarchs" retired from the game, who are known as the "whore nannies".

The women — Trotter dubbed them "sugar girls" after the *suikerhuisies*, and to avoid the pejorative or clinical "prostitutes" or "sex workers" — go to incredible lengths to appeal to and understand the culture and desires of the foreign sailors. Trotter's book opens with a description of a girl he called Brandy, who had specialised in pleasuring Japanese seamen. She had learned fluent Japanese, kept sake at home, gave her clients elaborate, traditional Japanese-style baths, and wore a kimono to bed.

Brandy was particularly attentive, but these kinds of efforts are not unusual. Most of the "sugar girls" learn a language commonly spoken among the sailors who call at the Cape, even an extremely difficult one such as Japanese or Taiwanese. They will then make that culture their "speciality". They also study the social habits of the different cultures, so they can glide seamlessly into the sailors' social experiences at the clubs. "Say a girl specialises in the Greeks," Trotter explained. "The Greeks celebrate camaraderie in a much more exuberant and jocular way than the Filipinos, who would sit and toast each other quite earnestly. So she would adopt that social style." Many of the girls

build lasting relationships with regular clients, meeting them each time they rotate back to port.

Once or twice a year, yes, there's a killing at one of the clubs. The December murder of the Vietnamese sailor happened after Vietnamese and Indonesian sailors disagreed over which nationality's songs the DJ should play. But it's striking that everybody agrees that, in spite of these spurts of violence, the Lido largely provides the sailors with a "safe space" — one of the few. It is the one place the special romance of being a seaman, with a loving woman waiting in the port, still exists. "The club is a place where everyone recognises the sailors have special needs," Trotter said. Or, in the words of the woman in black lounging at the Lido bar: "They can't go out on Long Street. They would be victimised so quickly. This is a home for them."

In my quest to understand life aboard the boats in Cape Town harbour I badly wanted to go aboard one myself. And I tried. I sought a permit to enter the harbour formally. I even investigated getting around the stiff security by approaching it from the other side: from the water. Somewhat undermining the harbour's goal to be watertight against security breaches, the shore-side security is stiff, but the water-side is almost non-existent. There's little to prevent people from sailing right up to the side of the boats they can barely get close enough to see from shore. Indeed, there's a launch service leaving from the Waterfront that ferries supplies or visitors such as lawyers out to the ships. In theory, one could even take a kayak out into the harbour.

But the obstacles kept rearing up. I was made to understand that a permit, if it came at all, wouldn't come through for weeks, long after I needed to leave Cape Town and return home. The launch captain wasn't available.

The night before I left Cape Town I climbed my favourite hill in Vredehoek to see if I could at least watch the boats on the water one last time, as I used to do. It being

early winter, though, a heavy mist had enclosed the whole foreshore. I could hear only the boats' foghorns lowing gently into the mist, a persistent reminder of both their presence and their ultimate invisibility. ■



The bookseller of Kibera

Caroline Wanjiku Kihato

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICK KOZAK



A large, stylized blue letter 'K' graphic that serves as a decorative element on the left side of the page. It is composed of two main strokes: a vertical line and a diagonal line that branches into two at the top and bottom.

Khaleb Omondi stood on the empty plot, gaping at the space where his bookstore had once stood, on the northern side of the train tracks in Laini Saba, one of Kibera's 12 villages. The only thing they did not take — could not take — was the ground on which the *mabati* (corrugated iron) structure had stood. It had taken 12 years for him to become the largest bookseller in Kibera, and in 12 hours it was all gone.

"Twelve hours," he would say to me later. "That was how long it took for them to carry the stock that I had in my shop." He shook his head and smiled wryly, the sinister symmetry not lost on him. "That was how long and how short it took to destroy my life."

Khaleb is not sure for how long he stood in front of his empty plot. But he eventually let go and walked in a daze through one of the world's most notorious slums; his home for 12 years. So many questions ran through his head: Where would he find the money to rebuild? What about his children's education? He had just married a second wife. How would he meet his obligations to his growing family?

He left the slum behind him in a stupor and did not see the car coming. All he remembers is waking up in Kenyatta National Hospital a few days later. "It was a very hard time for our family," his first wife and business partner, Tabitha Sungu, recalled five years later. "Everything, everything we had built was gone, and now Baba Pius [as Khaleb is known] was in hospital."

I had first heard about Khaleb in July 2012 while talking to women about the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kibera. For reasons I was yet to understand my conversations with these women would inevitably turn to the bookseller. In hushed tones someone would ask me, "Did you hear what happened to Baba Pius?" Not waiting for my response, another would say: "His bookshop was looted — everything was taken, including the *mabati* structure." "They took 12 hours to steal his stock ... imagine, 12 hours of books!" a woman would add, shaking her head in both sympathy and awe.

In Kibera Baba Pius is held up as something of an icon of the violence. For many — Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Kikuyu —

he symbolises the devastating impact it had on good, hard-working families in the slum. He also mirrors what many identify as their story: the sheer strength of the human spirit to survive against all odds. The spirit of Kibera, one of Africa's largest urban slums.

When I finally met Baba Pius he was standing behind a glass cabinet in his second bookshop, Jo Kinda, where the latest textbooks catch the eye of passers-by. Jo Kinda is just outside Kibera, in the nearby middle-class Magiwa estate, a 20-minute walk from Khaleb's first store. "I opened this bookshop in 2008, after I came out of hospital," he said. "I had to find a way to continue supporting my family. I decided to rent this store while waiting for things to cool down in Kibera and give me time to find money to rebuild."

Jo Kinda juts out of the backyard of a two-storey house and faces the main thoroughfare into and out of Kibera's Laini Saba. By ordinary standards its location is a great catchment area for customers. Every few minutes *matatus*, mini-bus taxis, drop off or pick up passengers going into or out of the city. In the mornings and evenings, scores of labourers walk by on their way to and from work. It is a busy street. Yet, despite its prime location, it is the Kibera store, Kinda, that makes the profits needed to send the children to school, pay for clothes and finance family emergencies.

It is easy to understand why Khaleb evokes such emotion. He is soft-spoken and unpretentious. His mild countenance and soft brown eyes hint at sadness, but there is none of the bitterness that hardened scars betray. "Kinda" (pronounced "keenda"), the name of Khaleb's first bookshop, "is a Jaluo word for endeavour," he said, as he sold past exam papers to a young man. "Jo Kinda means people who endeavour to succeed."

Khaleb was 19 when he moved to the slum from his ancestral home, Bondo, in Nyanza province, western Kenya — about 320km from Nairobi. His father was a carpenter

and his mother grew vegetables on their smallholding and sold them at the town market.

"My parents were enterprising people who worked hard. They instilled an ethic of hard work within me. I named the bookshop after them. The people who strive." When his father died, in 1992, the family lost its primary breadwinner. "My mother tried to keep me in school, but in the middle of my form three I had to drop out. As the first of nine children I felt I had a responsibility to help her take care of my younger brothers and sisters. That was 1994."

With his father's responsibilities now on his shoulders, Khaleb moved to Kibera and shared a 3m by 3m room with his uncle. He found work cleaning offices in Nairobi's city centre. His shift ended early and, at three in the afternoon, he would set up a makeshift rack near Kibera's rail tracks and sell *malimali*, knickknacks — cigarettes, matches, sweets — to supplement the 1 375-shilling (R170) wage he earned each month. This made him a little extra income, but not enough for him to leave his cleaning job.

After a short trip home for Christmas at the end of his first year in the big city he brought back his old school books, hoping he could sell them from his rack. "No one had any use for the books back home, it seemed a waste for them to sit there gathering dust. I had at least 50 textbooks," said Khaleb.

Much to his surprise, the textbooks sold quickly. "People would come past my rack and ask me, 'Do you have this book? Do you have that book?' I got so many requests, that I decided to focus my efforts on selling books." When people started asking for more books, he asked his friends and relatives for capital, roughly 8000 shillings (R1 000), with which he bought second-hand books.

"It started as a joke," said his first wife, sometimes known as Nyamalo, a nickname given to Luhya women married to Luo men, when I first visited the store. She was standing behind a wire barrier that blocked entry to the shop. Not many stores in Laini Saba have bars. Most shop fronts are accessible to customers, allowing them to browse through

the narrow aisles. Although it would take an able-bodied man only a few minutes to get through Kinda's barricade, it acts as a symbolic boundary between Tabitha and the neighbours who, five years earlier, had left the family with nothing. About 4m from the shop's entrance, at the end of a 2m wooden pole, a piece of white plywood announces:

KINDA BOOK SELLERS
DEALERS IN NEW AND USED BOOKS
SCHOOL BOOKS & STATIONERY

A rickety wooden plank delivers customers over the sewer rivulet that surrounds the bookshop. Crossing the channel I felt I was stepping on to an island. Indeed, on a good satellite image, Kibera might look like a series of archipelagos, with sewer "waterways" crisscrossing its land mass.

I could barely make out Tabitha's handsome face in the dark store. She was standing behind the book counter dressed in a white blouse and a tawny mid-calf skirt. Like her husband, she is soft-spoken and reserved.

Perhaps it was the poor lighting in the shop, or the barricade, that created a distance between me and the bookstore I had heard so much about. Whatever it was, I stood mesmerised for a few seconds as I took it all in. Every centimetre of the walls was covered with books. Chemistry books, physics books, mathematics books, geography, civics, literature. I saw biology past papers, computer workbooks, accounting and engineering textbooks. There were Swahili and English language books for all grades. Whether you had just started school or were attending university there were books here for you.

The wooden shelves that lined the walls were warped from the weight of the textbooks, notebooks and stationery they supported. The books were well organised, each section colour coded, with red, blue, black and orange book spines in neat piles. I remarked on how neat the bookshop was. "Baba Pius is the one who organises it," his wife replied quietly. A section to the left of the entrance is dedicated

to second-hand novels. Unlike other books, these are not locked up behind the barrier. "Novels do not have so much business here. What people want are textbooks for school," Tabitha said, as I leafed through a well-read copy of Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*.

By the time Khaleb moved to Kibera in 1994 it was home to at least 700 000 people, or at least those were the figures that urban planners, historians and UN agencies quoted. When the country's 2009 census counted 170 070 Kiberians, the slum — and the nation — were plunged into an identity crisis. "Myth shattered: Kibera numbers fail to add up," screamed the *Daily Nation's* headline. Having lost its dubious, yet prideful reputation as Africa's largest slum, what was Kibera other than just another ordinary place? The controversy over numbers continues, with some arguing that the government census was an undercount, while others blame international and non-profit organisations for inflating population numbers in order to get funding.

Whatever its population, Kibera's location, about 5km from Nairobi's central business district and close to the industrial area and employment opportunities in neighbouring housing estates, has attracted people from all over Kenya.

"People come to look for money in Kibera," Millicent Auma, my 34-year-old guide, told me as we crossed the railway line that snakes westward through Kibera to Uganda. "And they find it. Here, it is very difficult to find someone dying of hunger, there is food for everyone's budget, we have plenty."

Millicent, too, was a victim of the 2007-2008 violence. Her business and property in Laini Saba, a few hundred metres from Kinda bookshop, was destroyed — burnt by her Kikuyu neighbours. Fearing for her life, she and her daughter, Purity, then 11 years old, left Kibera to stay with family in nearby South B, a well-to-do housing estate. They came back a few months later to find themselves homeless and without an income. "I was forced to become an IDP [internally displaced person] in my own country,"

she writes on the website of her NGO, Kiviwosheg (Kibera Visionary Women Self-Help), which helps to empower women and youth in business.

Her statement that “we have plenty” seemed incongruous, in view of her experience and with Kibera’s socio-economic statistics. The settlement has inadequate water and sanitation systems and, according to Umande Trust, a local nonprofit organisation, almost 50% of the population live in poverty and 14% have HIV/Aids — a rate more than double the national average. But Kibera is a place of contradictions and, in many ways, Millicent’s words are also true.

Research by the University of Nairobi found that few businesses in the city give a better return on investment than rentals in Kibera. A landlord is guaranteed a return on his/her investment in less than a year.

Kibera began life about 100 years ago as a settlement for 291 Nubian Sudanese *askaris*, members of the British army’s Kings African Rifles. The area was given to the Nubians by the British army as a reward for their loyalty and service in protecting the railway line that linked Uganda to the Kenyan coast. The Nubians called the place Kibra, a local word for forest.

Jamaldin Yahya, a second-generation Kiberian, whose family has lived there since the early 1900s, remembers swimming in the rivers that flowed through it. “As young boys in the 1960s, we used to hunt rabbits, gazelles, birds, dik-diks and fish in the dam after *madrassa*. Then we would go to my grandfather’s place and eat guavas, mangoes and loquats. There was no need for money. Each homestead had about 10 acres of land,” he said.

Unlike the huddled homes that make up much of Kibera, Jamaldin’s house has a yard, where his children play, a 6m by 6m living area, a separate kitchen and four bedrooms. He was in the midst of renovations during my visit and most of the contents of the living room in which we sat were crammed in the middle of the room and covered in cloth and plastic to prevent damage.

“When my father and grandfather were demobilised

from the military, they became subsistence farmers in Kibera and made money selling cattle hides and meat to neighbouring *mzungu*, white homes,” said Jamaldin.

Then, no one could have imagined that, a century later, the 250 hectare settlement would have barely any trees, just mud, wattle and *mabati* houses and a garbage-choked river. No one would have dreamed of how infamous Kibera slum would become. Few then could have believed that Kibera would be one of the most researched and photographed settlements of its kind. Indeed, no one could have conceived of it as the site of a Hollywood movie. But it was there that *The Constant Gardener* was filmed.

The second-hand book market was good business for Khaleb. On average, he made between 80 and 120 shillings (R10-R15) per book. “The demand was always there,” he remembers.

By 1996 he had moved into his own room in Kibera and was doing well enough to marry. But second-hand bookselling had its limits. “When I was selling second-hand books it was difficult to find books people wanted, and to find sellers with those specific books. In 1997 I made the decision to sell new books.”

Using capital accumulated from sales he built Kinda and stocked it with books, mostly school textbooks, worth about 20 000 shillings (R2 500). “My expenses were small because I lived in Kibera. All my savings I invested in my business. I squeezed myself to add more stock.” Khaleb, initially stately and reserved, becomes easygoing and animated when he starts talking about his books. “A good business,” he continued earnestly, “depends on stock. All the money I make I put into my stock so that when people ask for a book from my shop they never miss it.”

During the nine months I spent talking to business people in Kibera I came to appreciate the delicate art of balancing stock, customer needs and cash flow. A complex matrix of variables goes into building up stock and, like retailers elsewhere, Kibera’s business-owners have to consider stor-

age space, available capital, demand for goods and the security of their stores. Customers are fickle here.

I was sitting on a three-legged stool at Jane Wambui's stall, a few doors down from Kinda bookstore, as she lectured me on the finer points of having the right sort of stock on hand. As an example she pointed out second-hand clothes that had been hanging in her cramped store for over two years. I could barely make out the dresses and pants through the thick layer of dust that enveloped them.

"If you do not understand what people are buying, you will remain with stock that you cannot sell," said Jane. Over-capitalising during a lull in the market may find you cash-strapped and unable to pay for food, water, rent and everyday necessities.

To offset customer fads, most shops in Kibera's Laini Saba sell a variety of goods. Jane, for example, sells anything from builders' trowels to water glasses.

"If my plastic chairs don't go this month," she explained, "someone may buy my tablecloths. The cold season is coming soon, so I will stock *jikos* [charcoal stoves]. Everything is for sale, even these kittens," she said, pulling at a net curtain and showing off her new tiger cats suckling at their mother's belly.

Jane, a single mother of two, is a storyteller. We had come to like one another and she took some delight in seeing my bewildered face and laughing at my naïveté. She threw her head back and bellowed with laughter. "These are in high demand in Kibera! They are still too young now, but soon they will be for sale, they help get rid of the rats that eat the stock in our *vibanda* [stalls]."

If anyone understands the nuances of stock, and his market, it is Khaleb. "Business depends on the season," he said. "In the first and second term of school I sell a lot of books and I can make enough money for me, my family and for investing in my business."

Khaleb has found a niche market. Bookselling is an intricate business and requires considerable research. "For college books, you have to stock the latest edition. Nobody in Kibera will buy an old edition."

A bookseller not only has to understand and anticipate what is going to happen in the school system, but must also buy the right number of books for the year. Too many and you're stuck with old editions you cannot sell. Too few and your customers will buy the books elsewhere. "If it is school textbooks, you need to know which are the set books for the coming year. You are constantly updating your stock."

For the most part, Khaleb's flair for the book business has served him well, although, when the government offered free books in schools in early 2000 business slowed down. Still, his turnover was between 8 000 and 10 000 shillings (R1 000 to R1 250) a month — a good income at the time. He continued to stock his shop, banking on the fact that parents in Kibera would still buy books for their children rather than have them share their books with other children in school. "A good parent will buy a book for their child. So if you don't want your child to share, that is when we make business."

By 2002 the business had grown enough to enable him to buy land for his store in Laini Saba for 35 000 shillings (R4 375). This was no mean feat. Before the 2007 violence Laini Saba was to Kibera what Sandton is to Johannesburg — its most valuable real estate. The shop owners here are referred to as *watajiri wa Dubai* (Dubai's wealthy class). Indeed, Laini Saba is Kibera's Dubai, where knock-off designer clothes, construction materials, black market DVDs, food, drinks and every imaginable item are for sale.

Few think of slums as places where people have an interest in books, reading or education. Our stereotypes are locked in on the basic human necessities, such as shelter, food, water and sanitation, that everyday life there must revolve around. But in Kibera there is a reverence for education. Here, parents will sacrifice almost anything, even a life in a middle-class home with space, piped water and flush toilets, to send their children to good private schools, pay for extra tuition and buy books.

Millicent, who, in addition to running Kiviwosheg, rebuilt the rooms that had been burnt in Laini Saba and put them up for rent, spends most of what she earns to

take Purity to a private school in Karen — a wealthy Nairobi suburb, once home of *Out of Africa* author Karen Blixen. “There is a reason why people live in the slum,” she told me during our ritual break for lunch in her room in Mashimoni village, where she had moved because it was safe for Luos, though her property was still in neighbouring Laini Saba.

“You look for somewhere where you can live comfortably. There are people who have stayed here even if their life has improved. They have children and they want them to go to school. If you move out of the slum and pay ten times more in rent, you will not have enough for school fees.”

Given the value placed on education in Kibera it is no surprise that Khaleb found a livelihood and a thriving business in the sale of books. It is not that there are no other booksellers in Kibera — sprinkled across its 12 villages are makeshift stalls, selling a hodgepodge of titles, second-hand textbooks and novels. But none has the considered variety, investment and strategy of Kinda bookstore.

Khaleb is a meticulous businessman, but it also helps that he is a lover of books. “This is not just about business for me,” he said to me. “Books make me happy. Since I was a boy, I have loved books. I didn’t complete my schooling but I read. I have a lot of time sitting in my shop waiting for customers. So I sit and read. I like Danielle Steel, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *The River Between*. I am drawn to reading,” he continued, “because of the lessons contained in books. Every book has a lesson I can use in my own life.”

Like many Kenyans, the 39-year-old has a devotional regard for self-help books, which, as in other parts of the world, have amassed a significant cult following across all social classes. Although motivational books do not carry the prestige of a literary canon, the “pop psychology” economy is worth billions of dollars, and it is growing.

Micki McGee, author of *Self Help Inc: Makeover Culture in American Life*, writes that “the success of self-improvement literature, whether secular or religious, is contingent on its ability to function as inspirational literature”. It is

this message of inspiration, the idea that a person’s destiny lies in his or her own hands, and that the achievement of happiness and success is within everyone’s reach that makes the self-empowerment industry so influential in places like Kibera. After all, this *is* Kibera’s story.

Khaleb is not particularly religious, but the Bible is one of his favourite books. As McGee points out, “the Bible is perhaps the first and most significant of self-help books”.

“The Bible has lessons which tell you how you can do things,” said Khaleb, explaining his love for the scriptures. Yet his connection with the Bible moves beyond its practical “how-to” lessons. “The words are beautiful,” he said, his gentle eyes lighting up, “the stories motivating. If you read Psalms, Proverbs and Job, they inspire you. It is books that have helped me heal and forget what happened to me in the violence of 2007 and give me strength to move on.”

The elections of 2007 were approaching and Kenyans were optimistic about the future. In 2002 the opposition party, led by Mwai Kibaki, had taken over power from the incumbent, Daniel arap Moi, in a peaceful, almost surreal moment in the country’s history. Arap Moi, an imposing man who had previously declared himself president for life, passed on the mantle to an ailing Kibaki, who was confined to a wheelchair because of a broken leg. The people believed the 2007 elections would seal the nation’s pride as a democracy able to address its differences through the ballot box, with respect for the rule of law. All seemed to be going well; television and radio stations in Kibera and around the world announced the votes as the results came in from the constituencies.

“People crowded around the television in the slum. We were all counting the votes together with the people at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre,” Millicent remembered, “and Raila Odinga was winning.” In an inexplicable turn of events, after three days of counting, Mwai Kibaki was sworn in as president on December 30 2007.

“We couldn’t understand how it had happened when we could see live on the television that Kibaki’s rival Odinga had been leading in votes.”

People in Laini Saba remember the violence in Kibera in two phases. The first was the announcement of Kibaki’s victory as president. Some of Kibera’s residents believed that Kibaki, a Kikuyu, “stole” the elections from Odinga, a Luo. “Riots began on December 30 after Kibaki’s swearing in. There was looting and burning of shops in the slum. But this was not ethnically motivated, it was people venting their frustration at the election process.”

After a few days the looting ended and people went back to their lives. The second violent phase, which began around January 15, was fuelled by retaliatory ethnic attacks. The ethnic violence in Kibera between the Luo supporters of Odinga and Kibaki’s Kikuyu supporters started a few hundred kilometres away, in the Rift Valley. Triggered by the killing of Kikuyus in a church in the area, militia groups in the slum formed behind the two presidential candidates.

“That is when Luos in Laini Saba were targeted by Kikuyu militia, the *Mungiki*.” Millicent’s wide face formed into a slight frown as she recalled the violence. “We were flushed out — me, Baba Pius, Mama Vero ...” She continued with the list of those who had had to pay for the death of Kikuyus in a distant part of the country. Baba Pius lost out in both phases of the violence, being both a business-owner and a Luo in the wrong place at the wrong time.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, about 1 200 Kenyans were killed, 300 000 displaced and millions of Kenyan shillings’ worth of property and goods destroyed during the violence. Kibera was one of the worst-affected areas in the country.

When I conveyed these facts to Khaleb, his face went blank. Official numbers and reports have a way of alienating lived experience. Unwittingly, they remove the emotional sting of traumatic events in ways that make personal experience unrecognisable. After a while, Khaleb responded. “In all the years I have lived in Kibera, I have never

experienced or seen such violence. No, that is not true. In all the years I have lived, I have never experienced such violence.”

The old English proverb “The eyes are the windows to the soul” may be clichéd, but few phrases would describe better Khaleb’s kindly and empathetic demeanor. He blinks with sadness as he tells me how “Luo men and boys were forcefully circumcised with *pangas*, many died. My family and I were stuck in Mashimoni village; we could not move anywhere, there was no food, no peace, no way to get out. I heard they had destroyed my shop, but I couldn’t even go to see the damage until February, when the violence ended. We were in fear, we lived in fear for our lives and our future.”

I had met people in Kibera who had lost their spouses, people who had been gang-raped, and some who mourned the death of their sons. A hair salon owner in Laini Saba shuddered at her memories of death in Kibera.

“*Maiti niliziona sana*. I saw many corpses”, she told me. “But I will not forget the Luo boy whose throat had been slashed lying on this stone in front of my salon with his ID on his chest. I have never been able to sit on that stone again.” Identity cards were used to identify a person’s ethnic group, which determined whether you were friend or foe in the violence.

“I don’t ever want to go back to those days again,” Khaleb said, shaking his head. “My shop was looted on December 30. They took all the books that I had, and even two kilograms’ worth of coins that we kept in the store.” Khaleb estimates he lost at least three million Kenyan shillings (R375 000). Everything his family had was gone. But he knew he had to move on. Even with the enormous losses, he had to find a way of feeding his family and ensuring that his eldest daughter continued her schooling in 2008.

“After the violence died down in early January, I went to town to get more stock for my bookshop. I used all the savings that I had. It was the beginning of the school year and if I was to survive as a businessman I had to sell during our busiest time of the year.” Khaleb restocked his store

with books he knew would be in demand at the start of the school year.

“We have a saying in our language,” one of Khaleb’s neighbours said to me. “Lightning never strikes twice. But somehow that man and his family were hit not once, not twice, but three times. The third was when a car hit him and he broke his leg.” Khaleb was fortunate that his injuries were not more serious. Still, he was in a cast for nine months and, five years later, he still has pains in his bones, particularly when the weather turns cold.

Not long after he had restocked his bookstore, violence broke out again in Kibera. This time his store was the target of ethnic profiling. The looters loaded all the new stock on wheelbarrows. Even the walls and the roof were carried away to sell in scrapyards. Khaleb’s, Millicent’s and other Luo businesses in Laini Saba were destroyed by people they knew, had shared a meal with, had helped during difficult times.

“These were people who are known by the community, we see them passing here every day,” said one of the businesswomen whose store is not far from Kinda bookshop, pointing to the railway tracks. And that is perhaps one of the most difficult things to come to terms with. How members of a community whose lives are so intricately intertwined can turn on each other. “*Tuliumia sana*, we really got hurt by the violence,” said Millicent. “Yet at the same time the leaders who we were supposed to be fighting for did not get hurt; their children were not even in the country, they were overseas. There is no other way to explain it. Here we are business people and violence is not good for business.”

For a year after the violence he could not afford to send his children to school. He rented a stall in Magiwa, with money borrowed from family, and established Jo Kinda while he rebuilt the bookshop in Kibera. He had no cash to buy books. “But I was lucky because I had a relationship with my suppliers, so I was able to get a few books on credit.”

The new Kibera store does not compare in size and

stock to the old bookstore. “We were doing well,” said Tabitha. “It will take time to get back to where we were.”

Five years later, the Omondis are still rebuilding what they lost. The first-born child, who will be 16 this year, goes to a private boarding school in Western Kenya. “I want her to get to university,” said her father. His two boys, eight and six, attend a school in Kibera and his youngest, a daughter, is just nine months old. When I visited their home in April 2013 he had two more charges — his sister’s children, who he takes care of. His responsibilities are ever-growing, even as his economic future remains uncertain.

Kibera has a magnetism that both attracts and repels and despite what has happened Khaleb is adamant that he will stay. “I will never leave Kibera and go somewhere else. If I leave Kibera it will be to go back to home-square [the local euphemism for ancestral home].”

A month after Kenya’s March 2013 elections Khaleb carried back to Kinda the stock he had stored in his house in Mashimoni during the elections for fear of a repeat of the violence. Now he was sure that all was safe. Cartons of books were spread across the bookstore and he painstakingly arranged the contents on the shelves.

The community may have dodged violence during and after the 2013 elections, but the wounds of the past have by no means healed. “What we have now is suppressed peace,” Millicent said, with a wisdom beyond her 34 years.

Khaleb now spends most of his time in Jo Kinda in Magiwa, while Tabitha takes charge of the Kibera store. I wondered whether the trauma of facing people who may have been complicit in stealing everything he had is too painful. When I asked him how he felt about what happened, he responded realistically: “*Ni watu tu*, they are just people. I am a business man, and they are also my customers.”

Whether it is the practicalities of having to live together, their dependence on each other, or even an acknowledge-

ment that fate has brought them together, it is perhaps stories like that of Khaleb, the keeper of books, the community's hope for future generations, the triumph of the human spirit, that give Kiberians the chance for a better life. ■



Prophets of the city

Matthew
Wilhelm-Solomon



Prophet Tshabalala.
Photo by Delwyn Verasamy.
Prophet Mzilani (previous
pages). Photo by Matthew
Wilhelm-Solomon.

n the parking lot of the Sundome Casino in Johannesburg a Zimbabwean security guard started having visions that were to shake his life. They led him to leave his job and embark on a series of wanderings, from the backrooms of Berea to the mountains and valleys surrounding Bulawayo. Around him — so he claims — he had begun to see the possible futures, and problems, of others.

It is fitting that the visions began in a place of gambling, a place of risk and uncertainty, where futures are given over to the vagaries of chance. For many migrants to Johannesburg, the city is a casino of sorts — a place of radical risk where lives themselves are the stakes at play.

In recent years the surfaces of the city of Johannesburg have been pasted over with signs advertising prophecy, often alongside those for penis enlargement and abortion. Prophets advertise the return of lost lovers, the revelation of one's enemy in the mirror, and healing of all kinds. The signs have proliferated alongside the emergence of new evangelical and prophetic movements in the city.

“The Prophet is a barometer of social and political behaviours.” This striking claim is made by historians Dave Anderson and Douglas Johnson in their book *Revealing Prophets*. Can these signs pasted across the scarred surfaces of the city — its derelict tenements and trains, traffic lights and bridges — tell us something about the social life and politics of the post-apartheid city? What is meant by “prophecy” and do the new prophets speak not only about the city's future but also about a hidden present and past?

These questions precipitated my own wanderings across the city for this story. The research revealed the vast varieties of prophecy and the settings in which it takes place — from rituals on mountainsides and mine dumps, flats in urban slums and sports stadiums to an old synagogue. The hilly landscape of the city, further surrounded by scarred mine dumps and encircled by highways, has come to represent the holy mountains of the Old Testament.

But first, back to the casino.

met Prophet Mzilani in his flat in Berea, near the long avenue of plane trees that joins Hillbrow to Yeoville. In the lounge his wife and children sat watching cartoons on television. The walls were adorned with miscellaneous posters: a framed picture of a white mansion, a print of Christ, a calendar from Singapore.

Mzilani invited me and my colleague, Melekias Zulu, to sit with him in his consulting room. The room was crowded with medicines in salt and liquid form. A few cloths shrouded the windows. On the floor was Mzilani's altar place, with cloths laid on the floor in red, white and blue — the colours of the French flag, though with its own meaning. White and blue for Zionism (of the Southern African, not Israeli variety) and red for his ancestors. Across the cloths lay a knife and a small steel staff.

Mzilani's city is inhabited by both angels and ancestors.

Mzilani was the security guard who, 15 years ago, was shaken by his visions at the casino. His journeyings through the city had, like those of many migrants, been of constant itinerancy, a search for wellbeing and prosperity. He had arrived in Johannesburg from Bulawayo in the early 1990s and had worked at the Killarney Mall and the Linden Spar before training as a security guard in Krugersdorp and working a series of different jobs, his hopes for the city eluding him.

"Sometimes you are posted in an old factory and there's nobody there. It's dark, there are mosquitoes. You're just there with a dog. Sometimes you are posted in a factory, night shift. There's no guardroom, just sitting in the shed. It's winter and you just sit there. That was a bad, bad experience in security," he says.

He had never visited traditional healers — inyangas (herbalists) or sangomas (spirit diviners) — during his childhood in Bulawayo. His mother was a rigid Jehovah's Witness and he would attend their services beneath the trees. But his troubles in Johannesburg led him to seek out healers there. First, he went to a Congolese in a Mayfair flat.

He tells us, laughing, that "it was a shocking experience

for me." "He said, 'You, you are not supposed to work for this job, you have got a call to help people like me.' I said, 'Ag, you are telling me stories. I don't like that. I want you to cleanse me to have luck and get a job. What you are telling me I don't like.'"

The job in the casino car park was a gift of sorts.

"It was not so bad because we were getting tips," he says. "You know when you are getting tips, you sometimes don't feel the pressure of work. It was good, sometimes at the end of the shift, you have R300 or R400 in the pocket."

However, Mzilani's life was troubled and he kept getting into arguments. He went to another sangoma, in Booysens, who told him: "You, don't continue working, you have got a call to help people, I can see that you see things, you are helping people, just take that call." Shortly afterwards he dreamt that he had to go to Filabusi, an area of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe, but could not catch the exact name of the place. He went anyway, and found a sangoma, but it was the wrong person. He returned to South Africa, but his problems continued.

"I was having a big problem, so I went to a lady next to the Spar in Hillbrow. She said, 'No, that's not the person, that's not the one. Just keep on asking, you will find the place,'" he says.

"I was like, ah, if they're sending me to the wrong person it's their fault, they're the ones calling me."

Yet Mzilani returned to Filabusi and, following the directions of men on the roadside, with whom he had shared calabashes of beer, he found his way, guided by a young boy, to a woman in a remote village.

"When I arrived there that mama was praying using herbs. The mama came to greet me. She said, 'I'm relieved, because I saw you in my dream coming straight to me, but today it was difficult for me to work, but I felt someone was still coming.' We went to the surgery. She said, 'You have been sent to me by your ancestors. But I'm not Jesus. I can't solve all of your problems. But I can take those I can manage. If I finish, you can proceed somewhere.' That night she took me to the river to clean me. The night was dark. I

was not feeling scared because I was expecting that if I get washed all my problems that I'm facing will be over."

She gave him some medicines and he returned to the city to work in a factory receiving containers. But his difficulties continued. He decided to return to Filabusi, where he stayed with Zionists conducting steaming rituals — purification ceremonies, using hot stones and steam in tents — and prayers in the valleys and on the mountainsides.

"I started to prophesy seriously by that time, and healing people. So a lady says now you can prophet and heal people, so just go back to Johannesburg."

He explains the experience of prophecy: "When you pray, a vision will come and open everything to you, and this person will have a problem ... sometimes it's a vision, sometimes it's a voice. It's a voice that tells me, just a silent one." He returned to Johannesburg to find that his wife had left him. He had to take care of his son and continued working in security, but doing more prophesying, while still struggling with his own problems.

In Johannesburg he met an inyanga who taught him how to use herbs. Mzilani's practice is an integration of the principles of herbal healing with the prayers and rituals of Zionist Christianity, though he is not a member of any church. He claims to have both angels and ancestors speaking to him.

Over the years his reputation has grown by word of mouth, so he no longer has to work in security. He has subsequently remarried and had more children. Most of his clients are migrants to Johannesburg, both South African and from other countries.

"Here they find difficulties, so they look for someone to cleanse them to have good luck," he says. "You know, most of the people coming to Johannesburg expect to get a job and get paid, but when somebody finds that I was employed in insurance, I was employed in security, I have this and this but can't find a job, they just want to check why he or she can't find the job they want. So we check."

Mzilani will send those he thinks he can't heal and are suffering from biomedical rather than spiritual conditions,

such as HIV/Aids or TB, to clinics or doctors. "Myself, I tell people the truth. Sometimes I tell them, you, you don't have bad luck. It's only that the time we are living in now is a challenging time, because a lot of people are educated, a lot of people have academic certificates, they've got diplomas, you see. Some of the people need experience when they employ you. So, it's difficult. Just continue looking for a job and one day you will have the luck to get the job you want."

But not all those who consult him have such pragmatic difficulties: "The biggest problem is that people have demons, because demons are working very hard to block somebody's way."

In contemporary Johannesburg the fear of demons, witchcraft and unhappy ancestors intermingles for many with the daily concerns about livelihoods, labour and safety.

Johannesburg is host to many of the struggles of the post-apartheid era: extreme inequality, high rates of joblessness, many residents working in precarious conditions in the informal sector. Attempts in the past decade to regenerate the city have been characterised by successive waves of violent evictions.

In recent years there has been an intensification of migration into Johannesburg, associated particularly with social and political turmoil in Zimbabwe. South Africa was, until last year, the largest recipient of asylum seekers in the world; Johannesburg has been the centre of this migration. In 2008 anti-immigrant violence spread from the townships on the urban peripheries to the inner city of Johannesburg and around the country. Overall more than 60 people were murdered, 700 wounded and more than 100 000 displaced.

The city has a crisis of urban housing, with inner-city rents far higher than many working in the informal sector can afford. Thousands make their homes in unlawfully occupied buildings. Struggles for refuge and employment, security and shelter characterise life for many migrants in the city.

As research by Jo Vearey and Lorena Nunez at the African Centre for Migration and Society has shown, the health of many migrants deteriorates after they come to the city. Those who are sick or close to death return to rural homes.

Dying in the city, away from home, without a proper burial is believed by many migrants to be a cause of long-lasting misfortune for their families. Many turn to faith or traditional healers for help to navigate the obstacles and misfortunes of urban life.

The city of Johannesburg has adopted a progressive stance towards migrants: a migrant help desk has been set up and there has been significant improvement in foreign migrants' access to health and social services, particularly with the help of translation services. Xenophobia among some healthcare workers, however, remains a problem.

In their vast and labyrinthine metropolitan headquarters I met staff of Johannesburg's department of health to discuss the matter of prophecy. The questions of who exactly were prophets was up in the air.

The city is trying to engage with alternative healers, including faith healers and prophets, using the Traditional Health Practitioners Act as a basis. The Act itself, however, makes no mention of prophets or faith healers. The city does not view prophets as a distinct group, but rather as a section of traditional healers.

"It's rare that you find a person working according to the classifications," says Dr Abe Mavuso of the Management Support and Development unit of the health department. "For example, a herbalist may double up as a prophet. You find that people do all classes because the practice is not controlled like, for instance, nurses or doctors, who require recognised qualifications and registration in order to practise. None of the training for any of the classes of traditional healers is regulated by government. So if a person puts up a board advertising a traditional health service people just believe it and the authenticity of the qualification is not an issue.

"There's been an influx of so-called prophets from African states who use our print media to advertise their ser-

vices," says Mavuso. "They are prepared to pay to advertise themselves. You don't know who among them is a herbalist, prophet, etcetera. They list conditions from which many people suffer, such as erectile dysfunction, high blood pressures, diabetes, etcetera. How can one practitioner offer a single remedy for so many diverse conditions?"

The city's health department is also concerned that the large new prophetic and evangelical movements may be making large amounts of money "thriving on the gullibility of people, offering quick remedies that may result in sufferers not complying with clinic medication".

The department worries that certain traditional healers, including prophets, may deter people from seeking orthodox treatment for conditions such as cancers or HIV/Aids or TB. The department has therefore been engaging with healers to encourage them to refer relevant cases to specialised health facilities. Hoping to boost referrals, the city runs training sessions for traditional healers on the prevention of HIV/Aids and TB.

As I found in my research, many people seek help from prophets as well as from state health services. There is also a willingness among some prophets I interviewed to refer people to clinics. Prophets such as Mzilani do not attempt any surgical procedures, relying instead on prayer, visions and herbs; nor do they advertise through street signs.

Unlike Mzilani, other prophets are not as open about their practices, with many working in high secrecy.

I was unable to get an interview with one of those healers whose posters adorn the city. But I did interview someone who had participated in a ritual led by one of the best-known and most widely advertised prophets. This was only on condition that I maintained the anonymity of the subject, a Zimbabwean man I will call Philani, and the prophet, also Zimbabwean, whom I will call Prophet Z.

Philani explained the rituals. First he made an appointment with Prophet Z and was told to meet on a Hillbrow street corner. An assistant checked Philani, clearly as a

form of protection against police raids, before he was taken to the venue, a nearby flat.

Philani paid an initial fee of R50. Once his prophecy, relating to family problems, was given, he was told to rendezvous near the Faraday traditional healers' market. He was required to provide a chicken, razor blades, a mirror and herbs, the cost of which totalled more than R500. From there he was pressed into paying for the taxi ride to a patch of overgrown land near Wemmer Pan, the small artificial lake just south of central Johannesburg.

A number of people were gathered in the bush in search of good luck, solutions to family problems and jobs in the city. One woman had come to try to win back her husband, who had abandoned her.

The chickens were sacrificed and the prophecy-seekers smeared themselves with a mixture of blood and the ashes of the herbs. They were washed and blessed in the water, then wrapped in white cloth, given a lighted candle and consecrated water to drink. Prayers were offered on their behalf. Some were cut with razors and had more herbs and ash rubbed into their skin. After the prayers Prophet Z circled the singing gathering.

Philani was asked to allow Prophet Z to make cuts in his skin and to smear the concoction of blood and ash over himself. He refused and incurred the prophet's displeasure.

Philani said the prophet called out of the group a man who had been possessed by a spirit sent by his mother-in-law. The man acknowledged that she had given him roots to bring to Johannesburg from Zimbabwe. He drove off with Prophet Z's assistants to collect the roots.

"After 30 minutes of waiting, the man arrived carrying a plastic bag. The prophet jumped up and began immediately sprinkling the man and muttering some inaudible words. The man fell down and rolled on the ground and began screaming. One of the assistants grabbed the plastic bag from the man and tore it open. A bundle of roots fell out. The roots were nicely tied together and were measuring about 10cm. The prophet said that these were not roots but would soon turn into a goblin.

"The remaining people stood in awe and fear. I was nervous, especially because the man seemed to be in [a] frenzy and in a state of possession and was now mumbling some words. The prophet and his assistants formed a circle around the man on the ground and prayed, rebuking the evil spirit. One of the assistants then fetched water, which they sprinkled on the roots and on the man. The prophet instructed the driver and two of his assistants to fetch firewood.

"There was dead silence. Some minutes later they brought firewood and lit a fire. The roots were thrown inside and the prophet made sure that they burn[t] to ashes. Then all ashes from the fire were thrown into the stream, every little bit of the ashes!"

After the ceremony the man's seizures quietened and he seemed "very weak and lost". He was sprinkled with water and told to go home and sleep.

Rituals of cleansing and purification are common in diverse prophetic traditions throughout the city, though animal sacrifice is a feature of the more secretive and occult forms. A healthy future relies on purifying the malevolent forces at work in the present that can be caused by the bad intentions of others, by unhappy ancestors, or by demonic forces. Prayer and prophecy are ways of reading the invisible in the visible. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to view prophecy simply as an occult or illicit practice. Signs advertising prophecy and the occult and commercial aspects of the practice are only one manifestation of the prophetic enterprise.

Prophecy has a long history in Southern African religions and movements and is not simply a recent phenomenon. In the 1930s in the mountains of Kwa-Zulu, the prophet Isaiah Shembe founded the Nazareth Church — at a time when rural life was being profoundly disrupted to supply white capital's demand for labour. It was to become one of the largest churches in this country. His prophecy and healing also appealed to a subju-

gated society in transition; it spoke, as scholar Liz Gunner has documented, of “national exile, poverty and alienation”. Prophecy has long been part of the traditions of independent churches in Southern Africa, such as the amaNazaretha and diverse traditions of Zionist Christianity. These traditions have often arisen during times of social transition, particularly after the dispossessions of colonialism and apartheid.

Can we understand the new prophets as a continuation of old traditions, or do they represent something unique about the post-apartheid transition and contemporary Johannesburg?

We meet Prophet Tshabalala in the gardens of Turffontein racecourse. We sit at a table outside the gambling hall, eating our McDonalds and chatting about football. Tshabalala, an Orlando Pirates fan, complains about their poor season and losing the Premier League to bitter rivals Kaizer Chiefs.

Alongside us lines of men place bets. Everywhere in this city prophecy and gambling seem to have an intimate relationship. The garden is peaceful and we sit on the grass to chat. From here you can see trucks circling a massive landfill and the distant shapes of the few remaining goldmine dumps on the city skyline.

Tshabalala is a soft-spoken, gentle man, his figure taut as rope. Like Mzilani he has had his own journeyings and difficulties as a migrant in the city.

Tshabalala came to South Africa via Botswana in 2002. While in the city he started his solitary wanderings along its ridges and mine dumps and highways, looking for a place of prayer. As a teenager in Zimbabwe he had followed the Zionists to the mountains of Plumtree, where he took part in their steaming rituals and prayer — it was there that he discovered his powers of prophecy.

When he arrived in Johannesburg he sought a spiritual home in the city. He lived in Yeoville for six months and started praying with others on the Yeoville hillside, where a number of different denominations gather, on the “mountain” overlooking the cylindrical skyscraper Ponte and Sara-

toga Avenue, and beside a half-built structure with graffiti on it proclaiming “God’s Land”. However, the worshippers were harassed by “tsotsis” (criminals) and moved to a place beneath the N1 Germiston freeway near Edenvale, to the east of the city.

Eventually Tshabalala found a job in Booysens in a factory manufacturing pressure valves, where he worked for four years. He moved to Rosettenville, where he continued his search along its koppies and hillocks. He found Zionists conducting steam bathing alongside the mountain and joined them. These high and hilly areas, which call up associations with the mountains and mountainsides of Old Testament revelation, have particular power for churches and prophets in the city.

“I was always watching the mountain. When I was off I went on top of the mountain to pray by myself. I saw smoke and went to investigate whether there was steam bathing. I went to them,” says Tshabalala. “I did not tell them that I am a prophet. I just prayed with them and said that I wanted to be prophesied. They only saw when we were praying that I am a prophet,” he says.

I ask him to explain what a prophet is.

“A prophet speaks directly to God,” he says. “He hears the voice of God. It will be in tongues. You will be asking what the problem is. It changes the language ... It also changes my language when I am talking, exchanging words. It’s like when I am talking to this man; it can take my vision back from his birth, background and show me when the problem came. I am praying for this man and it changes my vision ... I will see the problem.”

The role of the prophet, he explains, is also to forecast the future, or at least possible futures, and also to advise on the better paths. Hence the prophet serves the roles of the conduit for God, the healer and the oracle.

“I have prophesied [for] many people and in most case[s], I have been correct. Sometimes prophecies take time to happen. Sometimes people remind me of some prophecy that I had long back given. A prophecy can happen today, tomorrow or next year. It’s not a must to prophe-

sy. If you come to me, I have to find a way to speak honestly of what I have been told. Speak not to impress someone. If someone comes for good news but there is a problem I have to tell them. Fix the problem and then your life is going to be OK.

“I am not supposed to impress people and say that you are going to be a millionaire when the spirit is not saying that ... You see our church is for poor people who are suffering. When you read the Bible, for someone to be a prophet you need to be chosen by God.”

Tshabalala does not make money from his prophecy and continues to work helping his brother to transport goods back and forth from Zimbabwe. He says his church, the Church of Christ in Zion, “is a church of the poor, and composed mainly of migrants, many in search of work but for whom prosperity and health are important”.

The church holds rituals of steaming in tent-like structures on the mountainside in Rosettenville. The steaming is a purification of misfortune, considered, in a widely held Southern African worldview, as a form of contagion often caused by witchcraft.

As one of the members, whom I shall call Samuel, explained: “Tshabalalala is a prophet. A prophet is someone who speaks directly to God. People have misfortune. We can’t be healed by one thing. People will be faced with different problems. The steam bathing helps to sweat out impurities from bewitching ... In the home you are not looking for employment. In the city, you can face stagnation, so you look for a prophet.”

The church, however, does not claim to cure all diseases and those thought to be suffering from HIV/Aids and tuberculosis are encouraged to go to clinics.

Tshabalala wryly acknowledges that those who succeed in the city will move on to other, wealthier churches.

“Zionists made many people to move from one step to another. I know that, as I have friends who now have buses. We used to steam together. He has seven buses. But now you cannot see [him] by the Zionist church.”

He says it is mainly migrants, both those from Zim-

babwe and those from within South Africa, who seek prophecy.

“Jo’burg has many challenges of job,” he explains. “People need luck to get jobs. That’s why there are many false prophets ... When we’re in Jo’burg we are all foreigners.”

Religion has often been a way for migrants to find a place in the city. The Great Synagogue in Wolmarans Street was completed in 1914. Many of its congregants had fled Lithuania, threatened by pogroms against Jews in Russia. Their routes to the city were often via the poorhouses of London and a sea journey to the Cape. Early city life was not easy, as documented in *The Jews of South Africa* by Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn: although the wealthier were prospectors and landlords, many Jews suffered by becoming involved in the liquor and sex trades. Like many migrants now in Johannesburg they were often the targets of abuse and stigma.

The building of the synagogue was an attempt to gain social standing and to set up solid and social ties binding a community whose place in the social order was tenuous. In 1994, the Jewish congregation left the synagogue after the murder of one of its congregants in the area, and declining numbers of members. Subsequently, it became a short-lived venue for fashion shows.

Now it is home to one of the largest new prophetic movements not only in Johannesburg but in Southern Africa: the Revelation Church of God, led by Prophet Radebe. The synagogue remains, then, a spiritual home for migrants coming into the city.

Radebe, a South African, calls himself a “prophet of all nations” and indeed the church has a diverse congregation incorporating South Africans and many other nationalities, including Zimbabweans. Formed only four years ago, it has branches all over the country and has even set up in Bulawayo.

On Good Friday this year more than 30 000 people

from the Revelation Church packed the Johannesburg Stadium to capacity. At the event a number of Zimbabwean flags were waved.

The Revelation Church has its own channel on DSTV (after initially being broadcast on Soweto TV), a website with regular podcasts of services, and publishes its own magazine and newspaper, *Isambula*. It sells a wide array of merchandise, including beanies, holy water and salts, DVDs and CDs, a spear for “fighting evil spirits” and plastic buckets for “containing suspicious elements in people’s environments”. Tithes are regularly collected during services. The church has clearly localised some of the American-, Nigerian- and Brazilian-style evangelism, based on both miracles and marketing.

And yet to reduce its success to commercialism is too simple — the services clearly resonate with the fears and longings of many in inner-city Johannesburg and beyond.

On several days a week crowds line Wolmarans Street waiting to enter the old synagogue. Yellow-shirted guards closely control the throngs. Many women and some men from inner-city slums come to seek good fortune and healing.

The interior of the synagogue is still well preserved. It has a large sky-blue dome, echoing with the voices of the congregants and reflecting light through stained-glass windows. The Star of David adorns many of the walls. The menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum, remains on the old bimah (pulpit), its candles burning against the backdrop of a video screen. On the pulpit is a leopard skin throne. The church’s ceremonies are rooted in Pentecostal evangelism, but use symbols from African traditions, contrasting with the setting of the synagogue itself

Men and women in white robes line the circumference. The crowd dances and sways in circles, thrusting their hands into the air. The atmosphere during services is heated and trancelike, the songs and prayers building to a crescendo. At the culmination of the service the prophet facilitates exorcisms and blessings.

The prophet is dressed in a long, blue, patterned robe

and carries a spear. A crowd lines up in front of him and he blesses them, seemingly driving demons from some. This exorcism sees a few going into spasms and being held to the floor by the prophet’s sidemen.

In one ceremony a woman goes up to the stage and starts speaking, but suddenly falls over writhing, and shouting. A group of blue-robed men seizes her and holds the microphone out to her. She speaks in a gruff, terrifying voice — that of her dead mother, calling on her daughter to die and return to her. The mother’s voice keeps crying out, “my child, *‘umtwana wami’*”. The prophet invites the woman’s lover, her twin sister, and her baby to the stage. The lover explains that the stricken woman had been working at a Spar, but continually faints. The mother responds, speaking through the possessed woman, saying that her daughter should not be working; instead, she should be caring for her.

The prophet asks the lover whether the couple are married — they are not — and says that is one reason why the mother is returning. The mother is also haunting the daughter because the daughter had never accepted her death. The lover agrees to marry the daughter. The possessed woman falls down and rests after the marriage promise. When she gets up she says she is very tired, then bursts into tears and tenderly embraces the prophet.

It occurs to me amid all the song and euphoria that prophecy is not simply the gift of knowing the future or speaking with the dead, it is a way of making peace with the dead — allowing those who are silent to speak.

In the rituals of exorcism, in which demons are hurled out of their human hosts, many possessed members fall into the aisles in fits, some speaking in tongues, others crying out. Once I witnessed an elderly woman walking along the aisles, growling. Sometimes some of the congregants seem to go into epileptic-like fits, while others try to run away or fight and have to be restrained. Another time I saw a woman coughing up blood: the bloody spit and vomit was shown to all on the screen above the pulpit.

In the evenings in Wolmarans Street crowds gather and

are anointed by ushers with holy water and encouraged to shake the darkness from their bodies and lives. As the throng hurls away its misfortunes in slow motion a swell of whispered prayers passes through it: a collective speaking of unknown tongues, a Johannesburg glossolalia.

The Revelation Church advertises on its website its uniqueness: “power to heal”, “gift of prophecy”, “deliverance from witchcraft”, “revelation to deal with African problems”, “leading people to Salvation through Jesus teachings”.

Radebe is recorded on a Powerpoint slide on the website preaching that there are three types of death: “1. The death of hope, 2. The death of the flesh, 3. The death of the human spirit.”

Although the church claims on its website “the power to heal” and deliver congregants from witchcraft (I once witnessed a dead owl — an animal associated with witchcraft — being shown around the crowd), many of the testimonies about the church’s powers are more concrete: finding piece-work, or raising money for a laptop. The congregants seek healing for an array of ailments: infertility, problems with pregnancy, and physical pain, among others. A July edition of the church’s newspaper, *Isambula*, contains the testimony of a woman who claims to have been cured of HIV after participating in a ritual entitled “deliverance through the use of the black cloth”. The article claims that the woman, who, it notes, was also on antiretrovirals, “received a miracle of her life and tested HIV negative. She is healed from HIV and is an example to many people that when you believe in God nothing is impossible.”

It should be noted that testing HIV-negative is not proof that the disease has been cured. According to research conducted by Dr Ram Yogev of Northwestern University in the United States, prolonged antiretroviral therapy can lead to false negative tests because of highly suppressed viral loads. Furthermore, the risks of stopping antiretrovirals can include the rise of viral load and possible drug resistance, making treatment less effective. There

are no scientifically documented cases of HIV being cured through faith healing.

The Revelation Church did not give a formal comment for this chapter in time for publication, referring me to its public materials, but members of the church’s organisation, who do not wish to be named, insisted that the church itself does not claim to heal TB or HIV/Aids and other diseases, but that people can be healed through their faith in God and that miracles are possible. They also said the church encourages people to continue taking medication until they have been cleared by doctors and that the church is open to working with doctors.

It seems that a number of followers of the Revelation Church pursue standard biomedical treatment in tandem with prayers. I met a Zimbabwean woman suffering from a delayed pregnancy who believed herself bewitched, but was simultaneously visiting the prophet and the Helen Joseph Hospital for analysis. Another woman I’ve met, who is HIV positive, takes her antiretrovirals but continues to visit a Zionist church as well as the Revelation Church in search of healing and good fortune.

I spoke to an unemployed Zimbabwean man I shall call Samuel. He came to the church, struggling with family problems and suffering from a heart condition. We met on the ramparts of Constitution Hill where we could speak quietly. He was thin and his health seemed fragile.

“People through the prophecies can get jobs, healing, their problems are being solved through prayers,” he says. His sickness is a constant concern.

“First time I went to Hillbrow clinic, they said there’s a growth inside my heart and they referred me to Jo’burg hospital, and they said they did not see anything through scanning, but the way the heart beats is not normal. It rises and falls, rises and falls.”

He’s managed to get treatment for his heart condition at Charlotte Maxeke hospital, but often feels an outsider there. “If you are a foreigner, they don’t take you as if you are a patient, but as if you are foreigner. I don’t feel good at the hospital.”

There is, of course, the hope that Samuel will be healed. But there is something more immediate that prophecy offers — and which is so critical for many in the city. It fulfils the need for a sense of acceptance and belonging, and a public space to speak in a city where so many other avenues — the media, the state, society at large — are closed.

“When I’m in church, I feel I’m suitable. I’ve got that confidence and faith that I will be healed. Even if you’ve got any kind of sickness they don’t laugh at you. They show humble [sic] to those who are sick. I think the church is my home. My second home.”

Sitting on the ramparts of Constitution Hill, amid the bottle-green shards of evening light, overlooking the immense and stuttering engine of the city coughing up its smoky dusk, it seems that prophets are everywhere: on the mountains and the mine dumps, in supermarkets, in the security booths where guards wait long hours in the dark outside old warehouses, in the vans and minibuses driving itinerants back and forth across the borders.

The prophetic and the profane, the biomedical and the mystical, coexist in the city.

There are certainly hazards that come with prophetic healing. The misdiagnoses of biomedical conditions can have grave consequences, about which city healthcare workers are rightly concerned. However, the coexistence of alternative forms of healing is certainly a reality and a possibility as the stories collected for this article indicate, albeit in a provisional way.

Furthermore, the popularity and proliferation of prophetic movements indicate a social and spiritual service that prophets, in various forms, provide: the voices of prophets cannot easily be dismissed.

In 1948, the year in which apartheid began, the book *Bantu Prophets* was published, written by the Swedish missionary Bengt Sundkler. The language of the book is of its time and rooted in a patriarchal missionary worldview. It

is nonetheless attentive to the role of independent African churches and prophets in resisting racial oppression, and speaks to the role of prophets in mid-20th-century Johannesburg in a manner that resonates in the city of today. Sundkler writes of black migrants to the city:

“The Church follows them, caring for them in the crises of life. Ill health is rampant in the City, and Zionist prophets gather crowds in the hovels of the slum or out on the veld to pray for the sick and drive out demons. Just off the main road between Johannesburg and Pretoria, near Alexandra Township, they congregate in their hundreds on Sunday afternoons, laying healing hands on the sick. And death comes to the Bantu location. It comes often. Then the Church is close at hand, and its fellowship, in a strange and bitter world, is reassuring and full of warmth.”

Prophecy in Johannesburg today is both a new phenomenon addressing a new constellation of problems and an older phenomenon speaking to the dislocation and suffering of life in the city.

In contemporary Johannesburg many regional problems coalesce: social and political upheaval (particularly from Zimbabwe and other areas of the continent), urbanisation and joblessness, a lack of livelihood and accommodation, the fear of strangers and criminals in the city, the constant presence of death from violence, accident or illness. Under such conditions of uncertainty the ability to secure a safe, healthy and meaningful life remains a constant struggle.

And perhaps this is one reason why lampposts, traffic lights and rubbish bins on the streets of Johannesburg are plastered with advertisements for prophets and why people come in their thousands over Easter to wave their flags. For beneath the seeming excessive claims of some of these notices, and beneath the commercialism of the large churches, lies a collective anxiety about fertility and death, illness and labour, loss and love.

The voices of prophets in the city speak to the violence, humiliations and sorrows of the city’s past that have continued into the present and will continue in the future. As

much is it may be about divine calling, about channelling the dead, or about foretelling the future, prophecy, it seems to me, is also a way of articulating the daily troubles of the present.

It speaks to a hope that the failed aspirations of the city can be restored, that its pollutants can be cleansed and that the people and things lost in its streets will return safely home, wherever that may be. ■



**The burial of
Lungani
Mabutyana**
Kwanele Sosibo



Lungani Mabutyana's journey from a hostel room in Marikana (top left), in a coffin (above) to the village of KwaMwabo (below), where it was finally buried (previous pages).





KwaMwabo (this and following page).



**PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MADELENE CRONJÉ**



Animals are
slaughtered for
the funeral meal.



Mhlab'uyashukuma





From the outset it was clear that the unsolved mystery of Lungani Mabutyana's status as a Lonmin employee at the time of his death would hamper preparations for his funeral.

Mabutyana, a rock drill operator, was found hanging from a tree in Wonderkop, among the cluster of rocks that make up what is now known as "small koppie", on May 6, a Monday morning.

"Small koppie", not far from the informal settlement of Nkanini, near the Lonmin platinum mine, is where at least a dozen striking mineworkers were killed by police during the August 16 2012 massacre, as police pursued them from the main koppie, a few hundred metres away, where they had gathered. In total, 34 miners died from wounds sustained that day. Mabutyana survived the police onslaught but was among the 270 arrested on the day of the killings. His friends and family members say he saw some of the close-range killings: as he lay there, playing dead, blood splatters from his co-workers who were being executed fell on his body.

His family says contradictory reasons were given for Mabutyana's "discharge" — mine jargon for a resignation or firing. After visiting the "time office", where workers' attendance records are kept, Mabutyana's cousin, Vuyisanani Mlobeli, says he was told his cousin had been discharged for absenteeism, but, according to the human resources department, Mabutyana had asked to be released from work.

According to his colleagues, at the time of his death Mabutyana was in possession of a month-long release form allowing him to attend the Marikana Commission of Inquiry. His colleagues say he may have been called to testify at some point. The permission, they say, lapsed on March 22, although Mabutyana was discharged on March 7.

On Thursday May 9, Lonmin, through the public relations company Brunswick, told the *Mail & Guardian* that Mabutyana had been released to attend hearings from January 15 to February 22 2013. "After the lapse of the release," their statement read, "he did not report for duty and was subsequently DIA [dismissed in absentia] on 06 March 2013."

Lonmin says Mabutyana came to the Rowland shaft on April 16 “requesting to resign”, but was told that he had already been “terminated”. He was advised of his right to appeal, however, and indicated that he would rather not do so. He was apparently handed his termination documents and went to the hospital to do an exit check-up. The next day Mabutyana apparently came back to the shaft “to ensure that he is terminated”. He insisted on another termination form, which he signed and left.

His cousin, Mlobeli, and his brother, a sangoma named Thabani Mabutyana, both say they last saw him on May 1 at a May Day rally at the nearby Wonderkop stadium. Thabani says they had a few drinks together and he did not notice anything unusual about Lungani’s demeanour. Mlobeli, who lives in the same hostel complex as his cousin, says he last saw him leaving the hostel on that day, perhaps en route to his brother’s shack in the nearby Nkanini informal settlement.

Mabutyana is not the first Marikana massacre survivor suspected to have committed suicide. The first was Marvelous Mpošana, who was discovered hanging from a beam in his room on December 8 2012, less than four months after the massacre. Mpošana, who had been using crutches since the August 16 incident, having had metal rods inserted into his right knee, had fallen on the injured knee a few days before his death and had complained to his brother-in-law, Thembelihle Mtshaka, of severe pain.

There are always unanswered questions surrounding an apparent suicide in Marikana. When Mpošana, who was also possibly due to testify before the commission, died, some of his colleagues wondered how he could have hopped from his bed to a beam in the centre of the room, set up a noose, hopped on the chair and kicked it away — all without the use of his right leg.

At the time of his death, Anele Zonke, a colleague at Lonmin, said Mpošana appeared in some of the photo-

graphic evidence supplied to the Marikana Commission by the police. In one of the photographs, depicting a scene believed to have been tampered with, Mpošana appears with his hands tied behind his back and a handgun beside him. Zonke says he suspected that his colleague might have been murdered because of what he had seen and knew about the massacre. According to a police source, police had received information that Mpošana was having family problems, which may have led to the supposed suicide. This contrasted with the picture painted by Mtshaka, who says that on December 29 his family had planned to host a ceremony to celebrate a milestone in Mpošana’s lobolo proceedings.

Mabutyana’s friends say he had told them of incidents of unknown people knocking on the door of his hostel room, not saying who they were looking for when asked. On one occasion, one said, Mabutyana had turned on the outside lights and had heard footsteps scurrying away.

On the weekend after Mabutyana was said to have ended his own life, three other people were slain in violence related to the turf war between the more established National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the nascent Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu). Mawethu Steven, an Amcu regional organiser, was shot four times in the back as he watched football previews at a tavern in Photsaneng, not far from Marikana. Steven had been instrumental in the rise of Amcu in the platinum belt, leading a pivotal unprotected strike at Lonmin’s Karee shaft in 2011, a strike that led to the first significant erosion of NUM membership, with Amcu gaining about 5 000 members. In the hours following Steven’s death twin brothers Ayanda and Andile Menzi were murdered in a shack in Nkaneng. One was believed to be an NUM shop steward.

These events seemed to dwarf the significance of Mabutyana’s life and the trying circumstances leading to his death. The collective focus and anger among Lonmin’s

employees in the following week were dedicated to Steven. There was a two-day work stoppage, in which workers demanded the closure of the NUM's offices (before the deadline agreed to by all parties) and the end of union members' alleged habit of toting guns. With the working environment still hostile and the company's loyalty seen as lying with the NUM, workers — especially those who had been involved in the 2012 strike — were weighing up the gains of the previous year's sacrifices. When the parties emerged from negotiations to end the strike, a 22% increase was announced, one which has never materialised.

Mabutyana, for example, was believed to have been experiencing acute financial problems and had already attempted suicide twice before. "In December I left him here at the house while I went home to Matatiele on leave," says Thabani, who, at 39, is 12 years older than his sibling. "I got a phone call during that period telling me that he had tried to kill himself and he was already in hospital. He first tried killing himself with an electric cord but he failed. He then ate Rattex and the neighbours found him rolling about in the yard. At that time he just said he had the urge to hang himself and eat poison. But when other family members confronted him he told them that his problem was that he wasn't seeing most of his salary and that his ID and his card were with a loan shark in Marikana."

Thabani says he had settled his brother's debts on several occasions and rescued his ID and debit card from the loan shark and "on Good Friday he went home with the money we had kept for him".

Mabutyana, a twin, was single and had no children. Thabani says his younger brother had lived with a partner earlier, somewhere close to the mine, but had since moved into the Wonderkop hostel's dilapidated single quarters.

Asked whether his brother's demeanour had changed after he was detained along with 269 other strikers following the Marikana massacre, Thabani says they were happy to be reunited when Lungani was released. The strikers, arrested on August 16 for public violence and then charged

with murder (charges that were provisionally withdrawn after a public outcry), were released in the first week of September. There were widespread allegations that they had been tortured.

The Lonmin strike lasted for over five weeks. In the aftermath the National Credit Regulator shut down 11 of the 17 cash-loan operators in Marikana for illegal practices.

The symbolism of Mabutyana's choice of a thicket of trees in the cluster of rocks that comprise "small koppie" as the place to end his life, if that is what he did, is unsettling. It also points to the widespread trauma the event caused its victims. One wonders how he made his way from the Wonderkop hostel, past the Nkanini slum, on the way to the site of last year's massacre.

Did he go on foot, carrying the items said to have been discovered by his side (Coca-Cola, keys to his hostel room, a Lonmin access card)? Was he alone? Or could he have been captured at some odd hour and taken to the secluded bushes by force? Is it possible that he was a victim of what he knew and was about to share? Whatever the case, it seems that the aftermath, fraught with trauma, financial difficulties and what some would see as an increasingly hostile working environment, was too much for his shoulders to bear.

Lonmin's funeral policy states that, in the event of an employee's death off the mine as a result of any cause, which is how Mabutyana's death would have been classified had he still been officially employed, a benefits administrator assists the family with "the notification of death" to the relevant fund and with claims for death benefits. If transport is required, a "welfare official" assists with arrangements within South Africa, but the transport is deemed "private and not official company business". Colleagues wishing to attend the funeral, usually no more than six, can apply for unpaid leave or take accumulated leave if available.

In the case of Mabutyana's death, which took place, as

the company claimed, after his voluntary resignation, none of these benefits applied.

Mlobeli, Mabutyana's cousin, says he tried to get assistance from the union (Amcu) — and coherent answers from the company — but was unsuccessful. Although there seem to be two inconsistent stories about his dismissal, what they do indicate is that Mabutyana had missed work and then decided, for whatever reason, that he would no longer return. The alleged harassment by unknown individuals suggests a motive for his quitting his job, and perhaps the alleged suicide too.

What was clear in the week I become acquainted with Mabutyana's family members is that they would have to make all the funeral arrangements, as a family, without any assistance.

In the week of his brother's death, Thabani, who lives in the informal settlement of Nkanini, became ill. The doctor gave him medication for "high blood pressure" and he seemed to have developed some kind of an inflammation in the area of his nose.

When I meet Thabani for the second time, at his tin shack, surrounded by goats, he comes out of the secluded bedroom to greet me, a *doek* (cloth) wrapped around his stubby mound of dreadlocks, as though he was in the middle of some ritual. That's the first hint that Thabani is a sangoma. He tells me he isn't feeling well and that I should deal with his cousin, Mlobeli.

Later that afternoon Mlobeli, although somewhat sceptical, allows me into his brightly lit family unit accommodation in Wonderkop hostel's block F8. He shares the accommodation with a clean-shaven, younger cousin, Azile, who circumspectly introduces himself to me as Ayanda. It is a mildly cold Tuesday evening and, although Mlobeli believes my story, I still have to get the blessing of his elders to be allowed to attend the funeral.

Mlobeli tells me that the following day will not be busy for him. He has plans to attend an impromptu rally workers have called in protest against the NUM keeping the union

offices, despite its falling numbers, which have pushed it below the requisite organisational thresholds.

On Wednesday, three days before the funeral, I phone him on a hunch and find out that he is preparing to visit the undertaker who will transport Mabutyana's corpse. I accompany him to Rustenburg, where the meeting will take place. It is uneventful.

Siyabulela Ndlovu, a bespectacled undertaker from the Eastern Cape, tells Mlobeli he will have to come back the next day because the driver is still on the way from Matati-ele. Mlobeli can't complete the death certificate at Rustenburg's home affairs office until the body has been picked up from a Thlabane mortuary by the driver transporting it home. This, Ndlovu explains, is to prevent fraudulent "dumping".

On the way back to Marikana Mlobeli tells me he comes from a family of 11 children. He is the fourth-born child but the first of the boys. One sibling died, but his parents also brought up his cousins, Thabani, and his younger twin brothers including the deceased, Lungani (Mabutyana). Mlobeli tells me he first came to the mine through an uncle and he, in turn, brought Lungani to stay with him at the mine, but he spent his first two years there jobless.

Many of Mlobeli's siblings live and work in Durban, following in the footsteps of their father, Mhlab'uyashukuma Mlobeli. (Mhlab'uyashukuma's name means earthquake, when translated directly from Xhosa, but with the deliberateness it is uttered with among his peers, it may just mean "the earth cowers at your stature". Such is the respect he commands in the locale of KwaNyaniso.) Vuyisanani Mlobeli's sister, Bulelwa, works at the Passenger Rail Association of South Africa (Prasa), where their father worked for more than 20 years before retiring in 2002; Bulelwa helped organise employment for her sibling (Delisani) and, at some point, her own daughter (Fundiswa).

Mlobeli's arrangements for the funeral take place against the backdrop of the Marikana work stoppage. If he is to get clearance for his three-day "family responsibility"

leave, workers must return underground on the Wednesday night so that a shift manager can okay the leave. On the Wednesday afternoon we attend an Amcu rally at Wonderkop stadium, where Amcu leader Joseph Mathunjwa gives a stirring performance, mixing religious dogma with self-righteous rhetoric to full effect.

On Thursday morning I drive from Magaliesburg to Marikana to take Mlobeli to Thlabane West, where he must identify Mabutyana's body. As the grey morning unfolds, Mlobeli and I talk about the events of the past few days.

"Lonmin employees are actually not unreasonable. Most of the times when they act like that [go on unprotected strikes], it's because they just want management to treat them like people — to actually acknowledge that they exist. Even around August 16, all the guys wanted was for management to come and talk to them, but they don't seem to get that. At the end of the day, people are not animals."

As we park in the Nando's parking lot in Rustenburg, talk turns to the religious imagery in Mathunjwa's speech. I ask Mlobeli how people feel about the Amcu president's excessive religious rhetoric.

"Well, he makes it relatable. Like yesterday, he was saying that Amcu represent the children of Israel, and when they escaped from Egypt, Moses opened up the Red Sea for them to cross. And when Pharaoh and his army came, wanting to follow them, the sea's waters closed them in, drowning them before they could cross over. It's quite clear that Amcu is the children of Israel and the NUM is Pharaoh."

Ndlovu arrives in a white van. We follow him for about six kilometres to Thlabane, where Mlobeli signs forms releasing the body into his custody. The funeral parlour is unfortunately named: "Bafa" means "they have died", but I later find out from the woman working in its reception and coffin display area that the name is an acronym for Burial Association for All.

The man who has brought the body from a Phokeng mortuary calls Mlobeli to the side entrance to identify Mabutyana's body. He wheels the body out and unzips it to

chest level. Mlobeli stands next to the body and looks into its bearded, chiselled features. The stench of decomposition wafts through the funeral parlour's verandah. Satisfied that he has just seen the remains of his cousin, Mlobeli calls his cousin Thabani, and arranges a time to meet at the Marikana koppies, near where Mabutyana's body was found hanging.

Two hours later, after a trip to the Department of Home Affairs to finalise the death certificate, Mlobeli arrives at the meeting place, accompanied by the undertaker. He is sombre but efficient. He walks with Thabani and a neighbour to a secluded thicket of bushes, just to the side of the cluster of rocks.

Thabani burns *impepho* (incense), while Mlobeli takes a sharp stone to untie the noose, which is made of a thin, nylon-like fabric. He breaks a branch of the tree from which Mabutyana had hung and hands it to Thabani, who begins an invocation of his spirit, starting by reciting the deceased's clan names. "*Ja Lungani... sesizokuthatha manje. Sizokuyisa enkomponi uyothatha izimpahla zakho. Sicela ungahluphi sizesiyofika* [We are here to take you to the hostel to pick up your clothes. Please be at peace until we get there]."

Mabutyana's journey home has begun. Thabani gets into the back of the canopied van and it drives past Nkanini towards the dilapidated eastern end of the hostel complex. Here, while the hostel renovations continue, phasing out the dorm-like single quarters, men still share uninhabitable rooms. Holding *impepho*, Thabani, Mlobeli and some of Mabutyana's roommates cram themselves into the room and stand near the departed's bed. The same ritual is performed: Mabutyana is respectfully told that he is leaving his hostel room for good. His bed is stripped and his meagre belongings bundled into the van.

Thabani, still holding a smouldering bush of *impepho* and the branch taken from the small koppie, gets into the back of the van to accompany his cousin home. Between the coffin and his lanky frame there's hardly any space to sit in the back of van. It drives out of the mine via Rowland

Shaft, where Mabutyana worked, and on past Lonmin's main administrative block, before taking the N4 to Midrand. There Thabani and the corpse will take another car to Harding before his brother travels the final home stretch to the secluded village of KwaMwrabo, in a small settlement called KwaNyaniso.

Mlobeli, a photographer and I make the journey from Rustenburg to Matatiele by car. We leave in the afternoon, stopping off in Johannesburg before continuing in the direction of Durban. On the radio people are congratulating Kaizer Chiefs on their Premier Soccer League season triumph. From the passenger seat, Mlobeli confesses to being a Chiefs supporter, echoing the listeners' sentiments — that the team has rightly invested in a lot of good players.

On the road I ask Mlobeli about the perception that mineworkers have some of the biggest houses in the Eastern Cape compared to other working-class folk.

"Well, that depends on your willpower and your ability to save money," he says. "Someone who works at Spoornet, for example, can have a better house than you. Take me ... I only have a flat and a rondavel, but I want to buy bricks and extend that building."

A "flat" is a building with a single-gradient roof, unlike a rondavel or a building with a triangular roof. I learn that the goats in Mabutyana's yard are his. He dozes for most of the journey, until we reach the R617 to Underberg. From there, we drive through intermittent rain straight to Kokstad, to Cedarville then Matatiele, which we reach at 3am. We then travel out of the town, in the direction of Mount Frere, hitting a precarious 35km stretch of gravel that takes us to KwaMwrabo.

We reach the homestead at about 4am. Mlobeli ushers us into a large, unfurnished rondavel. Inside, in the flicker of a kerosene lamp, mostly elderly women straighten themselves up from sleep. They are members of Mlobeli's extended family. Someone starts a church hymn and

several bell-shaped contraptions accompany the singing. Mlobeli's father gives us a solemn welcome. "*Siyabonga ukuthi nizobona* [We are grateful that you came to see for yourselves]," he says somberly in his gravelly voice. "*Khona nizotshela umhlaba ukuthi asiphatekile kahle* [So you can tell the world that we are distressed.]" Cups of tea and plates of homemade bread are offered before we are ushered to our bedrooms.

Mlobeli and I share a room with two double beds set diagonally against opposite walls. By seven o'clock he is up, donning a puffy neon-orange safety suit to oversee the slaughtering of the first cow. By the time I make it outside some of the meat (a succession of rubbery digestive-system parts complemented by soft, fleshy, undercooked meat) has been laid out before a septet of the village's elders and some of Mhlab'uyashukuma's brothers.

The Mlobeli homestead is elaborate, but every square inch is put to use. It faces east, down a seasonal river valley overlooking the ruins where Mlahb'uyashukuma first settled in the 1960s, as a young man, to build a family. Located about 800m north of a bumpy gravel road, it slopes downward, a row of houses and rondavels giving way to an outside cooking area, a meat-preparation room and several kraals. Mhlab'uyashukuma's livestock number in the hundreds — sheep, cows and a handful of pigs. Perhaps appropriately, the wide, deep pit of the only toilet is situated not far from the pigsty.

Outside the mud structure of the prep room, near the centre of the sheep kraal, Mhlab'uyashukuma grants me an interview.

"I grew up across this valley, by those trees," he says, pointing to a homestead that no longer exists, not far from where he first built his own. "My ancestors built all across this valley [and] eventually I came here. My great-grandfather and his wife were the first to arrive here from a neighbourhood behind the hill [behind us]."

Mhlabuyashukuma's working life started in the West-onaria gold mines in 1963. "The money was too little, so I left," he says, rubbing his straggly black and grey beard. "I

started working in Durban on the Spoornet [now Prasa] line — we would lay tracks and maintain them.”

Was the money enough this time?

“Well, it was enough because they all went to school. I raised 11 children, and that’s not counting Lungani. Lungani and Thabani were young when they arrived here.”

I remark that it is an impossibly huge family.

“You have to protect them, they are your responsibility and you have no choice but to face it. When there’s nothing, you have to grow it into something, build it.”

I ask him how he kept his marriage going under the trying circumstances of migrancy.

“Once you’ve made the vows you have to trust your wife and not abandon her. Even if you’re far away, you have to keep her close. Every month-end I’d go home [when I worked in Durban]. Spend two days and go back to work.”

On the Wednesday, as we made our first trip to the undertaker, Mlobeli had explained that he tries to go home every three months. In fact, he had been at home when he heard the news of his cousin’s death and rushed back to work.

“It was important for me to keep focus on my family,” Mhlab’uyashukuma continues. “So I didn’t fall into the temptation of raising another family. In Johannesburg, when the ‘join’ [the employment season] would end, after nine months, we would spend three months at home.”

We discuss the fact that several members of his family are employed by Prasa. His daughter went from cleaner to station manager; his son is an office clerk and his granddaughter has also worked there.

“They found their own employment there,” he says. “Before, you could register your children, but later they let it be known that this wasn’t an inheritance business. They saw that I had good employment and they applied. Five of them are currently employed there and they are happy.”

Mhlab’uyashukuma finds joy in watching his children establish families of their own and marvels at how different working conditions today are from those in his day. “It was

rough working then, and it was easy to get fired for any small thing. When we talk about their work they complain about it being difficult, but I feel they have it easy. Some of them use pencils at work, like you — you are writing.”

It feels like an opportune time to ask him how he feels about the death of his nephew, Lungani, whom he took in and raised as his own son.

He lets out a deep sigh and sits askew, using his hand to prop himself against the back of the white plastic chair. “It destroyed my spirit, deep inside of me. I still can’t come up with a reason why he’d do it [kill himself]. When he was here during Easter, he said that after the strike at the mine, he was treated very badly. He said it still hurt ... the images were lodged in his head. What broke him the most was that the dying men had fallen on him, their blood spilling on to him as he lay down playing dead. Even sitting down alone was scary for him because he couldn’t reconcile with those events. He said it affected him profoundly because they were still being hunted down.”

“Did you say anything to him?” I ask, cognisant of the respect Mhlab’uyashukuma commands in his family.

“I said when a man is working, obstacles are part and parcel of it and he shouldn’t be afraid.”

I ask whether he thinks Lungani’s presumed suicide was directly related to the trauma he suffered when the strike turned deadly.

“I think what he saw left an indelible imprint on him. Last year I couldn’t sleep thinking about them until I heard that they were safe from the hardship they were facing at that time. I told them that it would pass because we had also worked under those conditions.”

As we finish our interview I ask Mhlab’uyashukuma how the family manages, living in such isolation. He says there have been frequent promises that the road would be tarred but so far these have amounted to nothing. The Mlobelis also make do without electricity. The food is cooked using firewood from a low-walled area in the middle of the yard. It is constantly busy. By midday, when I finish my interview with Mhlab’uyashukuma, I have already eaten

three meals: a thick slice of homemade bread and tea on arrival at 4am, sorghum porridge at 8am and the freshly slaughtered meat.

I spend the afternoon getting to know the Mlobelis a little better. Mandla, who works at a platinum mine in the North West, Vuyisanani, Delisani and Mandlakhe point out their houses for me in the drizzle. I remember their father saying: “When you’re all together, nobody can come between you.” It seems to be the family mantra.

At the wake that night, Mlobeli gives a dry, factual account of his cousin’s death. He recounts the Rat-tex episode, his subsequent hospitalisation and his eventual death. Mlobeli says Mabutyana avoided dealings with family at this time.

The wake starts off joyously, with songs keeping spirits high and staving off tears. The songs are also used to break up the testimony, especially when the testifiers are overcome by emotion. The women, mostly middle aged, play plunger-shaped metal instruments that emit a bell-like sound while some of the male preachers beat small, hand-held percussive cushions. The rest of the mourners clap their hands and stomp their feet.

At a river a few hundred metres away Mabutyana’s body, having been escorted from the nearby town of Harding where his brother Thabani had left it, is washed with goat bile, water and *ubuswane*, a herb, to remove the stigma of unnatural death. It is crucial for this ritual to be performed before the body enters the yard, or, as the belief goes, Mabutyana’s ill fate may haunt the family.

Thabani, who had escorted the body from Rustenburg to Harding, is nowhere to be seen when the coffin arrives. The simple hexagonal box is moved towards a wall in the room. A wave of wailing fills the room, but it soon subsides, giving way to more fervent testimonials.

The following day, the funeral gets underway at around 11 am. The weather is sunny but carries the sting of winter. It’s a simple ceremony, without the flash and peacocking of

urban funerals. There are bell songs and testimonials and a local councillor who tells the family that the municipality hasn’t forgotten about them.

An hour later, the funeral procession makes its way up a small hill, near the rondavel that Mabutyana called home. His twin brother, Lungisani, goes into the grave and lies down for a few seconds before emerging; this is to ensure that his twin’s fate does not befall him. Some men pass around shovels as the funeral party descends for lunch.

During the lunch, Thabani tells me that he had to leave the vigil before the body arrived, otherwise he would have become “ill”. He says he had to remove his sangoma beads so he could slaughter a goat to anoint Mabutyana as an ancestor.

How was his last journey home, I ask?

“I had to be strong and assure him that it was the three of us, myself, himself, and [our cousin] Vuyisanani [Mlobeli] were in there [in the back of the van]. I had to do it that way because initially, it was Vuyisanani who was supposed to take him home, but he couldn’t because of work problems.”

The more family members I meet, the more solid the family network seems. From one of the kraals where the men gather after the funeral to drink sorghum beer and cut pieces of meat with their pocket knives, the stocky Zimele Mlobeli, the eighth-born, who works at Nampak in Durban (the company where Lungisani works), says: “It’s good having your family in one city because when you have problems you can rely on each other and share ideas.”

The first-born of the family, 48-year-old Bulelwa, gives me a sense of the other side of the coin: “First of all, it’s not right because you don’t get everything you want. If your dad doesn’t have a good job, it’s not a pretty picture. My dad was able to take us to school and none of us had to drop out because of money. Most of us ended in matric, you know, he was a general worker.”

I’m sitting next to Bulelwa in the lounge of the house

Mhlab'uyashukuma sleeps in. It is the building closest to the entrance to the yard. Her head is wrapped and she wears a pinafore.

"Older people had this belief of not educating women. He wanted to take Delisani beyond matric. I would have studied further if he could afford it, but I was also worrying about the others coming after me."

Bulelwa has been working at Prasa since 1985 when she started out as a coach cleaner. Today she is the manager for Thandaza, Cato Ridge and Georgedale stations in KwaZulu-Natal. She switches to the benefits of having so many siblings.

"The load of Lungani's death — if it was just two of us who had to bring him here from Rustenburg ... But as the 12 of us [including his two brothers and her daughter, I presume], we arranged to bring him down. The funeral was carried out at our cost ... I thought he had a funeral policy or that the mine would cover the costs of the funeral. I don't understand how come he's not employed. As far as I knew he was attending the Marikana Commission and at his work they told us he was 'discharged', which is jargon I don't understand, but of course we haven't spoken to them face to face.

"During the funeral my daughter said she thought that we would have sat down and spoke with him [before he died]. I think we failed him as a family. We should have made sure that he received counselling. He was far away, but those close to him should have recognised that he needed help."

Bulelwa says the family is doubtful about the suicide claims.

"[Lawyer] Dali Mpofu [who represents the injured and arrested in the massacre] has just been stabbed, the *inyanga* [who supposedly supplied *umuthi* to striking mineworkers] has been murdered, there have been others that have been killed. There are all these things that were found near him — his clock [access] card, bread, a two-litre bottle of Coke and his keys ... Would he bring all those things with him if he was going to kill himself?"

Next I ask Bulelwa whether she thinks the size of her family influenced some of her brothers to choose employment on the mines.

"Those that did that had dropped out of school because they had failed and thought it better to leave." Bulelwa's daughter later tells me that this was the case with Lungani. He started falling behind at school and went to Marikana: "He thought there was money to be made in the city of gold."

"My dad used to work in the mines," Bulelwa continues. "In fact most people from here started their working lives in the mines. Teba [a mineworker recruitment agency] used to recruit here in Matatiele and there used be a lot of openings.

"Today, four of us [Bongekile, the second-born; Delisani, the fifth, and Nandipha, the tenth] including myself work at Prasa. It was only Delisani, who is a ticket-sales agent, that I directly helped with a job. But we get along well as a family. I call all my younger sisters *sisi* and they do the same. It's just how we were raised."

In a break with family tradition Bulelwa has only one child, a decision she says she took in order to be able to send her to university so she could study what she wants to. "She's about 27 years old now. To me she's like a sister and she contributes to the family."

After my interview with Bulelwa the siblings gather for a family meeting. I wander about in the yard and strike up a conversation with Mam' Qwathi. She leads me to an adjacent structure that is dark while she searches for a candle.

The elegant, slender matriarch of the family, Mam' Qwathi is a traditionalist who is against the idea of women being employed.

"Most of my daughters and daughters-in-law are employed. There's a problem because they only have two days of leave. Who's going to do the cooking for the visitors? Women are educated now, we weren't, so on that level I understand. It's just that it's hard when they are not around."

When her husband, Mhlab'uyashukuma, went to work,

Mam' Qwathi stayed at home with her in-laws, milking the livestock, raising chickens, tending the garden and planting crops. She took it in her stride: "A man reaches a stage where he has to go to work. He started looking in 1963 and by 1964 he had found work around Johannesburg. At the time, women didn't do that [go to Johannesburg]. I stayed with his grandmother and his mother's younger sister. We'd write to each other in those days because there were no phones. When he [eventually] worked in Durban he'd come around once a month. There was a bus that would bring people. Sometimes I'd also go to Durban for about a month and come back."

Later Mam' Qwathi developed a dressmaking career for herself, which gave her a measure of independence. One of Mlobeli's childhood memories involves walking long distances with his siblings to collect his mother's dues from her clients.

Mam' Qwathi says there is less inclination now to live off the land. "Nobody keeps crops. The grazing animals eat them. We asked the governments to help us fence the crops."

She mentions a government scheme through which half of the fertiliser used on the family's 20-hectare plot was subsidised. "This year, we're going back to the land," she says. "Or the hunger will get us."

I do not get to see the family's plot. We sit in the vast, candle-lit room, surrounded by Mam' Qwathi's various grandchildren and daughters. She pointed vaguely beyond her, up an unseen hill, where some members of the family hold on to a life they knew so well.

My last interview is with a third-generation Mlobeli. Fundiswa is Bulelwa's daughter, her only child — because her mother "never married ... maybe she didn't want to have children by more than one man".

She was raised by Mam' Qwathi and grew up with the youngest of her uncles, among them the twins Lungisani and Lungani, and the last, Sphelele. "We ate, we had every-

thing we wanted. Our grandfather worked, my mother worked, we had crops," she says.

Fundiswa is tall and dark, her height making her a little out of place in the Mlobelis' genetic mix; she speaks in a soft, child-like voice.

As a child she attended local schools and eventually matriculated at Futura High School, a school in a formerly Indian part of Durban. Fundiswa remembers her childhood with Lungani as idyllic: "We were always together. We had different parents, but you would never say [so]. We'd go to school, we'd play, we'd go to the kitchen together, eat, sing, clean, chat — we were always together and we were there for each other."

Fundiswa's education problems started later. She initially wanted to do marketing at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) but fell pregnant while doing a bridging course through Unisa.

In 2006 and 2007 she did computer studies at DUT but then found a job at Prasa, where she has worked on and off ever since. She says she saw Lungani briefly in Durban after the massacre. As to whether she noticed any changes in his demeanour, she reiterates that he just loved to joke — even about things that were not funny.

"I thought we'd get the chance to meet again and talk," she says. "Because I'm like that. I'm free. I thought we'd discuss it and arrange counselling if he needed it. He was afraid of pain, so I don't know where he could have found the guts to hang himself."

I ask her about his alleged financial problems. She says: "He had no wife, no children, no house, no car — what would be the cause of his debt?"

Fundiswa admits that she has no visual reference for where her cousin worked and would like to see where he died. She is still in pain. During the wake and funeral her recollections of her cousin were moving — and interrupted by the impulse to cry.

"If only we had some answers as to why he did it. But at night when I'm alone I get visions of him hanging and I want to know why, at that age, did he have to kill himself?

If I knew that, then maybe we'd have peace. Like, right now, we were talking as a family, but we kept coming back to that."

The next morning, I wake up and bath in a PVC tub, as I have for the past few days. I witness an interesting scene when Alfred Gege (who works in Durban and is married to the second-born sibling, Bongekile) has a brief exchange with Mlobeli as he walks into the room from his house nearby.

Gege, who works in retail in Durban, tells Mlobeli that things are not going well and wonders what the prospects are at Lonmin. Before he steps out of the room, Mlobeli promises to look into it.

For breakfast there are more dollops of tripe that I can't finish, then long, heartfelt goodbyes. As we began, so we end, with a prayer and some words of thanks. We make the journey from KwaMwrabo to Matatiele in the morning sun. The majestic isolation of the landscape is entrancing, but we leave it behind as we move towards tarred roads and speed traps. The life of the Mlobelis, gently enforced by a man whose very name signifies an extinction event, seems a way of the past.

Mlobeli jumps off at Matatiele, where he is to take a taxi back to the killing fields and the dank, dusty underground tunnels of Rustenburg. He swaps places with Delisani, whom we meet at the taxi rank. He and Fundiswa are our passengers as we weave up the south coast towards Durban. Delisani will go back to the tedium of his job as a ticket clerk at a Prasa station; Fundiswa will figure her life out as she sets her sights on shipping studies; and, perhaps, Gege will call Mlobeli to ask about that mining job.

Some weeks later, as the body count in Lonmin piles up, I get a call from Mlobeli, asking after me as though I am a long-lost friend. I ask him about Mabutyana and he sighs; he has never really corroborated the story of Mabutyana's discharge. It leaves me with one question: What did the miners gain from six weeks of struggling?

In a recent talk at a Finwrite Seminar at Wits University, lawyer John Brand, an employment-law director at Bowman Gilfilan, said that the 22% mineworkers were promised, as was announced following the negotiations, was actually the result of grade conflation and the amalgamation of two-year increases. "The maximum increase to rock drill operators was in fact 3% and that was only to a few of them because, again, they conflated grades, and those rock drillers that were below a certain level got 3%. So how did they get it up to 22%? They added in the 10% from 2011, they took into account a R750 rock driller allowance that had been agreed to prior to the strike. So R750 is 9% of the wage, then there's the 3%. That adds up to 22%.

"In fact, Lonmin workers lost 12% of their annual income during the strike due to the no-work-no-pay [rule], and 9 000 of the workers got absolutely nothing because they were employed through labour brokers," Brand said. "They were out on strike for six weeks and came back and got nothing. That's nearly a third of the group. Every single solitary worker at Lonmin lost more in wages than they gained. If you take the 12% loss, against 7.7% or 3% [that some actually got], you still end up at a loss, but for whatever reason it was painted as a great victory for workers, when it's actually a devastating loss for workers who can't afford to lose."

At the time of writing this, the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, set up to investigate the killings that took place between August 9 and August 16, culminating in the shooting of 34 miners, was in limbo because of the funding woes of the legal team representing over 270 of the injured and arrested miners. The team, led by advocate Dali Mpofu, was appealing a North Gauteng High Court ruling that found that the right of the miners to state funding was not absolute. The team lost the appeal. ■



'I get money, now I get trouble': Tanzanian women in Durban

Emily Margaretten

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OUPA NKOSI



A client gets a perm at a hair salon run by Tanzanian migrant women (this and previous pages).

Paulina, a middle-aged woman, drops two empty Castle Lites into the rubbish bin. With a stiff broom she sweeps up the candy wrappers, plastic containers and loose ends of nylon hair. Soft clippings evade her reach; they skim across the floor and settle underneath one of the swivel chairs. No matter. The beauty salon is small; a narrow wedge of floor-space no wider than the burglar bars that protect the front door. It is easy to clean and keep tidy. Paulina prefers the small space for other reasons too. Her kanga, a Kiswahili cloth wrapped around her waist, says it all: “*Riziki mwanzo wa chuki*. [Provision begins hate.]” Or, as Paulina gamely puts it, “I get money, now I get trouble.”

Proverbs — printed on dresses, adorning the edges of skirts, spoken in conversations and explicated in interviews — help frame my interactions with Tanzanian women in the city centre of Durban. To Paulina’s delight I recite these sayings over and over, attempting to gain an insider’s knowledge from an outsider’s perspective. When spoken aloud the proverbs bring forth smiles, for they convey the commonalities of social life. Occasionally they bring forth unease. In the fold of a kanga a flash of material displays a message that cautions that not all is what it seems.

Backs and shoulders press up against the walls, the chairs too few to accommodate so many. Generous helpings of advice match generous helpings of food: roasted meat and pap, brought in from the butchery next door. Diced chillies, an obligatory garnish in Durban, rim the edges of chipped plates. If the money is right, beer and cider make an appearance too.

Amid the relaxing, washing, blow-drying, combing, plaiting, twisting and braiding of hair Paulina eats and drinks from a raised position — either sitting on the edge of the counter that runs the length of the salon or standing in her platform shoes, a professional necessity because of her short stature. In the late evenings she teeters between the stools.

Kombi drivers enter to charge their cellphones. Panel-

beaters take it a step further and lay down extension cords, drawing electricity from overloaded outlets when theirs fail. A homeless man waits patiently to collect glass bottles from the dustbin. Representatives of burial societies make their rounds.

A woman runs into the salon and heads to the back. She begs Paulina to push the sink to the side, exposing a drainage hole. She lowers herself in relief; her kanga collects around her legs. More women follow, taking turns to stand in front of each other, blocking the view of pedestrians looking in.

“Tuko pamoja. [We’re together.]” Depending on the intonation, this statement can be a question too, one I repeatedly hear from Paulina and her patrons, as they make sure I understand them. Initially I view *tuko pamoja* as a feature of immigrant life in South Africa.

Tina, a recent arrival in the country, explains the concept to me more fully. Although she is a Tanzanian citizen Tina has spent most of her adult life in Kenya. When I ask her if *tuko pamoja* exists in Kenya she says no. I am surprised, for Kenyans speak Kiswahili. Tina elaborates on the distinction: “Like they have in South Africa, there are Zulus, Xhosas, and Sothos. In Kenya it’s the same thing. Zulu-Zulus, Xhosa-Xhosas, Sotho-Sothos. They don’t have *tuko pamoja*. In Tanzania it’s not like this. They treat you as one.”

Tanzania: a country that boasts more than a hundred different ethnolinguistic groups, a country where Tina does not notice social divisions. This sense of cohesiveness may be attributed to the country’s first president, Julius Nyerere, who, in his vision of African socialism and unity, strove to minimise differences such as ethnic privilege and class and religious polarisations that might foster inequality.

Supporting Tina’s observation, Natasha, a young woman who has come to South Africa “to try a new life”, still has this to say about her country: “People back home don’t disrespect each other. They treat each other equally.”

Yet, although *tuko pamoja* has positive associations of

support and mutual understanding in Tanzania, the same does not necessarily hold true in South Africa. To migrate abroad often means to seek out personal advancement, a position at odds with the commonalities of *tuko pamoja*.

Selina, who has lived in South Africa for nearly a year, offers her explanation: “There’s no getting together when it comes to Tanzanian people living in South Africa. Many don’t want you to go further. They want you to stay right there.” At which Selina lowers her hand to the floor and emphatically states: “all of you being equal”.

In this case, *tuko pamoja* represents the lowest common denominator — of being poor but evenly matched with everyone else also struggling to “make it” in South Africa.

“Haba na haba hujaza kibaba. [Little and little fill the measure.]” To accrue money in South Africa, Tanzanian women often start with small jobs. They scrub floors and toilets, sell *maandazi* (pastries) from buckets, train as hairdressers and manicurists, and work as waitresses for little or no pay. They pool their resources to make ends meet, sharing flats with relatives, boyfriends and strangers they meet during their travels.

“Two cups, two plates, two spoons and one bed” is how Paulina describes her living situation during her first few years in Durban. The two, two, two, one count indicates Paulina’s meagre possessions as well as her marital status. Recently divorced, Paulina left Tanzania in 1998 to start afresh in South Africa.

Along the way she met her second husband, a Mozambican sailor with ties to Tanzania. They chose Durban, a seaport city that offered the possibility of employment and the chance of finding a secure and affordable flat. For, like many cities, the centre hosted a large number of foreign and domestic immigrants because, until influx control laws were lifted, black South Africans were denied full access to the urban centres.

Between 1998 and 2000 Paulina and her husband

scrimped and saved to improve their lives as well as the lives of the three young children from her previous marriage, whom Paulina had initially left behind in Tanzania. Prudent with their money, they survived by buying staple food in bulk and renting cheap rooms in the Point area. To this day Paulina still measures inflation by sausages and bread rolls.

Not only thrifty, Paulina also was diligent, learning English and isiZulu bit by bit. Such endeavours helped her to secure work in hair salons, the first run by a Nigerian, the second by a Ghanaian. In both cases the men cheated Paulina of her full wages. In retaliation, she handed out slips of paper advertising rates that undercut those of her bosses, which helped her establish a contact base of customers who came to her flat. Paulina's activities were brought to the flat supervisor's attention, however, by complaining tenants. In a gesture of kindness and business savvy, he offered her a commercial space at street level. Paulina agreed to a rental of R450 a month, installed a sink and mirror and began her enterprise of turning small things into big things.

"Riziki mwanzo wa chuki." Revival, a large woman of 42, contemplates the proverb written on Paulina's kanga. In many respects Revival's circumstances parallel those of Paulina. She, too, is a hairdresser and owns a beauty salon in the Point area. Revival arrived in Durban in the late 1990s, leaving behind young children and an estranged husband in Tanzania. She opened a beauty salon in her flat, which she expanded into a small shop, another bigger shop, and now what she calls her "two-in-one", an establishment that accommodates hairdressers and manicurists as well as another small business in the back.

Despite her success Revival is bitter about her relocation to South Africa, saying if she had known the difficulties beforehand she would have stayed in Tanzania. Unlike Paulina, Revival has never brought her children to live with her or even to visit South Africa. Rather, she supports them

and her mother from afar. As she explains, "It's like I'm on the fire. I can't call someone into the fire."

Revival's wish to have stayed in Tanzania is typical. A report published in 2010 by the ACP Observatory on Migration estimates that between 0.5% and 0.7% of Tanzania's total population emigrates. South Africa ranks second, behind Uganda, as a destination for Tanzanian emigrants. The author of the report, Brahim El Mouaatamid, puts the total number of Tanzanian emigrants to South Africa at 52 554 — a low figure, considering that the most recent census shows the population of South Africa to be approaching 49-million.

Historically, too, the Tanzanian presence in South Africa has been small compared with that of other migrant groups from the Southern African Development Community region. In part this can be traced to the "frontline" politics of the late 20th century. In 1962 Nyerere withdrew Tanzanians from South Africa, a move in line with his consistent opposition to apartheid rule. Labour statistics from the gold-mining industry provide the most vivid picture of this repatriation — the number of Tanzanian gold miners dropped from more than 14 000 in 1960 to about 400 in 1965 and zero in 1970. The 1985 South African census corroborates this trend, revealing that only 887 Tanzanians were living in the country.

The year 1985 also saw Nyerere's departure from political office. At the time, the Tanzanian government faced massive economic stagnation. Prior to his departure Nyerere had followed measures of fiscal austerity to reduce government debt and stave off more stringent reforms proposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The standard of living for Tanzanians deteriorated and, in 1986, to gain access to credit, Nyerere's successor, President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, adopted the structural adjustment programmes they proposed.

Contrary to the assertions of the the IMF and World Bank, the liberalisation of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s did not improve the standard of living for ordinary Tanzanians; instead, it contributed to a growing class dif-

ferential between rich and poor. The devaluation of the local currency pushed up the prices of commodity goods, the reduction in government spending cut social welfare services and the privatisation of parastatals led to higher levels of unemployment — all of which hit ordinary Tanzanians hard.

To mitigate these circumstances Tanzanians began to rely increasingly on the informal sector, particularly in urbanised areas, to supplement their daily income. In his anthropological study of the informal sector during the 1980s and 1990s, Joe Lugalla — in an article entitled “Development, Change, and Poverty in the Informal Sector during the Era of Structural Adjustments in Tanzania” (1997) — differentiated between the economic approaches of two demographic groups in Dar es Salaam: the first were the urban poor, who relied on the informal sector to meet their basic subsistence needs, while the second consisted of the middle and upper classes, who capitalised on the informal sector for their business dealings.

Lugalla’s discussion of beauty salons, which proliferated in Dar es Salaam soon after the liberalisation of the economy, is particularly relevant to the experiences of Paulina and Revival. As Lugalla notes, the purchasing of foreign beauty products — associated with Westernised aesthetics of straight hair and values of “modernity” — set up a socioeconomic distinction in which wealthier Tanzanians had access to salons not only as clients but also as businesspeople. Because these salons were part of the informal sector, and thus technically considered “illegal”, it required women of some education, skill and personal connections to acquire the beauty products as well as the know-how to establish a business out of sight of government officials. Bribes, of course, helped officials to look the other way.

When asked why they sold their salons in Tanzania to come to South Africa in the late 1990s, both Paulina and Revival explain that hairdressing was a difficult profession. The business licences presented one problem, the irregular supply of clients another. As Revival puts it: “See now, to open a business in Tanzania, it’s not like before.

Now they say it’s better because people understand things. You can get customers. Before it was like nobody had nice things.”

With this statement Revival draws attention to the pervasive influence of capitalism and its emphasis on commodity goods or “nice things”, which has increasingly directed women’s disposable incomes towards beauty salons. For Paulina and Revival the South African economy presented these opportunities well before Tanzania did, although, as Revival notes, only now is she reaping the benefits of her hard work. “Maybe I’m getting,” she explains, “but I’m getting at last.” Furthermore, this “getting” comes at a cost — a cost that directly affects Revival’s personal relationships.

“Y our mother likes to talk.” Revival addresses her comment to Lulu, who is Paulina’s oldest daughter. Early in my research Paulina dispatched Lulu to act as my Kiswahili translator. “Eh-heh,” Lulu replies, laughing. “My mammy is stupid. This one,” indicating Revival, “is a quiet woman.”

“You know the problem,” Revival continues. “There are a lot of people who need to make friends. They can’t be alone. If you like friends, you’ll have them, but you’ll get their problems too. Me, I’m not used to having friends. My heart is not very public.”

“You’re quiet?” I ask.

“Yes,” Revival responds.

Lulu, who has known Revival for many years, says: “She likes to be alone. She doesn’t like friends.”

“I don’t like friends,” Revival confirms. “Maybe because I have it easy with my salon, I like to talk to my customers as my friends.” In other words, Revival does not need friends because she has plenty of customers whom she treats like friends. Revival also finds it difficult to juggle the demands of friends with the demands of her business. As she comments, “I don’t have friends that visit. I don’t have time.”

Although Revival is not as sociable as Paulina, her soli-

tude and quiet demeanour do not entirely evade unwanted attention. At the time of our interview several Maasai men were working in her salon as hairdressers. Their skill at quickly twisting hair appealed to women who did not want to wait long for their hair to be styled. Although Revival's competitors admired her ingenuity, they also circulated a rumour that she imported the men from Tanzania, paying for their transport in exchange for work. Although false, the story still managed to present an underside to Revival's success — one that, with its insinuations of indentured servitude, countered her carefully constructed persona of respectability.

Aware of these aspersions, Revival notes that her economic visibility, or "luck", makes her susceptible to resentment and suspicion: "You know *riziki* is like luck. A big salon, like this for example, it's the luck. But also people can hurt me. They can hurt me a lot for the luck I've got." Referring to Paulina's kanga, Revival elaborates. "Because this *riziki* is luck and *chuki* is hate."

The need to keep success a secret because it may provoke hatred is a common refrain in conversations with Tanzanian women. Aalia, a self-described businesswoman, who travels between Dar es Salaam and Durban to buy and sell fashion goods, explains that she misleads or, as Lulu puts it, "bullshits" people whenever they ask about her fortunes. "She doesn't give them a chance, she puts them aside."

Likewise, Tina notes that "if your luck goes up, people start hating on you". When asked whether she finds ways to defuse resentment, Tina claims it is impossible because people close to her, such as friends and co-workers, will see from the purchases she makes that she has money. To explain this dilemma Tina offers the following proverb: "*Kikulacho kinguoni mwako* [What eats you is in your dress]," or, as she translates, "It's the people close to you who will hurt you."

The one-way street that is intended to ease traffic accommodates a row of double-parked cars outside Paulina's salon. A police officer walks by and systematically tucks tickets underneath windshield wipers. She turns the corner. Women laden with groceries and small children peer in and greet Paulina. Taxis trawling for customers match their pace, be-ep, be-ep, a hum of traffic that picks up speed, beep-beep, when other cars jockey too close.

A sharp pop punctuates the languid routine; a musty smell hangs in the air. A firecracker? Gunpowder? The implications hit me, and I step back under cover. Paulina and her daughters push forward, eagerly seeking the source of the noise. Briefly, the street activity stops. Pedestrians crane their necks. There is nothing to see. No police vehicles approach. The women return to their walking, their steps slow and measured, guided by the soft wrapping of their skirts.

Another humid afternoon, another day sitting on the front steps of the salon. Paulina is outside, conversing with one of the garage workers next door. She stands near an older man who, judging by his waistline, enjoys his meat and beer. Paulina's daughters call out to their mother, laughingly, in Kiswahili. The man's eyes narrow; he assumes they are making fun of him. He berates Paulina and her daughters, demanding they address him in isiZulu. Paulina is confused, for she is speaking isiZulu. Her daughters refuse.

"You don't know me," the man threatens angrily. "I'll shoot you." Astonished by his hostility, they dare him to try. The man turns in a circle, sees a number of faces he does not recognise, and leaves — hastily.

The anonymity of the city, and its potential for violence, work both ways.

"Shanuo baya pale linapokuchoma. [A comb becomes bad when it burns (hurts) you.]” Paulina presents me with this proverb when she pulls too hard while plaiting the hair of a friend. Wincing, the friend recognises the proverb and calls out: “I’ll remember this [the pain]!”

Although the friend is joking, the proverb draws attention to the intricacies of maintaining good social relationships in South Africa. As Paulina explains, the comb is useful until it pulls too hard, upon which it becomes an object of hate.

Similarly, the slightest mistake or provocation can hurt an otherwise amicable relationship. These mistakes often occur between people who are in contact with one another every day — friends, family members and lovers. As with the comb, they are brought into a network of physical and emotional connections that provides opportunities for support but also for abuse and pain.

Thus Paulina tends not to worry excessively about the threats of strangers, for she keeps them at a distance. Rather, she is concerned about her closest associates, for it is these relationships — often the most intimate and therefore the most protected and hidden — that present the greatest challenges to her security and success in South Africa.

The vulnerabilities of Tanzanian women in South Africa begin well before their arrival. The Human Development Index — a composite indicator measuring the welfare of a population through categories of health, education, and purchasing power — ranks Tanzania 152 out of 186 countries. Given this, it is not surprising that Tanzanian women migrate to South Africa to improve their standard of living as well as that of their dependants back home.

Natasha, a young woman who has been living in Durban for the past six years, draws my attention to these economic advantages. As she says, “In South Africa, if you have a job the money comes, unlike in Tanzania where the money is no good. It’s a lot of money here which goes far there.” Natasha’s statement reveals the unequal values of currencies. “Money is no good” in Tanzania, whereas the South African rand “goes far”. Her comment — “if you have

a job the money comes” — also highlights the purchasing power of different kinds of work. Essentially Natasha privileges wage employment over other types of productive subsistence such as agriculture, horticulture, and housework.

Not inconsequentially, in Tanzania men tend to be wage earners and women subsistence workers. According to the 2002 Tanzania census, in urban areas, where access to agricultural work is limited, 40.8% of women are economically active, compared with 68.2% of men. A 2007 report entitled “Women’s Health in Tanzania” also reveals these gender differentials, claiming that “Men are far more likely than women to work in professional and skilled jobs. Almost 20% of men work in professional, clerical, sales, or skilled manual labour, compared with 9% of women.”

Employment statistics present one view of gender inequality in Tanzania; other societal factors contribute to women’s economic marginalisation as well. Of note, women cite marriage — and, more specifically, the lack of conjugal compatibility and stability in the home — as a reason for leaving Tanzania. To return to the 2002 census, the majority of women in Tanzania marry — about 75% of women enter into conjugal partnerships, usually expressed as marital unions, in the course of their lifetime.

To be unmarried is a departure from the norm. It is an economic loss, certainly, but one that also connects to a pervasive sense of abandonment and social vulnerability. Such is the case with Natasha, who explicitly links her material instability to the losses in her home. “First my mother died and then one sister and another sister married. And me, I stayed alone in my house. The *baba* [father] of my child left me. So for this child, I said let me go try a new life because I wasn’t married. I don’t have a business, I don’t have a job, let me try.”

Similarly, in other interviews, Tanzanian women explained that they left home not only to pursue a better life economically but also to forget the troubles of their conjugal attachments. Selina wanted to “clear her head” after a

divorce in Tanzania, and Tina left her boyfriend in Kenya because of a “misunderstanding”.

Revival, when asked about her marital status, dismisses the presence of her husband with a wave of her hand, indicating a conjugal separation. She is a devout Christian and prefers this arrangement to a formal divorce. Even Paulina is not immune from these heartaches; her first marriage ended in divorce, a social stigma that led her to look for new opportunities — including a second marriage — in South Africa.

Yet, although conjugal stability presents challenges for women in Tanzania, they are not necessarily better off in South Africa. Paulina’s second marriage is also a struggle, as her husband, a sailor, is away for months and sometimes a year at a time. Natasha, meanwhile, ended up accompanying a boyfriend to South Africa thinking he would provide for her needs. He abandoned her shortly after the birth of her second child, leaving her in a state of destitution.

At the other extreme, Tina finds herself embroiled in the sexual advances of a Tanzanian man who threatens her on the streets, one day even pinning her against a wall. Instead of reporting him to the police, Tina sought the help of other Tanzanian men, asking them to intervene. As Lulu translates:

“The guy backed off a little, but he’s still thinking, ‘I need to get this woman whether she likes it or not.’ And, on top of that, she can’t walk safely because she thinks anytime something might happen so she always watches her back no matter what. And, the guy told her he’d find a Zulu person to kill her. He said: ‘Know I’ll find people to kill you if you don’t want me to date you.’”

Voicing her opinion at the end, Lulu says: “This guy is a freak!” The situation is excessive in its intimidation, yet it highlights the vulnerabilities of Tanzanian women when negotiating personal relationships in South Africa; vulnerabilities compounded by their reluctance to rely on the service provisions of the state — in this case, the police — for assistance.

S eated in a row of evenly spaced chairs I wait for the orientation session to begin at Refugee Social Services (RSS), an organisation in Durban that helps immigrants navigate the paperwork of their residency and access social welfare programmes. Well-dressed men and women enter the office, queuing to sign in at the front desk. Low murmurings of French, English, and Kiswahili reach my ears.

An hour after its scheduled starting time the orientation begins, with Grace, a social worker, outlining the functions of RSS. She mentions the limited funding of the organisation, which relies largely on subsidies from the United Nations. I sit between a Congolese woman, who is crocheting, and a Congolese man, who keeps his hat in his hands. Grace applauds the woman’s industriousness and directs our attention to the wall behind her, which displays the craftwork of the centre. Some of it has been sold.

Grace returns to her presentation, partly ad-libbing and partly reading aloud from a piece of paper: “The South African government,” she reassures us, “promotes freedom of movement.”

The man next to me shifts in his chair.

“You can study, work, and live anywhere you want to. We don’t keep you in a prison.”

Too much for the man beside me. He jumps up from his chair. “But we’re slaves!” he counters. “There’s no freedom here.”

Sympathetic to the outburst, Grace allows him to explain. The man tells us he used to work as a security guard in the city centre but was fired for not having the appropriate documents. He is too afraid to apply for other jobs.

Grace nods, understandingly. “Perhaps you can be a car guard?” She offers the adage: “When one door closes another one opens.”

Defeated, the man sits down.

Afterwards I ask Grace whether she knows of Tanzanian women who use RSS. She says no. When I ask other social workers the same question they have the same answer.

They do not exist. The same is not true of Tanzanian men. RSS helps them with repatriation.

I climb the six flights to Paulina's flat. The lift does not work. Just outside her door children wait eagerly for a birthday party to begin. Paulina greets me and pushes an invoice into my hand. "What does it mean?" she asks. I look at it: a municipal statement.

"They're putting in meters. Soon they'll be charging for water."

Paulina wrinkles her nose and takes the invoice back. She ushers me into the living room where more children sit, closely pressed together, on the floor. They are partitioned off from the bedroom by a hanging curtain. Women — many of whom I know from Paulina's hair salon — meander in and out of the kitchen, helping with the cooking: frying chicken and chips, mixing salads, and spicing dishes of pilau. On the landing two additional fryers are working overtime. I take a photograph in the dark. The flash surprises Selina and Natasha, who flinch from the sputtering oil. Embarrassed, I apologise. They wave me off with their slotted spoons.

"Never again!" Paulina announces three hours into the party. Red-faced, she rearranges the furniture once more, trying to create space for the incoming guests. All of them are given plates of food; the older guests receive beer and whisky too.

The cake is set out, its size approximating that of Paulina's young son. A scanned photograph of him peers up from the top layer, as he is the reason for the party. After the first cut, the cake disappears quickly. One child settles for the frosting clinging to the inside of the discarded box.

Rummaging through an old handbag Paulina pulls out a faded R10 note. "E-he!" She triumphantly declares, "*Jungu kuu alikosi ukoko*. [A big pot is not without some crust.]" I ask Paulina to translate the proverb and she obliges. Like the cooking pot that has leftover pap (or *ugali*) crusted on the bottom, an old handbag has provisions — in this case, money — tucked away too.

Paulina's explanation of the pot presents a fitting end to this article, for it imparts an image of abundance and communality as well as scarcity and inequality. If the South African economy is the proverbial pot, the women in this story are those who partake in its leftovers, scraping off as much as they can to support themselves and their families.

For Paulina and Revival this was enough to start their own pots of prosperity, which they share to a certain extent with their compatriots. I see this whenever I step inside Paulina's salon; the togetherness or *tuko pamoja* of Tanzanians eating from one plate of food and swapping news about their lives. I also see the limitations of the pot. Not all women find economic success or security in South Africa; the large majority do not. Thus Selina decries *tuko pamoja* as a farce, for she thinks the only true equality in South Africa is the equality of poverty.

The reluctance of Tanzanian women to display their achievements openly because it begets hate — or *riziki mwanzo wa chuki* — lends support to Selina's observations. Paulina keeps her salon small as she does not want to attract undue attention. Her outspokenness draws enough gossip already. Revival takes the opposite approach and expands her salon, foregoing friends altogether. Whereas Revival's social invisibility maintains her economic viability, the inverse is true of Paulina. Her economic invisibility maintains her social viability.

Although Paulina and Revival are successful, the entrepreneurial activities of their female compatriots are not nearly as well enacted. It is more common for their businesses to go under than to succeed. Such is the case with Natasha, who once ran an East African restaurant in the city centre but now, unable to afford the overhead costs,

sells pastries for R1.50 from shop to shop. Natasha's circumstances are similar to those of other Tanzanian women who aspire to manage their own establishments, such as hair salons and restaurants, yet ultimately fall back on small-scale enterprises or *haba na haba hujaza kibaba* — little and little fill the measure.

These economic ventures offer only the barest of monetary returns. They do not provide enough to enable the women to survive without the help of someone else, such as kin or a conjugal partner. In this regard Paulina occupies a position of privilege, for she has a husband who can support her when she is in need. Still, although a husband is ideal, a business is even better. And that, Paulina notes, is the advantage of the big pot. If one digs deep down something will show up eventually. For her this happens every time a customer walks into the salon. ■

- Names have been changed to protect the identities of individuals.



It should have been Little India

Jackee Budesta Batanda

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DELWYN VERASAMY



Vendors prepare for an evening's sales on the pavement in Fordsburg (previous, this and following pages), despite having been earlier removed by the police.



meet Abdeslam Ahmed Habiballah at the Milky Lane Coffee Shop overlooking Fordsburg Square. It is a weekday and the square is empty. Rubbish litters here and there.

We take a table for two outside the café. He orders coffee for me. I decline politely. He places his own coffee order. The sun is out and competing with the cold. It is the kind of shy sunshine common in countries with four seasons.

Habiballah strikes a pose as a man happy with his surroundings. He leans back in the small chair and crosses his legs. He wears a sleeveless golf sweater in different shades of brown and a brown beret. The socks peeping out of his trousers match the browns of his general apparel. He places a pair of brown sunglasses on the unstable little table we have chosen to sit at. He waves to friends sitting on the patio of the Milky Lane Coffee Shop and speaks in Arabic. The aroma of strong coffee laced with cigarette smoke fills the air as little chit chats continue around the place.

I thank him for making the time to meet. He leans back, crossing his arms across his chest and responds: “No problem”.

I say I am here to interview him about his role in the regeneration of the Fordsburg Square Oriental Flea Market that grew from a sleepy, unattractive home for the homeless into the vibrant, multicultural place it is today, attracting visitors from all over the world.

“Yes, yes,” he says. “I will tell you now. I will tell you now.”

I wait.

“As an elder in my community I assisted my people to set up business. Using my network to get for them space, to advise them, to register them and to help them start the business by connecting them to the supplier, help them to sign the lease and then recruit in matters financially. I helped about 12 people,” he says.

“How did you get into the flea market?” I ask.

“I have a Moroccan man who was married to a British woman. He was struggling. I gave him toys and small things like socks to sell door to door. He used to sell the

most goods, which included toys, lighters, belts and other small gifts.

“I asked him where he sold his goods. He told me he had come to Mint Road and bought chicken from Chicken Licken. It was late. He was with his wife. They sat on the pavement and ate their stuff and left their wares on the pavement. People passing by asked for the price and bought. He decided to start selling there every day. So I came one day and saw the potential here. That was in 2000,” Habiballah says.

Habiballah says he was known to all the Moroccans and whoever needed help came to him. He saw an opportunity to make money and invited other traders to come to the new place. On the first day, he says, they set up 15 tables and everyone brought their own light-saver lamps. They set up shop on the pavements on Mint Road because it was a public space. At the time they sold mainly toys, lighters, belts, small gifts.

“Dino [Badroodin], the previous leaseholder of the square, approached me to pay him as I was using his space,” Habiballah says. “I told him, it’s a pavement. Then we came to an agreement. I must use his space to set up the flea market. There was no harassment at all.”

At the start, the main condition for setting up shop at the tables on Mint Road was uniqueness; traders were only allowed to sell goods from their home countries like perfumes and crafts, and were given a chance to trade every weekend.

“If it worked out they would pay me — if not they would not pay. It was R70 per weekend. Whoever returns then is happy and carries on his own business.”

The market, which operated on Saturdays and Sundays from 3pm to 9pm, was the only night market in the area and people who came into Fordsburg to enjoy the halaal treats offered by restaurants in the area started buying from the traders.

The first stall owners, says Habiballah, came from Morocco, Somalia, South Africa, Rwanda and Malawi. In addition to the ethnic clothing and crafts they brought from

their home countries, he showed them where they could buy other goods to supplement their sales. To some he supplied goods to sell on his behalf and split the profits in three parts — one for him, one for the trader, the last reinvested in more stock.

Until 2005, Habiballah says, they would collect about R50 000 every month. There were about 87 stalls, each renting at R400 and seven lock-up shops, each renting at R1 300. He estimates that there were between 10 000 and 15 000 visitors each weekend, most of them foreigners.

Managing a flea market had not been Habiballah’s ambition when he came to the country 18 years ago. He arrived in 1995 with a bag full of dreams and the fortitude to succeed in the newly created rainbow nation.

“When we came to South Africa it was exciting and inviting. I came to explore business opportunities,” Habiballah says.

When he left his hometown, Casablanca, in Morocco, Habiballah left behind a lucrative job as a regional director for the government.

“I was living well. But I was not content with what I had. I headed for my dreams, ambitions.

He did not require a visa and spent about \$1 000 on his air ticket. He came with \$20 000 to invest.

He first travelled to Durban by bus but did not like it there and returned to Johannesburg, where he checked into a cheap hotel in order to save money. He stayed with seven other Moroccans at the time.

He had been living in the country for more than a month when tragedy struck. His visions of a South Africa full of endless opportunities were shattered when he was robbed of all his money.

Habiballah had left his hotel room for the day. On his return, he found the door open and discovered that the \$20 000 he arrived with had been stolen.

“I struggled for two weeks. I had no way to get money

into South Africa. I had no identity card, didn't speak English." He sighs. "It was hard. We were chased out of the hotel. We went to another one."

Speaking no English, Habiballah navigated the maze of the new country, which was hanging on the euphoria of the death of apartheid. Stranded, he contacted his family back home to send him money. He also spoke to a Moroccan who had been living in South Africa for a long time, who advised him to tell his family to give money to the man's relatives in Morocco. Once the transaction was confirmed, he paid Habiballah the equivalent of \$5 000.

Habiballah moved to Hillbrow with his friends. It was a difficult time.

"We lived in horror in Hillbrow. A lot of people died every morning. Foreigners from around the world fought and killed each other," he says. "It was an odd year. We were hitting each other. I was robbed seven times at gunpoint."

He learnt the hard way that there was no recourse to justice. He talks of a white policeman at the Hillbrow Police Station who told people reporting crimes to go back and beat up the perpetrator. Habiballah believes other foreigners worked as accomplices to the police and combed the lodges and hotels for money. He adds that many of the foreigners living in Hillbrow at the time did not speak English or any South African language.

When the money ran out, Habiballah says, they slept on a balcony, on the street or in a park. They did not know where to go or what to do.

"We were thrown in the sea and did not know how to swim," he says.

Hillbrow was like a dumpster overflowing with the wretched of the continent. When Habiballah decided to leave he was tired of seeing people dying and suffering. There were fights each evening and law enforcement was weak.

"I used to hear bullets every morning and night. I would find like two dead every day," he says. "It was hard to tell the difference between South Africans and internationals."

The migrants foraged through dustbins, competing with the stray dogs and rats for food. Many of those who had come with him from Morocco could not take the suffering any longer and returned home. He estimates that almost 80% of those who came in 1994/95 went back.

Habiballah says he decided to move to a Muslim area where he would feel safe. He sought refuge at the Lenasia mosque, where he was given food and accommodation. It was during his time at the mosque that he conceived the idea of selling music cassettes, which brought in much-needed money.

He stayed with an Indian friend he had met at the mosque. However, tragedy struck again when his benefactor died, a victim of a gang-related shooting. Habiballah feared his dead friend's family would evict him from the house. He was pleasantly surprised when the parents paid two months' rent for him to remain in the house and told him to take all the furniture. He was determined to work hard and repay his friend's parents for the kindness of their hearts.

Someone, he says, lent him clothes to sell. In the two months he was living rent-free he worked extra hard and made money. When the two months were over he began to pay rent. After six months, he called his dead friend's parents and asked them to evaluate the contents of their son's house.

"I paid them back R10 000. They never asked for the money," he clarifies. "It was out of my heart."

He also repaid a South African who owned a spaza shop and had given him goods — tea, sugar and bread worth R1 500 — on credit for a whole year.

In the meantime, he had started a business. Then one day, when he and his business partner had parked their station wagon in Klerksdorp to speak to customers, they returned to find their car been broken into and emptied of all its contents.

They lost merchandise worth R6 000. He went back to zero, he sighs.

Hope returned when he saw a newspaper advertisement

calling for distributors for a wholesale business owned by a Muslim Indian. He went to him to ask for merchandise.

“I told him — you do not know me and neither do I know you. Only God knows us. I lost my goods,” he says. “I told him I would deposit my passport with him if he gave me goods on credit to sell. He loaded a bakkie with goods worth R10 000 and I handed him my passport.”

Habiballah pauses.

“When I handed him my passport, he said, keep it. Between me, you and Allah, if you don’t repay me, that is your problem.”

The new boost in business merchandise — umbrellas, T-shirts, socks and gloves — allowed Habiballah to sell at flea markets. He repaid his loan within six months.

Habiballah did not forget his friends in Hillbrow. “I went back to Hillbrow and I told those I had left to come to town. I gave them goods in the morning to sell. I make money, they make money.” He smiles.

About 16 Moroccans joined him. They made between R200 and R300 a day. He says this changed their focus from job-hunting to business. They started their own networks.

“That is how we grew up,” he says.

Today, Habiballah is still good friends with the Indian wholesaler who took a bet on him, and still recommends big customers to him.

By 1997, he says, he had made enough money and was independent. In that year he married a white South African woman. He now lives in Mayfair with his wife and two children — a 17-year-old adopted daughter and a seven-year-old son. He owns a shop where he sells South African tablecloths, blankets and clothing. His wife runs the shop.

Quickly establishing himself as a community leader, Habiballah enticed more traders to the flea market. However, change came when Dino Badroodin’s lease expired in 2001 and the Metropolitan Trading Company — owned by the City of Johannesburg — took over ownership of the market.

He’s disappointed with the way the market has turned out because the leadership is now based on nationality and not on management skills. As a result, the stringent rules that were in place before the takeover have been disregarded because many traders no longer source unique goods from their home countries. He says the traders have started to buy from the Chinese malls.

“They sell spices, curry, toys, clothes, sweets, CDs, cosmetics, food, gifts, cultural clothes [Arab] and accessories. Most of the goods are from Chinese malls. Clothing and toys, car keys, shoes, sports stuff are all from China.” He sighs.

A few, however, still sell products from their home countries — perfumes, Arab dresses and crafts.

Leaning forward, Habiballah hits the table with his forefinger and adds: “I start the market. They feel bad to recognise [my efforts]. It creates a lot of business here and it became famous to everyone.”

Confident that he has made his point he leans back in the chair, satisfied that he has had a chance to tell the story of his role in the flea market. He has situated himself in the retelling of the story as the person solely responsible for the fame and vibrancy of the market. He claims that everyone now wants recognition for setting up the market, leaving him out of the main narrative. It seems he is using this interview to insert himself closely into the market’s history and regeneration.

Before I leave, he insists: “Talk to Dino. You must talk to him. This is what you must ask him. Ask him who started this market. Ask him about Ahmed the Moroccan. He will tell you.”

meet Dino Badroodin, a South African of Indian descent, a few days later. First we speak on the phone to set up an appointment. His voice is soft and rasping. He says he will certainly make time to meet. When I arrive at the Train Restaurant it is closed. It is a quarter to 11 in the morning, the time set for the interview. I try his cell number. There is no response.

Construction work is taking place outside the restaurant. A workman wearing faded blue overalls asks whether I want to go in. I say I am waiting for Dino. I have an appointment with him. The man says Dino has just left but will be back. He adds, consolingly, that the restaurant will open at 11, so I should not worry.

I stand outside for a few minutes before two women pass me and open the door. A colourful plastic rocking horse stands at the entrance like an usher. I pass by it and enter. There is a round brown leather settee that probably serves as a waiting place.

I head to the counter and speak to the receptionist. I tell her I am from Wits and have an appointment with Dino. She points to the settee behind me and tells me to wait there.

When Dino finally comes in he leads me to a table. He wears a black shirt and black jeans. Periodically during the interview, he leaves to check on the work taking place outside. Music playing in the background is loud. He turns it down and asks the waitress to bring me a glass of juice.

He says we cannot talk about the flea market without understanding its history. He gets into a narrative about Fordsburg Square. He says the area was named in the 1900s when Fordsburg was still a mining town. It was the site of the miners' strike in 1928, the first Red Revolt in the country, when miners were up against the mining bosses.

"It was a battle of the haves and have-nots," he says.

The Smuts government, he says, crushed the revolt. The main building at the time, called Fordsburg Market Building, was used as a stronghold for the strikers. The government forces bombarded it.

"It was a fantastic Tudor-style building," he says. "That

deteriorated. It was no longer bustling. Years later, the council demolished it and erected a new building that has no character. It is plain."

Before the revolt, it was a bustling market. People brought all their produce there for sale. After the strikes the area deteriorated and was unused. The square declined to a point where, in the 1940s and 1950s, it became known as Hobo Park.

In 1990, says Badroodin, the council decided to name it a heritage site. Whoever got the lease would have to develop the place.

The development began with a flea market, but the local people were complacent. He rented out the stalls to people at R75 a week but there was little interest in the initiative.

"I could not get it going," he says. "I was paying rent for the land at R2 500 to R3 000 per month. The council had initially leased it to someone else for a year who did not do anything to develop it. I took over the other person's debt of R100 000."

Because the square had been declared a heritage site the use of permanent structures was prohibited. Badroodin wondered how to make use of the square without constructing a solid foundation.

"I came up with the idea of the train structures. They rest on steel structures on a 1m by 1m foundation."

His idea was to merge the concepts of conservation and preservation in order to create the ambience of an old mining town. That way it would become a tourist attraction matched by no other site in South Africa. The essence was to create a night market.

Badroodin says he wanted to create a family theme, have pedestrian pathways and make it a place where artists and musicians would perform. He wanted to turn it into a living museum and brand it Little India.

"This is the only country in Africa that has a Chinatown. So I wanted to brand it [Fordsburg Square] as Little India, where tourists would come. I felt if we marketed it as Little India it would win. I had [unsuccessful] discussions with the councillors," he says.

The first five to six years were difficult. The stars, however, started to change with an influx of migrants into the area after 1997. The popularity of the market grew between 1998 and 2000. Just as the demand was growing his lease expired and in 2001 the council took over control of the market. Today he is left with only 250m², on which his blue and green Train Restaurant stands.

Fordsburg today, he says, has a huge migrant population from all over Africa and Asia and the traders are doing good business. He attributes the success to the fact that no alcohol is sold because it is a predominantly Muslim area.

Badroodin is unhappy with the turn of events at the square since the Metropolitan Trading Company has taken over. He says there is no control. The traders play very loud music and the elected committee does not do its work well. Though traders pay R400 per stall, he says they are often in arrears as there is no proper follow-up, and the place is littered and dirty.

The square, he fears, is losing its ambience and uniqueness because of poor management and the fact that council inspectors come only once in three to six months.

He dismisses the metallic roofed shed the council has constructed as an eyesore. The drainage is poor and water floods the market when it rains.

Sahid Choban, chairman of the management committee of the Fordsburg Square Flea Market, disagrees with Habiballah's and Badroodin's assertions that the market is doing badly. He has risen from a place of nothingness to command respect within the Pakistani community and the business community in Fordsburg Square.

Choban, who left Pakistan in 2000 in search of a new life, found South Africa a challenge for an outsider trying to settle in.

In his first days in Johannesburg he heard many violent crime stories, from bank heists to common burglaries. He says he had no choice but to stay and see how he could

navigate this uncertain environment. Choban tried to move out and mix with the people. He had no job in the first four months. He contacted his family in Pakistan and told them how hard it was to get a job.

His parents are aged and he is the oldest in the family, but his father came through with R35 000.

With the money in place, Choban and a friend headed to the central business district every day to scout out business conditions and opportunities. He finally found someone who was leaving his business and he bought it.

"I had a counter that I bought at R20 000. The owner was going somewhere."

The business was in Bree Street, where he sold second-hand clothes, airtime and phones. He was robbed three times. The first time, in January 2001, a trio of robbers came to his stall. Two of them stood on either side of him, one held a knife to his side, while the third picked through all the stock. Choban says he lost stock worth between R7 000 and R8 000. Two months later, the gang returned. This time there were four or five of them. One had a gun and threatened to shoot him. He searched Choban's pockets and took R5 000 in cash. They also stole all the cell phones and airtime. This time his loss amounted to R12 000.

Choban was disillusioned. He had lost all the start-up capital his parents had sacrificed to send him. He left the premises. He only had R6 000.

"Then I am thinking what to do. My monthly expenses. R10 000 I cannot start a shop. Start a stall maybe." He speaks in staccato phrases.

In Bree and Eloff streets he saw people setting up tables. He found an empty space and bought socks and shoes to sell on the street. He was concerned about the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department. They came to the street three times. He was lucky his stock was not confiscated. However, business was very slow. He did not make any money. He changed his wares from socks and shoes to small toys and sold them at the corner of Eloff and Bree streets.

He ventured into the business of buying umbrellas when he noticed that people quickly bought them when it started to rain.

“When I saw the weather was bad, I quickly sold umbrellas and made quick sales,” he says.

However, selling on the street was dangerous and he got tired of the game. He says people chased him away.

His entrepreneurial spirit was at its peak. He ventured into the food delivery business. He made friends with people who owned restaurants and struck a deal with them. They agreed to sell him food cheaply at R10. He took the food to town where there were many Pakistanis. He served between 12 and 20 customers a week and made around R40 a day.

But he was living in Mayfair and walking each day to the Oriental Plaza and other places. It was tiring. Once he was robbed on the corner of Bree and Smal streets. The knife-wielding thugs made off with his phones and R300. The next time they came towards him he fought them off. Choban says they always target new people in the area.

Later other people started the same business and the competition became tough.

One day, in 2001, he was passing Fordsburg Square and saw two people putting up tables. He reckoned it was safe to set up shop and decided to try selling there. He approached Badroodin, who still owned the lease — the takeover was months away — and asked if he could join the men. Badroodin agreed and charged him R25 a week. The square was empty and quiet. He started selling clothing and towels he bought from a wholesaler at the Oriental Plaza.

The group had now grown to encompass Egyptian, Moroccan and Pakistani traders. They sold the much-sought-after DVDs of Indian movies, among other things. It was an open-air market and when it rained they lost stock because they had little time to pack their wares away.

Coban recalls one such night in 2002. It was very cold when the rain started. Lightning flashed, thunder roared

and hailstones dropped incessantly. They got plastic to cover their tables but the rain was heavy. He was soaked. Some of his stock was badly damaged and unsaleable. Many traders lost stock that night.

Today, Choban says, the flea market at the square is a big tourist attraction and during festive seasons people converge on it from around the world. Fordsburg now has more than 50 halaal restaurants. The traders provide entertainment and sell items people yearn for from their homelands.

Choban is worried that rich South Africans are complaining that the square is full of foreigners and want to take it away from them. He says they welcomed everyone in the beginning but the locals could not stand the sun or rain and quit.

“We make it successful for everyone. Because of people’s sacrifice. We mix South Africans, Indians and Pakistani traders. They want to give it to South Africans,” he sighs. “The people who sacrificed here every day even during the rains. Migrants struggled a lot for this place. The people complaining are rich.”

Choban says that in 2004 the market had a large number of Asian and Muslim customers, most of the traders were Asian, and the numbers of Asian traders are still high today.

That year Badroodin called the traders together for a meeting and brainstormed ideas of how to make the market a better place.

Choban gives the details of the council takeover by the city-owned Johannesburg Development Agency, which owns the Metropolitan Trading Company. Choban, Habiballah, Badroodin, Ahmed Pochee and a representative from the Metropolitan Trading Company attended the meeting the council organised.

“The market had been thriving for six years and was a community place for the area people,” he says.

He sent a letter to the Johannesburg Development Agency to ask what was happening to the market. Three people had applied for the lease once it expired. In his letter

he beseeched the council to consider the traders first before leasing the square out to private investors.

The letter read in part: “We would like to join MTC. Please do not give it [the lease] to a private person. Our traders are struggling. They work day and night. They make it cultural place. Give them the ability and chance to carry on working there.”

He credits Zunaid Pahad, a councillor, with playing an important role in ensuring that the traders had a committee to oversee the running of the market. Today, many restaurants and barbershops are owned by migrants who have built the area up.

Choban attributes the growth and vibrancy of the flea market to the migrants who sacrificed a lot and bore many storms in order to see the market grow into a multicultural melting pot that attracts droves of visitors each year.

A Saturday night at the flea market reveals the vibrancy of the place. Huge energy-saver lamps hang from the ceilings like thick icicles. Incense fills the air. Traders deal in all sorts of merchandise, from perfumes to traditional wear, traditional Moroccan decorations and spices. Some sell DVDs, cheap bags and clothes, mainly sourced from the Chinese mall.

The atmosphere is filled with the smell of different foods. Buyers flock through the market admiring the items on sale. Here and there a sale is made. For some, it is an opportunity for a family outing and the chance to grab something at a discount price. In some cases you see generations of families strolling together through the small walkways created between the stalls.

A blend of music blares from different speakers — a mix of traditional Arabic and contemporary music. The square that was silent and shy on the day of my interview with Habiballah has taken on a new poise and confidence and now owns the show, attracting pleasure-seekers to its embrace.

Regardless of the disagreements about the square and whose story it is, the one story that shines through is how the flea market over the weekend transforms it into something beautiful and compelling, making it a safe outing for families and visitors wishing to experience a part of Johannesburg at night. ■



SpaceWarz in Cape Town

Taryn Jeanie Mackay

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID HARRISON



Kurt Daley gives a training session
in Gugulethu (this page).
Tashreeq Brenner zooms downhill
in District Six (previous pages).



Local legend Kent Lingevidt
after a day's racing.





Claire Homewood and
Sergio Rinquist in front of
their Lavender Hill mural.



Almost every Sunday a group of about 20 people convenes on the roads that map Cape Town's heart. Ranging in age from 10 to 45, this crew of Capetonian long-board skaters has, for the past decade, taken part in Alpha Lazy Sundays with a commitment that mirrors a religious rite.

From midday till dusk they "bomb" down the hills of Stephans Street, perform gravity-defying tricks around the corners of Christiaans Street and close the day with a series of races along Keizergracht Street from Walmer Estate to the edge of town. The winners of these races earn the title of "king" and social media bragging rights for the week. The only condition for participating in the event is that skaters wear helmets and protective knee and elbow guards.

At the core of the weekly event is 32-year-old Kent Lingeveltdt, founder of the best-known local long-boarding brand, Alpha Longboards. His destiny was charted on his 14th birthday, when his older cousin, South African Idols finalist Ezra Lingeveltdt, gave him a skateboard as a gift.

Like many South African families displaced by a long history of geopolitical racism, Kent Lingeveltdt's family moved around a lot. Lingeveltdt, who has now relocated from Mitchells Plain to Woodstock, has also called Hanover Park and Atlantis home. Unable to make friends because of his transient life, he embraced movement and the skateboard as his lifelong companions.

His oval face and eyes that narrow sharply at the corners are framed by thick silver sleepers in each ear and a beard reminiscent of a goat's. It's an apt comparison because Lingeveltdt's determination is another quality he shares with the unrelenting, mountain conquering billy goat.

After competing in the Red Bull Downhill Extreme in 1999, when he was 19, he realised what type of board he would need to compete internationally and, with the realisation came the financial implications. With little to his name he retreated to his family garage in Westridge, Mitchells Plain. Here, through a dynamic blend of trial and error, research and intuition, he unearthed the skill that would come to represent his unique contribution to society

— shaping and customising long-boards to reflect the form and design of individuals.

Today, operating from his workshop at 52 Wright Street in lower Woodstock, he labours meticulously to craft works of moveable art for both the local market and a growing international client base that includes some of the most respected names in skating.

As part of his design process he collaborates with graffiti and other artists. Recently he completed the “Local Legends” series, which, he explains, “paid homage to the people who have shaped our current society by portraying them on long-board canvases”. Legend has it that one of these boards adorns a wall in Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu’s office.

For most people the name District Six conjures up images of an interracial, diverse and explosive cultural *mélange*: an oasis of love and possibility in a country torn to shreds by institutionalised hate and violence. It is these invocations that guided Lingeveldt in his choice of skating location. “Skating is for us a true expression of freedom, progress and community. All of our families are from District Six and it’s important for us to express our freedom in a place where it was taken away,” he says.

He speaks in a staccato rhythm: short, sharp bursts of information that mimic the pushing action required to coast on a board. Central to the activities of a typical Lazy Sunday is mentoring and encouraging the 52 Crew — a development group of ten young people between the ages of 10 and 18.

Shortly after setting up shop in Woodstock in 2003 Lingeveldt was harassed by neighbourhood youngsters curious about the activities taking place inside the building from which skateboarders emerged. Seeing a reflection of his younger self in these kids, who were moulding their identity in a harsh urban context, he realised that the only way to reclaim the ground floor of his studio would be to structure a development programme for them. He and his fellow skaters began providing informal training for the youngsters, making them custom boards at a discounted price.

Fifteen-year-old Fagroedian Rahim is one of those kids — a tiny young soul with an explosive attitude. Living in Woodstock, he has been skating with Lingeveldt for “five months and two weeks”, he states proudly. “Kent helps us. Because of him I’ve improved a lot of my skills. I’m connected to my board.”

Despite the fact that the Alpha Longboards crew has skated in District Six for the past ten years, on this Sunday a police van pulls up and issues a warning to them to stop and vacate the area. To placate the cops the team moves to an even more abandoned road, with a barrier and rubble, increasing the danger for them. Resettled, the threat of the authorities still lingering in the air, Rahim, in the blunt and simple manner of a child, suggests a way to resolve the situation. “I think we must go to the government and make it legal for long-boarding. It makes me angry when the police come because they take our fun and throw it away. We waited our whole week to skate and they come around and tell us we can’t, for no reason.”

Little scenes like this are playing out all over Cape Town. Viewed independently it is easy to dismiss them as inconsequential skirmishes between the culturally and economically marginal and an over-zealous police force. But when the incidents of skateboarders being criminally charged and graffiti covered over at the whim of a citizen who calls a hotline to complain are aggregated, the battle lines over the rights to public spaces are clearly drawn.

The morning of February 26 was calm, with a light southeasterly wind along which the smell of the ocean travelled to Lavender Hill. It was one of those rare glorious days that visitors to the city pray for and are offered rather grudgingly by Hoerikwagga — the flat-topped Mountain in the Sea — and the ocean from which she rises.

It is this same mountain range, immortalised in tourist brochures, postcards and photographs, that rises tall as part of the visual landscape of Lavender Hill. Nature is, after all,

much fairer than the humans who occupy her. Despite the visual fantasy of rolling hills covered with blossoming fragrant purple flowers that its name evokes, Lavender Hill is a harsh and complex space. The township is one of the sites where the discarded people of District Six and Muizenberg were dumped by the apartheid government.

Here people were piled on top of each other in uninspired three- or four-storey council flats, where overpopulation and fierce competition for scarce resources conspired to cocoon a hotbed of social ills. Today the media, writing of this community, refer to Gangland, or “the most dangerous place on the Cape Flats”.

On that Sunday morning, however, with the weather promising to play its part, a community-based nonprofit organisation, Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RapCan) had organised a one-day festival called “Taking It to the Street”. Since 1997 RapCan has advocated the promotion of children’s rights. Through a combination of child protection services, research and community awareness projects, the organisation tries to unsettle the disease at the core of a nation that rapes and abuses. The work is aimed at creating a new construction of what it means to be a South African born and raised on the Cape Flats.

The day’s activities for this festival included workshops, dance, visual art and live performances from children who have worked with RapCan to produce a CD, *Lavender Hill for Life*. As part of the programme RapCan approached One Love Studios, commissioning them to create two murals in the area.

The co-founder of One Love Studios, which he runs from his home in Muizenberg, is Serjio Rinkist, who was raised on the Cape Flats. Combining his self-taught graffiti skills with the talents of his business partner, fine artist Claire Homewood, he set up the design studio with the intention of increasing the amount of public art and the number of murals in Muizenberg and its surrounds.

IsJa, Rinkist’s graffiti name, is a slim 27-year-old, with shoulder-length golden-brown dreadlocks. He lives his life

in pursuit of his two passions — graffiti and boarding (both on land and in the ocean) — and his skin has the complexion and slightly leathery texture of someone who spends a lot of time in the sun and surf.

He explains how the two RapCan murals, one on Prince George Drive at the entrance to Lavender Hill, the other on the wall of a three-storey council block of flats, came to be. “The murals were workshopped with the community and welcomed with open arms. The one on Prince George drive was a display of the rights of children. The flat was decorated with a tall tree that contained messages of love and peace. Below it, we inscribed: *Lavender Hill for Life*, the name of the CD the children were launching.”

As a Cape Town graffiti artist IsJa is well aware of the bylaws requiring permits for graffiti art and had offered to fulfil the necessary obligations for the event. RapCan, however, had felt that permission would be more likely to be granted if the application came from them. IsJa busied himself with the other logistics entailed in a job this size — assembling the right team for the production, engaging with the community to determine the content of the mural and renting a cherry picker for hard-to-reach areas.

The day before the event permission had still not been granted. IsJa went into solution mode. “We knocked on the door of the local ward councillor, pleaded our case and asked for his endorsement of the community process. He refused.” Undeterred, IsJa made another plan. “I called JP Smith [the mayoral committee member for safety and security] and explained the situation. He granted us a provisional permit.”

Relieved, IsJa and his team set to work. The festival and the mural were both a success and IsJa remarks: “Whenever we paint in communities, children of all ages come to us with their sketch books or with pictures on their phone. All of them want to know how to paint. So many of them want to be artists.”

In addition to the community, the police were present on the day. Their presence in Lavender Hill is normal and on a day of festivity it is expected. Throughout the day they

watched the activities of the graffiti artists from a distance and never approached or interacted with them. Yet, on the following Monday, IsJa found himself in trouble with the law and was slapped with a R1 500 fine for contravening clause 9 of the graffiti bylaw of 2010.

What followed was a lengthy process in which he had to prove to the court that his actions were defensible. After weeks of persistent engagement the fine was scrapped. “I shouldn’t have been fined in the first place,” says IsJa. “The whole process takes time and money that we don’t have. Time and money we could be spending on our work and our community.”

Skating and graffiti are regulated by the City of Cape Town through two provincial legislative enactments: the Bylaw Relating to Streets, Public Places and the Prevention of Nuisances, 2007 (the “nuisance bylaw”) and The City of Cape Town: Graffiti Bylaw, 2010 (the “graffiti bylaw”). In terms of these bylaws, the two activities have been declared to be a nuisance, attracting criminal sanctions unless they are conducted with the direct consent of the city.

The nuisance by-law asserts that skateboarding is a dangerous activity. Clause 15(a) prohibits “skateboarding, rollerskating and dangerous acts” on all public roads, unless permission is explicitly granted by the city. Other activities deemed illegal according to this law include begging more than once, climbing a public tree, washing or cleaning a motor vehicle, or drying and hanging washing in a public space. All these acts can result in the guilty party being fined and/or imprisoned.

Brett Heron, the member of the mayoral committee for transport, finds it hard to explain why exactly the city has adopted a hard line on skating. Heron is the kind of guy you want to like: the type of person who wears well-fitted slacks and a tasteful cardigan to work on a wet and grey Cape Town winter morning. He is reasonable and presents a dispassionate, well-paced description of the search for

common ground between the city and the skateboarding community.

He contends that the decision to outlaw skateboarding on city streets is “probably historical”, that the by-law was “probably written at a time when skateboarding was not regarded as a legitimate mode of transport” and that “the thinking around that is changing”. With the by-law updated as recently as 2007 it’s hard to know to what history he refers. He proffers another explanation for the restrictive regulation: “Concerns of safety of vulnerable users, the most vulnerable of which being the skateboarders themselves.”

What he doesn’t seem to acknowledge is that cycling, rock-climbing and paragliding are all dangerous activities that take place in the city, yet all of them remain legitimate, legal, recreational activities in which enthusiasts assume responsibility for their own safety.

The preamble to the graffiti bylaw states that “graffiti affects the quality of life of all residents and visitors, and constitutes a public nuisance which damages the image of the City known worldwide for its beauty and makes it a less desirable place to visit, live and work in”. The law has ostensibly been promulgated to eradicate gang graffiti from the visual landscape of the city by introducing a complex permit process for artists who wish to paint.

JP Smith, to whom IsJa had turned for help, has been at the helm of a ten-year-long process that culminated in the enactment of the graffiti bylaw, which forms part of an integrated public safety strategy aimed at removing signs of social disorder. Smith doesn’t present himself as the nice guy but rather as a necessary and tireless defender against the forces of hooliganism. Tall, slender, blond and blue-eyed, he is wearing a suit and a blue-striped shirt.

He views the permit process as a legitimate way of regulating the use of public space. “It’s not an unreasonable provision that has been made in terms of enabling the environment [for art]. What there is is a determination by some of the — in quotes — artists to cling to a complete *laissez-faire* scenario where they are permitted to do what

they want, which is, in my mind, exceedingly unreasonable to the communities who they inflict that on.”

The legislation provides for two avenues through which mural artists, a term employed by the law to define an acceptable form of art on walls, can produce work: firstly, by obtaining a permit from the city, as outlined in clause 9, and, secondly, through a system of self-permits, which is set out in clause 10.

In order to obtain a permit from the city the artist requires the permission of the property owner and his or her neighbours and other interested or affected people. The permit application must be accompanied by a full motivation for the artwork as well as a sketch. The bylaw stipulates that the city has the right to grant or deny permission, but gives no indication of the grounds on which its decision is based.

Smith contends that “the only grounds on which we would turn a permit down would be a technical reason like the surface is not appropriate for the application of paint, or it constitutes some kind of traffic risk in the assessment of the traffic engineer. These same principles are applied to advertising and commercial signage.” He is adamant that “there is no power for the official to turn the application down based on the content of the sketch”.

Yet, in the absence of express guidelines, Smith’s assurances offer little comfort. Guidelines would go some way towards ensuring that the constitutionally entrenched right to freedom of expression is not trampled on by arbitrary decision-making.

If an artist fulfils three criteria, namely, the successful approval of five consecutive permits, membership of the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (a Johannesburg-based voluntary arts body that was vocal in its opposition to the bylaw during the period of public participation) and the absence of a previous conviction for any offence relating to graffiti, the artist is able to apply for the right to self-permit — to decide for him/herself when and where he/she places graffiti. Even this concession requires artists to submit a self-permitting notice prior to the creation of

artwork, containing proof of consent from affected parties and an accompanying sketch. The law also provides that the city will keep a database of all mural artists and their accompanying sketches.

Contraventions of the bylaw are met with heavy sanctions. First-time offenders are liable for a fine of R15 000 or six months’ imprisonment. Conviction for a second offence makes them liable for a R30 000 fine or six months’ imprisonment. The bylaw allows for alternative sentencing at the discretion of the court.

Smith also says the city has established a dedicated “Graffiti Enforcement Unit” with the task of removing all offending graffiti. This team, he says, paints over graffiti art that has caused complaints. The team uses grey cement wash — a substance that obstructs future spray-painting on the wall.

Cape Town is the only city in South Africa to have specifically enacted legislation to control graffiti. In Jo’burg, for example, graffiti rates only a nominal mention in the public-open-space bylaw that says no person may, within a public space, deface, damage, destroy or remove any municipal property. In general, unwanted drawing on walls is dealt with as malicious damage to property, a criminal offence.

The tacit arrangement in most of South African urban centres is that painting a mural requires the permission of the owner of the wall. Private property owners in Cape Town do not have that option. If you want to decorate your private wall with artwork, you need a permit from the city.

The current legislative position in Cape Town has the effect of making criminal ways of life to which many young citizens have gravitated in pursuit of a self-sufficient, creative life of meaning. Cradled in the political expression of hip-hop culture, graffiti and skateboarding tracked their way back to Africa from the United States, where the descendants of slaves had forged them as a path to self-recovery.

Hip-hop galvanised itself as a cultural response to the structurally violent collapse playing itself out in New York's Bronx neighbourhood from the late 1960s onwards. From these drug-infested and bloody sidewalks rose a generation of socially and politically conscious youth. Guided by the messages encoded in rap (rhyme and poetry), graffiti images and expressive movement, hip-hop, at its formation, was about providing black youth with the knowledge, tools and community to embark on a process of decolonisation.

It's easy to understand the historical and political similarities between the Bronx in the 1960s and the tear-gas-filled, petrol-bombed streets of South Africa in the 1980s. Hip-hop powered on to the South African scene in 1982. The conscious messages of African-American emcees advocating revolutionary social change connected with a South African generation frustrated by a life of surveillance and limited opportunity. The cultural movement that hip-hop embodied presented these young people with an artistic expression rooted in knowledge of self and people's power.

In South Africa in the early 1990s the message of self-determination appealed to a wider urban youth reality and skateboarding bonded with hip-hop culture. Skating forges an intimate relationship between skaters and their natural environment, as every crack, crevice or donga in the earth's surface ripples through their body.

Drawing on walls also connected with Southern Africans at a primal level. The subcontinent's first inhabitants — let us call them Azanians — have etched and painted with ochre and blood since the beginning of time. Through this practice they connected with the earth, from which separation was unimaginable. Rock art also served as a tool to document history, connect to the spiritual realm and create a more expressive world.

World-renowned and respected graffiti artist mak1one was one of those courageous enough to have participated in the embryonic moments of hip-hop in South Africa. Even if you don't know him, his appearance gives the game away. His slightly baggy jeans are covered with multicoloured

paint splats and he has personally customised his white Adidas shell-toes so that white is only something they once were.

Inevitably he is wearing a hoodie or T-shirt, often one that displays his own design: a rough-sketched breakdancer doing a one-hand stand. A huge soft Afro frames his brown face, which exhibits features that corroborate his Indian ancestry. His stance is confident, his chest pushed forward, a ready-for-action pose that looks like a body-language residue from his days as a breakdancer. His commitment to the practice of graffiti is shown by the fact that he has trained himself to be ambidextrous, ensuring that if anything happens to one of his hands he "can continue doing what I love". When speaking on matters of art, mak1one prefers to use his *nom de plume*. Profiling mak1one, he asserts, focuses attention on the art, not the artist.

mak1one spent his formative years in a one-room shack in Cafda, one of Cape Town's original apartheid-created coloured settlements, where his mother raised him and his younger brother and sister. His father would spend long periods away from home, working on ships to sustain the family. It was there that he received his artist name from his grandfather, a painter who worked in the affluent southern suburbs. "My grandfather taught me you can do something with your hands. You can plant flowers, build and paint things. He called me Mak and it stuck."

The family lived in Cafda for ten years, waiting for the development of Mitchells Plain. When mak1one was seven, they were allocated a home in Beacon Valley in 1982. This waiting period was punctuated by evictions, displacement and separation, a context that made learning impossible, mak1one contends.

"I failed Sub A, because I couldn't concentrate. All the trauma at home, it affects you as a *laaitie* [youngster], and drawing was the only thing I had — a way to another world." His language weaves between emotive English and the playful AfriKaaps that is typical of a Cape Flats upbringing.

For those present at the inception of the hip-hop culture

in South Africa, The Base, a club on Shortmarket Street in the Cape Town central business district, is fondly remembered as the site of the magic. Here hip-hoppers received a ritualistic weekly dose of sweaty beat boxing, breakdancing and emceeing. The daytime session created a reason for black youth from the Flats to enter the white city centre, shifting the visual landscape by their presence and in doing so, reclaiming the space.

“We would catch a *waentjie* [train] into town from Mitchells Plain,” says mak1one. “All along the way, Bontheuvel, Mannenberg, *ouense* [guys] would be jumping on and you could tell from their clothes that they were hip-hoppers. We used to gather in one carriage and build a vibe all the way to town. When we got to town we would walk as a mass group from the station up Greenmarket Square to Shortmarket Street. For a few hours there was this amazing space we all shared.”

Only 13 at the time, he would catch the last train out at 7.30pm to make it home in time for supper. His mother, unaware of the excursion, thought he had been playing in another street.

He explains why hip-hop captured the imagination of Cape Town’s youth in the 1980s. “Hip-hop was born out of poverty and violence. It was the collective consciousness of people living in a certain space who decided that a change needs to happen and with very basic materials or information. First you need to learn about yourself completely. If a boat’s sinking you need to save yourself before you save anyone else, otherwise you’ll both drown.

“You have to be conscious and aware of yourself and what you’re doing and why you’re doing certain things, before you can go out and educate other people. With time, the people realise that everything around you is up to the people living there, it’s up to me. Why did hip-hop happen? It needed to happen because a change had to happen and that change had to come from the people.”

In Cape Town particularly, the incubator of South African hip-hop, the culture filled the identity gap created by the apartheid racial category of “coloured” and offered

a productive form of expression to those with few options, “Hip-hop gave you a different route if you wanted to be something other than a gangster. The conscious music that came out of hip-hop in the early days was my education. We didn’t have any culture to be proud of. You’re part of this bastard race and hip-hop comes along and you can be part of it, you can empower yourself to do it and the more you grow, the more the culture grows.”

Having been declared a nuisance under the graffiti bylaw, there are no conditions under which those who self-identify as graffiti artists can legally produce graffiti art. Only mural art, a term that has no intrinsic meaning in this culture, is permitted. Regardless of the fact that it defines him as a pest, mak1one asserts that he is a graffiti artist, not a mural or street artist. “Graffiti art is part of a culture. It has a history and origin as one of the elements of hip-hop. Like any other culture, there are things attached to it, things you learn, things you stick by, things you defend. I call it graffiti ‘cause that’s what it is, it’s nothing else.”

As the political wheels turned and a change became eminent, these young people began, in the early 1990s, to push the physical boundaries of freedom of movement. Still on Shortmarket Street, next to The Base, was skating legend Errol “Bong” Strachan’s Skateshop. Six-times national freestyle skateboarding champion, Strachan began skating at the age of 13, in 1975, a time when the sports and cultural boycott meant he was never able to compete internationally. Instead what he did was to create a “hobbit hole” for young black skaters who were navigating the city streets on makeshift boards.

Kent Lingeveltdt remembers it as the safe space for young skaters from the Flats. “We used to go there on Fridays and hang out. Being a coloured skater back then wasn’t easy. Everyone saw you as trying to be white and Bong’s shop created a space for us where it was OK to be coloured and skating.”

Thibault Square was another important social site during the 1990s where skaters could forge a culture that transcended race and class. The square, a paved courtyard

in the centre of town, surrounded by banks and cafés, has steps, benches and a small amphitheatre, all of which lend themselves to reinterpretation by skateboarders.

“It was a home for everybody. There was nothing like coloured guys or black guys can’t skate here. It was just if you were good enough to skate the ramp you skate the ramp.” But by 1995 skating at Thibault Square was outlawed as business interests squeezed the ragged-looking young people out of the space and into Boogaloos, the mall-based skateparks that popped up around the country.

Hip-hop has maintained its core belief in the power of each-one-teach-one and the relentless commitment to a craft. Today graffiti artists, critical lyricists and those who reach towards the limits of the body-possible continue to amplify the voices of black city youth economically and racially oppressed in heavily policed ghettos. “At the core of hip-hop is the upliftment of myself from the condition I was born into — the victory over the streets,” says mak1one. “I was born into poverty, born into the category of human being that was neither here nor there but everything, and I had to learn to be OK with that and believe in what I do and the gift I’ve been granted. I had to learn to be self-reliant, and then to go back and teach what I learnt.”

The National Skateboard Collective (NSC) has committed itself to galvanising a movement that works to change the perception of skateboarders among members of society and lawmakers. Marco Morgan, city planner for transport and public works and a founding member of the NSC, shares his thoughts on why skateboarders are seldom welcomed in public city spaces. “Skateboarders deny the production of architecture and urban space as a commodity for exchange, or a place where the exchange of commodities might take place. As a result, we experience similar exclusion from public space to others who are not potential consumers and are therefore perceived as a nuisance by shop owners and the general public.”

Morgan has been skating since 1990, when he was six years old. As a commuter on his board, skating is a fundamental component of how he does life and expresses himself. Often found wearing an old school hat, a nose stud and a smile, Morgan elaborates, “For me skating is mine. It belongs to me. It’s not to impress, race or be number one. It’s something that is very pure. For me it’s the push. Sometimes I wake up at three in the morning just to push down the road and come back home and sleep. I’ll be doing it till the day I die.”

In October last year, after an extensive lobbying and public awareness campaign, the NSC managed to convince the city’s transport authorities to lift the ban on all forms of non-motorised transport (NMT) on the Sea Point promenade. The ban was lifted for four months, which ended in February. During this time the NSC launched the Promenade Monday campaign under the Share the Space slogan and invited skaters to come through in their numbers.

“The idea was to liberate skaters and say that we have as much right as everyone else to be here on this road. The other part was to start showing conservative people that Sea Point doesn’t belong to the residents of Sea Point; it belongs to the city, it belongs to all residents,” explains Morgan.

Behind the decision to lift the ban provisionally is Brett Heron, who is happy with the outcome of the initiative. “People began to understand that this is a space that other people can enjoy and we need to learn to tolerate and share. Overall, it went very well and I would like to see the ban lifted. And, in fact, the ban is probably de facto lifted. I don’t know how you go back when you had no incidents and people embraced it.”

Around the globe, town planners are embracing behaviour that contributes to a greener environment. This, in turn, guides intelligent cities towards the implementation of NMT. The NSC asserts that skateboarding as a mode of transport can contribute to this process and they promote a “push don’t pollute” philosophy among their beneficiaries.

At present, the bylaw criminalising skateboarding conflicts with two formal documents issued by the city.

In its bid application for World Design Capital 2014, the city claimed that “[a]long with getting their own parks, skateboarders are now more welcome in a City that recognises skateboarding as a viable mode of new mobility transport”. Furthermore, the city’s NMT policy of 2005, which predates the most recent amendment of the by-law, defines NMT as including “all forms of movement that do not rely on an engine or motor movement”. The list of examples that follows explicitly includes rollerblading and skating.

Heron contends that his work requires him to deal with these contradictions. To do so he has set up a task team in which members of the skating community are invited to participate. “The bylaw doesn’t prohibit it [skateboarding] entirely,” he explains. “Unfortunately, no one ever sat down to work out how we would grant permission. I think the conflict, the inconsistency, derives from the fact that as a city transport planning authority we acknowledge skateboarding as a mode of transport and we would like to encourage more people to use active mobility or NMT. So we need to accommodate that and we can’t accommodate it entirely on NMT lanes because they don’t go everywhere.”

Heron believes the progress made in the task team meeting is moving the city towards a new milieu in its interaction with skaters. “I would like to remove the conflict between the bureaucracy and residents who happen to use skateboards either for transport or their recreation; to find a way, through a collaborative process, to accommodate skateboarding as a legitimate form of recreation and of transport.”

There is, however, a gap between Heron’s reasonable position and the day-to-day reality of police harassment and violence that skateboarders testify to. Sitting on the pavement of Christiaans Street, opposite the church — one of the few buildings in District Six that was saved (by the Protestant morality of the apartheid state) from demo-

lition — the Alpha Lazy Sunday crew claim that simply holding a skateboard in the city attracts the attention of the authorities.

As dusk begins to fall and the *azan* — the Islamic call to prayer — echoes across the City Bowl, skater after skater tells a story of near escape or of being “klapped” and roughed up by security guards. Morgan says: “Cops don’t like people with rights. If you’re a 12-year-old *laaitjie* and you’re caught by a security guard they don’t tell you, ‘The by-law says this and that,’ they’re like, ‘Hey! *Voetsek* [fuck off]! They hit you and punch you. You get treated like shit.”

With regard to graffiti, IsJa believes the laws infringe the rights of young people to express themselves freely and exclude from the economy those who have built their livelihood on these creative skills. “Like me, many people have built their careers on graffiti or skateboarding. With the new bylaws people are less willing to commission murals because they are too afraid. They don’t want the drama of being in trouble with the law.” He insists that the tense struggle over the conditions imposed on graffiti artists in Cape Town is ideological: “The authorities have a problem with skaters and graffiti artists because most of us are critical thinkers. We question the things that we are expected to accept.”

The glass partitioning in Smith’s office is decorated with laminated images of the Brooklyn Bridge lit up at night and a long aerial shot of Central Park, visual clues to the type of city space to which he aspires. Fittingly, the graffiti bylaw is informed by the “broken windows theory”, a criminology position made popular by Rudy Giuliani, mayor of New York City from 1993 to 2001. The theory asserts that crime is likelier to occur in areas where there are visible signs of social disorder, such as broken windows. This policy position gets tough on graffiti, portraying it as the first step in the downward spiral of neighbourhoods into crime.

Both Smith and the website of the “Graffiti Enforcement Unit”, the special-purpose team employed to enforce the by-law, refer to the fact that “graffiti, vandalism and

tagging ... have been scientifically proven to promote social disorder and increase crime.”

The science to which they refer was research conducted by the University of Groningen in the Netherlands in 2008, entitled “The Spreading of Disorder”. As part of the research, a number of experiments were conducted in both a pristine environment and in a littered environment where graffiti was visible. One such experiment was exhibiting a bank note in an open addressed envelope close to a post box. Respondents were reportedly more likely to take the bank note in the dirty, graffiti environment than in the clean one. This was said to prove that theft was more likely in an area that demonstrated signs of social disorder.

These experiments were hardly conclusive. Although the Groningen research supports the broken windows theory, the University of Chicago *Law Review* conducted a five-city social experiment in 2006, which, like a number of studies before it, concluded that there is no causal link between the reduction in nuisance crimes and the reduction in serious crimes.

Smith contends that the legal position is creating much-needed job opportunities. Homeless people are employed to paint over graffiti as “part of a rehabilitation and reintegration process so that, when they go back to their families and communities, they do so with some form of cash in their pocket”. In the past three years, Smith says, the budget for this work has increased from R1.3-million in 2012 to a projected R2.5-million for next year.

IsJa sees the situation differently. “Lots of beautiful art has been deleted. Art by some of the greatest South African artists has been erased and is now lost to another generation. This is our graffiti heritage — they are sites of inspiration and history for our culture and now these same sites are grey empty walls.”

Both graffiti artists and the city seem to agree that safety and the eradication of gangsterism are important goals. The point of disagreement is in assessing the harm caused in pursuit of these goals. Is the right to freedom of expression adequately protected or does the bylaw constitute

an unjustifiable limitation of this right? In assessing this question one must consider whether crime and gangsterism could be reduced without making drastic incursions into artistic creativity.

Expression is the lifeblood of a democracy; it is the way the will of the people is communicated. Here again, the apartheid experience serves as a warning. Coming from a past of state-sanctioned and legislated large-scale suppression of the communication of ideas, it seems prudent that South African law-makers be wary of limiting this right and bear an obligation to consider whether there are less restrictive means of achieving their purpose.

Smith is adamant that the city merely requires a reasonable process of consultation. “Why should they be allowed at their own direction to dictate other people’s public open space? It’s grotesquely self-serving and narcissistic. You’re living inside your property, you look at the inside of your boundary wall, you’re not looking at that art mural. If it is important enough to spend money and time to do then it is important enough to consult the people who have to share that environment with you. It’s called good neighbourliness, it’s called respect for the community around you, and, in my mind, it’s only reasonable.”

Grffiti artists like mak1one and IsJa assert, however, that they do consult — just not in the bureaucratic way the city would like them to. For them, graffiti represents a different kind of politics, a way of practising politics that’s face to face and community-based. “Whenever I paint I ask for walls,” says IsJa. “When you’re out on the street you’re talking to people and they take you on and question what you’re doing and why. You have to deal with those questions on the spot.” The bylaw, he says, has the effect not only of criminalising the act of graffiti but also a particular form of solidarity and interaction and it does so because it requires this expression of publicness to be subjected to a bureaucratic process.

Throughout the ten-year process of implementing the bylaw the city has consulted with only four graffiti artists and has not set up any mechanism through which they can

communicate as a community of interested and affected parties. Smith asserts that the process has been representative and his door has been open. “Nothing stops them from requesting an interview during the public participation process, nothing stops them from requesting an interview with the portfolio committee and nothing stops them from making a formal submission.”

Unsurprisingly, there remains an unresolved situation of conflict between the city and the street artists within its jurisdiction, conflict that Smith claims cannot be solved through discussion. A visibly agitated Smith says: “There’s a difference of opinion and speaking about it over and over is not going to change that. It’s not that we’re not listening, it’s that we disagree and repeatedly communicating that, using other fora to try and impact on that, is not going to change it.”

He asserts that graffiti artists need to come to the table instead of resisting the permit process.

“If they applied a fraction of the energy by just becoming *au fait* with the permit process we could have been a lot further down the road. Their insistence on being allowed unfettered access to public open space is what has been a stumbling block here and I think they’re insanely unreasonable.”

Sitting with IsJa at the Empire Café in Muizenberg, a small, trendy spot where deliciously special Florentine treats are complemented by a beautiful sea view from the top floor, he brings into sharp focus the issues at stake in this battle. “Just because it’s law doesn’t make it right. Twenty years ago it was illegal for us to sit in this restaurant but that didn’t make it right. People organised and fought to change the laws that they thought were wrong, to create a free society. We’re simply continuing that work.”

The visual landscape of the city is severe. We are greeted by income inequality and discomfiting privilege at every traffic light. The natural environment bears witness to centuries of ecological atrocities inflicted upon the Earth — from septic rivers to the flurry of commercial waste that catches the wind and drifts across the sky. Billboards, posters and digital projections assail the psyche of city dwellers, never allowing them for one moment to forget the purpose of their existence: to consume.

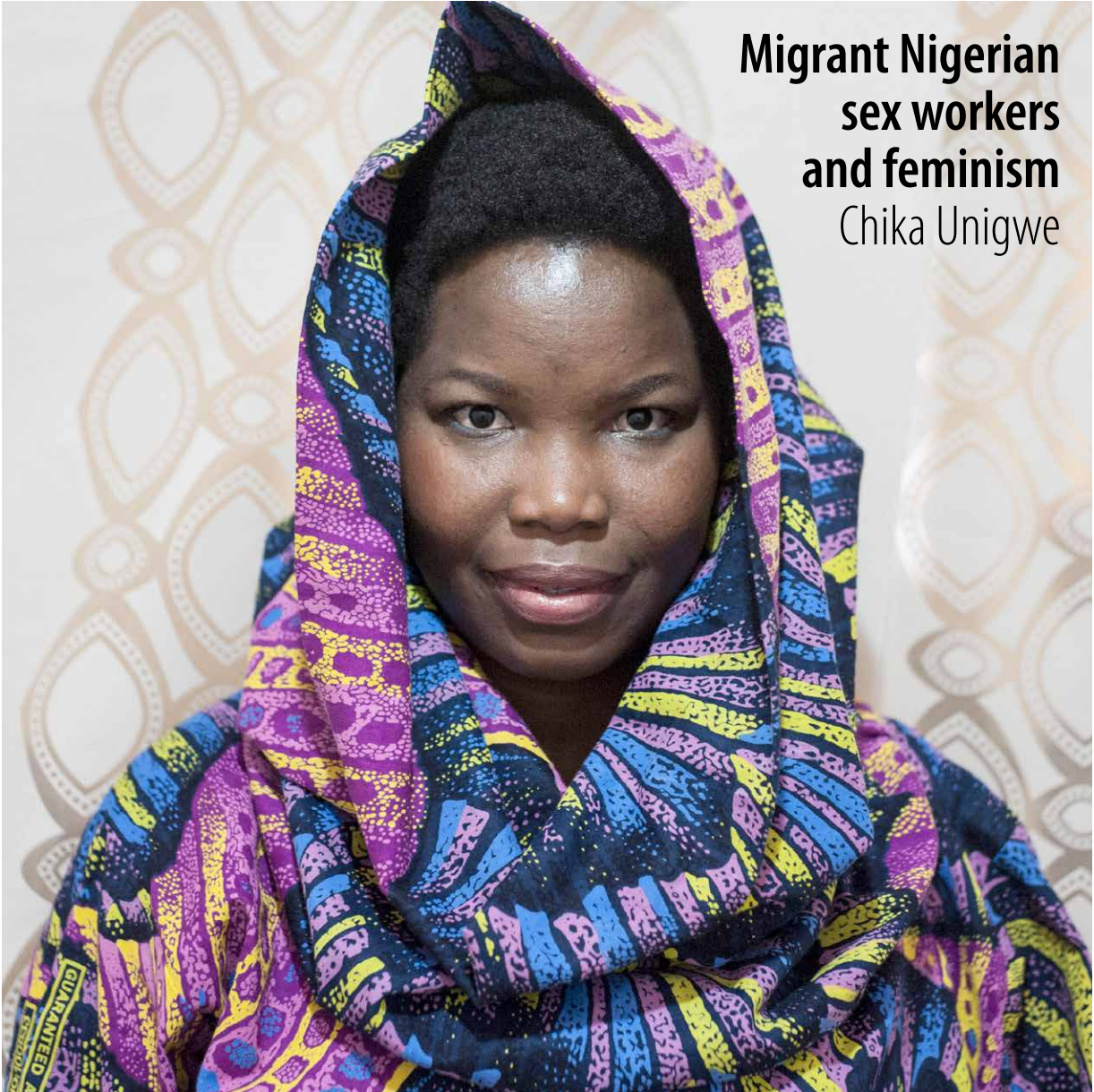
Graffiti as a form of public address intervenes and presents an alternative voice in a consumer-orientated visual landscape. Skateboarders, who are propelled only by their natural energy and four wheels, disrupt the dominant consensus that human movement should be confined to motor vehicles.

The dull concrete-washed walls of Cape Town, beneath the surfaces of which lie pieces of art that took time, energy and love, cast the mind’s eye 500 years into both the future and the past. The only true traces Azanians have of their cosmology before the violent rupture from land and culture by European imperialists are the drawings on the walls left by the ancients. The last pieces of rock art were drawn during the late 18th century and depict the violence and domination of the settlers as they made inroads into the interior.

The rock art of the Azanians was a ritualistic practice that expressed not only their talent, beauty and beliefs, but also their intimate relationship with their physical environment. As this relationship was savagely severed with the commodification of nature into land, so, too, the meaning of, and therefore the need to draw on walls disappeared from the rituals of our ancestors.

Skateboarding and graffiti are avenues through which urban youth reanimate this ancient conversation with the Earth. Their unapologetic expression stakes the claim of Azanians to remain connected to nature. Except now, nature has changed. It’s urban. ■

**Migrant Nigerian
sex workers
and feminism**
Chika Unigwe





A Nigerian woman takes a sewing class in Benin City, as part of a reintegration programme for trafficked women. Photo by Candace Feit, Reuters.
Isoke Aikpitanyi (previous page). Photo by Silvia Morara.



myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute.”

These often-quoted words from Rebecca West were the catalyst for a long discussion by a panel on feminism which I was privileged to be a part of at the last Adelaide Writers Festival in Australia. Who is a feminist? Who is excluded? Is feminism a set, solid position that polarises women? Is it an intransigent noun that refuses to shift its meaning? Is it elitist? Can prostitutes be feminists?

With regard to the last question, the passion and frequency with which West is quoted is, perhaps, proof of what majority thought is on this. If more proof is needed, the brouhaha that has followed in the wake of Beyoncé’s skimpy leather outfit at a recent concert would provide that. Her choice of outfit, referred to as “slutty” by some appalled columnists (very often women), has many questioning her “feminist” credentials (which are also regularly conflated with her role-model credentials). A columnist took Michelle Obama to task for referring to Beyoncé as a role model for her daughters (because Beyoncé had worn an outfit the columnist deemed inappropriate for a performance). And yet, Beyoncé is visibly feminist in so far as feminism is about independence, a sense of self and female empowerment. Indeed, in many quarters, she is held as an icon of feminism. Is she in or is she out?

Though I am fairly certain that for many people in the audience in Adelaide the jury on Beyoncé is still out, they have settled on whether sex workers can be feminists. For them, once a woman begins to accept money in exchange for sex, she becomes “disempowered” and therefore loses all claim to feminism. Unlike Beyoncé, sex workers are rarely allowed the chance to occupy that grey zone of flexibility where they can be “insiders” when they are “modestly” dressed (but not so modest as to be seen as victims of a religion in which women are oppressed by being forced to cover up completely), but “outsiders” when they are dressed for work, and working.

The career prostitute is cast in the role of passive victim of a patriarchal culture that decrees women exist for the sole purpose of pleasing men. In the same way, Beyoncé's critics cast her in the role of victim of the same patriarchal culture whenever her outfit serves no purpose but to satisfy the male gaze. Apparently, strong, independent women do not go about (even on stage) dressed in sexually tantalising outfits. They do not put nude photos of themselves up on twitter (Rihanna) or show a nipple on stage (Janet Jackson).

Ironically, the trade mark of Femen, a growing group of feminists in Europe, is their topless protests. Intriguingly, one of their more famous protests is against Islam's "oppression of women" (for making them, among other things, wear the hijab). One of the many words used to describe the Femen movement is "radical feminism" (which I suppose refers to their going topless). Their half-nudity does not detract from their being taken seriously (and I doubt that any of the columnists who have taken Beyoncé to task would see them as any less feminist than Betty Friedan, for example). Supporters of the Russian group Pussy Riot went bare-chested to protest their arrest in 2012 for desecrating a church and calling for the removal of Putin. Many of those protesters would not be challenged for identifying themselves as feminists.

So, why is there such strong opposition to expanding feminism (or feminisms, as I personally believe that no two feminists are the same) to include sex workers? One reason, I suppose, is because we very often consider these women to be without will. They are passive victims of oppression. How could anyone imagine that they could be powerful enough to be feminist if the only image of them we are fed, from the media to literature, is of passive, powerless victims locked into a system of oppression? Tellingly, prostitution, especially where it involves African women migrating, is referred to as slavery. The women are depicted as having no agency and as only being able to be free when an outside force intervenes.

The Yoruba say that one who journeys far enough will

eventually come upon a hunch-backed squirrel. My hunch-backed squirrels came when I started research for my second novel, *On Black Sisters Street*, which tells the story of four Nigerian women who journey to Europe to work as prostitutes. Before I began my research I had assumed that the popular notion that the major (and sole) driving force behind this particular kind of labour migration was poverty was irrefutable. After all, despite being part of a nation blessed with mineral resources, the vast majority of Nigerians live on less than a dollar a day.

I was also of the view that sex workers, by default, were unwilling, powerless, passive victims of a male-dominated society. I was certainly convinced, having been conditioned to be so, that every Nigerian sex worker in Europe was literally a poor woman who had been tricked into making the trip by a callous male pimp who then held her hostage. Then those strange squirrels began appearing, skipping through my preconceived notions and knocking them down, one after the other.

First of all, I discovered that the bulk of the recruiting is done by women. According to research done by German journalist Lukas Roegler and documented in his brilliant *Sisters of No Mercy*, international sex migration from Nigeria has its roots in the mid-1980s. That was when Nigerian women, most of them from Benin City in South-South Nigeria, who had travelled to Italy to trade, discovered, perhaps accidentally, that there was a niche in the sex market there that they could occupy. They did so.

As a result of their success, the market expanded and other women began to be recruited. (From my research it would appear that Benin City has been the major supplier of Nigerian sex workers to Europe since then. A study in 2002 by the Women's Health and Action Research Centre of some 1 500 randomly selected women aged 15 to 20 in Benin City showed that one in 20 had been abroad, and one in three had been contacted by somebody who had offered to help them organise a trip.

This study was replicated on a small scale in a girls' secondary school I visited in Benin City in 2011 with

nongovernmental organisation Exit, an Austrian-based anti-trafficking organisation run by Adesuwa Reiterer. In a hall of about 150 students between the ages of 15 and 17, fewer than a quarter did not have a female member of their family (both nuclear and extended) or a woman they knew, or knew of, who was not in Europe. More than half the students knew of “aunties” who could get girls into Europe.

A student confessed that her school fees were being paid by an Italian man she had yet to meet but who knew all about her through her “auntie”, who had promised to bring her over to Italy to meet the Italian benefactor once she graduated from secondary school. Benin City arguably has the highest number of upwardly mobile single women living outside the country of any Nigerian city. It would also appear, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Benin City has a strong tradition of women protesting successfully to protect their interests.

The strange squirrel further disabused me of my conviction about poverty’s role in the transatlantic sex trade. Poverty, despite what a Unesco report says, is not the sole driving force of this trade. It is a factor, but not as huge a factor as I had believed. Many of the women I spoke to were not working in order to be able to eat three times a day. The motivation was stronger than that. Roegler’s work follows four Nigerian ex-commercial sex workers from Benin City who have been deported from Italy. Even though all the women cite “wanting a better life” as their prime motivation for being voluntarily trafficked, all but one links the “better life” to escaping poverty. Their “better life” has a feminist ideal to it: independence.

One of the women says her father sold off a piece of land to sponsor her European dream. A family with a piece of land to sell is not likely to be wallowing in poverty. Their stories are not unusual. Some of the Nigerian women who have serviced or are servicing the commercial sex trade in Europe come from homes that would not be described as “poor”, or they have access to a father who could help if asked. It becomes obvious then that poverty, certainly in

the sense in which it is used in that Unesco report, cannot be the major motivating factor for the years of sex migration from Nigeria.

The women who are trafficked very often put themselves in debt amounting to tens of thousands of euros. Sometimes they borrow money to pay off an initial amount. They are often recruited by people they know: neighbours, family friends and so on. In some cases, as with that of one of the women I spoke to, she was recruited while visiting a hairdressing salon. A frequent customer there, an “elegant woman”, asked her if she wanted to “go abroad”. She said she did not even think twice about it. She had a small wholesale business selling oranges she picked from several trees she “rented” from farmers in the village, but she wanted more. “The money was not much, and this woman was giving me a chance to live my dream.” She did not ask what she was expected to do abroad because she knew that whatever it was, she would do it, but she had not expected it would be prostitution. Although many women are aware that they will have to work in the sex business, for some this still comes as a surprise.

Far from being passive victims, many of these women are risk takers. Before the journey, the woman and the trafficker agree that she incurs the debt and, until it is repaid, she is not free to quit. The women sometimes have to take vows to stick to the terms of agreement through religious rituals involving juju priests and clippings of the women’s pubic hair. With no idea of how long they will be indentured to their traffickers, or the circumstances under which they will work, they embark on the journey. However, they are willing to take the risk because they have witnessed the transformation around them of families with daughters abroad.

Isoke Aikpitanyi — one of the most remarkable women I met on my journey — is one of them. Isoke is a fierce feminist who now runs a nongovernmental organisation helping young Nigerian women in Italy who are seeking a reprieve. She worked as a prostitute in Italy for several years, primarily to take on the role of a breadwinner

because the man — her father — who should have done so had failed to. Her father earned about 75 euros a month (the average salary in Nigeria is about 50 euros a month), and so could have looked after his family. However, he abandoned them and moved in with another woman. Isoke was contacted by a trafficker, popularly referred to as an Italo, who told her she could earn a lot more by working hard, paying off her debts and looking after her family.

“Right there before your eyes is the example of the families who already have a girl in Europe. Maybe they build a little house, the kids go to a private school where at least the teachers don’t go on strike for weeks on end because their salaries haven’t been paid, everybody has enough to eat, they have clothes and shoes. The material changes are there, you can see them and you can touch them. The TV, the fridge, maybe even a car. Everybody’s dream is to own a Mercedes, the white one with the long bonnet, that here in Europe you never see any more. When money arrives for the family it’s the first thing they buy, if possible with air conditioning and fake leopard-skin seats ...”

Once abroad, it is not uncommon for the women to meet with horrific experiences at the hands of clients. It is, after all, one of the hazards of the business. One of the women I spoke to, B, a beautiful, light-skinned twenty-something with long hair extensions, recalled how a client had tried to smother her with a pillow. Yet a few hours later she was working on another client. “I had to work. I had to make money. You have to forget or you cannot work.” She pulled on her extensions as she spoke. Despite such experiences, once the women have repaid their debts it is not rare to find some of them recruiting others or staying on to earn more money for themselves.

M, whom I met in Antwerp, recruited her step-sister. “I have done my bit for the family; now it is her turn. I can’t do it all on my own. And as her madam I am a lot nicer to her than a stranger would have been.” M had worked for years to look after her parents and siblings in Benin City. She did not sound the way I expected “madams” to sound: harsh, impatient. Her voice was polite. Ordinary. Kind,

even. I could imagine her giving her sister days off and taking her to parties. Isoke writes in her book, which has not yet been published in English, of terrible experiences and of ex-prostitutes turned madams:

“Sometimes the men say things, while they’re raping you.

“Filthy nigger bitch, for example.

“What the fuck did you come to this country for, you dirty whore.

“Go back where you came from, you and your bloody knickers.

“Go back to the jungle with the monkeys.

“That’s what they say.

“And they also say: I’ll show you.

“They say: I’m going to fix you.

“And when they’ve finished, before they go, they say: That’ll teach you.”

“What you have to learn is that there are guys cruising the streets who think they are avengers. They hate you because you’re a woman. And black. And a whore. And weak.

“What you learn is that the most violent of them, the biggest and the strongest, always take it on the thinnest, most fragile of the girls. The ones who are so slight and slender they look like leaves of corn.

“If a kid tries to rape you, a sixteen, seventeen, eighteen-year-old, well, you punch him in the face hard enough to knock him senseless and you run for it. The most dangerous are those twenty-five and older. Thirty. Forty. Eighty or ninety kilos. The ones who at first sight you’d never think were violent. Who have nothing in the way they dress to alarm you, nothing in their approach to put you on your guard.

“They’re the ones who then say: I’ve paid, now you do what I tell you. Who have Aids or other diseases but don’t want to use a condom and maybe even make you pregnant. Who say shitty nigger bitch, who pull out a knife or a gun. And burn you with cigarettes, bash you, use their belts on you, rip your hair out. Who go off with your bag and your

money and leave you naked miles from home, in the dark and the snow.

“And these are only some of the things I could tell you.

“As for gang rapes. They happen. Often.

“Three or four at a time.

“They arrive, they force you into their car.

“You’re lucky if you get out alive.

“I can tell you this: the first rape is the hardest to get over.

“But you console yourself by saying: I thought I was going to die, but I’m still alive.

“The second time you’re raped you say: it happens.

“The third time you say: it’s normal.

“After the fourth you stop counting.

“In fact, Felicia says: it’s an occupational hazard.

“And when the girls go home bashed and raped, when they say I don’t want to do it any more, then Felicia sits down with them and she tells her story. As if it were a fairy-tale, if you know what I mean. One of the ones you tell children to put them to sleep.

“Look at my teeth, is how Felicia starts her story. You see, there are worse things than what happened to you. Much, much worse.

“This Felicia has been in Italy for many years, she’s forty now, one of the first generation to come from Africa.

“In other words: she arrived when the system of the mamans and the debts did not yet exist, when the girls still came on their own, on do-it-yourself journeys across the desert. Like Carol. Yes. Exactly.

“Felicia tells how one evening two carabinieri went with her and a friend of hers but they weren’t satisfied, they yelled things at them, and even though she didn’t understand Italian too well, she knew they were insulting her and saying you don’t understand a thing. They went away, but a short while later they were back, only this time there were six or more of them.

“She had ended up alone on the footpath, her friend had gone off with a client.

“She says: they forced me into the car and took me

away, they bashed me and beat me until there wasn’t a single unbroken tooth left in my mouth.

“Then they left her, fainted away on the ground.

“It started to snow and when she reopened her eyes she was covered by it, like lying under a thick white bedspread. She was all stiff, she couldn’t even walk. She dragged herself to the footpath. A police car arrived. What happened to you?

“She pressed charges, but she was dazed and couldn’t remember the details properly.

“Nothing came of the charges.

“But I survived, she says. You can survive even horrific stories like mine, and then make money just the same and send it to Africa and build yourself a beautiful house.

“In fact she now has a three-storey house in Nigeria. After that bashing she worked for another year, then she got better organised, and now she has five or six girls working for her. She’s not one of the mamans who beats up. She never uses violence. She only has to open her mouth and say look at my teeth. The girls go back to work without any protests.”

Is there no room in feminism for women like M? Like Felicia? She is financially independent, refuses to be subdued by men (and patriarchy), gives other women a chance to be independent, and looks after her family and more. She is making sure that her siblings get an education, the same education that eluded her, so that they have more options open to them on their road to empowerment.

It is precisely the lack of viable options that makes this brand of migration, even with its attendant horrors, attractive to many young Nigerian women. Sometimes these women have access to other options that could keep them out of poverty but would not pay them as much as servicing the sex trade. What one sometimes hears is: “Why would I work as a cleaner for 6 euros an hour when I can earn 100 in that amount of time as a prostitute?” Yet 6 euros an hour is more than the average Nigerian earns in Nigeria, but

then their dreams, like Felicia's, extend beyond satisfying hunger. They are all aiming for independence, the kind of financial independence that is empowering, that makes it possible for them to transcend their gender by taking on roles culturally reserved for the male.

One of the most touching interviews I had was with a young woman who was working as a prostitute to enable her father to have access to good medical care. She had approached a woman known for "getting girls into Belgium" and begged to be taken to Europe too. Unable to get a job and unwilling to steal or cheat, she saw working in the red-light districts of Belgium as a feasible alternative to begging for funds. Some of her colleagues were working to ensure better lives for their families: children, parents, siblings, back in Nigeria, giving them opportunities to live better lives.

In 2008 I met a Nigerian sex immigrant who kept on working even after she had paid off her debt to the traffickers and was free to stop, to finance a business in Benin City. That business was her ticket to financial independence, to empowerment. "I never want to be a kept woman," she said. That could be the feminist slogan: "I never want to be a kept woman."

More recently I interviewed a former Nigerian prostitute who had been trafficked by her father, who lived in Germany and regularly "organised for girls" to be brought to "madams" in Antwerp. According to this young woman her father had not told her she was coming to work as a prostitute. She had come under the illusion that she would live with him, get a job and make some money. When it became apparent why her father had brought her into the country she gave in because she had no option, but also because she wanted to "own fine things". Besides, she said, she could not go back as her father had torn up her passport, telling her it was fake. When I asked whether she hated her father she looked stunned at the thought. Then she said: "I can't hate him. He's my father."

"But he brought you here to work as a prostitute," I argued.

"Yes," she agreed. "But he was only helping me."

Now she says she has a chance to earn her own money. To be independent. To build a house at some point. Buy a car. She has been moved from the periphery of the economy to the centre. By moving herself into a position traditionally reserved for men, natural breadwinners in many Nigerian cultures, including that of Benin City, she has, in essence, become "male". By being in that space many women like her have also taken over roles traditionally reserved for men. Maleness therefore loses the traditional construct, where it is equated with gender, and becomes much more expansive, with room for women.

It is the ability to operate within that space that these women yearn for. They are not content with being passive recipients (which marriage, for example, might make them); they want to be active participants. There have been cases where prostitutes have married men (often European men) who are capable of sustaining them financially, yet they carry on working because they cannot bear the thought of being "looked after". I met one Nigerian prostitute who was working with her husband's permission. It was given grudgingly, but he claimed to understand her need for financial independence and her assurance that it was "only a job".

In Benin City the effect of having so many young women abroad is visible, yet their role is not publicly acknowledged. Isoke says: "Cynthia went to Benin City this summer and says that in the centre there's no free land left, there are houses everywhere, beautiful houses, sometimes even designed by architects. And it's all due to the girls who make the journey, but nobody ever thanks those girls. The whole economy of [Benin] city is based on money from Europe, all the businesses, the taxis, the hire scooters, the construction, the schools, everything is based on money sent through Western Union. But when the King of Benin makes his speech every year to Nigerians overseas he never ever mentions the girls. He says to his countrymen: whatever you go off to do around the world, may you kill a white man and bring the boat back home. That's the literal trans-

lation, but it's a way of saying good luck. To everybody, but not to us."

The money sent by the "travellers", as the women are known in Benin City, is transforming the city more than the government ever could. So much so that the opposition to calls to halt the trafficking comes from an unexpected group: the mothers. Mothers of daughters have been elevated in a society that traditionally favours sons, because daughters have become the new breadwinners.

When, according to Roegler's documentary, a National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons official called on the *oba* of Benin (the traditional ruler of the Edo people) to try to tackle the issue, the *oba* revealed that he had been warned by the mothers to keep out of their business. They threatened that they would come naked to his compound by way of protest. In essence, they have tied the *oba*'s hands and made him redundant in discussions involving putting an end to the wave of trafficking from his city.

For many women, especially single mothers, the "business" has helped to raise their status. Where their spouses have abandoned them, their daughters in Europe have become their new "husbands", taking up the roles of the absent men. Where their men are around but unwilling or unable to fulfil their role as breadwinner, their daughters step in and fill their place. It is no longer about breaking boundaries between men and women; it is about filling men's boots.

What becomes apparent, then, from the testimonies of the Nigerian sex workers interviewed is that these are not women who are escaping poverty; rather, they are finding new ways to negotiate their space in a patriarchy that can no longer sustain them. The model of patriarchy also implies that it is men who look after women (a model traditional feminism rejects as being oppressive). When this is no longer possible, new models must be created.

My argument, therefore, is that these women are escaping zones of oppression: their fathers abandoning their mothers. Or their fathers being present but unable or unwilling to fulfil their breadwinner roles, as in the case of

Isoke. The result is a new social structure in which women rise from the status of second-class citizens to become number-one citizens, albeit without any form of radical confrontation with patriarchy. The women, in essence, transcend their femaleness and become male, with all the burdens and privileges that implies, including the ability to "buy" a husband.

Many of the women I spoke to still harboured hopes of marrying once their debts were paid off and they had saved enough money to be financially independent of their husbands. Economic independence is very much the bedrock of maleness, and the ideal to be aimed for, an independence that makes them breadwinners, not just because they take care of their families, but also their husbands, the ultimate symbol of transcending gender. And isn't transcending gender the apogee of feminism, after all? ■

Academic responses

LOREN LANDAU:
A RESPONSE TO 'THE SEAFARERS'

In my time writing in South Africa and on matters “African” I have become acutely aware of the struggle I face in asserting an authoritative voice. This is especially so when writing about people poorer and darker than I am. At one level, the experienced and educated writer — especially when that education and experience is garnered elsewhere — is granted an authorial credibility that may silence critics. Indeed, an acuity with the written word, particularly English, may render a piece unavailable to and, in effect, unassailable by those who might critique it on empirical, ethical or ideological grounds.

As a writer of academic texts I have come to embrace my outsider status, taking inspiration from the German sociologist Georg Simmel’s apposite treatment of the stranger (*italics added*): “Because he is not bound by roots to the particular constituents and partisan dispositions of the group, he confronts all of these with a distinctly ‘objective’ attitude, an attitude that does not signify mere detachment and nonparticipation, but is a distinct structure composed of *remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement*.”

He is describing an observed condition. I suggest we take it as an aspiration — a position that opens space for analysis by those not wishing (or simply unable to) claim status as children of the soil. But we must be wary. Such a position demands that we respect the knife edge along which we walk. One misstep and we lose our balance, sliding dangerously from Simmelian stranger to outside critic whose words will only harden divides.

This is where I come to Eve Fairbanks’s work. At one level the piece is (in my view, as a fellow stranger) remarkably successful in illustrating the critical empathy required to speak with (and not to) a South African or global audience. The author humanises her characters while recognising their own place in a world in which the boundaries that

long defined work, race, and public space have — for better or worse; judgment here is not the objective — been partially and disorientingly dissolved.

It is refreshing to see an account of South Africa's transformation that recognises but does not rely on the easy, if tired, vocabulary of race or class or the easy critiques of neoliberalisation, globalisation or the US-led securitisation regime. There is exploitation here. There is casualisation. There are human rights abuses. But these are not the vocabulary of the piece as I suspect it might be if written by a "progressive" South African hand. Instead, we have rich, if schematically drawn, characters from South Africa and elsewhere who are all struggling — forgive the nautical metaphor — to find terra firma, when much of what they have known or taken for granted is choppy and liquefying. But they do so from various perspectives that blend the kind of suspicion and cosmopolitanism that characterises much of contemporary South African sociality.

For all its strengths, the overt insertion of the author into the piece's opening paragraphs runs the risk of shrouding the insights and ambiguities I have just described. Without wishing to deny Fairbanks's background on the Chesapeake Bay or her love of sailing, by framing the discussion in these terms she positions herself perhaps one or more steps outside the society (or sub-societies) she later observes. The kind of post-material values — for the romance of the sea or the beauty of the mountains — may not be unique to the wealthy and white, but the desire to sail for nothing but its joy is redolent of past privilege. The suggestion that "everyone hikes" reinforces an unwitting alliance with what is, in fact, a small, if powerful, and deeply resented minority. There is little gained by framing the piece in this way, but I fear much is likely to be lost.

Having dispensed with my observations on positionality, I can now engage with what is revealed through this investigation into the invisible. In this regard, the lengthy list of characters and subcultures is remarkable, given how abbreviated the piece is: sugar girls, fisherman, stevedores, priests, bartenders, human rights advocates and, of

course, the sailors themselves. I knew some of these groups were out there — or could imagine they were from having watched *The Wire* — but knew little about them. Revealing how they connect and co-evolve is clearly one of the piece's great strengths. Where an academic piece might have focused on one character — or one theme — the benefit of this mode of storytelling is that we follow Fairbanks's breadcrumb trail as she meanders through this forest of characters and confrontations.

In describing these accounts she adds depth to a number of themes that have preoccupied my own work and interests; concerns that are evidently important but have yet to capture fully the imagination of South African scholars or public commentators. Perhaps most evidently it resonates with the themes I raise above in a different way: questions of the insider and the outsider. Although my own work has focused on what are often violent forms of exclusion, out of intellectual curiosity (and for reasons of my own sanity) I am increasingly drawn to explorations of conviviality or coexistence amid great diversity and fluidity.

My own work has questioned how in new and highly fluid spaces — the peri-urban township, the ever-changing inner city — people find ways of living together, of establishing patterns of authority, of claiming space or rights. As in Fairbanks's piece, these are sometimes violent spaces, but they are also areas of remarkable tolerance: spaces of sociality that blend discourses and values — religion, hospitality and more — from people's own histories in ways that are shaped by the strange and often precarious positions in which they find themselves.

At what is, perhaps, a more abstract level, the piece also speaks to the making of the state and nation in a period characterised by the great tension between fluidity and frustrated movement. As Zygmunt Baumann notes evocatively, the same highways that facilitate the global flows of goods and capital become drawbridges when approached by the already disadvantaged. Yet the obstacles they present are not absolute: people move. As they do, we see how restrictions and stratifications are spatialised and concrete-

tised by permeating an often surprisingly diverse set of practices.

It is not only the physical fence and or regulatory regimes that have emerged around a previously open port that matter (in this regard, see Chalfin's work on Ghana). In some ways, these physical restrictions can be overcome more easily than the racialised, nationalised and gendered rationing of rights, religion and certain forms of (sexualised) recreation. These draw boundaries and generate socialities that are particular, potentially precarious and persistent. As they are manifested, they help to create zones of distinction — not necessarily of legal exception, as political philosopher Giorgio Agamben might suggest — that are at once part of and distinct from the countries in which they operate. In this odd way, the disheartened fisherman of the Cape and a left but not forgotten family in Thailand or Indonesia are unwittingly drawn together in processes that too often remain unseen. Only by stepping in without being absorbed by these people can we hope for these revelations.

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MARIE HUCHZERMEYER:

A RESPONSE TO 'THE BOOKSELLER OF KIBERA'

This is a fascinating piece of writing that brings to life a well-known area of Nairobi that most would associate with images of a vast expanse of tightly packed corrugated iron roofs and heaps of refuse in its only open spaces. As author Caroline Wanjiku Kihato mentions, Kibera can be referred to as the most researched, most visited and most photographed “slum”. It has been represented by a wide range of local and international commentators. Thanks to artists, filmmakers, researchers, religious workers and the aid industry, Kibera has a strong virtual presence. What then is invisible about Khaleb Omonde?

There is much academic debate on the way “slums” and their inhabitants are represented. There are eloquent critiques of sensationalisation — the focus on crisis, on poverty and squalor, and on ever-rising numbers. Kihato mentions the tendency to exaggerate, whether for political or financial gain. Kibera has, indeed, been sensationalised and represented as a crisis.

Another much criticised and often exaggerated frame of “slum” representation is that of entrepreneurialism, which has fuelled the proliferation of capitalist solutions to the world's slums. At the forefront of this form of representation is Hernando de Soto, with his book *The Mystery of Capital*. Khaleb, the bookseller, is an entrepreneur of note, a trait perhaps not directly associated with his Luo roots.

And yet, I would like to argue that Kihato does not fall into either of these frames (crisis or entrepreneurialism). I place her piece in the frame that I have proposed for urban informality, namely, a field of tension. This tension plays itself out at many levels. One is between the creative desire to make it in the city and the uncertainty that forms the elusive backdrop. Khaleb lost his goods, his life's work, in a matter of 12 hours. Had Kihato researched her story some five years earlier, the massive development-related evictions

in Kibera would have been the cause of this uncertainty. More recently, in 2011, a large chunk of the “village” of “Soweto East” — the other end of Kibera — was demolished to make way for modern apartment blocks.

Khaleb’s story is one of tension: creative and entrepreneurial drive on the one hand, the threat of destruction on the other. The sense of community on the one, ethnic strife on the other. Beside each other, the ordinary and the extraordinary. There is the seeming ordinariness of the unexpected: a book seller in a “slum”, the customers’ commitment to education, the slum-dwellers’ worldly reference to Dubai. Much of this Kihato explains or comments upon.

What to me is another subtle tension, but one not commented upon in this story, is that between rural traditional values and the Western urban. Like many urban Kenyans, Khaleb and his customers take an interest in inspirational, motivating literature and, for them, the Bible falls comfortably into that category. To my surprise, Khaleb is a polygamist. We hear of his first and his second wife — only the first features in the narrative, the second being “new”.

I would have loved the narrative to delve a little deeper into the underexplored intertwining of rural and urban values, in particular from a gender perspective. Towards the end of the paper Khaleb’s wife is merely referred to as that, no longer as the first wife. Is there an ambivalence about her changing status within the household? Or is she merely the subservient wife working in the husband’s shop? The neighbouring shop owner (a woman) is a more important protagonist in the story line. Does this suggest a social order in which entrepreneurialism gives women a status they may be denied in the household?

The story also deals with the lingering tension in Nairobi, the consciousness of ethnic difference sharpened by the events and memories of what followed the December 2007 elections when neighbours turned into destructive enemies. As yet, the most compelling explanation is the high-level orchestration of this hatred, which has resulted in leading politicians from both sides of the political spectrum in 2007 having to answer to the International Crimi-

nal Court in The Hague. In my own research on tenancy in Nairobi I was relieved to find that the Waki Commission — formed in 2008 to investigate the post-election ethnic violence in Kenya — also engaged with the irresponsible political promise of rent control as a direct trigger for the violence, explaining why the epicentre of urban clashes was in the city’s largest concentrations of private tenancy — the “slum”, Kibera, as well as the multistorey-tenement areas in which I was conducting my own research.

Woven into “The Bookseller of Kibera” are accounts of this violence by ordinary people — Khaleb and the other protagonists. Such portrayal of direct experience and of victims coming to terms with painful memory and loss are important in countering the hasty production of academic articles on this phenomenon in the immediate term. In this way too, Kihato writes the invisible.

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LORENA NUNEZ:

A RESPONSE TO 'PROPHETS OF THE CITY'

Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon's text, "Prophets of the City", brings us closer to the stories and lives of extraordinary people who live anonymously in the city. The text makes us aware of the likelihood that at any given time — and unknowingly — we may encounter extraordinary people living ordinary lives, such as the gifted prophet who makes a living as a security guard in a parking area outside a casino.

I think this is a wonderful piece about the invisibility of a certain category of people in the city. Not only do most of these prophets live anonymously — or invisibly, but the core of their work is an invisible matter; they produce intangible goods: a divine message, a truth. For those who believe, this knowledge comes from God and has been made accessible to humans through prophets who are able to hear the words of God. In the African Zionist tradition as well as in other independent churches, prophets prove their efficacy by word of mouth from those they have served (as in any other service). Prophecies serve ordinary people; they speak about their ordinary lives, yet in extraordinary ways.

And here is the first point I would like to make regarding the issue of invisibility. The stories Wilhelm-Solomon presents can be situated in a continuum in terms of their degrees of invisibility: from the most inaccessible and secretive prophet who performs healing rituals in the middle of the bush to the most public, such as the Revelation Church. This church holds public healing events in sessions that are attended by hundreds of people and are made accessible to millions, originally through Soweto TV, and now through their own DSTv channel. These are public and massive events and there is a logic to that that is consistent with the nature of the prophetic profession, where the proof of the efficacy of prophets lies in their capacity to give anyone in a big audience the most accurate information about his or

her life, with details that could not have been known in any other way but by means of a prophetic vision.

As we know, prophets are found in many religions. They are listed in the Bible. In the Roman Catholic tradition, prophets are classified as major and minors. Major prophets are those whose public revelations can be massively witnessed and made visible, and their prophecies need to be historicised. In this sense, the public nature of massive prophetic events in the context of our local prophets serves the purpose of obtaining legitimacy. These prophets need to be visible, prophecies need to be witnessed. This raises the question of why we consider them invisible here. To whom are they invisible?

The text offers a rich narrative that opens up other critical questions on the matter. The reader feels compelled to wonder about the reasons for the numerous prophets working in Johannesburg, about the orders of which these prophets are custodians, or about the differences and degree of competition between them. The text, however, deals with two fundamental questions: the reasons why people need prophecies and the purposes of these prophecies. Yet there is so much that we still do not understand.

Wilhelm-Solomon argues that prophets are there because there is randomness in life and people need certainties and offers a persuasive association of prophecies, casinos and gambling. Though uncertainty is a common experience prophets deal with, I would argue that prophecies respond to a complex social logic, seek to restore a broken social order and undo social transgressions. The prophet may identify that current problems exist because the supplicant has not paid *lobola* to the family of his spouse. The prophet may then say this needs to be addressed to solve the problems. There is a reason behind misfortune, poverty, illness and death.

Wilhelm-Solomon also shows us how prophecies help migrants to navigate the risky urban environment, anticipate an accident, to explain sickness and misfortune. He asserts that prophecies are needed to deal with anxiety.

And the wonder is that the certainty in predicting the future as conveyed in prophecies goes hand in hand with the possibility of changing the course of events by adhering to indications given by prophets — indications that are not random or whimsical.

As Wilhelm-Solomon rightly explains, the presence and the role of prophets lies in the fact that, for migrants, the city brings adversity and risk. In the midst of darkness prophecies guide migrants on their journeys, help them to navigate adversity and give them hope. South Africa, historically and at present, has been a sought-after destination for migrants. The biblical saying seems to answer the question of why there are so many prophets in the city: “A prophet has no honour in his own country.” Prophets cannot give prophecies to their families or communities because they need to distance themselves from the familiar. It is not so strange, therefore, that this land of migrants is, at the same time, a land of prophets, although, as Wilhelm-Solomon’s stories show, many of them came to Johannesburg like any other ordinary migrant.

Finally, I would argue that the narrative about prophets and their craft needs to be situated within a broader perspective, something crucial when writing against invisibility. We need to give justice to the historical roots of this important tradition of prophets among the Zionist and other African independent churches. I would say these prophets remind us how, some decades ago, other extraordinary people opposed the colonial order and the hierarchical structure of mainline churches, in which priests, saints and miracles need to be sanctioned by a central religious power.

African independent churches broke away to liberate themselves from centralised religious power. Religion was lived as part of a political and emancipatory struggle through which anyone can have a direct experience of God and the Holy Spirit and anyone, therefore, can be given the gift of prophecy.

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CRISPEN CHINGUNO:

A RESPONSE TO 'THE BURIAL OF LUNGANI MABUTYANA'

The chapter by Kwanele Sosibo provides a unique exposition of the otherwise invisible underlying dynamics central to the life of mineworkers following the Marikana massacre. It reflects on the death and the personal life of one of the rock drill operators who survived the massacre but subsequently died mysteriously. The demise of Lungani Mabutyana, suspected to be the result either of suicide or of one of the many assassinations that characterised the contestation in the platinum belt, was almost ignored as he was just an ordinary worker. Nevertheless, his death — whether as a result of suicide or assassination — is connected to broader social factors.

Through a succinct narrative of Mabutyana's death and life the story paints a vivid picture of the typical life of mineworkers in post-apartheid South Africa. The story connects the death and personal life experience of Mabutyana to the broader social changes affecting the life of mineworkers after South Africa's democratic transition and illuminates significant continuities and discontinuities.

For example, the narrative gives a broad and in-depth picture of the workers' demands when they gathered at the koppie and explores their underlying meaning. Their demands were not just about wages but also concerned recognition and dignity, the absence of which have been central to the mineworkers' struggles in South Africa since the onset of the mining industry. During apartheid mineworkers were treated as sub-humans, even by their fellow blacks. The workers in this story present this as a continuity in the post-apartheid order.

To complement Sosibo's narrative I propose that analysing the death and life of Mabutyana through a sociological lens helps us link individual experience and circumstance with the broader society. We are thus able to view how the personal life story and death of Mabutyana, an ordinary mineworker, is linked to the broader historical, social, envi-

ronmental and political context of the mining sector and beyond.

The story of Mabutyana may be located in the broader debate of structure and agency. The life of an individual is shaped by a mix between social structures and individual agency. Mabutyana's story, for example, highlights the continuities with apartheid in structures such as the migrant labour system and the cheap labour regime that has underpinned the mining sector's capital-accumulation strategy since the introduction of the industry to South Africa.

Mabutyana was a migrant worker, but this may not be explained by his individual and personal experience; rather, it is tied to broader structural factors. He went to the mines as a migrant, following in the footsteps of his uncle, Mhlab'uyashukuma, brother Thabani, cousin Mlobeli and many other generations before them from this area.

Nonetheless, there are also discontinuities with the past and possibilities for change. For instance, Mhlab'uyashukuma and some of his children were able to sever ties with this legacy of the past through personal agency: they were able to disconnect from the exploitative mine migrant labour system.

Mineworkers have a divided identity, as shown in the life and death of Mabutyana. They are migrant workers and, at the same time, have rural homes. Traditional rituals were conducted when the body was taken home from Marikana, the workplace, and in accepting it into the homestead for burial. Mabutyana's death shows that the traditional belief system is tied to the mineworkers' daily reality in the two worlds in which they exist. It is thus not unusual that the mineworkers at Marikana consulted a sangoma during the strike.

Furthermore, this story reflects the changing roles of gender in South Africa and those of the family as an institution. Participation in the labour market is no longer tied to gender, as shown by Bulelwa and her daughter. The family has also gone through a transformation and is under stress, as highlighted by its failure to assist Mabutyana in his time of need.

The narrative gives a voice to the mineworkers and to Mabutyana's extended family. Thus we are able to interpret and understand the behavior and experiences of mineworkers, drawing on their perspective, and we get the story from the people involved. We are then able to understand, for example, that the workers' response did not just relate to wage adjustment but was also linked to the quest for dignity. The workers at the koppie wanted the manager to come and speak to them and respect them as humans.

The dominant narratives on the Marikana massacre do not come from the ordinary workers but from the elite. These are usually people who do not really understand the life and daily reality of the mineworkers, or their perspective. The evidence presented in this story is extraordinary, as it shifts from the usual elitist discourse by giving a voice to the marginalised. This exposes the underlying precariousness and violence that constitute part of the organising order of the mining sector.

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SHARAD CHARI:

A RESPONSE TO "I GET MONEY, NOW I GET TROUBLE":
TANZANIAN WOMEN IN DURBAN'

"Writing invisibility" appears immediately to be a provocation. What might it mean to write the invisible into visibility and is this, in fact, possible? Does this conceit not immediately presume that the writer (whether defined as academic, journalist, poet, philosopher, and so on) has that kind of power? Might we think of "writing invisibility" as a critical art that, at least momentarily, illuminates the structures that make invisible particular ways of being. I have in mind the kind of portrayal of New York City in the film *La Ciudad* that shows the lives of the city without any of the iconic signs, but through Latino day labourers and others on the social fringe. For a moment, we see another city and we are reminded of the many ways in which this city does not yet exist.

Durban has long been a diverse African city, with circuits of movement of people and things connecting its port to the Indian Ocean world and its central city markets to various hinterlands. Durban's Point area, the site of Emily Margaretten's writing, is a particular point of convergence, of fear and loathing, of racial and sexual transgression and also of political incarceration and, today, of a kind of Zulu-Disney biryani gentrification. The commodification of difference for the tourist industry is at some odds with the play of difference on the street, and this is what migrants such as Margaretten's Tanzanian women interlocutors stand to convey to us.

What are the spaces of habitation and work that these women inhabit in this strange geography of Durban's Point? How do they move through the valorisation of *some* differences, and usually not theirs? How do they imagine their ways of belonging and how do they safeguard themselves when they precisely do not belong? Margaretten uses an interesting device — the circulation of Kiswahili

proverbs — to think about these migrant ways of being in Durban.

Proverbs are interesting things in themselves. As polysemic objects they can mean pretty much anything. Although these are in Kiswahili, some have South African counterparts. One phrase, for instance, *tuko pamoja*, meaning “we’re together”, refracts uneasily against the isiZulu proverb, “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* [a person is a person through others]”. In the fraught times since the attacks on Mozambicans, Malawians, Zimbabweans and Tanzanians in Durban in 2008, these proverbs carry a painful sense of irony. What does it mean to speak of *tuko pamoja* rather than *Ubuntu*? Does this speech act point to life at the limits of tolerance in contemporary South African cities?

Fears and accusations of improper attainment, expressed in the phrase *riziki mwanzo wa chuki* also seem familiar rather than strange or un-South African. First, there is a question of how to translate and interpret this proverb, which Margaretten translates as “provision begins hate”. *Riziki* can mean daily sustenance, or earnings, or it could mean God’s blessings or providence; *mwanzo* can be the beginning or the cause; and *chuki* can be hatred, animosity, discord or anger. Whether “God’s blessings provoke anger” or “the daily grind of sustenance is the source of discord”, this proverb, like others, can only be understood in a situated ethnographic context. This is where the narrative of work in the vignette is most useful in conveying what is proverbial, and what is not.

Other proverbs demonstrate notions of slow and patient improvement of self and circumstance and of careful attention to relationships, which one might expect in migrant self-presentations. But how do these self-presentations also conceal and hold invisible the pervasive insecurity and indeterminacy of migrant life inside Fortress South Africa?

Margaretten and her Tanzanian interlocutors also have various things to say about the fear of violence in purportedly xenophobic times. One person says: “*Kikulacho kin-guoni mwako* [What eats you is in your dress]”. Indeed, we know that many women face violence in their most intimate

spaces, and not from strangers. This is practically a proverb in talk about gender-based violence in South Africa.

Like proverbs, the vignettes on offer are often truncated, rendered with a cadence that is meant to convince the reader of a particular way of living in the city. In part, this writing strategy is convincing. However, in interpreting one incident, Margaretten suggests that when faced by what appears to be xenophobic hostility these women secure their safety in numbers. After relating this, Margaretten adds her own proverb: “The anonymity of the city, and its potential for violence, works both ways.” But what are these “both ways” and might we think against this dualism to consider our urban realities as quite intricately entangled? Indeed, might this momentary theatre not also be a particular kind of self-presentation that conceals pervasive fear and insecurity about waves of anti-immigrant violence in Durban’s inner city, to which Tanzanians have also been subject?

How are we to gauge when a particular space is more or less tolerant, particularly when people subject to intolerance present themselves as living in the kind of space they would rather be in? Indeed, might we see these proverbs not just as reflections of reality, or guides to proper action by good migrants making it through hard times, but also as calls to a possible future in which neither they nor those they share the city with need to live with a prolonged sense of indeterminacy?

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ZAHEERA JINNAH:

A RESPONSE TO 'IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN LITTLE INDIA'

Narrative journalism holds tremendous promise for the social sciences. Storytelling is a rich and powerful way of undertaking and disseminating research and by sharing these stories on a public platform the writer gives them an opportunity to move beyond the academic world and to inform public opinion. Nuruddin Farah, Annie Holmes and others, by telling the stories we all know and are familiar with in a deeply personal way, have reached new and different audiences, raised new points and perspectives about old stories and brought new topics to the public eye.

My main concern here is how we understand *invisibility*, both as a concept and specifically within the context of Fordsburg, but let me start with a few secondary points.

The article raises many questions: Who belongs in Fordsburg, who are the original inhabitants, how has its history shaped modern-day dynamics, what is the regulation of space, and how do the two migrants described in the article challenge, threaten or conform to the very particular space and social dynamics the article reveals?

Fordsburg/Mayfair was founded in the 1880s and in its early days was a lively and affluent area: shrubbery and trees had been planted and there was a vibrant trading atmosphere. In 1887 the authorities established an “Indian location”, a distinct area housing people of Indian descent — a forerunner of apartheid-era segregation. A six-block area to the east of Fordsburg was established to accommodate the number of Indian traders who had migrated to the newly created mining camp. The trading potential of Fordsburg was therefore identified and exploited early on by migrants, a pattern that would be redrawn in the post-apartheid era.

In the past century, Fordsburg, and neighbouring Mayfair, has been an area where Indian, Black, Malay, Chinese, Jewish, mixed race (coloured) and working-class Afri-

kaans-speaking whites have lived alongside one another at various times. Today, the economic promise of Fordsburg is still a drawcard for new groups of migrants.

Yet Fordsburg is caught in a dichotomy of opportunity and neglect. Official city policy and planning documents describe it as a potential heritage site, worthy of regeneration and protection. At the same time, its new residents, many of whom are migrants and refugees, are marginalised politically and socially. The flight of the middle classes from Fordsburg and Mayfair, and white business from the inner city in the 1990s contributed to the neglect of physical infrastructure in the area. Despite this, many migrants have carved out opportunities for trade and created parallel nodes of social, economic and political governance.

Jackee Budesta Batanda’s piece hints at various themes: Fordsburg as space, and its evolution over the past two decades; the various activities and forms of mobilisation people employ; the regulation of public space and the informal economy and the livelihood strategies of migrants. These are pertinent issues in urban hubs across the developing world, as the inhabitants of cities grow in number and diversity and authorities battle with how or whether to welcome a changing and increasing populace.

One of the central themes of Batanda’s article — the changes in and regeneration of the urban space in post-apartheid South Africa, and the particular role migrants play in this — is still to be understood and theorised. Fordsburg is a good example of this, but so too are other areas in the country: Yeoville, Rosettenville and the Rosebank flea market in Johannesburg; Belville in Cape Town; and Yusuf Dadoo Street, the Point area and Overport in Durban. Batanda presents migrant success stories as central to this narrative, as is their effort against all odds, and this, for me, challenges the notion and conceptualisation of invisibility.

Both Abdesalem Habiballah and Shahid Chobanis seem to hold a particular social status in their respective migrant communities and appear to be prominent and well known

in Fordsburg. To what extent, then, do they represent the invisible? This raises several points.

First, what is invisibility? Is it a state of absence from the public space; of multiple marginalisations, whether those be economic, social or political; or is it more than that? Is it a state resulting from an intention to remain hidden or choosing not to engage in civic or public life?

I want to raise several points here. First, is invisibility also a choice? Invisibility may be used as a mobilisation strategy by marginal groups to remain hidden in order to circumvent regulation.

Second, do people move between visibility and invisibility? Both Habiballah and Chobanis see themselves as being on the fringes of South African society but have centrally and visibly positioned themselves in their own migrant community. Both points remind me of research done in Musina by Lincoln Addison, along with my own work, which shows how Zimbabwean farm workers navigate and shift among multiple categories and identities: loyal hard-working employee, undocumented migrant, asylum seeker, in order to access services, claim entitlement to a space and make sense of their existence.

Third, the question arises: Invisibility from what or whom? In this article we see how both men are visible in public space yet absent or marginalised in interactions with authorities.

Fourth, who is or are the invisible? We often speak of groups of people: the urban poor, children, disabled migrants, the narratives presented shifting between individual invisibility drawing on a set of personal characteristics to group — based in this case on the invisibility of non-nationals. My own work among Somalis has found that multiple layers of definition and therefore social positioning exist — gender, class, ethnicity, race, religion and language — that together determine who belongs in which groups and can access which resources. Moving beyond that, how are subjective realities among migrants formed and reproduced in their everyday lives and in interaction with each other, the state, the media and civil society?

To conclude, I mentioned that narrative journalism has the potential to disseminate research and to bridge the divide between academia and public discourse. Platforms such as this are moving these stories out of the academic world, but are still in a limited realm — about 44 400 copies of the *Mail & Guardian* are sold each week, half of them in Gauteng, and, by all accounts, the readership is middle class, suburban and liberal. Compare this to the 296 489 copies of the *Daily Sun*, the 118 547 weekly sales of *City Press* and the 169 412 of the *Sunday Sun* (all data from the ABC circulation figures for the first quarter of 2013). It would be interesting to see how the e-book and the other forms of dissemination this project envisages will bridge the gap between scholars, soothsayers and everyone in between.

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MEHITA IQANI:

A RESPONSE TO 'SPACEWARZ IN CAPE TOWN'

Taryn Jeane Mackay writes about two forms of public practice: skateboarding and graffiti, which, despite having huge cultural significance for those who practise them in Cape Town, are disallowed by city regulations. Mackay interviews several key players in these subcultures, including the skaters, the graffiti writers, and the city policy makers. Her piece shines a light on the practices of two interrelated subcultures, but also, I believe on the *politics* of public space.

We talk about the public all the time, but what does it actually mean for something to be public? This is a question that occupies me in my own research into the relationship between media and consumer culture. In media studies, the interdisciplinary field in which I teach and write, the public is a very central concept. Scholars of the media use this idea in order to make arguments about whether various media forms can function as spaces of dialogue and participation, as so famously argued by Jurgen Habermas in his writings on “the public sphere”.

The notion of the public is also key from other disciplinary perspectives, particularly when it comes to our thinking about the shared spaces in cities. These two types of publics — material, actual public places into which any citizen can walk (or skate), and spaces of communication in which various opinions and ideas are expressed and shared — both appear in Mackay’s narrative.

The big question underlying the politics of skating and graffiti in Cape Town is the extent to which public spaces, be they communicative or material, are truly democratic. It is impossible to think about the public without taking power relations into consideration. Who gets to decide what messages are made public, and where? And who gets to decide who can go where and what they do there? Subcultures such as graffiti and skateboarding explicitly challenge the power of corporations and governments, who

consistently seek to reinscribe their own authority about what messages may be public and what people can or cannot do in spaces that are meant to be shared.

What are the possibilities and limitations of the public in societies such as ours, where we see an ongoing battle between neoliberal power and counterhegemonic cultures? There are many ways to answer this question. Two perspectives come from scholars of very different eras.

The first is from Hannah Arendt. In her 1958 book, *The Human Condition*, she writes about the public realm. This theory of the public in fact predates Jürgen Habermas’s much-quoted notion of the public sphere. Arendt argues that the public realm comprises a number of components, including accessibility, participation and visibility. The public is not only a space to which all can gain access and within which all can actively participate in some kind of collective project, but it is also a space that is visible to all.

If we think about the kinds of messages that are most commonly placed in public space in our society, it is quite clear that far too often corporate messages are placed under the spotlight, whereas the creative expressions of our artists are put into the shadows. The fact that the artists who take it upon themselves to beautify their communities are criminalised by these acts of participation and denied free access to the walls that form their canvases seems to undermine Arendt’s vision of the public realm. “Public” officials working in local government should be pressed to account for what, precisely, is public about a regulatory system that denies artists the right to access freely, to participate and to make visible their ideas.

The second perspective is contained in a wonderful article published by a contemporary media scholar, Anna Feigenbaum, who teaches at Bournemouth University in Britain. In her 2010 article, “Concrete Needs No Metaphor: Globalized Fences as Sites of Political Struggle”, published in the open-access journal *Ephemera*, Feigenbaum argues that certain walls produced by global neoliberalism can, in fact, become sites for liberating communication.

She looks at divisive “fences” such as the Palestine separation wall, the US-Mexico border fence, and the fences surrounding immigration detention centres and the temporary sites of global superpower gatherings. Although these walls are meant to divide, to make private in the service of private interests, and ultimately to erase the possibility of a commonly forged public, they can be appropriated as sites of communication and resistance. The Israeli apartheid wall, for example, quickly became a place on which messages were graffitied and images made visible. When this happens, says Feigenbaum, the fence becomes both a canvas and a channel for communication. As such, the private nature of the walls is undermined, and they become, instead, sites for the construction of messages of emancipation or hope and channels for communication through the barriers that are meant to divide.

We live in an age in which public institutions, such as local and national governments, favour the interests of corporate profitmaking over public deliberation and participation and democratised opportunities to make visible. One of the ways in which this happens is that public spaces are sold off to corporates as screens for their messages, yet simultaneously individual citizen-artists are not only denied the chance to make their messages visible, but are also criminalised in the process.

As long as the aesthetic takeover of public space by commercial power is condoned, and the creative interventions of citizens penalised, we are experiencing an evacuation of the true possibilities of the public realm. Feigenbaum offers some possibilities for that resistance, but of course those possibilities need to be continuously and creatively regenerated. So: the skaters should keep on skating, and the graffiti writers writing — because it is through *their* acts of participation and expression that the true public realm is forged, despite the attempts by commercially oriented bureaucrats to claim it as something to which only the rich and powerful have access.

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JO VEAREY:**A RESPONSE TO 'MIGRANT NIGERIAN SEX WORKERS AND FEMINISM'**

Chika Unigwe's original contribution provides a unique and useful entry point from which to navigate the complex and hazardous terrain linking migration and sex work. Through insight into her own experiences of (re-)conceptualising who she understands Nigerian women selling sex in Europe to be (and not to be), Unigwe creates the beginnings of a written map that outlines and presents the multiple ways in which explorations, both empirical and literary, of sex and agency, of work and entrepreneurship, of movement and gender, can be made visible. Her map writes into being, therefore making visible, the intersecting lived experiences of Nigerian migrant female sex workers.

Research for Unigwe's 2010 novel *On Black Sisters Street* involved interviews with Nigerian women currently and formerly involved in the European sex industry. Undertaken in both Benin City (Nigeria) and Antwerp (Belgium), her research findings and reflections highlight the complex terrain associated with any exploration of migration and sex work. This rocky landscape is further complicated by her chosen footpath to the topic: she attempts to traverse the mountainous landscape of feminism in relation to sex work, reflecting her questioning of where migrant women selling sex fit within a global feminist movement.

In responding to this piece it is important to define the terms I use. I apply the term "sex worker" to refer to adult women, men or transgendered persons who self-identify as sex workers, consent to the sale of sex and view the selling of sex as a job that deserves the same workplace protections and labour rights as any other form of employment. This is an important clarification. I choose not use the term prostitution when referring to adult consensual sex work; the label "prostitute" refers to somebody who is prostituted for the (financial) benefit of another, such as a pimp.

In my use of the term "sex work" I do not include child

prostitution (this is, clearly, child sexual abuse), nor am I including persons who are trafficked — moved through threat, force or coercion for the purposes of exploitation — into the sex industry. Whether writing from an empirical, theoretical or fictional perspective, all authors, as will be outlined below, need to tread carefully when navigating among the multiple, distinct terms at their disposal. Importantly, there is a need to separate clearly migration and sex work from trafficking.

Unigwe admits that her own preconceived assumptions about migrant African women involved in sex work in Europe reflected an imagined vision of "unwilling, powerless, passive victims of a male-dominated society". She outlines how this vision was challenged and reformulated as she searched for, was exposed to, and made visible the hidden and marginalised experiences of Nigerian women, who, by developing independent, financially successful livelihoods in the Belgian sex industry, are "escaping zones of oppression".

By engaging with the words, experiences and stories of these women, including unpublished writing by a former sex worker who now works as a "madam" in Antwerp, Unigwe makes visible the migration trajectories and experiences that challenge notions of assumed victimhood, highlighting agency and determination. She concludes by indicating that through their independence migrant sex workers absolutely belong to the global feminist movement.

Navigating the complex terrain that links migration and sex work requires a clear route map. This should allow a writer (journalist, academic, activist, migrant, sex worker, novelist) to find a foothold in the key issues at hand while uncovering ways to avoid stumbling between polarised feminist positions (an abolitionist argument holding that all prostitution is violence against women versus a pro-sex-work one that contends that consensual adult sex work is work) and to sidestep the often unmarked hazards associated with anti-trafficking approaches.

It is essential to map out this hazardous landscape, get our bearings straight and find a foothold before embarking

on a journey to explore and write about migration and sex work. The chosen route should set out to engage with the lived experiences and voices of migrants involved in the sex industry and avoid dangerous generalisations and uncritical applications of labels and categories — in both research and writing. We have a responsibility to write and represent these experiences carefully and creatively, and to be clear on exactly what the experiences are (and are not), and with whose experiences we are (and are not) engaging.

Unintentionally, Unigwe sometimes loses her footing. This is evident when she moves into dangerous terrain, applying the term “trafficking” uncritically and interchangeably with “migration” and “sex work”, or using the label of “prostitute” interchangeably with “sex worker”. With a loose application of these terms to the experiences of the women with whom she has engaged, Unigwe sometimes removes the agency she previously attributes to these women. Navigating the topography of the lived experiences associated with migration and sex work is a challenge, but one that deserves to be carefully mapped.

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