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# **THE MIRE OF WOMANHOOD**

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS (Creative Writing)**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

2002

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CO-SUPERVISOR: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: GEOFFREY HARENAPE**

## CONTENTS OF THE COMPACT DISC

The Mire of Womanhood is a collection of original poems and songs composed by Halejoetse Tsehlana. It is accompanied by a twelve minute Compact Disc, which gives the reader an opportunity to experience poetry becoming music.

The contents of the Compact Disc are as follows:

Dedication Section

In praise of the City

Night of the Jazz Legends

'Mankokosane

'Switzerland of the South' I serenade you

Music written by H. Tsehlana

Accompanying guitar by John Haguna

## DECLARATION

I declare that this collection of work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree at any other university. It is my own work and each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been duly acknowledged, cited and referenced.

Halejoetse Tsehlana  
2002

November

Signed.....

University of Cape Town

## DEDICATION

This collection of poems is dedicated to my mother Teresa Makuta-Tsehlana, whose love and belief in me surpasses my understanding, whose gentle spirit and love for music and nature lives in me. For all the dreams she could never realise because of the poverty that is her life. I admire and salute her, for she performed the chores of motherhood with diligence and dedication, often swallowing tears and blood. I salute her for not giving up on me in the face of challenges that only God would have got her through.

This is also dedicated to the brothers, sisters and friends who lend ears to my babbling recitals and encouraged me to come out of the closet and explore my creative writing openly. To the Cape Town audiences that helped to chisel the pieces of work into place. To the 'mother city' for her inspiring mountains, music, love and accepting me as one of her own. Lastly to my supervisor whose patience, interest and dedication to my work helped me compile this collection.

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## THE MIRE OF WOMANHOOD

The mire awakened

a rupture unknown to me.

It gave me a voice,

unleashed my potential

and expanded my choice.

It grew me wings and taught me to say 'no'.

After all 'no' is a complete statement of intent.

The mire sent me to explore my manhood,

the different voices rising from within.

Desexed voices that I never knew I possessed.

The mire guided me and bid me accept

that I have become the man I always wanted.

What the mire taught me can

never be taken away.



# AURAL DELICACIES

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## **NORTH SEA JAZZ FESTIVAL 2001**

Music cloaks the city with mist,  
drums stir the foundation  
of table mountain,  
stardust falls on the tarnished streets,  
as the city staggers  
off towards morning.

Growling stomachs enjoy a fill  
of music mania manna.

Drunk with aural delicacies,  
heavy feet shuffle cha cha cha  
on the sidewalk. Stone faces  
etched with pain and covered in dirt,  
turn on an angelic glow.

Sagging cheeks hollowed  
by time, fill with joyous expectations,  
desiring a nibble of the octaves,  
staccato & treble overflowing  
from the banks of Good Hope Center.  
Stars rub shoulders, igniting  
the saccharine drenched nights.

Inside, limbs are saturated  
with electric pulses, heaving

concertina chests, lithe torsos, hardened  
gyrating butts make fluid music  
with their sweat. The cranium  
rattles when the spinner whirls  
on the dance floors,  
to the rhythm of the drums.  
Bodies blend in an orgy of sound.  
Auras mingle with heated breath.  
Secret pulses ignite the crisp young  
morning and the treadmill pauses  
as a lilac dawn sneaks  
up on the mass of sweating bodies  
to chase the neon lights away.

## NIGHT OF THE JAZZ LEGENDS

That night,  
Good Hope  
opened her belly, to  
welcome the peoples  
of the earth. Music notes  
billowed from gurgling trumpets  
as the night sauntered away. The drum's  
volcanic boom followed a confetti of melodies.  
Majestic-sighing sax, brassy, jazzy, Panasonic notes.

Sailing blues saturated the air with fragrant melodies.  
Man-made-stars shot across skies, riding the crest of the  
north sea jazz. As Ronny Jordan caressed the waxed  
guitar strings, Busie chanted to the ancestors,  
and uncle Hugh crooned lullabies to the  
homeless. On the night the jazz legends  
gathered to usher the millennium in  
with style, the city of many  
moods, spoke one tongue,  
become one.

It cherished one  
dream and nursed  
a hope to free the broken  
spirits of its people. Black  
and white shoes of all shapes'n  
sizes tap dancing till morning light  
dawned on them. High on music for a change.

## TRIBUTE OVERDUE

On the Nile

your nimble fingers

perfected the reed flutes.

You floated into the heart of

Soweto. Soothing sounds of your

piano setting the southern skies afire.

Secrets of youth hid under your gentle gaze

had not unfolded. The curtain shall not fall on you

now jazzman, till the ripe old lungs can't sing anymore.

You crossed-over to hold concert with heavenly orchestras.

Your music remains a gentle libation, soothing the spirits

of Thembisa where they sleep. Your music is salve

for the young and the old. How shall we forget

the nimble fingerettes, oozing reconciliation,

that harmonized the black and the white?

How shall we forget, young Moses,

who carried the torch of freedom

and buried his soul in black

and white discord?

With ululation

in our hearts &

pride on our fore-

heads, we'll sing his

songs and we'll lay him

to rest in our memories. For the

prophet shall not pass this way again.

## INSIDE THE LEISURE DOME

Dew sparkled hair,  
wet nose thrust  
into the musty mist  
at earth's foothills;  
to embrace  
renaissance come alive.

Heavenly drums  
awaken the city,  
peace pipes  
fired by harmonica exhaled!

Vinyl people, adrenaline pumping.  
fake lashes sweeping Kippies,  
while the city lies in slumber  
oblivious of the southern stars  
writing history in the heavens.

Trendy Randy releases the child inside.  
Fiesty Vusi sets 'the husky bitch free'  
Mama Africa watches over her pride  
of young lions.

Seductive Lebo drowns my sorrows.  
Urban legends are birthed  
in the leisure dome.

## **PRAISE CANNOT WAIT**

Well!

Black woman

you were silent all along.

Yet!

When you found your voice,

it was propelled by the gale

of subservience and hungry silence,

It was driven by a powerful

need to succeed and to win.

It was most colourful

with the deep rumblings

of summer thunder.

yet, with mellow spring colour.

Well! Black woman

the challenges still await you.

Yet, Africa has no choice

but to reckon with your angel voice

and give you that long overdue

honour, respect and praise.

You daughter of Mtungelwa,

shall be remembered

with fondness forever.

You ought to be praised

in life as mother, sister, songstress.

You black woman are voice enough for all of us.

## SINGING THE BLUES

Anaesthetic fragrances  
of youth fade  
and ancient fears  
are triggered by peers,  
as age nibbles  
on the hands of time.  
Truncated dreams  
of a virtual reality  
Mr Right, waltzing  
her away to the lost city,  
vaporise as the tramp  
transfigures into  
a gallant prince,  
whose whirring mustang  
cruises her to the Ritz.  
She tilts her head back and sighs,  
reminiscing about affluent yesterdays.



## DREAMING AS WE LAY

Landlocked  
in the grip  
of grim winters,  
the minds opiate  
with intoxicating  
mountain breeze,  
hearts braised  
with passion,  
we lay in solid embrace,  
liquid fire caressing  
the summer sautéed hearts  
while the nails played salsa  
on your knee.

## **'MANKOKOSANE**

“Mankokosane, pula e ea na  
re tla hola neng? ha tsatsi le chaba”

Let the sound of 'Mankokosane play on.  
It warms the aching heart,  
it holds away the falling skies.  
It wakes up the little girl inside me,  
buried beneath tons of make-up  
and foreign tongues.

Let the sound of 'Mankokosane play on.  
It makes grandma smile. It tells of nostalgia,  
for innocence and purity.

Let the sound of 'Mankokosane play on.  
It's the story of our childhood,  
a story of dreams to become the best,  
of nurses, doctors, teachers  
film stars and mothers of the nation.

Let the sound of 'mankokosane play on.  
It is healing to the broken dreams  
and broken promises, and a life  
led in concentric circles.

“Mankokosane, pula e ea na  
re tla hola neng? ha tsatsi le chaba”

Let the sound of 'mankokosane play on.  
It is a song of hope. It is a song about tomorrow.  
It fills the empty heart with fond memories.

It holds away the falling skies.  
and wakes up the little girl inside me

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## REVOLUTION SONG

History swiftly fades  
as the sun undresses  
the grey dress of the sky,  
frantically calling  
freedom to unshackle  
the young.

They have become  
plastic figures, cloaked  
in foreign tongues, masks  
and accents.

'Hurry!  
Before it's too late,  
the curse of europia  
stamped on their hearts.'

Sow the seed of confidence  
in the hearts of our youth.

*'Black is beautiful'*  
no doubt about it,  
the hallowed word  
from the black box says so.

But *'mankind cannot live by slogans alone'*.

It's a well-orchestrated attempt to sterilise  
my porcelain mind and drive away 'native cobwebs'.

The African child is tormented  
by haunting dreams  
inside every jar of cream  
the promise of freedom  
the promise to reform

the thick nose and pout.  
Inside the Wella Straight tube,  
the promise to permanently untangle  
the beautiful kinky curl.  
Inside every book lurks  
the illusion to become  
Jack and Jill that went  
up the hill.

African child!

You are the endangered species.  
Save yourself, forget the penguins,  
the whale and the bear.

Africa!

You have been too slow  
to tell Europe  
to leave your children alone.

Inspired by:

1. Motjuwadi, S. (1968) White lies. In (eds) Couzens, T. and Patel, E. The return of the amasi bird (1982). Ravan Press: Cape Town.
2. Banana K. 'for mankind shall not live by slogans alone'
3. Marechera D. 'We looked into the mirror teaching our children the use of skin lightening creams'

## DEAR THESELE

I hear your anguished cry  
for the souls of your offspring,  
led astray to the periphery of despair  
by the tantalizing lure of civilization.

I hear your plea of penance  
for their souls to be freed,  
from the hoax that they have  
to flee from their heritage,  
by enlightening their minds with peroxide  
and burying their heads in encyclopaedias.

Tell the hillocks to continue  
singing nostalgic songs in their hearts.  
Tell the dewy crystal mountain air  
to caress their kinky curls.  
Tell the mountain pool distilled waters  
to purge these smoked lungs.  
Let their marrow boil with love  
and jealousy for their country.

Let the children come home to themselves  
and the peace that you laid your life for.  
Let them come home to peace,  
for it is by this that they shall be known  
as your sons and daughters.

## LATEX MUSIC

The ultimate alternative  
so they say. Research says otherwise.  
There is room for chance happening  
and this once could be it.

The latex premise,  
the latest empty promise.  
Pulsating lucid danger,  
lurking from all sides  
struggling to free its tentacles  
to thrash out its curse.

The translucent hull  
of the latex skull  
bursts open. Brain matter  
lunges forward with a wild throb,  
lured by the warm  
darkness of the night.  
The tide seeps into  
the warm lagoon.

Colourless music flows  
into my womb,  
and stirs an unknown warmth  
in the bosom  
of my womanhood.

Life immortal unveils its glory and power,  
as the horizon fills with riotous images.  
Fantasy and reality meet per rendezvous.

## SONG FOR GRACA

The year was 1978  
and young Mkize  
sat drinking  
the warm Natal air,  
thinking lukewarm thoughts  
about the fate of Africa.  
Thinking about the fallen  
leader Samora Machel.  
The last words of his dirge sung,  
he folded his arms and sighed,  
"the cows of freedom returning home  
Mother Africa rise" he sang.

The year is 2002,  
the cows of freedom have returned home  
and Mother Africa has risen.  
She holds a sceptre of power in her hand  
and love for her kinsmen in the other.  
A loincloth of servitude  
graces her waist,  
her smile clothes  
the orphans of the mother city,  
and her warm bosom  
soothes the pain of the refugees.

Inspired by "A Dirge for Samora Machel" p9. One Calabash One Gudu



# 'I KNOW WOMEN WHO DON'T CRY'

and she is one of them.

Mother!

One whose hands tell a story  
of how she held away storms.  
How she wore flowers in her hair  
and a brave smile on her face,  
while salt crystals sedimented  
at the bottom of her heart.

Her own muffled  
cries for help unheeded.  
Marks of honor  
stencilled on her face,  
all over her body  
affirming the strength  
of the warrior of our time.

## **YOU TAUGHT ME**

You taught me to smile;  
an art I've grown to hold dear.  
You taught me to talk,  
a tool without which  
my trust could not have grown.  
You taught me to trust  
so that my steps in life can be firmer.  
You sang me lullabies  
and snatched me from the dark  
amniotic embrace of fear.  
You revealed to me  
guilt freeing truths of life.  
You taught me to forgive myself  
and the insignificant others  
who rob me of my happiness.  
With your unceasing patience  
you opened in me springs of summer  
beyond my understanding.  
You nurtured everyday  
my blossoming love for humankind.

## **BLACK MAMA**

listen to the magic whistles,  
deep in the African forests.

Feed your imagination  
with pastel dreams.

Let the seductive sweetness  
of honey caress your thick  
warm African lips.

The smell of fresh rains  
cleanses your mind.

Listen to your dreams.

The moon calls to your beauty,  
her light shines in your eyes  
her dust bejewels your hair.

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## WILL THINKING MAKE YOU FREE?

How is your liberation to be obtained?

How is the light of your life to be re-kindled  
when you linger in the relative safety of matrimony  
trapped in the snares of womanhood?

You hold onto fragments of reality  
and sadness stills your mind,  
as you sow, yet do not reap.  
You who possess everything.  
In reality, possess nothing.

Forests of ignorance  
give birth to many sons and daughters  
in the shallowness of delight,  
gaining nothing for the effort;  
from him who by nature is empty minded.  
He whose thinking is dissolved  
in children, wife, property acquisition.  
Whose aura fills the household.

How can the fires of understanding,  
thirst for knowledge and freedom be fuelled  
if you remain tethered to the edge of opportunity  
not unfurling your wings to explore your potential?  
Will thinking make you free?

I see dualism in every principle.  
I have a body, no! the body is not mine!  
I am it's caretaker.  
perhaps my ignorance is my freedom.

## SUNLIGHT STREAKS INTO MY ROOM

Having committed yourself  
to most sanguine monogamy  
you lead her across the aisle.  
The audience grants you  
the generous benefit of doubt.  
Pregnant mischief  
chagrined on their faces.  
plastered smiles neatly folded  
into the pockets of the rented tuxedo.

Marginal love finds its way  
to the alter and tepid it snakes  
around you, binding you  
to enjoy and endure

The mask of time is unveiled.  
The mystique of Lace, Satin and Caviar  
echoes sadly on your heart.  
The subtle truth rents your brain  
asymmetrically.

You begin to hear them.  
Luciferian tones  
telling you things.  
Things your mother told you  
never to do. But the margin of thought  
loses its equilibrium.  
This sacred union becomes  
Hot soundproofed walls  
You cant breathe or think.

The smell of freedom  
wafts in, between the prison bars,  
and you will it to come and embrace you.

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## THE WOMAN BY THE ROAD

sits fidgeting and listens to remarks  
by passers-by at her naked child,  
and perhaps even her deserting husband  
somewhere in exile.

This woman, who has seen the sun rise  
and go down every day with a sigh.  
Her shoes road worn,  
coins jingling in her torn pocket.  
Where does she come from  
this sad woman?  
She looks at strangers with hope,  
from their eyes to the bulging pockets  
full of money or dope.  
Who knows? A dime or two  
might pass her way.

## **DID I EVER TELL YOU?**

Did I ever tell you that every time  
you laugh with me, warm, invisible  
fluid fingers caress and tickle me?

That when I close my eyes in sleep,  
I enter the doorway of our past  
where you forever beckon me  
to come and love you again?

Did I ever tell you that your song  
is my breath of life,  
it is a balm, that bandages  
my aching heart?

Did I ever tell you that your touch,  
charged with kinetic energy  
sends my five senses into a constant orbit?  
That your laughter plays violins  
on the strings of my soul?

Did I ever tell you that your side of the bed  
remains unmade since you left?  
By the way! did I ever tell you  
that I'd marry you again,  
if you asked me to?



## I ASK NOTHING OF YOU

When I wear a shirt two sizes smaller,  
to hug the soft rising breast,  
I ask nothing of you, but the wind to caress  
and cool my hot navel  
just like your revealing heavy chest  
or shirtless back on a sweltering hot day.

The short skirt that reveals the fine African leg,  
that tantalizes the wind, is not for you,  
but an expression of myself.

With my platform shoes, I can reach heights  
reserved for the mighty eagles.  
I ask nothing of you, but my right to be me.  
Life is too short, to live it under your shadow.  
Life is too short, to spend it wrapped up,  
in a cocoon of self-doubt, and conscience.

Therefore I ask nothing of you,  
but my right to choose, what to eat,  
what to wear, when to sleep,  
when to come and go.

Peace brother  
I ask nothing of you.

## ROBOSEC

I am an employee  
Honest and loyal  
I arrive at work  
earlier than my boss  
which is normal.  
He acts like a child  
and I play the role of mommy  
even though  
I don't have any children of my own.  
He has programmed me  
with tiny silicon chips  
My ears are his buttons.  
He snaps orders and I dance.  
The brain in my skull  
does no thinking of its own  
and hardly any questioning at all  
I move with the speed of lightening  
My heart is operated by miniature heart pacers  
bloodless – unfeeling  
My joints worn out from all the bustling  
are occasionally lubricated by shreds of Rands  
So miniature they have lost all value as legal tender  
I am a Robosec

# OF MEN AND THINGS

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## FOR THE MAN WHO WANDERS THE FACE OF THE EARTH

For lack of choice and fearing for their lives,  
my parents ran past the horizons.  
Mama strapped me to her back  
and Papa held our only paper suitcase,  
stuffed with puzzle pieces of our lives.

The village woke up that morning,  
found we had all gone.  
into the unknown forever.  
The daily struggles continued.  
The laughter, crying of children,  
sounds of the hoes tilling the barren land,  
echoed across the scorched mountains.

Children of my moon,  
grew to be men.  
Some left for the mines,  
some became gardeners  
in the white man's backyard.

My parents took me to the cradle of slavery,  
that stripped me of the colourful  
night-time fireside stories.  
Peter Pan and Cinderella became the heroes  
of the day and I saw Humpty Dumpty  
sitting on Wall Street everyday.  
I lost sight of my African dream.

I grew up to stroll in Piccadilly Circus,  
and ate snow for Christmas.  
The cold frosty English smiles,

impaled on my heart  
the white man's dream  
to take away Africa,  
from my heart, from my head.

Oxford and its smell of musty books,  
took my memories of the warm  
glowing African sunsets.  
The beautiful rhythms of the streams,  
were replaced by a coldness in my heart.  
The inappropriate African smile,  
quickly replaced by the jaundiced  
polite civilised smirk. Ouch!  
It hurts to smile.

They succeeded,  
to take away my dreams,  
my life, myself  
and left me only the name,  
rich in history and meaning.

## DON'T THEY SEE AFRICA IN ME?

These people;  
do they not recognise me?  
Do they not see  
the flat culvert like nose,  
chiselled from the mould  
of my grandfathers?  
Do they not see the thick  
swollen African lips?  
The thick stocky legs,  
so unique to the Amabotho?

Don't they recognise  
the African dream gleaming  
in the depth of my gaze?  
What will it take  
for them to accept me  
as one of their own?

I may not have fought  
their wars, I may not know  
the lashing of the white man  
on the corn fields of the  
Orange Free State.

But I know and I have  
endured the cold slashing  
of the merciless white tongue,  
all of my childhood,  
all of my adulthood.  
It tore at my black skin  
everywhere I went.

It unclothed me with contempt.  
The iron stares that wrote  
black devil on my proud  
forehead, unravelled  
my tongue and  
took the clicks  
away.

## THE WORTH OF A MAN

I am  
a  
man  
measured  
by the white man's Righter Scale.

But,  
what am I in Africa?

When  
I have not been tested  
by the village stick fight guru?

What am I?  
When  
I am no graduate  
of the mountain university,  
with the patron spirits of my fore fathers?

What am I?  
When  
there is no life tree  
to prove my  
manhood?

## A GENTLEMAN'S EXIT

The 'Most wanted man'  
finally made an exit.  
The envy of every criminal mind  
took it lying down.  
It's not clear how it happened,  
but rumour has it  
that he was handcuffed,  
hands to feet to the bedpost.  
We don't really know,  
all we heard was that  
ricocheting bullets  
sang him a lullaby,  
while merciful death led him away..  
Rabotapi died a gentleman.  
He took his vows of silence seriously.  
Until death takes me away he'd say.  
While they argued, whether his name  
be entered into the Guinness books.



## **HECTOR PETERSEN**

Sacrificed on the altar of Bantu education  
that children of Africa should triumph.  
It transcends the mind that one so young  
should die for noble cause.

Centuries down the road, we echo your song.  
Centuries down the road, we remember you with pride  
Hector Peterson and your comrades,  
who also fearlessly faced the enemy hippos  
with biros for bayonets.

We pledge to uphold the cause  
that you laid your life for - quality education.  
that the world would condemn us not.

Remind us everyday, candle of hope,  
why they snuffed your innocent life away.

Remind us everyday, that your memory  
should remain an everlasting inspiration for us  
for generations to come.

## **ON CELEBRATION OF YOUTH DAY**

History holds frost bitten memories  
of our pain, and we bear  
the invisible whip marks of apartheid.

But, the blood of noble martyrs  
courses in our veins, igniting  
unquenchable thirst for knowledge,  
and fuelling passion for excellence.

We lost our brothers and sisters,  
we lost our mothers and fathers,  
but a common destiny enriched us  
and we did not lose the dream that we shared.  
The dream for freedom from oppression  
and an unjust education system.

We are the Mandelas, Tambos, Chris Hanis  
Ruth First and Coline Williams of today.  
We are their sons and daughters,  
that continue to walk the road of hope,  
that continue to walk the road of endless challenges.  
We suckled strength from our mothers.  
We inherited courage and determination  
from our leaders, and we follow their  
footsteps to victory.

We are the future, bright hope for Africa.  
We are living testimony,  
that Africa has ascended  
from the depths of darkness.  
We are the generation  
that revitalises Africa,

helps her reclaim her dignity.

We are ready to take South Africa  
to the pinnacle of success.  
Education is our amour,  
to dismantle prejudices  
to 'heal the divisions of the past'  
to 'lay the foundations' of justice  
and to 'build a united and democratic South Africa'.

The time has come for us,  
to cross frontiers of knowledge,  
to carry the torch of hope  
for the youth of South Africa  
surging forth into the 21st century.

Quotes from: The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 Pp1

# **LIFE UNDER GENERAL**

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## WHAT IF

The world isn't round  
as they said  
and all the sounds  
are just the churning of your mind  
and don't really exist?

The strings of your life  
got caught-up in a cement mixer  
of the concrete jungle  
and you were sucked  
down the sewer pipes  
with the Rondebosch  
rats' droppings?

The doctor said  
you have developed  
radio active breath  
from the endless  
cell to cell jabbering?  
and that you've the last 10 white cells  
fighting the immuno invasion  
and without them  
there is no alternative  
but to expire,  
what would you say  
about the HIV medicine patent laws?

## **GIVE ME BACK MY WORLD**

Fake furs, vinyl snakewear  
Isotomic solutions to modern dilemmas.  
Computer mania,  
Monkey Face Rock,  
Monkey gland sauce for breakfast?  
What the heck!

Smoke the ribs,  
smoke the Vienna  
and smoke the peace pipe?

Polymer hearts and wombs for sale.  
What of future generations  
growing in catacombs?

Mankind is an endangered species  
Alien Control Acts for their own kind?  
What if the aliens took a stroll to earth?

Doctor prescribes genetically  
engineered foods from Woolworths,  
they compare well on the health charts.  
Human traffic jam thickens.  
The concrete jungle just mutated.  
Cloned babies crawl better  
on concrete floors.

Mad aid clinics, Cyber sex, Cyber babes,  
'you know who at Yahoo'  
Computerboffin, Raggamaffin,  
Bongomaffin, Muffins anyone?

The modern woman wires shut her mouth  
to induce weight loss. Common doctor  
pump more silicone into my breast!  
I am destined for Hollywood.

'To be or not to be' need you ask?  
pink money is alluring.  
Cape Town just became, the capital.  
All the f words became beatitudes,  
and Madonna finally covered her tits.

Bloody hell! Pokemon booted out Mandela.  
Ozone layer became crater.  
Aural sax is a prescribed textbook.  
Shame, Bauch and Lomb  
even manufacture artificial tears  
so the bereaved can weep.

Then, the word came and dwelt among us  
became a living organism,  
ate platelets for breakfast.  
Earth's conceptual framework  
will never be the same.

And

until the African Renaissance  
grows root in our hearts,  
the world will never be returned to dock.

**Give me back my world! Please**

## COMPUTER LOVE

A face freckled with a million pixel shadows  
tumbles through cyberspace to be with me,  
and for a moment, she is mine!

I blush at the mention of your name,  
my raven haired blue eyed angel.  
Your invincible kiss stencilled on my lip  
causes aseismic trembling of my heart.

My earpiece moans with your languorous laughter  
pushing past ions and stardust, sending electric tremors  
down my spine. Monochrome time whizzes by,  
still I can't let go. I am addicted to your love.

When my computer awakes me with a beep,  
your perfume wafts into the crevices of my mind  
and I nuzzle up to your wire bosom.  
Your ion breath ignites passion in my body.

My cyber woman!  
neither American,  
Chinese, nor even African.  
Just a uniquely blended specimen  
made in the computer lab especially for me.  
I pledge eternal love to you.  
Signed impersonally yours,  
Youknowho@yahoo



## THE MONITOR

Phantom blue lakes  
quiver as words  
slow dance  
across the screen.

The monitor beeps  
at regular intervals  
and oh! the wonders  
of this computer age,  
that make no secret  
of your breakfast  
or the color of your underwear.

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## **E-MOTIONS IN MOTION**

Intimidation, apathy shy sigh.

Why slowly dry, die?

Woman, self-sacrifice.

Subservience, servitude.

Quiet, peace with self.

Nurturing sister,

wife, woman, mother.

Frustration, turmoil.

Overburden, confusion.

Supplication, compromise.

Fear, submission.

Co-existence, quietness.

Acquiescence, silence.

Bitterness, soul transience.

Make don't know.

Woman, death, birth.

Bitch!

Free At last!!

## SAVINGS OR LOTTO?

A humble beginning,

a journey of courage.

Many barren months,

the struggle is not over yet.

Only one cent at a time

is all it costs.

Dare say you don't have a dime?

Who says a nugget of gold at a time,

secured away can't make a whole dime?

Pennies don't fall from heaven anymore.

Who knows? Rainy days could be here to stay.

A pinch of salt, taken with a smile.

School fees? The African child

also needs a home. Nurture

this southern star,

forget the blues.

Save, for the days of plenty are numbered.

Riches are not dreams you know!

Make saving your motto,

for if you wait for the lotto,

you may end up in a grotto

singing the blues.

## THE PAVEMENT

Has seen much more than  
rubber and plastic soles.  
It has seen discarded souls  
and the rhythmic idyllic steps of lovers  
strolling away the lazy afternoons,  
the gay dancing at the grand parade.

It has felt  
chalk lines caress its face  
and seen children  
skipping and playing hopscotch.  
It has felt the wire cars  
and nugget polish wheels  
bruising its face

It has felt  
more than the scorching heat  
and the numbing cold.  
It has shared the pain  
of the homeless  
and cried in shame  
for their fate.

It has seen  
families sprouting  
in the corners of the street,  
provided a bed, a table and chair.  
It remains completely baffled  
by the rape of the innocent.

It has witnessed  
life given and taken away.  
Why! Just yesterday,  
it held the entrails  
of a young boy  
caught in a cross fire  
outside his home.

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## SONNYBOY

He calls me!

Ticket to the next meal?

Maybe a new pair of shoes?

Yet, I do not like it,  
this thing that he does to me.

I hide my shame, between my thighs,  
and let him take me.

Oh! But it hurts soo.....bad.....

I chant the good mantra.

Shoes, food, and fifty cents extra.

I lower my head in shame,  
while slivers of pain,  
split me from behind.

I bear my cross like a man.

Cold, hunger, abuse, loneliness, fear, drive me insane.

If this is to be a man, on Long Street,  
then! let me remain the little boy that I am.

For when he calls me, Sonnyboy,  
and pats my head with knowing,

I know it is time to run.

I want to run home to mother,  
but there is only rubble, where home used to be.

I have since lost my voice, I have no choice,  
but to answer the devil's call, only for one more time.

Sonnyboy!! He says.....  
and the nightmares return.

## **LIFE LINE IS THINNING**

Warm, solid, alive, pulsating.

With every particle of protein regenerating.

A gnawing feeling

with internal feeding.

The Villi shut down.

Growth is slowed,

the red berets are dying.

Help! get a booster battalion.

Get reinforcement boosters.

Countdown is high

casualties are mounting.

A losing battle.

Close-out sanity,

laughter,

thoughts of tomorrow.

Fight the battle with tenacity

life line is thinning.

## STATE OF EMERGENCY

Don't fold your arms in despair,  
doomsday is not nigh.  
If we commit body and soul,  
to wage war against this monster,  
abstain till permission is granted.  
Do not bathe with your neighbour's  
daughter to save water.

Be faithful to yourself and partner.  
condomise at dawn, lunch and night-time.  
Keep away from drunken orgies.  
I repeat, keep away from Mqombothi pots  
that weaken your resolution  
and fill your loins with suggestions.

Shame on the Jackrollers  
that defecate on Africa's beautiful tapestry,  
that corrode our hope of salvation.  
Be warned, the world will soon pass laws  
that'll feed your weasel pride to the dogs.  
It is the last time, you piss on earth's daughter s  
to satiate your many desires.

Earth laments the birth of a dying nation.  
The little ones born with hollowed eyes,  
clutching rosaries in their tiny hands.

In their greyish nursery rooms,  
sunflowers on the wallpaper wilt  
under their pitiful gaze.



Earth has been chastised enough!  
Human kind must declare war  
on the HIV/AIDS virus,  
that takes its children away,  
littering pavements  
with our noble dreams.

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# **SERMON FROM THE MOUNTAINS**

Ode to the mountains that grace the face of Africa

For my greatest source of inspiration is the solid mass of rugged rock. Miles and miles of mountains: silent, yet, patient, stable, strong and assured in their own being.

'Black mountains in the night crouch to humble hillocks at the rise of the sun. But there shall come water, there shall come fire, there shall come windstorms and there shall come the redness of blood, soon, to rid the mountains of this vermin. And the mountains shall stand tall at last smiled upon by the sun' (Kunene: 1981:34)

## **I HEAR THE MOUNTAINS CALLING**

I hear the mountains calling,  
the little streams dancing  
at the feet of the graceful Maluti.

I hear 'Maletsunyane Singing  
of nostalgic lazy afternoons.

She remembers  
the little boys that  
used to throw pebbles  
into her deep dark waters  
and wonders if they can  
still laugh and sing!

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## STONE EMBRACE

(When the sounds of the hammer die out and the artist holds up the dream)

The dream that speaks of timeless feeling  
locked up in a stone embrace.

Preserved in each others unceasing gaze,  
the silence that speaks no evil.

The silent dream that defies the architecture  
of a faceless fate, that carved  
the memoranda of love on stone

Yoked together by the intricate web of passion  
fusing their hearts in a drunken embrace.

The children of the mountain soar  
together astride the friendly eagle,  
no roof over their heads  
only the hypnotic call  
of the gurgling mountain springs.

The warmth of their embrace  
hastens the blooming wild flowers.

Their laughter lights up the lonely evening fires  
chasing the mesmeric blackness of night.

Caught in the labyrinth of the modern world,  
drawing strength and courage from instinct,  
and yet uncertainty curtains the smooth faces.

The stone hearts  
entomb fragments of memories,  
sealed in the steel embrace.

Happiness evicted from their hearts  
only the dream remains.

If only they could unfurl their wings to fly  
if only they could unlock,  
the irony of the stone embrace.

Inspired by Kunene: "People of the sky" Kunene, D. P. (1981) Mountains. A seed  
must be seen to die; and other poems. Johannesburg: Ravan Press. P34.

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## SLEEPING DINOSAURS

The mountain towers above,  
a giant dinosaur asleep in the sun.  
Spiky trees grow on his back,  
like tufts of uncombed hair.  
Rivulets of sweat cascade softly,  
down the crevices on his body.  
He lies sweating after a hard day.  
He dozes in the warm sun  
and pretends not to see, civilisation  
crawl by. He is history on permanent display,  
this giant dream and salvation of Lesotho.  
These gentle bewitching elegant monsters,  
graze upon the green meadows.  
Their feet open crevices in the barren land,  
as they move across the once blameless plains.  
The ageless, prehistoric beasts of Lesotho,  
stretch their limbs across the land.  
They whisper and laugh amongst themselves,  
about the ignorance of man, who comes to behold  
the green-grey beasts of this country.  
Men and women of the world,  
come to this heavenly country,  
to see and hear, these elegant  
black monsters sigh and moan  
in their afternoon siesta.  
Come and see the trees on their tireless feet,  
sway and dance to the native melodies of Lesotho.

## SWITZERLAND OF THE SOUTH 'I SERENADE YOU'

You stand sentry lining heaven's gateway,  
you hold up the skies, forever welcoming daybreak.

There you are! between the heavens  
and the deep blue seas,  
holding up Africa by her toes.

You, monument of liberty,  
carry secrets of generations,  
their history chiselled on your face  
I celebrate with you centenary birthdays.

### Chorus

Monument of liberty,  
carry secrets of generations,  
their history chiselled on your face  
I celebrate you,  
Monument of liberty,  
carry secrets of generations,  
their history chiselled on your face  
I serenade you.

Though your brow is scorched  
by the Sahara dry sun,  
your ochre sunset radiates healing.  
The rhythmic laughter of boys at play,  
reverberates and scampers down your dark ravines.  
The rhythm punctuated by the splashing water,  
as they scramble nonchalantly  
between the slippery rocks.

The rivers meandering down your brow freeze,  
as the snowy June/July nights crawl by.  
Mock stalactites grace your lashes,  
catching stray rays and igniting lounging in my heart.

Only you 'Switzerland of the South'  
would understand,  
why I guard you jealously.

Chorus

You are the light that breaks  
the starless Maluti nights.  
'Switzerland of the South'  
you've made a home in my heart.  
You are the light that breaks  
the starless Maluti nights.  
'Switzerland of the South'  
I serenade you.  
'Switzerland of the South'  
I serenade you.

Inspired by: Cope, Michael (1991) Fat Clouds - Winter in Maseru 1983. In Scenes and Visions. Cape Town: Snail Press. P22

'Above us the night clouds fly  
from the 'Switzerland of the South'  
....Black majestic peaks  
Rise from the depths of an African reverie'



## **'TOLL GATE INTO AFRICA'**

The night was long and cold.  
The same dreams came to me,  
deep in my sleep,  
suffocating inside the mine shaft,  
struggling to escape the nightmare;  
only to wake up into another.

The cock signals  
the start of another day like yesterday.  
The warm sun does nothing  
to chase the nightmares away.  
I just sleepwalk through the day.  
Since I know this land so well,  
maybe I will be a land surveyor,  
or perhaps a tourist guide,  
or own some vast farmland of my own.

I must stop dreaming.  
Another car comes,  
perhaps I can make a sale or two.  
Let me fetch my clay cows  
and the shimmering stones.  
Maybe the tourist wants some souvenirs  
and may even drop a shilling or two.

Inspired by : De Kok, I. (1988) Road through Lesotho. Familiar Ground.  
Johannesburg: Ravan Press. P55

'...but there he is before us' Inspired by : De Kok, I. (1988) Road through Lesotho.  
Familiar Ground. Johannesburg: Ravan Press. P55

# LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY

The landscapes of my memory  
are scattered with pieces  
of all of you,  
all of them.  
Each day,  
a piece of this puzzle  
fits together  
to make my life a treasure.  
Each encounter with love  
a fragrant fragment to be savoured.  
Though moments of pain  
and uncertainty may cloud the skies,  
each day is a unique blessing and should be lived to the fullest.

## I AM

I am not just a part of your past  
but I am the present  
and the promise of your future.

A vision formed  
with the secrets of the universe.  
Reach out and touch  
smell and feel the reality of us  
as predestined in the utterances  
at the formation of time.

Let us travel together  
to the places where our memories begin.  
Let us waken the birds with laughter,  
they have waited a long time to sing.  
Uncork the Maluti springs,  
the rivers have been dry too long.  
Let the withered and the dead  
feel the pulse of life course through the aorta.

The 'winds of change', frozen in mid flight  
shall begin the mating ceremonial dance,  
carrying our bodies and minds to the land  
where time holds no meaning. The place  
of tomorrow where history is unknown,  
pain and rejection barely understood.  
Where the water lilies line our bed  
and roses canopy the heavens.  
Where rhythms of time,  
beat to the melodies  
of our hearts.

## MEMORIES

swagger and stagger  
along the corridors of my mind.  
Pain brands the grey-matter  
forcing me to stand still.

Yet, the local kid  
with a psychology major,  
certifies me a split personality.  
A mad woman!  
He doesn't know  
history glares me in the face  
everywhere I look

Evidence of my ancestry  
collective lives embedded  
into my skin, my voice,  
behind my eyeballs  
shaping this world.

Mnemonics sprawled all around me.  
Giant tentacles clutching my childhood  
relax and unleash floodgates of yesterday's  
darkened corridors with streaks of sunlight.

I focus on the beams of hope,  
To stretch every inch over the dark alleys  
chasing unjust memories  
invading my sanctuary.

## RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH

Destiny's child made her resolve as she lay,  
and 'God forgive me' she said; as she prayed.  
Sweaty palms clutching the cold rail.  
The sinking feeling that she has failed  
the purpose of her life. But then,  
it was too late, to turn back  
on the decision she had made  
on the faceless morning; with grey  
skies and the threat of rain.

She cleansed herself for the ritual  
and looked at her face in the mirror.  
Frustration, pain, fear and sorrow  
cloaked her hope for tomorrow.  
She looked at the calendar one last time  
and resolved to keep her date  
with lady fate.

If only she talked,  
shared her pain with a friend.  
If only she'd cried to an understanding  
brother or sister, she might have stopped hurting.  
The nightmares that pursued her  
would not have driven her to this hell  
of pain, frustration, sorrow and fear.

If only I had reached out to her,  
to help make the load lighter,  
if only we heard  
the silent anguished voice  
of the girl in despair

we might not have done much  
but showed her that we cared.  
Then she might not have  
walked the last mile  
to her rendezvous with death.

University of Cape Town

## THE MEMORY OF GRINDING STEEL HAUNTS ME

Her damp face  
stuck to the railroad.  
Her heart keeping rhythm  
with the rumbling tracks.

Fear blinds my eyes,  
as the jaws of death  
open to swallow this  
fragile pride of youth.  
The smell of singed hair  
and burning flesh  
gags me in my cabin.

It was over so quickly,  
yet it'll never be for me.  
The memory of screeching iron  
chewing her ribs  
and spewing minced flesh  
into the bushes, torments me.  
For she was just a child  
and I wonder what burden  
weighed and pinned her  
to the rumbling tracks.

Her memory fills my days  
and her silent screams fill my nights.

## **DEATH I CHEATED YOU ONCE**

Blood saturated with ether,  
brain turned putty,  
mouth gagged by ozone.  
Feebly reaching out,  
to life's dislocated embrace.  
Invisible shackles hold me,  
mummified on the steel Op table.  
Cumulonimbus death hanging above.

The skilled executioner of a surgeon  
master examiner  
of putrid steamy bowels,  
cuts, pulls, stretches.

Holding onto the anchorage of eternity,  
half composed thoughts  
scurry across my brain,  
in pursuit of health.

Mouldy voice softly heeds call to life.  
Hanging limply to sanity,  
reason trickles into the brain cavity.  
Pleasant pulses of life,  
flow back to the toes.  
Death I cheated you.



## **THAT WAS THE DAY,**

Africa lay on my shoulders.  
That was the day,  
I held the miracle  
of the mother land in my palm.

They told me if I peered harder,  
past the mass of dark blue waters,  
I might just catch a glimpse  
of South America.  
And if I keep a steady gaze,  
the naked flamingo dancers  
dancing the Salsa might  
also come into focus.

They did not tell me  
of the hundred hungry dragons  
that live in the caves  
of the dark seas, all around  
Cape L'Agulhas,  
jealously guarding  
Mother Africa.

## NOTES TO THE POEMS

Amabotho – a Zulu expression for a legion of warriors

Cape L'Agulhas is known as The Southernmost Tip of Africa

Jackrollers - notorious gang of boys and men common in South Africa during the 80's and early 90's. Their purpose was to abduct, gang rape and torture women as a sign of their manhood.

Kholu was the mother of the late King Moshoeshoe I (also known as Lepoqo or Thesele), the founder of the Basotho Nation

Kippies is one of the venues in the Good Hope Center.

“Mankokosane, pula e ea nare tla hola neng? Ha tsatsi le chaba” – informal sources say that ‘Mankokosane is a ‘Rain god’. This word also describes the kind of dance children would perform at the beginning of light showers of rain. They skip, hop and sing that the rain is falling and ask when they will grow up. ‘Ha tsatsi le chaba’ – when the sun comes up. This suggests that the children see themselves as little crops that are being watered by the rains and will have become taller when the stops falling.

‘Maletsunyane is a waterfall in Lesotho

Maluti Mountain ranges joining the Drakensberg to Lesotho.

Mooobrai clearmont keptown – is a chant by the Cape Town Taxi conductors to call passengers to board taxis passing through Mowbray, Claremont and Cape Town.

Mqombothi is a name given to most traditional African Beers common in Southern Africa.

Pokemon - A cartoon character known for his unconquerable spirit. In this poem he seems to have replaced Mandela as an icon and role model for the young people.

Rabotapi – or commonly known as ‘Fingers’ A very smart criminal who evaded the police for a long time. It is alleged that when they caught up with him they handcuffed him to a bed and shot him. They could not extract the information they wanted from him inspite of the torture.

Rondebosch - A place in Cape Town which was in the news because of the story of a woman who kept 1000+ rats as her ‘babies’.

Sonnyboy - A term of endearment for a son or a name common for young boys. One can even use it in the case where the boy's name is not known.

Wella Straight - A German made hair straightener that was very popular with black people in the seventies and eighties.

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