

CHAPTER 7

Alan Paton, *Cry, the beloved country* (1958)

Oliver Walker, *Wanton city* (1949)

Lewis Sowden, *The crooked bluegum* (1955)

'Umfazi', *Amadodana Ami* (1950)

Peter Lanham & A S Mopeli-Paulus, *Blanket boy's moon* (1953)

Daphne Rooke, *Ratoons* (1953)

Peter Gibbs, *Stronger than armies* (1953)

BLACK URBAN PROTEST IN THE FORTIES

Seven novels contend for attention in this chapter.¹ Alan Paton's *Cry, the beloved country* and Oliver Walker's *Wanton city*, though startlingly different in almost every possible way, share the initial grouping with Lewis Sowden's *The crooked bluegum* because of their involvement with Johannesburg. Paton's historical references are to the Alexandra bus boycotts (between 1940 and 1945), the squatters' movement (1944 to 1947), and the discovery of gold in the Free State in 1946, whereas Walker's two virtually explicit references are to Smuts's conclusion of the United Party pre-election campaign of 1948, and a black miners' strike, presumably in the same year. Sowden's novel refers to the black miners' 1946 strike, the Alexandra bus boycott (he does not specify which one), and Shanty Town. Like the other two novels, the action of *The crooked bluegum* pre-dates the coming to power of the Nationalist Party,

although it was published seven years after that event. However, as its action involves a kind of proto-Group Areas situation, I decided to place it last in the group and thus close to Nationalist government manoeuvres. The novels in the second group (*Blanket boys' moon*, *Amadodana Ami*, and *Ratoons*) share a concern with the Natal Indian Riots of 1949. For this reason I have relied on their publication dates for a preliminary sorting, and then placed *Ratoons* last since the time period of the plot extends beyond that of *Blanket boys' moon*. (Incidentally, although Rooke uses actual dates at the beginning of the novel, the necessary telescoping of her plot towards the end means that she has to avoid specific reference to 1949.) Peter Gibbs's *Stronger than armies* seems to be set in the late forties in what was then Rhodesia. Because of the distinctness of location, which indeed necessitated compromising my overall criterion for inclusion, it seemed appropriate to allow it a section of its own.

Contextualisation: general

As it was necessary to incorporate a good deal of sociopolitical information for the contextual material offered in this chapter, my sources include major expository texts relevant to the period as well as articles from *Trek* and *The Forum*.² My list of sources, apart from the two journals, is given below in alphabetical order, together with an abbreviation for the sake of reference. In line with my practice in previous chapters I have dispensed with dates in these references as only one text by each writer is cited.

Dowlat Bagwandeem (1991) *A people on trial – for breaching racism* – [Db]

Philip Bonner (1990) 'The politics of black squatter movements on the Rand, 1944–1952'. *Radical History Review* 46(7):89–115. – [Br]

H Gibbs (1949) *Twilight in South Africa* – [GsH]

Peter Gibbs (1947) *Land-locked island* – [GsP]

Trevor Huddleston (1957 [1956]) *Naught for your comfort* – [Hn]

Tom Lodge (1983) *Black politics in South Africa since 1945* – [Lg]

Martin Loney (1975) *Rhodesia: white racism and imperial response* – [Ly]

Edward Roux (1964 [1948]). *Time longer than rope; the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa* – [Rx]

Christopher Saunders (ed) (1994) *The Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa* – [RD]

Jack and Ray Simons (1983) *Class and colour in South Africa* – [Sn].

Contextualisation: novels in group A (Paton, Walker, Sowden)

'The contextualised material for this group is divided into two main sections: pre-1948 election; and post-1948 election. Within both sections, sub-headings are used as a guide to the different facets considered. As much of this material is relevant for chapter 8, suitable reminders are provided wherever necessary in that chapter. Most of this material is also relevant to the novels in group B, which concern the Indian Riots of 1949 but, for convenience' sake, I have provided more specific contextualisation for these novels at the risk of creating a certain amount of chronological distortion. The one Rhodesian novel in group C clearly warrants its own contextualisation.

Pre-election post-war Nationalist Party manoeuvres

Midway through World War II there was a feeling that a 'new and vigorous liberalism' had arisen, 'reinforced by a great surge of humanism, loosed by the war'. Thus ventured to claim *The Forum* (5:32, 7 November 1942, p1). The prediction could hardly have been more mistaken in the light of what was to come. Rather more realistically, and with the benefit of another two years of internal political evidence, an article in *Trek* saw Nationalist propaganda as having 'undergone a sharp turn towards appeasing the feebler elements of the English-speaking population'. But the writer, K C Roberts, recognised only too well that 'Malanite propaganda both in Afrikaans and English is merely ill-concealed and ill-digested Hitlerism' (9(19):22).

Eighteen months later the *Trek* editor referred scathingly to the 'Smuts brew', which contains the 'most potent ingredients' of the 'unsweetened reactionary dope now being offered' but 'carefully flavoured with a democratic liberalism' (11(5):5). He cites in particular the 'Indian Ghetto Act' (see below under 'Background to the Indian crisis of 1949') as evidence of this mixture which seemed to be proving very successful (5). In similar vein *The Forum* editor, in his 'General election preview' (9(30):25) warned of the danger that the United Party (UP), 'seriously misjudging the extent of progressive opinion in South Africa, may be thrown on to the defensive over the colour question, and either seek to evade the issue or assume an unprogressive attitude itself' (25).

By early 1947 both editors were distinctly more anxious. *Trek*, aware of a growing dissatisfaction amongst English-speaking South Africans, and the threat that they would vote against the government at the forthcoming election, warned

that they were in 'danger [thereby] of delivering themselves into the hands of a new taskmaster who has no very great opinion of democracy' (11(16):5). In a trenchant leader entitled 'False assumptions', *The Forum* argued that '[the Nationalist party] regards it as axiomatic that a policy of repression, of denying political and economic rights to the African population, is the only and the automatic way of preserving White civilisation' (10(13):25). In the year of the election Colin Legum, a prominent member of the Labour party, warned that the Nationalists' programme of promises and political bribes '[rested] on a foundation of promoting fear – the most potent weapon in political campaigning, especially if the fear is directed against Natives and foreigners' (*The Forum* 10(41):25).

A year before the election *The Forum* decided to press for clarity on the meaning and implications of the Nationalists' concept of 'apartheid' (in fact at first *The Forum* is inclined to use the English translation 'separateness'). Responding to J K Strydom's explanation of the concept to a Jeugbond Congress, the editor spelt out the implications: '[E]very native worker in "White South Africa" will become a migrant labourer; "White South Africa" will become a series of huge compounds' (10(16):15). Staggered by the inhumanity of the doctrine, the editor proceeded to ask Strydom questions about the consequences: What would be the economic consequences of shifting probably 4 000 000 people? Where was 'ground to be found for the millions who obviously cannot be accommodated in the existing already overcrowded Reserves?' (15).

UP ineffectuality and doubleness; whites' ambivalence in general

The post-war political predicament led *The Forum* and *Trek* to devote almost as much space to criticism of the UP as of their opposition. Referring to the debate on 'native affairs' at the Transvaal Congress of the UP in November 1945, R M de Villiers wrote about 'The two voices within the United Party' (*The Forum* 8(35):7–8). Noting delegates' sensitivity 'to Nazi and Fascist tendencies and influences among public servants and members of the Opposition generally', De Villiers comments caustically: '[I]t did not strike them that so much of [their policy with regard to 'natives'] was nothing more or less than unadulterated Fascism' (8).

At the UP Congress in Bloemfontein a year later, Hofmeyr, possibly with such strictures in mind, clarified the position of his party: Christian trusteeship would be the basis of their concern for the non-European people of South Africa. He rejected the Nationalist assumption 'that there are two and only two methods of approach to the Native problem: the path of assimilation or complete equality

between White and Black, on the one hand; and on the other, the path of perpetual domination of the non-European by the European'. Christian trusteeship was for Hofmeyr and the United party 'the golden mean between assimilation and domination' (*The Forum* 9(36): 31). Just how the idea of a 'golden mean' could apply to all, given two such end terms, does not seem to have worried Hofmeyr. *The Forum*, in any case, seems not to have been entirely satisfied with Hofmeyr's statement of UP policy. The editor argued with some vigour that a clearcut and progressive policy regarding blacks would hold out an immense appeal to the towns: '[The man-in-the-street] is far more progressive than the United Party evidently believes him to be' (10(11):15).

At the ANC meeting in Bloemfontein in 1945 a delegate argued that the 'root of the problem [for blacks]

... lay in the non-European accepting many years ago the theory that he was an inferior being to the European. From this premise the idea of trusteeship had been evolved; from trusteeship grew up the policy of territorial segregation into Reserves and locations, of political segregation which means no franchise whatsoever, economic segregation which forbade the non-European becoming anything more than a delivery boy – and, arising out of all these, social segregation. (*The Forum* 8(39):9)

In this delegate's view it therefore became necessary to 'reject finally and utterly the ideology of the "herrenvolk" in SA, to educate White and Black alike to realise that there was no inherent difference between the two races on the basis of colour alone' (9).

Rather than being progressive, the white man/woman 'in the street' was unfortunately likely to be as ambivalent as his/her leaders in politics and the media. Even the editor of *The Forum*, for example, stated explicitly that he favoured residential separation, but without compulsion (8(5):3). When C R Swart, leader of the Nationalist party in the Orange Free State, posed five questions to the editor, he stated that his journal did not stand for the dominance of either the whites or the blacks: 'We stand for the *preservation* not *dominance* of White civilisation. Although the journal considers it essential to maintain a *social* colour-bar, it challenges the operation of such a bar in the political and economic spheres' (9(31):27). The editor emphasised that to exploit the colour-bar as a barrier to progress – as an arbitrary means of 'keeping down' the black man – is 'not only wrong but dangerous' (27). However, he chose not to contemplate the inevitable consequences once a colour bar is considered at all acceptable.

Smuts himself was a prime example of white ambivalence. *The Forum* editor, for example, expressed much disappointment with Smuts's 'utterances' at UNO in December 1946 in which he seemed to put approving emphasis on colour divisions in the country. On the other hand the editor felt more positive about Smuts's address to the women of the UP in the Pretoria Town Hall in which he revealed his dissatisfaction with the position of blacks at that time: they were not allowed to build their own houses; and the treatment of educated blacks was indefensible (9(39): 27). It seems always to have been possible to find a more positive and enlightened side to Smuts. The crucial question was which prevailed in actual practice?

State of the Blacks

Smuts's Pretoria Town Hall speech (just referred to) only touches the surface of the actual condition of blacks in this period. The question of migratory labour preoccupied a number of writers in both *Trek* and *The Forum* in the forties. D Molteno, parliamentary representative of the Western Cape blacks in the Natives' Representative Council, regarded it as the 'aspect of Union policy that is most responsible for the depressed condition of the non-European population as a whole' (*The Forum* 4(13):23). In early 1946 *The Forum* editor, having initially sought to encourage black migration to the towns and cities, later stressed that this process should not be allowed to create a 'stampede' (9(14):3). However, Edgar Brookes, giving more weight to the reality of the urban situation in relation to the challenge posed by the new Free State discoveries of gold, declared that: 'It will be a scandal and a crime if South Africa again permits the compound system unmodified to form the basis of its labour structure' (*The Forum* 9(15):8). Instead he recommended the following two positive reforms: '(1) the steady infiltration into the labour system of family men living with their families at or near the place of their employment; and (2) the working of the mines by a smaller, better paid and more efficient labour force' (8).

It is important to remember that the process of black urban migration because of impoverished conditions in the tribal areas began long before the Nationalist Party came to power. In 1930, the noted historian WM Macmillan wrote that rural Africans were 'dragging along at the very lowest level of bare subsistence' (RD:354). In 1932 the government-appointed Native Economic Commission was shocked at the poverty it found in the reserves. By 1936 however, rural conditions had grown even worse. Lodge points out that:

Between 1939 and 1952 the African urban population nearly doubled, the major proportion of this increase being the result of

the movement of whole families from the countryside into the towns. The two most powerful impulses to this migration were the threat of starvation in the reserves and deteriorating conditions on white farms. In the reserves overcrowding and sharp inequalities in stock ownership and landholdings had created a situation which for many was precarious even in years of good climatic conditions. (11–12)

Further, he notes that 'the exodus from the countryside was at first facilitated by a brief suspension, between 1942 and 1943, of influx control in the major cities. This was one of several measures taken by the authorities in the early stages of the war so as to avoid confrontation and maintain African political quiescence' (12). Once the exodus started, comments the *Reader's Digest illustrated history*, 'it continued week after week, month after month, year after year, until, by 1946, Johannesburg's African population stood at 400,000 – a rise of almost 100 per cent in just one decade' (RD:355). At this crucial juncture, however, the Johannesburg municipality claimed that it did not have 'the cash to cope with the needs of the spiralling black population. Local industry, on the other hand, had the money but not the will to assist African employees. And so a belt of slums sprang up from east to west across central Johannesburg' (RD:355).



Alexandra bus boycott

Lodge explains that Alexandra was one of the few areas in which Africans enjoyed freehold property rights. This status also made it a 'catchment area for those people who had no official sanction to live in an urban area' (13). Because there were no proper building controls, 'landlords could build shacks around their stands, making accommodation available for people who for economic and bureaucratic reasons could not find housing in municipal townships' (13). In his more intimate commentary on Alexandra, Trevor Huddleston makes the telling observation that: 'without the Alexandra "natives" the northern suburbs would have to go servantless, and not a few commercial concerns in the city would be hard put to it to find labour' (Hn:21-22).

Lodge provides useful basic information about the Alexandra bus strikes, one of the most important of the black working-class struggles:

Transport was obviously a sensitive issue in Alexandra. There were no trains and its distance from the city centre made the existence of a cheap bus service vital to the continued existence of the township ... the first boycott occurred in 1940, nine months after the bus fare to town had been raised from 4d to 5d. (13)

Further boycotts occurred in 1942 and 1943 after fresh attempts to raise the price again to 5d. The [third] time, reports Lodge,

... the boycott was longer and attracted much more external attention, lasting from 2-11 August ... the boycotters, 20,000 of them, walked to work across Johannesburg's north-western suburbs ... To assist these people an emergency transport committee was formed, composed of members of the Communist Party, white left-wingers and liberals and various prominent Alexandra figures ... Negotiations faltered and were ended by government intervention after a dramatic procession of 10 000 Alexandra residents marched through town on 10 August. (13-14)

The Bus Commission, in finding that transport charges were 'beyond the capacity of the African workers to pay', also noted significantly that 'the Europeans have forced a policy of segregation on the Africans. The transportation of the Africans is therefore very much a financial obligation of the Europeans' (Rx: *Trek* 10(6):12). Roux, however, goes on to explain that 'the particular difficulty in relation to Alexandra was that the buses were operated by private companies which refused to continue running their services for 4d a single fare' (12). Indeed, before the appointed Bus Commission had even published its report, bus-owners' claims induced the gov-

ernment, via an emergency regulation, to raise the fare to 5d again. The consequence was an even more prolonged strike lasting for an astonishing seven weeks (12). Finally the people of Alexandra were persuaded to accept a settlement which involved buying books of 4d tickets. Nevertheless, despite this succession of upheavals, the government agreed in November 1944 to the 5d fare (Lg:14).



James Sofasonke Mpanza (the squatters' leader)

Introducing an analysis of the squatter situation, Lodge reveals that there were about 14 000 houses in the four black municipal housing schemes in Johannesburg, but that these became 'steadily more overcrowded' through the wartime population increase (15). However, he proceeds to explain that

... the housing shortage and consequent overcrowding was only one of several factors underlying the sudden emergence of squatter communities on the outskirts of Johannesburg which ultimately were to number some 90 000 inhabitants. With unskilled workers earning about [five pounds] a month and rent accounting for around a fifth of this, squatting could be a vital strategy for survival, and the most effective way of meeting the cost of subsistence with pauper-level wages. Squatting could also be the resort of the unemployed, especially those who had left behind them the sheer hopelessness of rural existence ... but it seems that squatters were not characteristically unemployed ... the central government [following a policy of sheer expedience] displayed little enthusiasm in assisting local officialdom in its persecution of the squatters. The latter were housed at no cost to the state or industry. For the municipality, though, the squatters represented a direct threat and challenge to its authority. (15)

The squatters' movement began in March 1944 with the exodus of several hundred families of sub-tenants from Orlando to open land near the township. Hundreds followed the leader, James Mpanza, from the Orlando location to unoccupied space between the railway line and the communal hall where they were exhorted thus: 'You are soldiers now. You have joined forces with me and you will die where I die' (RD:356). By the first week of April, 8 000 people had streamed into the hessian township. At the end of 1946, its population had risen to 20 000 (RD:356).

This first camp provided a model structure for those that followed it over the next three years:

Families had to pay 6 shillings to join [Mpanza's] squatter group. Thereafter a fee of 2s 6d entitled them to a site – while an addition 12s 6d a week contributed to the day-to-day administration of the camp. To the thousands of [squatters] it was money well spent. The main attraction of the *Sofasonke* camp was the protection it offered its vulnerable inhabitants. (RD:356)

The leaders were regarded as saviours (Br:95). There were deep-seated social problems which these leaders had to try to address, together with Zionist church leaders. At best they succeeded through close, sustained contact with the squatters; a wide range of prohibitions against 'potentially disruptive practices'; and the establishment of cooperatives (102). But crime was a very serious problem as in all the Rand townships (96). The spirit of 'independence and insubordination fostered in the squatter camps' was, in fact, a greater source of alarm for the authorities than the question of health hazards (99). Indeed, 'James Mpanza's *Sofasonke* settlement ... became a no-go area for white officialdom. Even when shacks of smaller parties were demolished, squatters simply moved to other pieces of ground' (RD:356). However, by the end of the forties the government, having almost crushed the squatter movements, pushed their remnants into the vast housing estates later to be known as Soweto (357).

Trade union activity in the Transvaal

Besides the popular movements, that is, the bus boycotts and the squatters' movement, the other factor which led black political leadership to become more militant was the influence of organised labour. Lodge explains that:

The expansion of secondary industry in the late 1930s and during the war caused a large increase in the numbers of Blacks employed in manufacturing ... Also, more and more Africans were performing skilled and semi-skilled functions in industry and this made them less easy to replace and in consequence less vulnerable to dismissal. (17)

Trade-union activity pioneered by the Trotskyite Max Gordon (see chapter 5) thus had fertile ground for development, and soon Communists as well as Liberals became involved (Lg:18). The figures are dramatic: the number of African trade unions on the Witwatersrand rose from 20, with a total membership of 23 000 in 1940, to 50 with a membership of 80 000 in 1945. The development of the black trade union movement had a radicalising effect on the ANC, and the Council for Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) became the most powerful black trade union grouping ever to have existed in South Africa. Nevertheless CNETU was unwilling to demand recognition until 1946 when it responded to the AMWU (African Mineworkers' Union) call for a strike, but unfortunately no longer held such an advantageous position (18).

The Simonsons explain that the high incidence of strikes in the years 1939 to 1945 'indicated a tendency to emphasize immediate demands. There was no intention of turning the strike wave into a revolutionary assault on the bastions of white supremacy' (Sn:556). It is interesting to note that, as trade unions were reluctant to disrupt production, these strikes were often independent of union initiatives (Lg:18).

It is hardly surprising that there was continuous unrest amongst mine workers in the early forties: their wages were only about half of the recommended figure. Small increases were made in 1942 because, as usual, mining profits remained the priority. As Walker puts it in caustic vein: '[T]hou shall employ only cheap migrant labour' (1948:19). Then in 1943 the government appointed the Lansdowne Commission to investigate mineworkers' wages and conditions. At first the commission argued (preposterously) that, as the families of black workers had their farms in the reserves to rely on, wages could be regarded merely as pocket money. This argument was conveniently supported by the Chamber of Mines. Actual investigation of homeland conditions, however, led the commission eventually to reach very different conclusions: 'Reserve production is but a myth' ... poverty, landlessness and severe malnutrition were a 'cause for grave concern' (RD:359). Despite this breakthrough in insight, the commission refused to call for an end to the migrant labour system, or to support recognition for the AMWU.

AMWU leaders described the Lansdowne Commission recommendations as 'hopelessly inadequate and unsatisfactory' (RD:359). Fearing further unrest, the Chamber of Mines banned all union activity in the compounds, and the Minister of Labour reinforced this clampdown in 1944 by 'enacting War Measure 1425 of 1942 which banned gatherings of more than 20 people on mine property ... and exposed strikers to the maximum penalty of a five hundred pounds fine or three years' imprisonment' (Sn:556). (The ban was removed only in 1956, more than ten years after the end of the war (572-573).) The AMWU was therefore forced to hold secret meetings at night (572), and the relationship between the workers and the government, together with the Chamber of Mines, deteriorated rapidly, culminating in the major disruption of 1946 when 60 000 workers engaged in one of the biggest strikes in South African history (RD:359).

The immediate spark for the 1946 strike was a police attack on protesting miners at Modderfontein East mine. The AMWU then made specific demands, including a minimum wage of ten shillings a day, family housing and paid leave, and threatened a general strike if their demands were not met (Lg:19-20). As the management response was negative, between 60 000 and

70 000 miners refused to go on shift in at least twelve mines on 12 August. CNETU's call for a general strike in sympathy 'had almost unanimous support and brought the entire Witwatersrand gold-mining industry to a halt' (OC:187).

Smuts, claiming that the strike was caused by agitators, acted speedily and ruthlessly. The AMWU president was arrested, and the union offices were raided (RD:365). Workers, report the Simonses, were

... forced back to work by police and compound officials who drove them out of their rooms, beat them with clubs and rifles, and fired on them when they gathered outside the compounds or marched in procession to claim their passes with a view to returning home. (Sn:575)

By 17 August the strike had been crushed; twelve people had been killed and more than 1 000 injured. 'In terms of what it set out to achieve, the strike was a dismal failure – it took another three years in fact before mine-owners were moved to grant their African workers an extra 3 pence a shift' (RD:365). While the Natives' Representative Council deprecated 'the Government's post-war continuation of a policy of Fascism which is the antithesis and negation of the letter and spirit of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Charter' (Sn:579), the Chamber of Mines devoted no more than six lines of print in its annual report to the strike.

As it turned out, reports Lodge:

[T]he strike effectively destroyed the African Mineworkers' Union and seriously weakened CNETU. Twenty-two African affiliates were to secede from the Council in 1947, citing as their reason disenchantment with Communist leadership and disillusion with the strike weapon. (19–20)

A further serious consequence was that the Smuts government put forward a Bill in May 1947 designed to make 'trade unionism illegal and a criminal offence for Blacks in mining, farming, railways, government and domestic service; outlaw all strikes by Blacks; and isolate them in segregated registered unions' (Sn:560). As the Bill stirred heated controversy, however, it had to be referred to an industrial legislation commission, which was only appointed by the Nationalist government in 1948. 'Its findings', observe the Simonses, 'were incorporated into the Natives (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953 which reproduced the worst features of Smuts's bill and deprived African unions of any recognized role' (560).

'Native' Council representatives

In 1943, as a member of the Natives' Representative Council, Edgar Brookes wrote of his fervent wish for his fellow South Africans to be 'free from fear' (*The Forum* 6(6):5). Also he reminded readers that the 'agitation amongst young people of colour' would be stopped 'not by removing the agitators but by removing the cause' (6). In relation to Brookes's colleague on the Council, Margaret Ballinger, *The Forum*, was quick to reassure its readers that she was not an agitator, rather a propagandist who 'spreads enlightenment about, and to effect improvements in the African position' (9(1):36). She is accordingly described as the 'voice of White South Africa's conscience' (31).

Mrs Ballinger's husband, W G Ballinger, explained in *Trek* how the work of the Natives' Representative Council had 'suffered from the handicaps of its construction and the decided limitations of its powers' (11(3):10). Furthermore, he lamented that its existence had been 'marred by several glaring instances of advice being ignored or not even being asked for on vital issues affecting the people whom the African members have been nominated or elected to represent' (10). Despite this less than privileged position of the council, the editor of *The Forum* expressed complete agreement with Brookes's sense of the task which was to 'save South Africa from the deadly peril into which it is being pushed by the Government' (11(48):3).

Debate about the formation of a Liberal Party

In February 1948 D B Molteno discussed the difficulty of establishing a South African Liberal Party at the time. The problem from the point of view of the Africans and their representatives, Molteno decided, would be that 'such a party would inevitably, in essentials, be an all-white party' because it would 'in the first instance, have to rely primarily on European votes' (*Trek* 12(2):6). Later the same year (after Jan Hofmeyr's death) J P Cope, asking why a Liberal Party had not been formed, decided that it was a consequence of the difficult situation in which Jan Hofmeyr, the obvious leader of such a party, found himself: 'Jan Hofmeyr really wanted to see an independent Liberal Party emerge. But he was never in a position to found one without injuring the man he admired most of all, General Smuts' (*The Forum* 11(37):5). Even after the 1948 election when there was apparently a strong intrigue against Hofmeyr, and a 'number of supporters offered to go with him – into the wilderness if necessary', he replied: 'No, we must stand by General Smuts and the Party; there must be no groups' (6). In R M de Villiers's obituary to Hofmeyr

he made the salient comment that could well be applied also to several other leading liberals of the day: '[Hofmeyr's] admirers sometimes became impatient with him for not going further and faster: all the time his enemies criticised him for going too far and too fast' (*The Forum* 11(37):3).

Post-election apartheid: principles vs practice

Soon after the election *The Forum* proceeded to engage, issue after issue, in agonised questions about what the Nationalists would actually do in government. For their opponents, it would be necessary, above all, to follow the government's actions 'during the coming months, with exceptional vigilance' (11(11):3). By August the editor had already soberly concluded that 'predictions about the real meaning and nature of apartheid are being borne out with monotonous regularity' (11(21):3), and thus he agreed with Jan Hofmeyr that 'apartheid is nothing more than a cloak for repression' (3).

Worse, of course, was to follow. In September *The Forum* editor responded to Dr Malan's declaration that, after obtaining legal advice, he would proceed to try to abolish 'Native' representation in parliament by a simple, instead of a two-thirds, majority. Truly alarmed, the writer asked 'whether men who are willing to ignore the entrenchments of the Constitution are not capable of going much further "when the time comes"?' (11(24):3). In November *The Forum* reported Mr G Strydom, then Minister of Lands and leader of the Transvaal Nationalist Party, as having said (as usual, more bluntly than Malan): '[T]he continued existence of White South Africa demands [the abolition of the non-European franchise] and therefore we must [do it]. It is our duty towards our descendants' (11(32):1). The editor was so appalled at this threat as to place a sombre leader, 'Twilight of democracy', on the journal's front page. One wonders, though, how the many previous signs of Nazi tendencies in the Nationalist Party had not acted as sufficient warning signals.

Role of the United Party

After nearly two months of Nationalist party rule, D Molteno observed that their victory should not have been a surprise. In response to the Nationalists' dynamic but 'poisonous conglomeration of appeals to hatred, malice, prejudice, greed and ignorance', the United Party offered merely 'half-hearted agreement, tempered with mild apologies, feeble excuses and a few boasts'

(*Trek* 12(7):2). Having reiterated his conclusion that the United Party had already 'lost most of its positive significance and function' (2), Molteno nevertheless still maintained that it would not be opportune to try to found a Liberal Party at that juncture. Instead the task of the Liberal in his view would be to 'attempt to revive the UP and to induce it to adopt as much of the Liberal programme as contemporary conditions reasonably permit' (3). As for the Labour Party, he saw little chance of its growing sufficiently to establish itself as a government at any stage. A progressive programme for the UP would 'strive to bring home to the people, in opposition to the neurotic fantasy of "apartheid", the fundamental interdependence of all racial groups' in South Africa. The immediate steps that needed to be taken would already be available in the Fagan Commission Report (30).

This commission, which met from 1946 to 1948, presented its report shortly before the May 1948 election. Although the Fagan Commission found territorial apartheid to be utterly impossible, the Nationalist Party, observed the editor of *The Forum*, has 'nonetheless managed to persuade a large number of electors that they are right and that Mr Justice Fagan and his fellow-commissioners are wrong' (11(10):33). Accordingly, Dr Malan and his Cabinet are challenged with the following decisions: 'Are they going to stop Native housing loans to local authorities? Are they going to abolish the squatters' camps around Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban? Are they going to send these tens of thousands of Natives ... back from whence they came ... If they are logical, they must do all these things and more' (33).

The United Party's belated 'native' policies

Following up his July article in *Trek* on the tasks facing the Liberals, D B Molteno sought to encourage the United Party to formulate a decisive and enlightened 'colour policy'. He insisted that 'in a multi-racial society, race relations is *the* issue in public affairs, which *cannot* be side-tracked' (*Trek* 12(9):1). Accordingly he welcomed Smuts's statement that the United Party must have a colour policy, belated as it is, and its basis must be 'the economic and social realities of our inter-racial society', while taking heed of the necessity for racial prejudice to be 'gradually eradicated' (2). Echoing Molteno's concern in the same issue, the editor decided that General Smuts alone could curb the 'political malaise' that had set in since the May election (16). As if not altogether convinced, however, the editor hoped that Smuts would eventually be able to defend with more enthusiasm the 'progressive policy on the

Native Question, based on the Fagan Report, which [he] outlined in the early stages of the new parliament' (16).

Trek seemed to be rather too easily satisfied. Pleased to observe that the 'Shadow of reaction [to the government] spreads', the editor was also eager to commend Smuts for a clear and concise 'programme of enlightenment' in relation to the colour question, and in particular for warning that 'prejudice rooted in events of one hundred years ago' could not be allowed to become the basis of policy in regard to the Indians (12(10):16). Much less enthusiastically, the editor of *The Forum* gave only limited approval for the United Party 'statement of Native and Coloured policy', deciding that although it was not an 'imaginative or courageous document, it has the merit of being practical' (11(28):3). The only important differences from the Nationalists' policy, noted the editor, were its recognition of the permanence of urban blacks, and its insistence that the 'meagre rights which the natives and Coloureds today possess must not be tampered with' (3).

At this stage in South African political history the Nationalists began a Liberal-smearing campaign that was to have enormous success, finding unexpected allies later among Marxists and Black Consciousness leaders. *The Forum* early on tried to confront incipient manoeuvres in the campaign in the form of Dr Malan's and Dr Jansen's claim that 'no true South African is – or has ever been – a liberal on questions of colour. According to the Nationalists' interpretation the old Cape liberal tradition was a purely British product imposed on reluctant colonists' (11(46):3). The editor, however, raised awkward facts, for among the men who defended the Cape tradition at the time of Union were men like Onze Jan Hofmeyr, M Sauer, and W Schreiner whose South African roots were indisputably deep. Defiantly he therefore asserts the presence of *many true South African Liberals*. They were to be found, he claims, in the four English-speaking universities; in most of the Christian churches; also in the trade union movement. All of these were finding 'common ground with those enlightened industrialists who have discerned the economic shape of things to come' (11(46):3). Deliberately shifting away from the nationalists' obsessive concern with colour, the editor suggested that what gave liberals in South Africa their 'strength, persistence and driving force' was their awareness of the 'sorrows, disabilities, and the frustration of the great majority of the people who live in South Africa' (3).

The novels

Paton: *Cry, the Beloved Country*

(published 1948; set in the early forties)

It is important to remember that although *Cry, the beloved country* (henceforth *CTBC*) was published in 1948, it was conceived and written before the Nationalist party came to power in that year. In his talk, 'Why I write', Paton holds that the defeat of General Smuts was 'to the astonishment of every part of the civilised world' (1975:11). Giving the 35th Hoernlé lecture in 1979, 'Towards racial justice', Paton discusses South African history (post 1652) as a long succession of conquests. However, he goes on to emphasise that 'the greatest conquest of all was a *political*, not a *military*, conquest in which no gun was fired and no spear was thrown, and that was the conquest of all South Africa in 1948 by the National Party, a conquest that has lasted up to now [ie 1979]' (1979:9). Dwelling further on the theme of conquest, Paton speaks of South Africa as a 'country in which conquest must now be *undone*, when the conqueror must make restoration to the conquered' (10). The novel leaves one in no doubt of the immense problems facing the country and the magnitude of the tasks involved in finding solutions. Of all possible solutions the one offered by the Nationalist Party is clearly seen to be the most abhorrent and retrograde since it seeks to reinforce and intensify the mission of conquest. It has been argued that Paton's major solution to the country's ills was to endorse a paternalistic policy of restoring black life in the rural communities. Paul Rich's perspective offers a warning of the strongly deterministic aspects which govern much of the novel; naturalism is indeed one of its prevailing modes. In particular the novel seems to infer that it is better for people to grow up in the country; the city (particularly in the case of blacks) inevitably misshapes and corrupts them. Though it is clear that Paton finds many features of black rural life attractive, I shall argue that his vision is too practical and wide-ranging to be satisfied with nostalgic pipe-dreams.

The force of much of book 1 is to suggest how misguided is Stephen Kumalo's optimism that, through his rescue of his sister, Gertrude, and her child, 'already the tribe was being rebuilt, the house and the soul restored' (31). Renewed contact with his brother, John, takes Stephen much deeper into the effect of urban life upon his own people. Although the novel begins and ends in rural Ndotsheni, once the action of the novel has shifted to Johannesburg, the city is never quite allowed to leave our consciousness. As John Kumalo is the only character in the novel engaged in public activity

who could be deemed resistant or even rebellious from a white point of view, I shall give him much prominence in what follows. John has surprising and important things to say, amongst which are:

I do not say we are free here. I do not say we are free as men should be. But at least I am free of the chief. At least I am free of an old and ignorant man, who is nothing but a white man's dog ... it is not being held together ... It is breaking apart, your tribal society. It is here in Johannesburg that the new society is being built. (34)

Interestingly, although John's words are invested with passionate bitterness, the narrator's descriptions (see p34 esp) invite us to take a somewhat mocking or distanced attitude. Above all, Paton seems to be using John Kumalo to provide underlying support for Msimangu's 'one great fear in [his heart], that one day when they are turned to loving, they will find we are turned to hating' (38). In this way the question of the validity of John Kumalo's viewpoint somehow becomes obscured or displaced.

A noteworthy aspect of Paton's strategy, as Stephen Kumalo becomes more disturbingly aware of his people's urban plight, is to reveal the role of white liberals in alleviating this plight (see pp46-47 concerning the Alexandra bus boycott). Stephen's awareness of how extraordinary is the behaviour of these whites is underlined by Msimangu's bewilderment that a white would be prepared to go to court to defend his right to give lifts. Desirée Lewis's verdict that 'the perspective from which the social expose is made reveals *CTBC* to be a product of the flagrantly paternalistic liberalism that flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century' (1988:61) seems entirely to miss the point of how outrageous and courageous such actions were at the time in relation to white norms. I shall argue that in any case Paton is not offering such actions as an *adequate solution* to the problems of urban blacks. In the spectrum of white responses it is nevertheless one that needs to be singled out for special remark.

The climax of Stephen Kumalo's journey into the heart of his people's degradation is his visit to Shanty Town. To prepare for this visit, Paton shifts from his main story to offer several representative mini-narratives which help to create a vivid substitute for sociological and historical information. Paton was right to assume that his readers, predominantly white, would be largely ignorant of Shanty Town and the circumstances that forced people to create it; wise also to retain a fictional, rather than factual or documentary, mode of presentation. An early critic of the novel claims that *CTBC* is full of 'social data, not all of it structurally integrated' (103). We are now perhaps suffi-

ciently accustomed to shifting modes of presentation in a novel to appreciate Paton's need for a novel within his novel. The snippets seem independent, as if providing cumulative evidence of different families' desperation – of their being driven to the shanty solution. Nevertheless the five snippets from pages 52 to 54 fit together to make up a continuous narrative, the story of a family whose child dies because they arrive too late in Shanty Town. In other words, this story reinforces a sense of the desperate urgency of the situation for vast numbers of urban blacks.

Paton dramatically juxtaposes this black family tragedy with the death of the Liberal, Arthur Jarvis, to emphasise the need to connect such narratives if one is to make sense of South African reality. A false kind of connection is unfortunately only too likely to be made by whites. This kind of reaction Paton presents in a *second* shift from the major narrative. In his speech 'Towards racial justice' he had spoken of three great obstructing factors in relation to the attainment of his ideals: white fear, white pride and white greed (1979:11). The short passages that initiate chapter 12 (67–72) can be seen as an economical way of offering fictional presentation of the way these obstructions operate in practice, mingled with suggestions of some enlightened white views.

From the realistic, cinematic impression-gathering of the passages up to page 70, Paton shifts to a more rhetorical, satirically generalising mode. Here he partly expresses the dilemma of white Liberals who would like to be able to help ('Yes, there are a hundred ...' (71)), but whose wish for reform is undermined by their fear; partly he expresses his own indignation at the way blind fear becomes a ruling principle of life for many whites. The climax of this series of passages is a brief and desolate echo of the very first passage of the novel. It is noteworthy, however, that the pastoral evocation at this point is bitterly, almost violently, invaded by a kind of fatalistic pessimism. It would seem, then, that no sentimentalised return-to-the country trusteeship is being purveyed.

Watson decides that Paton makes use of the mode of tragedy and that he is 'concerned to make the causes for the tragic unfolding of events which his novel records ultimately inexplicable' (32). Here I think that Watson is in danger of confusing Paton's own views with those of his character, Stephen Kumalo. Stephen Kumalo cannot fully comprehend the social causes which Paton has explicitly and pointedly invited the reader to consider in his study of the formation of Shanty Town, and in the fears that follow from the death of Arthur Jarvis.

We get to know Arthur Jarvis's views through the manuscripts which his father reads after his son's death. Like the narrative sections of the novel, the discourse of these writings is without any special rhetorical effects: Paton

knows the language of speeches and reports, and imitates it very carefully. I cannot agree with the critic who finds Jarvis's papers essentially undramatic. They are not long and they serve to give a clear, persuasive rendering of the young man's beliefs. Indeed the way in which they substantiate the idea of the father getting to know his son better gives Paton a useful, unobtrusive means of clarifying essential and relevant aspects of liberalism.

In the first of these writings, part of an article or speech that Arthur was busy with just before his death, he proceeds, by means of a cumulative series of alternating claims labelled, 'it was permissible' and 'it is not permissible' to build up to an affirmation of the liberal's sense of the duty of whites (or Paton's version of it, at any rate):

Our natives today produce criminals and prostitutes and drunkards, not because it is their nature to do so, but because their simple system of order and tradition and convention has been destroyed. It was destroyed by the impact of our own civilization. Our civilization has therefore an inescapable duty to set up another system of order and tradition and convention. (127)

Clearly this credo, however much one might wish to quarrel with its patronising, trusteeship overtones, is an implicit response to Msimangu's bitterly indignant claim about what the whites have failed to do. The second piece, the last unfinished paragraph of Arthur's manuscript on 'Native' crime, points to the glaring contradiction between what whites in general proclaim, and the reality of South African society: '[T]he truth is that our civilisation is not Christian' (134). The 'Private essay on the evolution of a South African' (150-151) is cleverly saved for last because it involves direct criticism of his upbringing, and will thus be the most painfully challenging for Jarvis senior. Alternating with the two previous texts have been the narrator's reports of how the son also read Abraham Lincoln's speeches, helpful confirmation of Arthur's beliefs. Thus, by the time James Jarvis reaches the 'Private essay' he should be well on the way to being persuaded by Liberal principles and aims.

The views of Harrison, Arthur's father-in-law, provide a foil to those of Arthur. As a conventional but well-meaning white, he has been worried about Arthur's activities on behalf of blacks. However, in expressing Harrison's fear, there is no mockery or sneering on Paton's part - Harrison is not made to seem like a monster or a brute. The older men's second discussion reveals how easily Harrison is capable of stooping to a wish for cruel vengeance (129-130). Paton is at his best here in capturing the authentic contradictions and fears of all too many white South Africans. Once again we feel that the writer refuses to con-

demn, even as he creates awareness of how little understanding the average white South African has of black urban problems. And one needs to sustain an awareness that the actions of white liberals (for all their inadequacies by our perspective) were undertaken in a context of pervasive fear and prejudice.

The next historical event that affects the plot is the discovery of gold in the Orange Free State in April 1946 (chapter 6:145–149). Up till the foot of page 148, Paton makes use of an indirectly satirical mode. He exposes, simply by placing them in the context of the novel, the falsity and hollowness of several unnamed speakers' rationalisations in support of capitalistic enterprise. They *could* be those of a man like Harrison, though they involve less sense of compromise or qualification than he is prepared to show.

John Kumalo's protest speech (chapter 9:157–161) employs words that are plain, unambiguous and forceful. Basically his points or questions are as follows: we request a share in the fruits of our labours; we do not get enough; why should the mining industry be kept alive through black poverty; we seek justice, *not* equality. In the narrator's descriptions, however, there are strangely ambiguous elements (as has been noted already by several commentators). The initial image of 'bull voice' (twice on p157), echoed by 'bull throat' (158), involves a suggestion of strength certainly, but also of repugnance and revulsion. Next a note of contrast is struck: '[T]he voice has magic in it, and it has threatening in it, and it is as though Africa itself were in it' (158). The further description of the voice reveals that Paton's intention is far from straightforward: 'a voice to move thousands, with no brain behind it to tell it what to say' (158). An extended question about the effect of the voice seems to indicate that Paton is *not* suggesting an actual lack of intelligence behind this voice, but rather asking about the consequences of the thoughts it inspires in the audience:

What if this voice should say words that it speaks already in private, should rise and not fall again, should rise and rise and rise, and the people rise with it, should madden them with thoughts of rebellion and dominion, with thoughts of power and possession? (158)

Nevertheless the initial suggestion remains, hovering over this later question and making it all the more menacing. Soon afterwards the narrator addresses John Kumalo as if actually encouraging him to go further, to test his oratorical power to its limit, but then comes a reminder that Kumalo seems in fact to be afraid of his own power. Now that the narrator is mocking Kumalo for *not* having a martyr's spirit, the contradiction is indeed troubling. On the one hand Paton builds up a sense of the danger in Kumalo's words; on the other,

he comes close to inviting us to share in the two policemen's contempt from the sidelines for Kumalo's apparent cowardice. Such distinctly biased treatment is a major weakness in the novel, betraying the extent to which Paton himself was affected and confused by the white fear which so concerned him.

In Paton's handling of Absalom Kumalo's trial there is much stress on the respect that should be shown in court. At first one might be inclined to think, because of the emphatic repetition of key words such as 'law' and 'judge', that Paton's tone is satirical. If one considers the handling of the situation more comprehensively, however, it becomes apparent that such a conclusion would be wide of the mark. Indeed as we move into paragraphs 4 and 5 strong criticism emerges, but its focus is the white group, not the law. Clearly Paton fully endorses that great liberal hope: the incorruptibility of the courts. The judge's summary of Kumalo's defence relates strongly to the major concerns of the novel ('the disaster that has overwhelmed our native tribal society'; 'the case of our own complicity in this disaster'). These echoes help to endorse the impression created of the soundness of the Judge's viewpoint. Furthermore, his assertion that 'a judge may not trifle with the law because the society is defective' is an echo of what the narrator has already argued in chapter 5, so that we can be fairly certain of its representing Paton's own attitude: the rule of law should be upheld. Once this decision is made, the view that 'under the law a man is held responsible for his deeds' (171) follows logically. Yet in a novel with such a deterministic plot, and so much reliance on the mode of naturalism, it is a surprising decision to have reached. It is indeed curious that in some ways circumstances/environment are crucial factors for Paton, whereas in other ways belief in individual responsibility seems to be seized on to prop up his liberal principles.

John Kumalo's treacherous behaviour at the trial in order to rescue his son further compounds his apparent malignancy, and when he ultimately throws his brother out of his house, he is made to seem no more than a vicious, unscrupulous bully. The narrator points out that Stephen Kumalo had come to tell his brother about the corrupting force of power (182), and the violent dismissal naturally seems to offer proof complete. The impossibility of reconciliation between these brothers (one from the country, one from the city) is an essential part of the deterministic logic that holds sway over much of the novel. On the other hand, reconciliation is shown to be possible between Jarvis (Senior) and Stephen Kumalo, both from the country.

Msimangu's decision to enter a contemplative religious community derives from Christian belief in the power of prayer: it is implicit that he will devote his life to praying for the healing of the land and reconciliation be-

tween the races. His savings will assist Stephen Kumalo in the fostering of healthy rural communal life. These are touching but nonetheless disappointing gestures. It is not so much Msimangu's choice which one would wish to criticise, as Paton, who offers no *other* suggestion for a way of dealing with the slums and social rehabilitation of the city (apart from Jarvis Senior's thoughtful cheque donation to the Boys' Club, which turns out to be the only positive and active response to the ills of Johannesburg *within* that city in the novel). What is most disturbing is the apparently complete split between the reprehensible activist, John Kumalo, and the total non-activist, Msimangu, in Paton's representation of urban black leaders.

Last in a sequence of optimistic trends discernible on Stephen Kumalo's return to Ndotsheni, the black agricultural demonstrator, Napoleon, arrives, to begin translating into practice Arthur Jarvis's liberal ideals, at least in relation to a rural area. At first Kumalo and the agricultural demonstrator are very friendly towards each other. However, when the young man shows eagerness for the people to be freed from dependence on the whites' milk, a clash occurs (227–228). It might be seen as a conflict between the kind of black who believes in and accepts trusteeship, and the type who rejects it. With much force Napoleon repeats the crucial point which Msimangu stated at the beginning of the novel, and which John Kumalo also emphasised in different ways:

Umfundisi, it was the white man who gave us so little land, it was the white man who took us away from the land to go to work, and we were ignorant also. It is all these things together that have made this valley desolate. Therefore, what this good white man does is only a repayment. (228)

Neither Kumalo nor Paton seems to have any real or adequate answer to the consequent, grim question raised by Napoleon: 'If this valley were restored, as you are always asking in your prayers, do you think it would hold all the people of this tribe if they all returned?' (228). What is of major significance nonetheless is that Paton has deliberately ventured to include such a question. This kind of breadth and honesty makes it impossible to dismiss the novel as unrealistic and sentimental.

Paton's theme of blindness and darkness is brought to a climax as Stephen Kumalo prepares to ascend the mountain on the day of Absalom's execution, and meets Jarvis by chance. In response to Kumalo's gratitude for the demonstrator, the milk, and the offer of a new church, Jarvis insists on his own reason for gratitude: 'I have seen a man ... who was in darkness till you found him' (232). In this situation of mutual appreciation and understanding

one is at the centre of what can be called Paton's Christian vision. Watson accuses Paton, however, of not ever really questioning 'the applicability of the Sermon on the Mount to a political programme' (38). One cannot get far with this sort of response as it betrays a very limited idea, in the first place, of the Sermon on the Mount and, in particular, of Christ's promises in the Beatitudes: 'Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied ... happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5; 6, 10). In any case it would certainly be simplistic to suggest that Paton meant the ending of the novel to be regarded as a solution for the ills of South Africa. Lewis's verdict is that '*CTBC* connects with prevailing liberal currents in tending towards the segregationist prescriptions of Alfred Hoernlé. Paton's novel evinces an obsessive preoccupation with some pristine traditional ethos which ... is the only feasible locus for blacks' (62). It might be more accurate to say that through his ending Paton gives serious consideration to the Hoernlé prescription. The nostalgic element in the final section, however, indicates that Paton *wishes* this solution were possible, but ultimately finds it wanting.

In one way then Morphet may be right to state that 'the novel could provide no answer because there was no answer available in the society and its history' (1983:8). On the other hand, despite Paton's evasiveness in relation to John Kumalo, one has again to remember the polyphonicity³ of the novel – those many voices which *are* given scope, most emphatically that of the agricultural demonstrator. The meeting of the two old men on the mountain does *not* answer his question. What the mountain episode achieves is to hint at a kind of personal responsiveness and wish for rapprochement that will need to be widespread for any meaningful solution to be achieved. The activities which James Jarvis's change of heart prompts him to undertake at this stage are appropriate for him as part of a rural community. Just how such a wish is to be widely fostered in practice, and particularly in the urban areas (a problem to be faced by Jarvis himself because of his relocation to Johannesburg) is not part of Paton's project. What is therefore most unfortunate is that while Paton did recognise the inadequacy of the rural prescription solution, he was so opposed to the idea of black activism as to present a distorted conception of it via John Kumalo.

Oliver Walker: *Wanton City*

(published 1949; set c1947–1948)

Like *CTBC*, this novel was written *prior* to the 1948 Nationalist Party victory. However, it is very likely that Walker had read *CTBC* and is trying to render a more authentic sense of Johannesburg life from a white point of view. The method of the novel is impressionistic, even naturalistic, as if Walker wants to rivet our attention on the ordinary, day-by-day experiences of an actual white journalist and to avoid anything that could be construed as liberal sentimentality. Thus there is no attempt to claim sustained involvement or large vision of an Arthur Jarvis type.

On the other hand there is an underlying current of strategically placed reminders of the reality of South African society; the harsh facts of political discrimination against blacks keep obtruding unexpectedly. Most actual events in the novel do not involve blacks at all. The dealings of the protagonist, Peter Random, are with his fellow white journalists; with the white musician Astrid Larsen, the artist Anton Vermaak, the socialites Sonia Kalinski, Thelma Kullmann, and Theodora Stutterheim, the fake Russian boxer Count Serge Resorgsky, the Scots ex-teacher Jean McNab, and the old violinist Lyubatovitch. Thus a deliberate kind of gap is created. One has to ask, though, whether the method is sufficiently troubling to be effective.⁴

One of the main episodes that explicitly concern the broader South African situation is the City Hall meeting addressed by Smuts (104–105) as a winding up of the United Party pre-election campaign in 1948. His plea for unity and an end to racialism (in the sense of English-Afrikaner antagonism) leads Random to wonder, 'What was at the bottom of Dutch grievances?' (106). Although his companion, Astrid, is revolted by the Afrikaner mob which tries to beat up a 'rooinek' afterwards (108), Random has been given a lively affirmation of just how pertinent Smuts's anxiety is. However, the next experience of violence is at the boxing match in which Serge, having beaten his opponent, Vos, is assaulted by spectators and then later set upon by four men. As no political overtones are apparent in this episode, it has the effect of somewhat neutralising the City Hall fracas.

Walker's method, if my assumption is correct, is even more noticeable in the case of Random's involvement as investigative reporter with a strike at Booysen's Deep mine. (This strike cannot be related to the AMWU strike of 1946 as it is preceded in the novel by Smuts's 1948 election meeting. In fact I have not been able to find any information about a Booysen's Deep strike at this particular time.) Because the episode comes towards the end of the novel

it is presumably meant to have a kind of climactic force. To increase the tension Walker has Random accompanied by the photographer, Lariviere, whom we already know to be flagrantly racist. When the mine officials seem to be at the mercy of the crowd of chanting Sotho miners, the police fire into the air and then proceed to use batons and tear-gas. As this measure proves only partly effectual, however, the police resort to what Lariviere had privately recommended, namely 'a dose of lead' (191). At this point he advises Random that they should leave rapidly. Random's final reflection is a telling one: 'Ahead were the canyoned streets and the big offices. They were the facade. Behind and below was this great pit of black human lava toiling and moiling in the deeps of the gold-shot Reef on which the city stood' (192). Walker then swiftly re-erects the facade and the reader is shifted abruptly into concern with Jean MacNab who has become a 'swingster sensation'. One is left with a strong sense of bathos and inconclusiveness.

On the other hand, in relation to Random's newspaper, *The Comet*, Walker offers a certain amount of contact with what lies behind and beyond the facade. When the journalists hear that the editor, Spike, is in trouble with the directors, it is assumed that they have disapproved of the leading article in which he demanded a real programme of change from Smuts. Later, however, it turns out that the directors' concern was with circulation and advertising. At this stage Peter offers the suggestion of a bi-weekly page in one of the black languages. No more is heard of this possibility, however; we lurch next into the welcoming party for Astrid Larsen's ex-husband, Lomont. When *The Comet* is forced to close down (in tandem with the closure of the novel) the account of the leader in the final issue reveals that it was a paper that tried to tell the truth (213). Accordingly we are informed that Spike's new venture is to be called *South African Truth*. And now we have one of the novel's rare moments of illumination: when Spike persuades Random to join him rather than return to England, he packs into two sentences his justification for the chosen title: 'I tell you the whole structure of this country's crazy. Why? Because it's founded on the fundamental falsity that God made Africa for the white man baas not the African' (215). Peter's decision to stay presumably offers a slender hope to the reader that the truth about South Africa is more likely to emerge than previously. Chiefly, however, one feels exasperated that Walker has chosen so quirky and risky a method of trying to tell the truth himself.

Lewis Sowden: *The crooked bluegum*

(published 1955; set in the late forties and early fifties)

It is not easy to decide to which period the events of the novel correspond. The explicit references to the black coalminers' strike of 1946 (123); to the Alexandra Bus Boycott; and to the erection of Shanty Town of 1944 (124) place the main part of the plot in the mid-forties. But an earlier reference (52–53) to the 'year when the world price of gold fell' is confusing – the years 1953/54 would seem to be indicated in that case. Perhaps Sowden is deliberately muddling actual chronology; or perhaps he is actually confused. Certainly the novel's period predates the coming to power of the Nationalist Party.

Sowden seems to have felt that coloureds had been neglected in South African fiction; accordingly his novel focuses on *their* relationship with whites, while blacks or Indians are peripheral figures at most. My impression, after consulting several available texts on Johannesburg's coloured townships, is that he has chosen an imagined, symbolic place rather than an actual coloured area of the time. The whites in their suburb of Westdorp are separated from a growing coloured shanty town called Claratown by a buffer zone. Once it boasted a large plantation; now only a single, crooked bluegum remains in what has become known as Westdorp Waste.

The protagonist is David Lotter, youngest of the three sons of Izak Lotter, ex-miner and phthisis pensioner. Izak, a virulent racist, regards the Waste as a natural barrier intended by God. His two older sons, Jake and Abe, share their father's prejudices but David, who as a child felt great fondness for the family's coloured maid, Sanna, grows up eager to befriend people of different races. Even as a schoolboy he informs a teacher of his wish to teach coloureds, and later, while engaged in a four-year BA and Teacher's Diploma course at Wits University, he does voluntary teaching at Claratown, although these part-time classes turn out a failure.

As the novel progresses, the conflict between whites and coloureds escalates. Jake, champion of the Westdorp whites, successfully opposes the proposals by the Claratown Township Board for turning the Waste into a park and playing-ground. His death from pneumonia has a drastic effect on the cartage contracting company run by the two brothers, leading the less efficient 'be to 'resort' to business deals with coloureds. However, Lotter & Lotter has to close soon afterwards because of Claratown gangsters, according to Abe. Whatever the truth of the matter, he believes he has good cause to resent coloureds even more than previously.

Abe's initial excitement in his new job as miner soon turns to complaint and vilification. In particular he is incensed by any attempt on the part of the coloured man, Jonker, in his gang, to put himself on an equal footing with whites. When Abe is killed in a mine stope accident it is assumed at first that *his* was the voice heard singing 'Onward Christian soldiers' to keep up his gang's morale. Later it is discovered that Jonker had in fact lived longest, and in celebration of what turns out to have been *his* heroism, the Claratown people sing him to his grave with that very hymn.

Meanwhile racial tensions increase in the larger society. The narrator refers at this stage to the black coalminers' strike (123), the Alexandra Bus Boycott, and the erection of Shanty Town. Now the second main strand of the novel is introduced: David meets and falls in love with Maisie Johns, who had to leave school because she was a suspected coloured. Despite the opposition of his two sisters-in-law and his father (who obliterates David's name from the family bible), David and Maisie decide to marry. A telling discovery is that the sister-in-law who made the chief fuss about David and Maisie turns out to have lived originally in the same street as the grandmother who brought up Maisie. In furious indignation Maisie lashes Mrs Abe with her belt.

Although Mrs Abe is well and truly silenced, other painful consequences of David and Maisie's relationship cannot be avoided: Maisie, as post office employee, is told to keep away from the public counter; David's school board refuses to renew his appointment. This joint suffering leads to an intensification of David's feeling of solidarity with the coloureds, and he accordingly takes a post at the new Claratown Mission High School. The belief of the coloured community that David is on their side is indeed the crucial factor in the dénouement of the novel.

Defying the Westdorp Ratepayers' Association, a coloured called 'Big Josh' sets up a kind of shanty town in the Waste. Promising his followers that if they keep order and avoid any fighting or violence, they have nothing to fear, he appeals for piped water and sends out a team of schoolboys to collect money for the purchase of land. Meanwhile the town council puts pressure on Dr Philo, chairman of the Claratown Township Board, to control his people. Having asked Fr Digby (from the Claraville Mission), as well as David, to help him persuade the squatters to move away, Dr Philo tells the crowd that they are being fooled if they believe they can buy land in the Waste. David, however, to the astonishment of Dr Philo and his board, actually advises the people to stay put.

In his portrayal of this event Sowden seems to be intent on subverting previous white notions of agitators. Apart from Big Josh, who carefully

avoids a confrontational stance, the chief apparent 'agitator' is actually David. When stones are thrown by hostile whites (including Izak Lotter), David is struck and killed. At this point the squatters perceive that the whites have callously set their shacks alight. However, when the police arrive in strength, the whites and the squatters are equally anxious to leave rapidly while Big Josh and his supporters are taken away.

David's degree of compassionate involvement with the coloured cause reminds one of Arthur Jarvis in *CTBC*. Yet here Sowden, whether conscious of doing so or not, actually conflates the liberal white with the black rebel, John Kumalo. Thus, whereas Arthur Jarvis is killed by black burglars, David is killed while expressing solidarity as a passive resister with the coloured community in the face of obdurate white prejudice.

Contextualisation: novels in group B (Umfazi; Mopeli-Paulus & Lanham; Rooke). Background to Indian crisis of 1949

Edgar Brookes and C de B Webb in their *History of Natal* refer to the ongoing manoeuvres amongst Natal white politicians and Durban city councillors generally against the Indian community (1991:290). When it became clear that repatriation was not going to solve the problem, white agitation about what was referred to as Indian 'penetration' intensified. As far back as 1939 the Durban City Council (DCC) had planned to expropriate Indian-owned property. Although the plan was delayed, they eventually used the Slum Clearance Act and the Housing Ordinance to go ahead despite massive opposition from Indians and certain white liberals (notably Edgar Brookes and Mabel Palmer). Agitation for the legal segregation of Indians led to the passing, despite mass protests by the Natal Indian Congress, of the Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Bill on 28 April 1943.

Smuts alleged that the Indians had brought the legislation upon themselves:

[T]hey have forced our hand, and we are today faced with this position that in Durban, which is a European city and which we are determined to maintain a European city – we are faced in Durban today with large-scale penetration. (Db:88–89)

Indignantly, Mrs Ballinger reminded Smuts that Durban was 'a South African city, and that like all South African cities, its wealth and development had

been built up by the combined efforts of a number of racial groups' (89). Nevertheless, allowing for certain minor concessions made after objections by Hofmeyr, the Bill was passed and became known as the 'Pegging Act'. In Bagwandeen's sardonic view, it 'showed a bankruptcy of statesmanship on the part of Smuts. He allowed the promulgation of legislation which was a contradiction of the basic principle of democracy when a war was being fought to establish a broader democracy' (94). One positive form of action resulted: the Anti-Segregation Committee formed in opposition to the Pegging Act revealed, comments Bagwandeen, 'the shift from moderate gradualism in Indian Politics to new aggressiveness' (103).

Continued vociferous opposition to the 'Pegging Act' on the part of Indians, and the Anti-Segregation Committee in particular, led on 8 April 1944 to what was known as the 'Pretoria Agreement'. At a meeting in Pretoria between the Natal Indian Congress and Natal White politicians, including G Heaton Nicholls (by this time Administrator of the Province), it was agreed to set up a form of licensing board with joint white and Indian representation which would 'control and regulate future juxtapositional residential occupation of Europeans and Indians' (112). The device was a clever compromise on the part of Indian congressmen, but also provided a 'face-saving strategy' for Smuts on the eve of the Commonwealth Conference, and a 'tremendous boost to the ego of Nicholls who wanted autonomy for the Provincial Council' (113). Unfortunately, vitriolic criticism from the wider Indian community, as well as anger from whites, led Nicholls to tamper seriously with the intentions of the Pretoria Agreement in the form of new legislation, the 'Draft Occupation Control Ordinance'. The Natal Indian Congress regarded this ordinance as a violation of the agreement, while the DCC sponsored a mass meeting of whites in protest against it. So extreme was the bigotry of the whites that when Douglas Mitchell (MEC) began reading out a message from Smuts pleading for an acceptance of the necessity of compromise on the issue, 'the seething audience exploded into disorder and abuse, and [Mitchell] had to be led away by the Police Commandant for Durban because of the threat of violence' (119). As a result, a new and more drastic ordinance was formulated but the central Government would not accept it and the 'Pegging Act' remained in force.

At the end of 1945, soon after the ending of the war, a revitalised Natal Indian Congress sent a delegation to Smuts to demand, amongst other matters, 'the extension of adult franchise on the common roll to Natal Indians, the abrogation of the 'Pegging Act', veto of the Housing and Expropriation Ordinances' (Bagwandeen:147). Smuts's dilemma at this stage was that 'on the one hand Indians had moved to the left, and on the other European opinion in

Natal was consolidating as never before against the Indian community' (148). Sadly, but understandably, he chose to placate the whites and formulated a new Bill which became law on 2 May 1946 as the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act (commonly known as the 'Ghetto Act'). Hofmeyr accepted the Bill as a compromise, although apparently he told Smuts: '[W]e are making a surrender to European prejudice in Natal which I for one shall find it difficult to justify' (152). On the day after the Bill became law, 6 000 Indians marched down West Street protesting 'Down with the Ghetto Bill!' (157), and as a more sustained response a countrywide passive resistance campaign by Indians commenced on 13 June 1946 (166).

In February 1947 *The Forum* editor pointed to 'Natal's grave responsibility' regarding the question of representation for Indians in local government. Douglas Mitchell's proposals ('election on separate municipal voters' rolls of a maximum of two Indians to city councils') were regarded as 'eminently reasonable', but only 'a minimum concession' (9(47):29). It was imperative, declared the editor, 'that the Indians be given such a voice – it should be regarded as a right not a favour'. Furthermore he took the opportunity to remind Natal (and the people of Durban in particular) about the non-implementation of the 'Pretoria Agreement', together with the 'painful and in many ways tragic experiences of the intervening years' in terms of European- Asiatic relationships (29).

Indian crisis of 1949

Henry Gibbs, in *Twilight in South Africa*, attempted to reconstruct the origin of the riots. A young fourteen-year-old black, George Madondo, used to frequent a shop owned by Harrilal Basanth, who believed that Madondo belonged to a gang that had been causing him trouble. The story told by Danragh, employed by Basanth to help attend to customers, was that when Danragh told Madondo (on 13 January 1949) that he had no cigarettes, Madondo 'caught hold of his arms and slapped him twice in the face' (97). When Basanth then seized Madondo to interrogate him, Madondo hurt his head in the shop window while trying to free himself. Madondo's version was that he had been peaceably awaiting the arrival of his brother when Basanth came up, 'caught hold of him, and pushed him back through a big shop window head first' (98). Madondo had to be taken to hospital to have his wounds, caused by broken glass, stitched. Whichever version is correct, what did occur is that Madondo had to go to hospital, at which point Basanth 'departed in great haste, chased by number of natives, to his shop'. A fight then started in which more and more blacks and Indians became involved.



Group with anti-'Ghetto' Bill banner



Guard being kept by a soldier at one of the main access roads to Cato Manor during the 1949 riots in Durban

Although police quelled the fighting in central Durban, the vengeful resentment felt by both blacks and Indians was unleashed in the outskirts of Durban. Further violence was caused by the circulation of 'wildly exaggerated stories'. At midday on 14 January a large group of blacks (Gibbs mentions a figure of over 2 000) 'suddenly appeared in the Indian commercial quarter, armed with sticks and stones, smashing windows, looting shops, attacking every Indian in sight' (101). It was reported that some Europeans encouraged the blacks with cries of 'Hit the coolies!' (101). Both within the city and outside violent disturbances broke out throughout the remainder of that day and night, and for the next four days 'riots raged' (103). Gibbs gives the following statistics: 142 people killed, 1 087 injured. One factory, 58 stores and 247 dwellings were destroyed; two factories, 652 stores and 1 285 dwellings were damaged (103).

The commission appointed to investigate the cause of the riots, held, according to Gibbs, 'the principal contributory factors' to be:

- (1) Increasing lack of self-discipline by the natives;
- (2) Bad precepts and bad examples;
- (3) the characters of the parties to the riots [the Commission regarded the native as primarily responsible for the aggression; when his 'vener of civilization ... breaks ... he again becomes one of the warriors of Chaka'];
- (4) Increasing tension between Natives and Indians [reasons including the Indians' 'high-handed methods and self-assurance' in relation to Blacks; irresponsible miscegenation; treatment of Blacks in Indian-owned buses; ruthless exploitation by Indian merchants];
- (5) Unsatisfactory local conditions. (105)

The Durban newspaper, *Indian Views*, which appeared every Wednesday, was not able to comment until the following week, Wednesday 19 January. On that day the headline read, 'Story of the anti-Indian pogrom', and the sub-heading stated: 'From Thursday the 13th to Sunday the 16th a reign of terror was let loose against Indians in Durban and district by frenzied native mobs' (35(24):1). Not surprisingly, the events were reported from an entirely Indian perspective. Nevertheless, one must credit the journalist with having apparently amassed details of every possible incident; virtually each new paragraph gives further evidence of Indian fear and suffering.

In the following issue of *Indian Views* the editor, after summarising the riots as 'the most bestial orgy of loot and arson, of massacre, murder and rape ever witnessed in this country since the days of Tshaka', asked 'What does the average Indian feel and think of the tragedy?' (35(25):1). In line

with the overwhelming tendency in the previous issue not to find any possible cause to lay blame on the Indian community, the editor referred to a 'feeling of bewildered astonishment at what has happened as at the happening of something impossible, inconceivable' (1). However, these sentiments were followed by comments which revealed a far more enlightened position. The editor found no evidence of 'any feeling of hatred and revenge against the native people or even against those of them who assailed them. There [was], instead, a disposition to regard their assailants as ignorant dupes of others to be pitied as such' (1). Most tellingly, the editor went on to reveal:

But there is bitterness in their heart against these others who, they feel, are the real criminals answerable for the crime before man and God ... these are the people who had not a word of solace or sympathy to offer them in the hour of their travail and they are the people for whom even the murder of their women and children by a barbarian mob gone mad was an occasion to be utilised against them for the slinging of mud. (1)

This line of thinking was affirmed in the next issue of *Indian Views* via the report of comments made by Edgar Brookes in his presidential address at the annual general meeting of the South African Institute of Race Relations: 'Much of the responsibility for what has happened rest [sic] on those Europeans who have fanned anti-Asiatic feeling in Durban and made of it in recent years a city of hate. This feeling has communicated itself to the Zulus, and in some instances has been deliberately spread among them' (34(26):5).

In its February 1949 leader *Trek* rejected the explanation of secret agent agitators as of secondary importance. Regarding the Durban Riots as 'a nodal point in our social evolution' (13(2):16), the editor considered the 'struggle for existence', exacerbated by the rising cost of living, a more valid idea of the motivating force behind the Zulus' acts of violence. Accordingly readers were asked to recall how members of all political parties participated in the anti-Indian agitation initiated three years previously (16). Thus all of them shared a 'measure of complicity'. Furthermore the editor refused to join those who condoned 'to some extent the assault on the Indians, on the grounds that the Natives suffered from black-marketeering and exploitation' (16).

D Molteno tackled the question of anti-Indian agitation in the next issue of *Trek*: 'Although Durban has often claimed to be the most "British" city in SA, its anti-Indian agitators', argued Molteno, 'are strangers to the British sense of honour, to British grit, to British phlegm and to that inner gentleness that has made the conception of "English Gentlemen" – a conception entirely

above and beyond all class significance' (13(3):1). The unfortunately jingoistic slant pervaded the article, especially in relation to what Molteno felt could be learned from the 'durability and stability' of the British Empire. Nevertheless, some important points were made. He referred to the bizarre irony of Union representatives arguing at the UN Assembly two or three years previously that Europeans cannot share with Indians. Dr Malan, the prime minister, seemed to the editor more concerned about overseas press comment than about the actual disturbances. Molteno was careful to observe that the 'leaders of the African people' were not responsible for instigating the riots, and spurned the Minister of Justice's complacent view that the attacks were *not* directed at Europeans or blacks (1).⁵

In the same issue of *Trek* excerpts from overseas press reports on the Durban riots were presented. The American journal, *Nation*, put the matter boldly and persuasively:

It is the 'white' men of Premier Daniel F. Malan's government and, to a somewhat lesser degree, of Premier Smuts's government before it, who must bear the responsibility for South Africa's tragedy ... there is good reason to believe that much of the hostility between these two groups was deliberately fanned by their overlords, who dread the Negro masses and who have a score to settle with the Indians for bringing South Africa's condition to the attention of the United Nations. (17)

Unity moves were fostered by Communists in the leadership core of the ANC, as well as the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses, who noted how the riots underscored the point that polarisation fragmented the liberation struggle. Co-operation was thus both necessary and desirable. One of the immediate benefits of the new spirit of unity was the signing of the so-called Doctors' Pact by Alfred Xuma, president of the ANC, G M Naicker of the NIC and Yusuf Dadoo of the TIC—a joint declaration of co-operation which dedicated all three congresses to action against the race policies of the Union Government, and which was to lead to the formation of the Joint Planning Council of the Defiance Campaign of 1952 (RD:384).

The novels

Umfazi: *Amadodana Ami [My sons]*

(published 1950; set in the late forties)

The use of the Zulu word for woman as pseudonym implies that the author is a woman. The fact of the dedication to Albert Schweitzer; the reference within the text to friendship with an Anglican priest called Father Trevor (obviously intended to suggest Trevor Huddleston); and the name of the publisher (France-Suisse) all suggested to me initially that there were enough clues to track down the author's actual identity. In fact I am no nearer now to this knowledge than when I started, and the publisher remains as mysterious as the author. From another point of view the novel is puzzling in that it is hard to understand why the writer felt sufficiently competent to write a work of fiction. Very likely *CTBC* was its inspiration, yet the novel is so feeble in comparison as to make one wonder about the author's critical capacity. Perhaps s/he felt that the Durban riots warranted attention; perhaps s/he imagined it possible to ring certain important changes on Paton's novel. If the former is the reason, it is odd that the riots are so perfunctorily dealt with at the beginning. If the latter is the case, one has to admit that the plot involves a young *white* man who goes to Johannesburg to look for a black man. As the search is conducted virtually off-stage, however, the change is no more than a gesture. Altogether the novel lacks adequate momentum and the development of appropriate climaxes.

Through the friendship between the protagonist, John Walton, and the Afrikaner, Jan van der Merwe, the author offers a hint of Afrikaner-English rapprochement, and also uses encounters between John and Jan's circles of friends to introduce discussions of South Africa's sociopolitical problems. As the characters have been so flimsily created, however, their dialogue lacks even the force of Arthur Jarvis's writings in *CTBC*. The author fares slightly better in handling the major set of relationships in the novel: those between John and his childhood domestic servant, Songiya, together with her two sons. These two, Joseph and Solomon, together with John, are presumably the particular sons referred to in the title, although it has a wider symbolic reference as if to suggest that Mother Africa herself is lamenting the divisions and conflict between her children.

It seems that the author intends the plot to revolve around a series of assaults. Somewhat bathetically the report of the multiple atrocities in the anti-Indian riots is followed by the reported assault on a black night

watchman by three young whites. When Solomon runs away to Johannesburg (after being hit by his employer), John decides to get a job and house there; find Solomon; employ Songiya as his housekeeper; and have her, together with her two sons, live with him. After the plan has been carried out, Joseph has a dream of brutal young whites beating up an old black woman whom he recognises as his mother. The climax of this series of assaults, real or surreal, is the murder of Joseph himself when he is dressed smartly for the wedding of his patron, John – his outfit is construed as a form of impudence by two Afrikaans-speaking whites. The series provides some semblance of dramatic coherence for the novel as a whole, but as the climactic murder of Joseph is carried out by Afrikaners, the wider implications, in terms of South African racism more generally, seem distorted.

In Johannesburg John also becomes friends with an Indian tailor, Saran Naidoo, and his fiancée, Kathleen, who are arrested under the Immorality Act and given harsh sentences. Having made up his mind to attend their trial against his employer's wishes, John is sacked. This set of circumstances is unfortunately quite separate from those involving Songiya and her sons; no attempt is made to bring these characters together, or to connect Saran in any way with the initial Durban events. Further perfunctory weaving involves John's engagement to his employer's daughter; her influence succeeds in winning not only a deathbed pardon for John from her father, but the offer of taking over his business!

Some grasp of the suffering undergone by Saran and Kathleen temporarily raises the mostly tepid level of interest in this novel. The only other reasonably effective treatment concerns Solomon's bitterness, which becomes extreme after his brother's murder. When John first finds him it is clear that he does not share his mother's and brother's tolerant Christian viewpoint; eventually he is filled with hatred of all whites. The effect on John is profound, giving him an awareness of his complicity in white guilt. Although the author mercifully avoids didactic Christianising in the course of the novel, s/he finally foists on the reader baldly obtrusive moralising about the sad loss of Christian values in the modern world.

A S Mopeli-Paulus and Peter Lanham: *Blanket boy's moon* (published 1953; set in the late forties)

Two reasons *could* be given for not including this novel in my project: the likelihood that the novel is in large part the work of black writer A S Mopeli-Paulus,

and that Peter Lanham's role has been largely that of editor (but see discussion in cited articles)⁶; and that the crucial concern of the novel is with politics and culture in Lesotho, not South Africa. Nevertheless, since there is ambiguity about the exact degree to which Lanham was involved in the actual work of fictional representation, and since the protagonist, Monare, is presented as living in Johannesburg and Durban during much of the time encompassed within the novel, I decided to compromise with my overall policy. A particular inducement was the vivid attention given in the novel to the Durban Riots, and to the unusual friendship, perhaps unique in South African fiction, between Monare and two Indian families, one in Durban, the other in what was then Lourenço Marques.

Most critics are rightly preoccupied with the aspect of ritual murder in the novel: Monare, as village headman, feels himself bound to obey his chief's instructions when parts of the flesh from a neighbouring villager have to be obtained as protective medicine while he is still alive. To Monare's horror, the victim turns out to be his great friend, Koso, and the deed, which inevitably causes Koso's death, leaves Monare driven by guilt and anguish. The larger purpose of the book is an attempt to understand why the practice of *loreti* had been restored at this point in Lesotho's history; the need for chiefs to try to regain some of their traditional power in the context of British colonial power is posited as the chief cause.

Monare, having been a successful businessman in Johannesburg (he and Koso had engaged in the sale of tailor-made trousers; and the murder had been committed during an interim period while visiting their families in Lesotho), has to flee to Durban to escape the search for the guilty parties. This is the part of the novel that chiefly concerns me. For here, as dock worker, Monare saves the life of Abdul Wahid, the Moulvie (an Islamic religious leader), when a large sack of sugar almost crushes him. This act is a prelude to Monare's extreme bravery at the height of the riots when he has followed a band of angry fellow-blacks, wondering what will happen when his people in general decide to rise against the whites (168.) Resisting the group's frenzied passion for violence, Monare unexpectedly comes upon the beleaguered Moulvie. Although his own life is in great danger, he succeeds in saving the Indian and his whole family. One of the most startling scenes in the novel occurs when the Moulvie takes his family and Monare to a designated place of safety in Durban, and has to pacify his fellow Indians by insisting that Monare is to be trusted. Though I cannot find official records of actions such as Monare's, the fictional hero is acclaimed for his dramatic intervention, and can only say in modest explanation: '[T]he Moulvie was my friend' (173–175).⁷ A new period of hardship for Monare follows because his Lesotho

'home-boys' at the docks are divided in their opinions about his pro-Indian stance, and many actually refuse to communicate with him.

When it turns out that detectives are now in Durban on the track of the ritual murderers, Monare is given temporary refuge with Abdul Wahid and his family, while a plan is worked out for him to go to Lourenço Marques and find employment there through the agency of another Moulvie. Here follows what is surely one of the most extraordinary inter-racial friendships in South African fiction. Monare and Wahid's son, Ghulam Hussain, become so attached that Monare is converted to Islam, to the extent of taking on a new name, Dost Ghulam (190). A similar pattern of close friendship is repeated in Moçambique, until Monare has to make an abrupt departure on hearing that his son has been trapped in a Reef mining disaster. Also of some relevance for my exploration are Monare's discussions with the white man, Newington, who drives him to Swaziland on the first stage of his risky trip to Moçambique. Newington is full of semi-paternalistic wisdom about how to run South Africa, and one wonders how much of this material was imposed by Lanham, rather than part of Mopeli-Paulus's original narrative. What is indeed curious is that both Abdul Wahid and Newington are also characters in Lanham's later novel, *The road ahead*. This overlap has not been previously noticed, and makes all the more puzzling and intriguing the relationship between the black author and the white man whose editorial services he sought.

D Rooke: *Ratoons*⁸

(published 1953; set in the twenties to forties)

Blanket boy's moon refers to the way Natal whites, both English and Afrikaners, feared the increasing number of Indians. Rooke takes up this aspect as the central core of her novel. However, she makes no attempt to keep close to the historical record. The Zulu-Indian riots with which the novel culminates match those of 1949, yet the fictional events would have had to take place in the thirties for the chronology to proceed logically.⁹ Furthermore, although there are some Durban scenes in the course of the novel, the final, climactic ones occur on and around the Anguses' farm, Westongate, on the Natal South Coast, the main setting for the plot. Rooke notes the animosity of certain booksellers to the novel when it first appeared and presumes that this was prompted by racist or sexist feeling. White animosity can readily be understood when one notes the degree to which Rooke persuades the reader that white domination, oppression and manipulation are the leading causes of the

violent eruption between Zulus and Indians. Close study of the novel reveals, however, that Rooke has achieved this aim without ever allowing the reader to lose sympathy with the whites. Rooke's method is a risky one, involving a contradictorily and ambivalently positioned white narrator-heroine, Helen Angus, who is no ideal figure to be set apart from her fellow whites. Although her precarious status as quasi-wife to her father, John Angus, and quasi-sister to her child, Nicky, seems to afford her the potential for openness towards Indians and their culture, the racist influences that surround her at every turn cause her to fail tragically – at a certain point – to sustain a crossing of cultural borders. The disparities between Helen's moments of multicultural openness and her lapses into racist manipulation create our access to the kind of challenge offered by the novel as a whole.

Helen is not only appropriate but also crucially necessary to fulfil the function of narrator. As daughter to John Angus she is inescapably enmeshed in the whites' urge to maintain economic domination. This takes a particularly marked form in John because of his own father's dissoluteness, and because of competition in the cane trade from the more financially successful Drew family. The fact that John's land is entailed makes his need for a male heir a kind of mania. Helen's legally ineligible gender, on the other hand, keeps her in a position of potential estrangement. Furthermore, John blames her for the death of his wife and of his frail heir. Later he recompenses himself by taking over Helen's love child as his own, and brutally attacks her when he assumes that she was responsible for losing the tiny Nicky in the cane.

The Indians' first crossing of the Awetuli bridge into John Angus's farm is presented by Rooke as a border created in terms of domination in relation to the whites, and in hatred in relation to the Zulu farm workers, especially the Induna, Zetke, who from the very first singles out Leela for intense loathing.¹⁰ The novel traces the development of tensions between the three groups, especially through the younger generation: Nicky; his lover, Chanjaldi; her half-sister, Amoya; and her half-brother, Sowa, until the eruption of violence between the two dominated groups seems inescapable. The novel is rich in partly humorous, gripping episodes in which Rooke critically interrogates and exposes white racist mythology, offering hints of alternative possibilities but without any moralising.

Although John, like most cane farmers at this time, has employed Indian labourers, he is thoroughly contemptuous of them. Helen is not altogether free either from the patronising and mocking attitudes prevalent among her fellow whites. Yet she learns how much misery and despair the Indians suffer, and also that if they are cunning or even thieving, survival tactics are in-

volved. Through her, Rooke exposes the whites' delusion of possessing moral superiority. Early in the novel Helen reports that 'The Indians took root at once' and, more ambivalently, 'Afterwards we were to remember how softly they came amongst us' (9). Part of the ambivalence of 'softly' lies in the latent suggestion of cunning and duplicity on the part of Indians, a belief that is dominant in the consciousness of her father, her Aunt Lucy, and Mrs Lambert, the midwife, and which rises to a kind of crescendo as the novel unfolds. The other part suggests a non-aggressive, non-competitive mode of being.

Leela is the first of the Indians to break away from white economic domination, doing so through her vegetable garden and later her lichee contract with Mr Bannerjee, the businessman who first organises the group of indentured labourers for John Angus. The survival skills shown in her (but also in Mr Bannerjee and in Leela's son, Sowa) exemplify a pragmatic acceptance of the world as it is. Our impression of Indian resourcefulness, as against the stereotypical white notion of their craftiness and greed, is heightened by Rooke's unobtrusive reminders of the very limited scale of the early Indian enterprises in relation to those of the whites.

However callous or vicious John's behaviour, Rooke makes us aware of how much is desperately at stake for him in terms of the land and the question of heirship. When John is faced with the ruin of his cane crop through devastation by wind, Helen notices how 'the story of his struggle with the land [is] marked in his face' (131). John's inability to burn Nicky's hands, when he chooses this barbaric form of punishment for a cane fire started through the negligence of Nicky, Peter and Sowa, shows him to be no depraved monster. Desperately afraid of intensely painful feelings, his solution to the crisis over Nicky's hands is to flee to Durban where he can resort to prostitutes and dagga. Nevertheless, although Rooke does not allow us to lose pity for him, we are made to feel that excessive concessions are made because he is a male, and that women like his sister Lucy manage to perpetuate a kind of special *licensing* of masculine brutality, stubbornness and escapism.

What Nicky takes as an act of cowardice on John's part later gives him enough hold over his grandfather to gain permission to enlist (together with Peter Farrell) for the war in Europe, having passed himself off as eighteen. Thus John's attempted act of merciless violence is ironically one of the important events which leads to Nicky's self-abandonment to the large-scale violence of war. Nicky is steadily corrupted from the time of his enlisting in the war. Apart from the historical appropriateness of the war, I assume that Rooke intends it as a sign of the most destructive potentialities of white cul-

ture. On the one hand, it enables Rooke to explore the inception of the problems that beset Natal society by the time of her adulthood, but it also provides a wider, international background of large-scale violence and inhumanity. Rooke observes how the evils of the local community are reinforced by war propaganda, while at the same time this small, apparently insignificant farming world is one of the many that insidiously help to foster vast, unleashed forces of hatred.

While Nicky is away, Amoya is sent by Leela to be Helen's personal maid. The first thing that Amoya has to learn from Helen is to keep herself clean, and no time is lost in setting about this process. White cultural assumptions have the initial victory and Helen seems at this point to behave as a conventional white. Yet before Amoya's clothes are even dry, Helen has started to learn *from her*. The fascination suggested by the unusually lyrical antithesis, 'grimy splendour', is an appropriate preparation for the awareness of a 'passion for living' (156) that Amoya offers Helen. Friendship between the two develops in a way that was never possible with Leela.

One of Helen's significant personal choices involves a mature and socially constructive form of power, one by which she distinguishes herself firmly from her aunt's self-preoccupation, as well as from the prying nastiness of a midwife like Mrs Lambert. While Aunt Lucy bemoans the way in which the Durban hospital affects the tone of her neighbourhood (98–99), Helen is inspired to train there as a nurse. Furthermore she prompts the now adult Amoya – after the tragic loss of her husband and baby in the flood – to follow in her footsteps. In this way she is able to foster a spirit of human nurturing that seems so lacking in a society marked by disdain, self-preoccupation, or cruelty. Amoya's wish to become a nurse is the culmination of her development through her husband's and Helen's influence. Serya's barbaric method of inducing birth has made plain Rooke's sense that Hindu culture (at least in terms of the group with which she was acquainted) is deficient in knowledge of midwifery. Not only does Amoya learn the rudiments easily from Helen, but during her training she is the top Natal student (215). And her clinic is responsible for spreading enlightened midwifery along the South Coast. Rooke seems to have chosen Western medical knowledge and practice in deliberate contrast to World War I in order to indicate what is positive and valuable in the culture of whites, and thus worth sharing.

The chief intended victim of white racist prejudice in the novel turns out to be Chanjaldi, illegitimate daughter of Leela and her lover, Mr Bannerjee, because of what is seen as the spell Chanjaldi casts over Nicky. Helen has always given Nicky great freedom to play with his Indian peer group, so much

so that Mrs Lambert, ever ready with cautionary wisdom for the preservation of the dominant culture, has had to warn Helen to '[keep] him away from coolies for a while' so that 'he might learn to conduct a proper conversation with young ladies!' (149). However, the potential for multicultural interaction, present in Nicky's relationships with Indians, is infected by his special status, and severely damaged, perhaps even destroyed, by the varied influences of the war upon him.

Since Nicky is Helen's love-child and John's desperately needed heir, father and daughter are driven into acute states of panic at the thought of losing him. Having just overcome the war threat, they then have Chanjaldi to contend with. Ironically, she is not only disfavoured by her mother, but she is already the victim of Indian male chauvinism (one of the ways in which Rooke refuses to sentimentalise Indian culture). The permanent physical consequence of early abuse by her intended husband, Ramlagen, is her inability to bear children. Lasciviousness seems to be her psychological compensation for this fate. Towards Helen one cannot help having some degree of sympathy in relation to the threat posed by Chanjaldi because Chris (Helen's lover), on discovering that she has kept hidden the fact that Nicky is actually *his* son, makes love to Chanjaldi as an act of revenge. Helen's own marginalised and ambivalent status, which has the merit of enabling her to be responsive to multicultural influences, also makes her fiercely resistant to whatever threatens to cut her off from Nicky. In her community, cross-racial sex on the part of her son/brother would make life more unbearable than it already is. And so Helen's specially intense and ambivalent relationship with Nicky becomes the most powerful factor that corrupts her potential for multicultural openness (while simultaneously retaining our sympathy).

By the time Nicky actually returns from Europe he has attained the status almost of a demigod in the eyes of the Indians. The only celebrations in which John invites the whole community on the farm to participate are the two which involve Nicky: the successful end of the search for him when lost in the cane as a tiny boy, and the news of his finding safe internment in Switzerland. Small wonder that when Chanjaldi puts a garland round his neck at the festivity held for his return, she tells him, 'You are my god' (203). Nicky, already sexually experienced from his opportunities in Europe, needs little further encouragement. Ultimately the result is to wreck the frail multicultural sharing that has been achieved.

John Angus's vicious racism is shown at its worst during the height of the flood when his entire concentration is on saving his cows, and afterwards too, when the threatening thought of 'hundreds of coolie kids' leads him to declare

that 'Perhaps the floods weren't such a bad thing after all' (209). His sister, Lucy, seething at the thought of the effect Indian neighbours will have on her Durban property (a fictional version of that Indian 'penetration' so dreaded by the whites), helps to incite his prejudice to ever greater extremes. Nevertheless, earlier in the novel, we have been shown his predilection for Thandezele, wife of the Zulu farm overseer. Thus where he is not threatened, as with the Zulus, racism seems irrelevant. The Indians' rapid economic advances are another matter altogether for him.

Either Zetke is unaware of the way John favours Thandazele, or he connives at the white master's seduction ploys for fear of retaliation. The way he has allowed himself, with apparent zeal, to observe John's every need and wish is shown vividly by his complete concentration on helping save the cows during the floods. In shocking contrast Rooke gives us another glimpse of his malevolent feelings towards Indians when he deliberately pushes Leela's drowned and battered corpse back out onto the tide. His response to Helen's stricken plea tellingly encapsulates his extreme sense of threat: 'Every day she said to me, "the police will chase you off your land because it belongs to my son". Coolie woman, Zetke laughs at you now' (197).

Sowa's coming into possession of originally white-owned property leads us to the part of the novel that relates directly to the Durban Race Riots. Sowa, encouraged and assisted by his mother from childhood to become a prosperous businessman, becomes a leading strategist in the acquisition of land. When he puts Indian families into the Farrells' house, purchased after the drowning of their son, Peter, the whites retaliate by invoking a colonial form of group areas legislation. 'The land on our side of the river was restricted to Europeans' (214), Helen explains. In effect therefore the border is reconstituted, and the element of domination writ even larger. Nicky then forces Sowa to sell the house to John at a minimal price through emotional bribery, 'reminding Sowa that he [Nicky] had risked his life to save Amoya and that he had tried to save Perian and Leela too' (223). It seems then that Nicky's generosity, unlike that of Mr Bannerjee, is conditional. Furthermore, no cunning or trickery on the part of Indians in the novel can match this act of conscious betrayal of an erstwhile friend. Jokingly, when Nicky is still a teenager, John describes him as 'hard as a Zulu and as cunning as an Indian', and accordingly holds up Sowa as an example to him (114). The irony of Nicky's turning out to match the stereotype that Sowa is not, creates one of the most devastating challenges of the novel.

Sowa also discovers that Nicky has cheated him by spending a night with Chanjaldi. To this devoted son of Leela and loyal brother of Amoya, eager as a

boy to be Nicky's and Peter's friend, the double treachery is unbearable. So he threatens that unless Aunt Lucy pays him the other half of the selling price in gold shares, he will inform Nicky's wife about his liaison with Chanjaldi. In doing so he engineers the culminating drama of the novel. Terrified of John and Nicky, Sowa arranges with Helen that *Chanjaldi* will collect the shares at the Awetuli bridge.

Through the threat to Nicky resulting from Helen's developed relationships with the local Indians, Rooke reveals how unexpectedly deep is her protagonist's corruption by both racism and violence. When Helen realises the lengths to which Chanjaldi is prepared to go (including a fake pregnancy) to win Nicky despite his marriage, it seems that Helen's sense of her previous powerlessness spurs her to a act of uncharacteristic ruthlessness: she plots with Zetke to waylay Chanjaldi and push her to her death from the local bridge. The act is vile for several reasons: Chanjaldi's father, Mr Bannerjee, went out of his way to care for Helen's father on his worst drug spree in Durban; Nicky is as responsible as Chanjaldi in sustaining the affair; and Helen knowingly exploits Zetke's extreme anti-Indian prejudice. Though Helen is usually intent on distinguishing herself from her Aunt Lucy's virulent racism, her significant use of power here is tantamount to an endorsement of her aunt's and father's views. How cruelly ironic it is, though, that Helen's devious plot to ensure the protection of her son from Chanjaldi should backfire and lead instead to the death of Amoya.

Helen's plan fails disastrously because Chanjaldi, just as frightened as her brother Sowa, sends their sister in her place. Amoya thus becomes the innocent victim of Helen's conspiracy, even though, in the deeply ironic twist that I have already pointed to, it is the *terrifying appearance of John Angus* that causes her fateful plunge, rather than Zetke's direct intervention. Whereas Leela had always believed that demons and ghosts haunt the falls, Amoya's fateful terror is caused by the face of a white man, so ravaged by dagga that he resembles a tormented diabolical creature. It is as if the dominant culture has literally created a virtual chasm instead of a 'border crossing'. John's knowledge that he has been the cause of Amoya's death only makes all the more appalling his contemptuous description of her funeral ceremony: 'They wait until the head goes off with a bang and they go away as happy as kings, laughing and chattering' (233).

The chain of events resulting from the sale of Sowa's house and Amoya's death becomes inextricably and disturbingly linked with Rooke's anticipation of the 1949 Durban Race Riots. On the night of Amoya's funeral, and while Sowa's house has been set alight, he has cause to flee into the Angus's house

for protection from murderous Zulus. Here he is induced, for the first and only time in the novel, to speak with ugly vengefulness, and his victim is the dying John Angus. John's explicit reference to Sowa as a 'stinking coolie' (237) is a vivid and disturbing reminder of Aunt Lucy's callous description of him as a 'snivelling little coolie'. It is not surprising that John's recklessly goading admission of responsibility for Amoya's death inflames the young Indian with passionate hatred. In vengeful recompense he *falsely* informs John that Nicky and his wife and Drew's Pride have all been consumed by fire.

Nor is it surprising that this thought should accelerate John's impending death. Sowa derives further vengeful satisfaction from declaring that his own wife and new baby are safe in Durban. Distant indeed seems the youthful Sowa, eager to share a joke with his white friends, and flourishing multiculturalism seems at this point a vain and vanished hope. John's frightening pre-death state is the most powerful possible indication of what he has done to his own humanity. The deep human feelings from which he has almost totally estranged himself now seem able to manifest themselves only in a grotesque external form. His inner corruption literally ravages him, and we are left in no doubt of his appalling suffering. At the same time it is not possible for us to forget his entire lack of sympathy for the Indians in their misfortune, and his apparent inability to make any connection between their plight and his own. Zetke's lack of sympathy for the Indians is another matter altogether. Unwittingly he visits on his fellow-oppressed the unconscious rage, frustration and humiliation that should be directed at the dominant whites. Sowa's vengefulness is as distressing as Zetke's readiness to be complicit in Helen's vendetta against Chanjaldi. However, Rooke's narrative insists ultimately on white responsibility for the train of events that culminates in the violence unleashed by the Zulus against the Indians.

Rooke's ending is resonant with ambivalence. At first it does not seem as bleak as one might expect. As day breaks, Helen observes no spirit of triumph in Sowa when he moves back across the burnt fields, and she feels no hatred for him as he passes his ruined house. Looking at the 'blackened stalks of the cane', the thought of its ratoons gives her a vision in which 'I saw the hills green once more. Even now, far to the south, a miracle of movement had begun' (238). In her Introduction Rooke refers explicitly to ratoons as the 'symbol of renewal' (5). However, the final images of the novel focus on Serya 'sett[ing] down into a confident walk', and Drew's Pride, which 'from its ruined fields rose flashing to the sun' (238). In this way Rooke seems deliberately to juxtapose the least enlightened member of the Indian community in the novel (nevertheless a

helpful one), and the dominant members of the white group, as if to suggest that they will be the ones to survive the turmoil.

Yet Helen's vision of regeneration is surely not simply to be cancelled out by these concluding images. Part of the tense ambivalence I detect is that her final impressions need to be closely associated with the very beginning of the novel, which points forward to a later period than the narrative encompasses. In doing so, it focuses on the work of Dr Naidoo, the woman who is Sowa's daughter, and thus also Amoya's niece and Leela's granddaughter. The heritage of Helen's and Amoya's friendship, passed on through Dr Naidoo, is compassion and caring for suffering, *not the pursuit of domination and hatred*, and she is thus rightly described by Helen as '*our greatest achievement*' [italics mine] (7).

Contextualisation: novel in group C (Rhodesian novel: Gibbs)

A visit to Rhodesia in 1944 led *The Forum* editor to believe that it had 'an air of confidence in the future that we lack', and that Sir Godfrey Huggins was the 'one man above all others who has inspired this confidence' (7(38):5). The Rhodesians, despite the greater proportion of Africans to Europeans, were ahead of South Africa in 'native policy ... because they have greater courage than we have and fewer prejudices, they are nearer than we are to a solution of the native problem' (5).

Two years later *The Forum* dealt somewhat less favourably with the Rhodesian scene. 'Some disquieting aspects of labour conditions' in Rhodesia were presented. The black railway workers' strike was found to be due to low wages and poor housing. In this connection the editor noted that 'industrial natives in Rhodesia are lucky to earn in a month what they are commonly paid in a week south of the Limpopo' (8(40):5). A commission of enquiry into mine workers' conditions recommended 'native labour officers and the tightening up of the law in regard to recruiting'. These features prompted the editor to observe that the 'Rhodesian administration lag[ged] considerably behind the Union, on whose experience it tend[ed] to draw only slowly and sometimes belatedly' (5). *The Forum*, however, would not be able to draw a comparison so favourable to South Africa in two-and-a-half-years' time.

Indeed not! In a leader entitled, 'The parting of the ways?', the editor reported the outstanding success of Sir Godfrey Huggins in the Rhodesian elections and the profound shock of most Rhodesians 'at the result of the

general election in the Union and by certain of the speeches made by Nationalist Ministers since then' (11(26): 3). Two years earlier, with much prophetic insight, the editor had noted that:

Mr Smit's [sic] incongruously named Liberal Party, although proclaiming itself against close ties with the Union is considered more likely to compromise with the Nationalist Government ... than is Sir Godfrey Huggins, friend of General Smuts and a staunch supporter of the Commonwealth ideal. (8(40):5)

He went on to describe Sir Godfrey's Twin-Pyramid policy as lying 'about midway between our policy of repression ... and the British policy of equality of opportunity and development.' As Sir Godfrey was himself 'progressive towards the native', the editor's view was that his stronger new position would 'enable him to pilot Native policy in an increasingly liberal direction'. The consequences, in terms of divergent 'native' policies, might thus 'signal the parting of the ways between the territories north and south of the Limpopo, with incalculable consequences to the future of Africa' (3).

I cannot find any record of a strike that closely parallels Gibbs's fictional account in *Stronger than armies*. Martin Loney in *Rhodesia: white racism and imperial response* gives brief details about significant strikes in the forties. Urban poverty and frustration are cited as major reasons for the creation of a new sense of unity amongst black workers by the end of World War II. Their leaders then began to articulate their new demands. Railway workers in October 1945 went on strike over a two-week period, and about 2 400 blacks were involved. However, it was only in April 1948 that the first 'general' strike occurred:

Bulawayo was the centre of activity, but in this case it was the municipal employees who led the way, and a mass meeting of 13 000 Africans was held in the African location. Despite an apparent lack of centralized co-ordination, the strike rapidly affected most of the African employees in Bulawayo and spread to every urban and mining centre in Southern Rhodesia. The militancy of the strike and the widespread support that it gained gave a considerable shock to the settlers ... The response of many Europeans was to demand repression, but more intelligently the government planned reforms. (100)

It is intriguing, though disappointing, to find that Gibbs's explicit political views, as expressed in *Land-locked island: a commentary on Southern Rhodesia*, are

less enlightened than what one surmises to be his position from a reading of *Stronger than armies*. As the commentary was written six years earlier than the novel, however, one might (must?) conjecture that Gibbs arrived at a more enlightened position by 1953. Although Gibbs acknowledges in the *Commentary* that ‘the ideal of equal franchise rights for all is the main tenet of democracy’ (111), he cannot agree that ‘world opinion [is] likely to condone the ... criminal folly of handing over to a primitive and socially uneducated people the political power over a civilized race’ (111–112). To Gibbs the thought that ‘the white man must continue to repress the black’, or that the ‘black will eventually dominate the white’, are equally ‘undesirable alternatives’ (112). Accordingly he opts for a system whereby Southern Rhodesia ‘must allow the native, gradually as he fits himself to do so, to take his full share in the government of his own affairs’ (114). That final phrase, ‘government of his own affairs’, is not lightly meant: what Gibbs has in mind ultimately is, indeed, ‘two distinct lines of development’ (115) – this is indeed none other than Huggins’s Twin-Pyramid policy. Enforced segregation is not the answer; in this fantastically deluded vision ‘the principle of separate settlement areas as already established in Southern Rhodesia could be extended throughout, and in his own area the black man or the white man would have his own franchise, look after his own affairs and live his own life. He may, of course, come and go freely in the other’s area, but there he would be of no political account’ (116). Apart from all the practical problems of such an arrangement, however, no thought is given to just how much reciprocity would actually be involved.

Peter Gibbs: *Stronger than armies*

(published 1953; set in the late forties)

I decided to incorporate this novel because it provides in miniature some aspects of the South African situation just before the beginning of the Nationalist Party regime. Although the author’s introductory note stresses that the novel is set in an imaginary country, the resemblance to ex-Rhodesia is too close to leave one guessing for long. (Nothing like the merging of geographical landscapes and places such as in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the barbarians*, for example, is attempted.) Much of the novel’s focus is on the Cabinet’s handling of a crisis regarding the black population. The most enlightened Cabinet member, Philip Anderson, is unfortunately rather ineffectual and lacking in vision. On the other hand, his wife, Margaret, is actually more politically aware and ready to express her views with passionate force.

Gibbs's main thrust is the basically non-violent approach of the blacks when they seek to redress what he represents as their chief grievance: inadequate payment for their labour. The novel in fact commences with the polite intrusion of a black leader, Muntambo, into a Cabinet meeting where he makes his demand undramatically and unthreateningly. The strike action planned by the more powerful leader, the man called Doctor, with the threat to kill those who continue working for whites, is the consequence of the government's failure to heed Muntambo's ultimatum. Gibbs reveals how an older domestic servant like Moses, who works for the Andersons, feels trapped in this situation. In contrast the township youth are shown to become more vociferous and activist as the action of the novel develops.

Doctor, who has studied in America (though without attaining a degree, Gibbs is at pains to inform us), is carefully distinguished from the local black activists like Muntambo in that he actually seeks to create a revolution but bides his time. Thus one finds that Gibbs's apparently enlightened approach is mixed with elements of the all too prevalent white tendency to ascribe any demands on the part of blacks to agitators. At the beginning of the strike it looks as if the whites will have everything their way. A totally non-violent crowd of black strikers that gathers outside a white person's house, waiting for the servants to emerge, is violently dispersed by the police. At this stage of the strike there is, on the part of the whites, a display of spurious bravado — they persuade themselves that they can manage perfectly well without a black work-force anyway.

The flash-point occurs when a similar group led by Muntambo gathers outside the house of a diehard white man named Jorgansen to induce his servants to join the strike. Completely misinterpreting Muntambo's attempt to calm the group, Jorgansen shoots and kills him. In consequence the blacks generally become mesmerised by fear and seem (to the surprise of the police) to have given up. At Jorgansen's trial, held only because Anderson is for once intent on this minimal form of justice, blacks and whites are present, but each group is shown to have a very different attitude to what constitutes justice. The city blacks, on hearing of the trial, anticipated that 'For once there is justice to be done' (191). The whites, on the other hand, find themselves 'uncharacteristically' in court, 'because the accusation against one of their race was preposterous and they had come to see justice done' (153). Jorgansen's rabid hatred and fabricated race myths have a powerful effect on the all-white jury, which accordingly finds him not guilty.

Later, outside the courthouse, the excited black crowd angrily heaves at the car in which Jorgansen, his daughter and nephew are about to drive away.

The force of their belligerent action is enough to turn the vehicle over and, as a result of the nephew's rapidly discarded cigarette falling onto spilt petrol, the three occupants of the car are burnt to death. At this point Gibbs shifts into an apocalyptic mode to reinforce a sense of horror, as well as of inexorable, cleansing retribution:

When [the crowd running away from the court-house] turned they could see through the cloud [of dust] before them a great crimson glow, like a mighty setting sun.

It was Jorgansen's funeral pyre. All the myriad particles of dust were catching its flaming light in their microscopic prisms and over the street there hung a red pall, the colour of blood.

Then there was another flash of lightning and a crack of thunder. A great hissing noise came borne on the wind as the trees lining the streets bowed before it. The rain swept down and across the city in a great wave and soon the gutters, which had been dry for months, were roaring cascading rivers. (175)

As a result of the white hysteria that is subsequently engendered, the Minister of Justice decides that the police will have to be armed – a previously unthinkable policy. Gibbs stresses several times the belief of both blacks and whites by this stage that force is the only way to deal with the rival group. Meanwhile Doctor is of course waiting eagerly for opportunities to inflame the violence still further. When a group of blacks form the impression that a white constable has killed a black child (run over in the street in fact), black fears seem to have been realised: it appears to them that the police are now beginning a campaign of terror. Soon afterwards Constable Jackson's killing of a compound escaper during a raid is described by the author as the 'bitter fruit' of arming the police. The conflict situation is now expressed vividly and starkly by Moses: the blacks feel that they must either kill or be killed.

The prime minister, clearly modelled on Sir Godfrey Huggins, pursues his short-term agenda of maximum force, while agreeing with Margaret Anderson's plea for a necessary change of heart on the part of whites. She points to the pattern of vengeful killing engendered by the white use of violence. Her husband's lack of initiative, however, gives the Minister of the Interior the opportunity to reveal the full extent of his racism through his new Bill against what he calls 'uncivilised savages': only bona fide workers will be allowed to remain in the city. The murderous rising in which the blacks then engage actually suits his predetermined purposes. Ironically Margaret Anderson is one of the first victims of the counteractive black violence, though Philip

Anderson is now aroused to join the opposition to face a government phalanx of support for the new racist Bill. His new, vigorous stance suggests that the force of grief impels him at last to put Margaret's wishes into practice. Thus he is prompted to tell parliament with forceful indignation that repression cannot save the whites; the blacks' desire for their own free destiny 'will eventually be stronger than all the armies of repression you may range to fight against them' (236).

Conclusions

While the novelists considered in this chapter reveal more awareness of prevalent South African myths, their most noteworthy feature is that several of them actively question or attempt to demolish such myths (especially Rooke).

Perhaps it is part of Walker's strategy that his protagonist, Peter Random, should stay on the sidelines in terms of protest. The political viewpoint of the paper he serves is not made too clear till late in the novel and only in the end is it revealed how much of a dissenter Spike, the editor, is. His telling denunciation of South African policy and the announcement of his new venture, meant to penetrate beneath the surface (so prominently displayed throughout the novel) and tell the truth, however, belongs more to the sphere of authorial assertion than representation. Random's decision to stay and work for Spike possibly marks his entry into effective dissent. Paton and Sowden adopt very different attitudes towards their chief dissenting figures: Paton's John Kumalo is given forceful speeches, only to be undermined, even vilified, by the narrative voice; while Sowden's David Lotter, on the other hand, in his increasing solidarity with the embattled neighbouring coloured community, has the author's wholehearted support. In Gibbs's novel the black protester is shown as cautious and prudent, but the writer hedges his bets by including an agitator figure, the American-educated Doctor. He is not characterised as persuasively as John Kumalo and has no powerful speeches to utter. Possibly he strikes the reader as less ominous than Gibbs intended him to be. Although Philip Anderson is supposed to be Minister of Native Affairs, he is no passionate liberal, unlike his wife. However her death moves him to take up a far more explicitly dissenting position (rather like Jarvis in *Cry, the beloved country* who undergoes a fairly radical conversion as a result of his son's death).

In the novels dealing with the Indian riots, Monare in *Blanket boy's moon* emerges as the outstanding dissenter. Having sacrificed his power of individual agency in the tribal ritual murder, he compensates by deliberately separ-

ating himself from his rioting fellow blacks in Durban to become the heroic rescuer of a trapped Indian family. Of course, as both Rooke and Umfazi implicitly acknowledge, the blacks are also expressing dissent, but act misguidedly in choosing Indians as scapegoats for their pent-up anger. Walton has to learn a severe lesson when his admirable plan for Songiya and her sons exposes one of the two, Joseph, to a fatal assault which in turn arouses in his brother even more extreme bitterness against whites. Although Walton's decision to attend the 'immorality' case trial of his Indian tailor friend brings him good fortune (not only does he have his job restored, but he is appointed manager), the ultimate, tragic consequence of his bringing the black family to Johannesburg leads him to realise his 'complicity in white guilt'.

Rooke deals with this question in a far more complex, convincing and disturbing way. Helen Angus's father persistently abuses his potential for agency, resulting in prolonged attempts to escape reality and responsibility. The saddest consequence, apart from the demoralising effect on Helen herself, is Sowa's vindictive betrayal of his own integrity. Nicky too betrays *his* capacity for compassionate agency in his unscrupulous bribing of his erstwhile friend, Sowa, a reversal of what was revealed in his rescue of Amoya. Helen herself is a promising dissident in her supremely racist society as she critically interrogates her father's and aunt's obsessive racism. However, she too is corrupted by the prevailing white ethos, and her desperate wish to protect her quasi-son, quasi-brother, Nicky: she becomes implicated in an act of sinister violence that unsettles and shocks many readers. The abuse of agency on her part almost eliminates the fruits of her earlier solicitousness in encouraging Amoya to become a nurse.

Amongst the many merits of Paton's novel is the way it establishes, with greater strenuousness and force than perhaps any preceding novel by a white writer, the legitimacy of urgent reform. On the other hand he is also effective in revealing how much liberals' opportunity for exercising agency is undercut by fear. His own fear indeed seems to have led him to polarise John Kumalo and the Rev Msimang, portraying the first as a dangerous influence, and the priest as worthily committing himself to indirect spiritual agency. Sowden, in contrast, subverts the white myth of the agitator figure by having his white protagonist take on the apparent role of agitator himself, though he is in fact a responsible leader engaged in legitimate, non-violent protest.

In this group of novels as a whole violence becomes an ever more significant touchstone than previously. When Random in *Wanton city* witnesses the police enacting precisely what his racist colleague had desired, in their use of bullets against striking black miners, he apprehends (it seems for the first time

adequately) the true nature of Johannesburg: namely that its sophisticated exterior masks the reality of black exploitation and suffering. Although Umfazi's novel has little more coherence than Walker's, s/he too emphasises the amount of racist violence perpetrated by whites. The consequences of Helen Angus's enlisting of Zetke in her reckless plot to eliminate Nick's Indian lover become inextricably bound up with the larger-scale anti-Indian agitation. Perhaps in Gibbs's novel one finds the issue of white violence moved most prominently to the forefront of attention. The process is initiated by the response of the arch-racist, Jorgansen, to legitimate black protest. At his trial the judge is prevented from exercising agency by the racist jury. In their furious indignation at Jorgansen's acquittal, black members of the public who had attended the trial are then induced to betray the kind of responsible agency shown in Muntambo's dignified complaint. Vindictive white responses thereafter proceed to escalate until blacks are driven to the conclusion: '[E]ither kill or be killed'. In this context legitimacy is an abandoned concept, agency a fanciful dream. Nevertheless Philip Anderson does succeed, aroused by grief, in exercising his agency more fully than ever before. So too the demise of Spike's *The comet* in Walker's novel spurs him on to a more challenging project. Paton, Sowden and Rooke find cause for hope in cross-racial friendship. In Rooke's case the friendship of Helen and Amoya, which is so tragically terminated, leads ultimately, through a ratoon-like process, to the manifold benefits of the training of Doctor Naidoo.

CHAPTER 8

J C Watson, *Shadow over the Rand* (1955)

Phyllis Altman, *The law of the vultures* (1952)

Nadine Gordimer, *The lying days* (1953)

Harold Bloom, *Transvaal episode* (1956)

BLACK URBAN PROTEST IN THE EARLY FIFTIES

The novels which create the substance of this final chapter are divided into two groups.¹ J C Watson's *Shadow over the Rand* is placed first on its own because its narrative involves a fantasy scenario of a plague-ridden Johannesburg. The second section comprises three novels: Phyllis Altman's *The law of the vultures*, Nadine Gordimer's *The lying days* and Harry Bloom's *Transvaal episode*, in all of which the fictional events correspond directly to actual occurrences or are closely modelled on such occurrences. The order of publication dates for this group coincidentally matches that of the historically relevant circumstances: the action of *The law of the vultures* extends from sometime during the last years of World War II to about 1950 at the latest; the major culminating episode of *The lying days* is the 1950 May Day Strike; *Transvaal episode* begins explicitly soon after the Defiance Campaign of 1952.