

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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KwaMashu: A Black Township on the Rocky Road to Change

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Dear Peter,

KwaMashu is a black township situated on hilly terrain approximately 12 miles northeast of Durban. It is named for the late Sir Marshall Campbell, a Natal sugar magnate and the former owner of the six square miles of land. He was known as "Mashu" by the Africans living in the area.<sup>1</sup> Building in KwaMashu began in 1957 and people started moving there in 1958. Today, it is home to more than 250,000.

I am friends with a school nurse who lives in KwaMashu and recently I visited Khosi, her teen-age son and niece. Khosi met me at my apartment in central Durban and together we rode 40 minutes on the "KwaMashu K" bus to her home. The bus ride cost slightly more than \$1 and while \$1 might not seem like much, transportation is a stupendous problem for township residents. It cuts into a significant portion of their earnings.

Khosi fetched me from my flat on a Monday, after finishing a day's work at a boarding school near the airport, which is a good 15 to 20 minute ride from my place. Neither she nor other friends living in townships in the Durban metropolitan area trust that I can travel unaccompanied to their homes. It is not that they believe I will not find my way; they do not trust that I will find my way safely. Between crime and transportation, I'm not sure which is the worse worry for black people living in townships. Not so long ago, a mugger attacked Khosi as she walked from a bus stop in KwaMashu to her house. That's why she insisted that we make it to her home before dark.

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Khosi and I caught the "KwaMashu K" bus from a stop on Point Road near where I live. She carefully checked the bus schedule to determine when the next one was due to arrive. "This bus schedule is new," she said, unfolding the three-paneled sheet. "We've had bus schedules only recently, in the last three years. We used to go and stand at different stops until we figured out which one was right." She laughed. "See how they treated us blacks."

KwaMashu is divided into neighborhood sections and each corresponds to a letter of the alphabet. Khosi lives in section "D." Section "A" consists of hostel blocks built for single men. It's hard to determine how many single men live in the hostels but one study estimated more than 20,000. The majority of houses in KwaMashu have four rooms. They are matchboxes -simple, brick, drab and one situated almost on top of another. There are also two-room houses, with toilets out back. These dwellings are even closer in proximity to each other -- one perhaps two giant steps away from the next.

Where Khosi and I stepped off the bus, the road was paved. However, we immediately crossed over to a dirt road dotted with mounds and potted with holes. The walk to her house is five minutes and there are no sidewalks. We passed garbage strewn in gutters and on corners. I viewed the trash as a sign that no one values the gritty segregated community. Furthermore, if ever there was a degree of relative optimism among residents, I believe it too has been kicked to the curb.

Not surprisingly, people milled around the streets. I say not surprisingly because with eight people on average to a four-room house it means the only space you have is the space outdoors. The most thorough study I found of KwaMashu is quite old -- dated 1978. At the time of the study, all houses in KwaMashu had water but less than 10 percent had electricity. From the looks of things, not much has changed. The 1978 study also found that the township had 48 churches, 36 schools with an average of 53 pupils per class, five clinics, 12 child care centers, one center for alcoholics, one youth center, one cinema (which was out of use even back then), six tennis courts, 11 soccer fields, one tribal dancing ground, two swimming pools and no library or parks. <sup>2</sup>The top five grievances of residents, in approximate order of magnitude, were community administration, crime, transportation, housing and education.

Based on my conversations with Khosi, as well as a couple of comments gleaned from her neighbors, I suspect that the grievances of 1978 apply today. If anything, residents feel more grieved about their circumstances today than they did almost two decades ago.

Khosi, for example, is terribly upset about the squatter community edging onto land behind her house. The squatters showed up following the country's first all-race elections last April. Her body grew tense as she circled to the back of her house and pointed to a shack almost touching the concrete wall that surrounds the property, which belonged to her deceased parents. Besides the one shack there are dozens of others on the sloping land -- all constructed of mud and wattle, with roofs that look like aluminum foil. During my overnight stay with Khosi the sky was uncharacteristically gray; the clouds, brooding, which matched Khosi's outlook towards her new neighbors. When asked why she believes the squatters have settled there since the April elections, she said: "They think the government is going to give them free land. So they stake out the land they want and wait for the government to build them proper houses."

"Can you believe it," she added, shaking her head. "How is it that people come to believe that you get something for free." One of her neighbor friends said: "It's an outrage, but what can we do. Where do we go to complain and who will listen to us?"

Khosi and her neighbors are not alone with their feelings, and KwaMashu is not the only choice of site for people desperate for land. Informal settlements, or squatter communities, are mushrooming all over the Durban metropolitan area. An organization known as the Built Environment Support Group estimates 15,000 to 20,000 people live in informal settlements around the city.<sup>3</sup> And local authorities find themselves in no position to turn back the tide. As a local newspaper editorial put it, "it was inevitable that once people could no longer be prosecuted for living in the 'wrong' areas, many would be drawn into urban centers to find the convenient housing that had previously been denied them."<sup>4</sup> Homeless people are also undoubtedly attracted to the suburbs and fringes of the city because it means they are closer to Durban's main industrial area and their transport costs are reduced.

Several weeks ago I spotted an informal settlement situated on a stretch of sidewalk not far from the city center. At first I thought my eyes deceived me, but the driver of the car in which I was riding confirmed that indeed I saw shack dwellers occupying a city sidewalk. Two weeks ago, heavy rains visited Durban and washed away mud shacks housing 205 families in the Cato Crest squatter camp, which is located near a river. Worse, 12 people were reported missing and presumed dead. The surviving families now share 50 tents and three bucket toilets, and rely on handouts from religious groups and individuals.

While it is clear that local authorities have no power to turn back a movement of people driven by compelling social and economic forces, as The Natal Witness pointed out in an editorial, the government can proactively identify suitable land for informal settlement and other high-density, low-cost housing. What's more, existing township properties sorely need maintenance, upgrading and capital projects. However, land surveyors --invariably the front line in development -- are increasingly reluctant, and in some cases refusing, to venture into black townships. Their fear: crime and violence.

The Institute of Professional Land Surveyors of Natal recently issued a statement carried in local newspapers saying that "unless a solution is found soon, the entire Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) in Natal and indeed the country is in jeopardy." (The RDP is the government's major means of delivery of improved quality of life.) The land surveyors are reacting to the recent shooting death of one of their own, struck down while working in a Durban township. According to the Institute, which claims the backing of the South African Federation of Civil Engineer Contractors, the country's already small pool of just 837 property surveyors is rapidly depleting, as more surveyors opt to emigrate. The Institute is surveying its members about problems faced in black townships and one local company responded with three pages of incidents, ranging from three murders to 13 vehicle hijackings, according to a March 24 article in The Mercury.

The limited tax base of dusty townships is another major problem in narrowing the gap between the haves and have-nots. (Squatter communities are not even a consideration; there is no legal framework to levy property taxes on squatters.) Since the middle of the 1980s there has been a rent and service payment boycott in many black townships. Areas such as Khayelitsha in Cape Town, KwaMashu in Durban and Alexandra in Sandton are on the verge of collapse. So too, is Soweto which has a population of millions.<sup>5</sup>

The national government has embarked on a campaign to end the practice of nonpayment. It's called Masakhane, meaning let us build the nation together. However, ending rent and service boycotts is not likely to result in adequate funding for local authorities. The fact is that no matter how successfully the envisaged new culture of payment is established, an estimated 60 percent of black South Africans cannot afford to pay for so basic a service as water. Yet, provision of basic services is both stipulated by the interim Constitution and promised by the RDP.<sup>6</sup>

Neither can township businesses be expected to provide municipalities with a huge and certain source of income, as most of the businesses are retail, run by hawkers and street vendors. What's more, a 1989 survey rated 44 percent of KwaMashu small businesses as "only slightly profitable."<sup>7</sup>

Local entrepreneur Sakhiwo Tshabalala this month initiated township tours as a small business. His "Get to Grips" tour costs \$45 and the package includes a stop at the house of a sangoma (a diviner), music and beer at a shebeen (bar), a traditional meal of phutu and braaied meat, a visit to a men's hostel and a general tour of a township. Besides the daylong "Get to Grips Tour," he offers shorter, less expense packages. During a telephone conversation, Tshabalala said he plans to advertise the tours in all city hotels and tourist offices. I've waited three weeks to take a "Get to Grips" tour; Tshabalala needs a minimum of three people to run one. I'm waiting for his call.

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KwaMashu is not homogeneously poor. There is a black middle class. The house in which Khosi lives is spacious and secure, structurally speaking. Her parents moved there in 1972. The original house had four bedrooms, with two and a half baths, but the family built an extra bedroom and bathroom some years ago. The furniture and furnishings are as fine and decorative as you find in any solidly middle-class American home. Also like many solidly middle-class homes in America, she has security bars on the front door. The night of my visit it was oppressively hot and muggy, which is not unusual for this time of year. Khosi opened the front door but only a quarter of the way. She switched off the lights in the living and dining rooms, leaving us with light from the 30-inch color television. Khosi apologized for opening the door only partly but explained that she didn't want thieves to get a clear view of the inside the house.

During dinner, Khosi and I, and her 19-year-old son, enjoyed a lively discussion about the O.J. Simpson trial. They believe he is innocent; I say guilty. After dinner, we watched "The Nanny," followed by "Frasier" and "Melrose Place" -- Hollywood exports.

In many ways visiting Khosi was like visiting any number of segregated black neighborhoods in America and that realization lingered in my mind long after the trip to KwaMashu -- how strikingly similar it is to places I know all too well.

Several days after visiting there I spoke with my parents by telephone and my father asked me to describe KwaMashu and I said: "It's like the 11th Street bottom (a section of my native Winston-Salem, N.C. where the poorest of the poor blacks once lived)." My father responded with a single word. "Shacks." I echoed: "Yes, shacks."

The "11th Street bottom" was a place people tended to drive around rather than drive through, not unlike the way pedestrians tend to step around homeless people rather than look them straight in the eye. In both circumstances, I suppose it's a matter of people not wanting to get too close, lest they might be forced to recognize the humanity that resides in the seemingly blank, dusty souls of disadvantaged people and places. My grade school was located not too far from the "11th Street bottom." So was the funeral home operated by my Godparents, and the old YMCA for blacks. The "11th Street bottom" is gone, rehabilitated, finally, after decades of government promises of "urban renewal" as opposed to "Negro removal." But there are still shacks in East Winston; all one needs to do is find the old railroad tracks and cross over to "the black" side. There is a saying, "too bad you had to go so far to find what was so near." I've thought about the saying lots since traveling to KwaMashu.

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The Tuesday I departed from Khosi's place the nation celebrated Human Rights Day, a public holiday which for 35 years had been an unofficial stay-away day for black South Africans marking the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, when police shot dead 69 people and wounded 177 others during a demonstration against pass laws. On Human Rights Day --March 21-- Khosi also had to attend a funeral. It would mark the third one she had attended in as many weeks, but at least all the deaths were from natural causes. In recent years, she said she had attended far too many funerals where violence was the cause of death. We walked the five minutes to the bus stop and stood several minutes before a woman passing by explained that the bus had arrived early and already gone. Missing the bus meant that Khosi might also miss a connecting one in the city and, if that happened, she would have a two-hour wait. On public holidays buses operate on reduced schedules.

We could have taken a taxi van, but Khosi tries to avoid use of the ubiquitous vehicles. As many as 18,000 of the nation's 110,000 taxis operate in KwaZulu-Natal and half of the province's black commuters rely on taxi transport.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, figures show that minibus taxis carry as many commuters as subscribed bus and commuter rail industries combined.

Taxi drivers are known for reckless driving and wildcat blockades, however. What's more, it's a tight squeeze in the mini-vans. Drivers pack in as many passengers as possible and then some. I've taken a ride in only one van since my arrival here. The driver coaxed me in by saying "please usisi (sister). Plus, I was melting in the heat while waiting for the city bus. There must have been 15 of us in a van meant to accommodate no more than nine comfortably. I was sandwiched between two neatly dressed men to my right and a man wearing goat hair as a bracelet to my left. The driver was friendly and polite; I suspect he knew it was my first time in a mini-van. He even explained the hand signals drivers use to communicate with the public. A finger up means the taxi is traveling uptown; a finger down, downtown. A finger circling means a taxi is headed towards The Workshop, a shopping mall centrally located in the city. Still, polite as he was, the driver zoomed through city streets, like a man possessed.

Earlier this month Durban City Police arrested 28 taxi operators for traffic fines issued for reckless, high-speed driving. That's 28 arrests out of more than 11,000 warrants of arrest pending for taxi drivers who have not paid fines. Taxi operators retaliated for the arrests by blocking downtown Durban -- just the kind of thing that makes people like Khosi shy away from mini-vans as transport.

In the end, we didn't have to resort to a taxi to get to the city. One of Khosi's neighbors drove by, picked us up and gave us a lift to a major road near an entrance to KwaMashu. We were just about to climb steep stairs to somewhere I don't know, when Khosi spotted a bus coming our way. Luck was with us because the driver stopped, even though he scolded us for not standing at a designated stop. Khosi got off the bus midway between KwaMashu and the city center, and I remained seated until I reached my destination on Point Road.

Back at my apartment I turned on the TV, plopped down in a chair, and heard these words spoken during the live broadcast of a Human Rights Day service: "We should all have the freedom to become fully human."

## THE BRIDE PRICE

John speaks Zulu and hardly any English. I speak English and, by Zulu standards, hardly any Zulu. So you can understand that communication between us is difficult. Still we try. Last time I saw John, a janitor, we talked about the traditional practice of lobola.



A lobola contract is intended by all parties to create a lifelong association between husband and wife. It is payment in trust to ensure the proper treatment of the bride in her new home. The main effect of the contract is to transfer the reproductive capacity of the woman, and to transfer her ability to perform domestic services from her guardian to her husband.

The wife's guardian retains the role of protector for the remainder of her life. Should she be ill-treated or neglected by her husband, she has the right to return to her guardian, who is obliged to support her until a reconciliation has been effected. If a wife deserts her husband and refuses to return, or is guilty of misconduct, he has the right to reject her, and he is entitled to the restoration of lobola. A husband may reject a wife without cause, but in this case has to forfeit the lobola he has paid.

John didn't tell me all the above; the information came from the December 1994 issue of Community News, a monthly magazine published by the Community Law Centre. But it was definitely John who inspired me to search for information on lobola. One of my friends further explained lobola to me, but in very poetic and romantic terms. Her eyes glazed, as she described the Zulu tradition of courtship and how the groom negotiates a price for his intended. He sends a party of friends and a coordinator (my word) to the bride-to-be's home. They stand at the gate of the home, and one in the group sings her praises, even reciting the woman's family lineage. The coordinator offers the father of the bride-to-be, say R50 (\$15), to start negotiations. As negotiations progress, the groom at a later date will bring his intended a dress and its length is symbolic. Whatever it is, that is the length he expects the woman to wear once they are wed.

The whole process is quite long and involved, as my friend Sibongile "Bo" Buthelezi explained it. If things work out with her and her boyfriend maybe I'll get to witness the process from start to finish. In the meantime, I'm looking forward to attending a traditional Zulu wedding Easter weekend. Bo is preparing me, as she doesn't want me to become unnerved at the ritual killing of a goat, among other things. Of course, not everyone sees lobola as a custom worth maintaining. Some women abhor that a price is put on their worth. Not all men like the practice, either. A friend named Sipho hates lobola. He said: "You tell a township girl you love her and she asks, 'are you mobile,' ... (meaning) do you have a car and what kind is it."

Anyway, John and I stumbled onto the subject of lobola because he wanted to know if I am married. When I said "no," he asked where is my "baba (father)." It took at least five minutes for me to explain with words and hand gestures that my baba (father) lives far away in America. At first John mistook what I said to mean that my baba (father), and by extension me, lived somewhere far out in KwaZulu-Natal. I blame that misunderstanding on my Southern drawl. After all, I don't quite sound like the characters in the O.J. Simpson trial, on "Baywatch" or on "Knots Landing."

Once we got the bit about America straight, John and I continued on the subject of lobola, but focussing on my sister-in-law, since only one of my three brothers is married. "How much he pay," John asked. "Nothing," I said. "No lobola in America." John drew back, either astonished that lobola doesn't exist in America or, since I'm never sure whether I'm making myself clear, astonished that my brother (umfowethu) got a bride (umakoti) for free.

Anyway, rather than let the matter end there, I rambled on, explaining to John that while there is no lobola, the bride's father traditionally pays for the wedding ceremony and the groom's family pays for the reception. Considering that one cow costs about \$285 and brides go for as much as 11 cows I told John that an American father often spends a lot more than \$3,135 to marry off a daughter. What's more, a well-to-do father sometimes helps the new couple with a down payment on a house, which many a ubaba considers a small price to pay to keep the couple out of his house. As I said, I rambled on, until I realized that John was completely confused. So to clarify the matter I told John that sometimes the ubaba pays little money (and I held my left forefinger parallel to my left thumb to demonstrate the concept little) and sometimes he pays big money (I suspended one hand a foot above the other.)

John seemed to really get it then. He gave a big smile, used his hands and arms to repeat the gestures for big and little; and then he held up his thumb to signify OK. After John left, I began to think how dangerous it is to mix languages, especially when talking about important matters. After all, language is not only about words but about culture and context.

South Africa has 11 official languages; imagine the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding. In writing the nation's final Constitution, its creators are bound to respect a list of constitutional principles. They are bound, for example, to acknowledge and protect South Africa's diversity of language and culture. Also on the list is a principle to recognize indigenous law, like common law.

That means John retains the right to offer money, animals or goods to the family of the woman he wishes to marry. Not only that but tribal customary law permits him to have several wives, in addition to the one to which he is already married.

On March 13, the Durban City Council debated for 45 minutes over whether medical benefits should be extended to the common-law spouses of council employees married under Islamic or tribal customary law. Councillors in favor of the recommendation argued that the employees shouldn't be discriminated against just because they chose not to formalize their union with "a piece of paper." That prompted a councillor to say, "what corruption is setting into our Western world."<sup>9</sup> That then led another councillor to label the "Western Christian values" statement as "unconstitutional." In the end, the City Council agreed to extend benefits to common-law spouses. But you can see how things can go wrong when merging different cultures, traditions and language. Take my case, for example. As hard as I tried to communicate with John about lobola, I'm not sure what he walked away thinking. For all I know he could show up any day now with one to 11 cows.

#### A GATHERING OF WOMEN

Hlomelikusasa is an organization run by women in 14 rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. It was established a year ago to address needs and concerns of rural women and to empower them to participate in their own development. The organization has an estimated population base of more than 900,000. Among other things, the women aim to develop self-help schemes for their financial empowerment and independence; to promote the recognition of rural women as equals in families, rural communities and the country; and to assume a voice and presence in local, regional and national government.

Saturday March 10 I spent the day at a workshop with nine of the organization's officers and members, all of whom had traveled three hours and more to attend the monthly meeting in Durban. The meeting was conducted mostly in Zulu, so I missed out on a lot of what was said. However, every now and then, one of the members would lean close to my ear and explain what was happening. Plus, they gave me an agenda written in English, which helped.

It was the kind of meeting that reporters loathe to cover -- no action, just talking heads. But something kept me there for the duration, and maybe it was that one of the women looked like Mrs. Rucker, the ever cheerful next door neighbor who in my childhood hand-crafted gifts for my

birthdays, school graduations and other important dates in my life.

Another Hlomelikusasa member looked like my late Aunt Hattie, a deeply-religious hairdresser who wore cat glasses. My Aunt Hattie adored me and once bought me a play tea set, from which her chihuahua, Mitsi, and I used to drink coke and eat ice cream. Also there was a woman who looked like Mrs. Walker, my ninth grade math teacher and the organ player at the church where I grew up. Seated to my left was a woman who looked like Mrs. Lila T. Davis, the hard-nosed seventh grade teacher with the big body and stick legs who smacked my hands with a ruler for chewing a wad of gum in class. At one point during the workshop the Lila T. Davis look-alike leaned close to my left ear and said: "I know people must confuse you for coloured. But I know you're black American. I met some black Americans three years ago. That's how I know something about who you are." Her perceptiveness, I thanked with a smile.

However dull the meeting, I felt inspired in the presence of the nine women, and that's why I stayed. I'm glad I did, otherwise I would have missed hearing this untitled poem, written by Philippina Mabuntana during her three-hour ride from the village of Rietvlei to Durban:

Freedom to you woman  
you are the engine of liberation and transformation.

You are a program of action  
in bondage  
Now is the time to set yourself free.

Now is the time woman  
to free yourself  
in order to free the whole world.

Transform yourself in order to  
transform the world.  
Reshape yourself in a career  
to reconstruct the world.

Position your attitude in order  
to change the world  
Identify your skills to develop  
the world  
Compose your mind to liberate.

Timeless struggles  
against fellow humans  
always attribute  
to male-dominated governments.

Mix with the men folk,  
respect them and their role.  
Step on their strong backs  
to form a ladder to liberate  
the world.

Yes, liberation is a painful process  
Come on girls, old and young,  
you are the only ones  
who has the experience  
of labor pains of  
child birth.

Woman now is the time  
to face yourself  
in order to free the world.

#### THE APOLOGY

I hate when little things nag at my conscience, especially something as trifling as a spat over a bag of coffee. It all started when I pulled a bag of French Roast from the refrigerator in the History Department of the University of Natal. I stood pouring the grounds into a filter when suddenly I heard the angry voice of the black woman who cleans the lounge. "What are you doing with that bag," she demanded. I answered, curtly: "I'm making coffee." She said, sternly: "You don't open this bag. You use coffee in the jar in the refrigerator!" Without bothering to turn around to face the woman, I said: "Why." At this, the woman became more terse. "You listen here," she said. "When the coffee is through in the jar, then I fill it with coffee from the bag. Do you understand!" Then she switched her big hips out of the room.

The woman really ticked me off, especially since, one, I bought the bag of coffee and, two, I wanted French Roast, not the generic brand in the jar. Later I told a professor about it and she said not to fret. "That's Mavis. She's been here 30 years."

The incident happened early in the morning. Now it was nighttime and I found it impossible to fall off to sleep. My mind drifted back to my first newspaper reporting job. I started work at The Winston-Salem Journal three weeks after graduating from college but before my start date, my father told me, "you be sure to speak to all the black folks down there -- the janitors, the cleaning ladies, the men loading papers on the dock. Don't act like you don't see them, like you're too good to speak. They had their hopes and dreams, too. It just so happens that you are more fortunate than they are."

I did as my father told me, on that job and on every one after. At the Providence Journal-Bulletin, I always found a few spare minutes to talk to Al, the night janitor. Al loved jazz and seemed to have more expertise on the subject than most music critics. On Fridays his wife packed crab cakes in his lunch bag and he always had her pack an extra one for me. God knows how many years Al cleaned the newsroom. However long it was, he once told me that the other reporters "paid him no never mind." I told Al: "Well look at me. I'm here working the 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. shift. My desk is hidden in a corner behind a pole so that editors don't even know I'm here." Al laughed to know that I didn't take my position too seriously. My last day at the newspaper, he gave me his wife's special crab cake recipe. I still have it.

At The San Diego Union-Tribune, my work day began with a friendly exchange with Mr. Beale, the plump, balding security guard who works at the employee entrance near the loading dock. Mr. Beale served in the Navy before the integration of the U.S. armed forces. He has conflicting feelings about his military tenure, which we have talked about at length. Mr. Beale and the old salts who served with him gather somewhere in the U.S. each year. When they held their reunion in San Diego, I spent an entire Saturday with them, listening as they recalled the indignities they endured in the days before integration and the deep pride they felt when Colin Powell was named chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

My remembrances of Al, Mr. Beale and others blocked my sleep. But it was the professor's words, "30 years," that stuck in my mind like a thorn. "Thirty years" means Mavis has cleaned in the History Department for almost as long as I have been alive. God knows what hopes and dreams the thief apartheid stole from her.

Eventually, I dozed off. But before I closed my eyes, I decided that the next time I see Mavis I will apologize -- not because I believe I was wrong but because I momentarily lost all sense of myself.

#### DODGE BALL

Twice in recent days the game Dodge ball has popped into my mind. Teams of us children liked to play the game during recess in grade school. Dodge ball is played just as you would expect; you dodge a ball as it's being kicked in your direction. That's how I feel some days in Durban, as if I'm a player in a game of Dodge Ball.

Winning the game requires quick thinking, an ability to anticipate from which direction the ball is coming, so you can scoot out of its way. That's what I try to do when I pass through the lobby of my apartment building -- scoot past the racist white security guard who likes to remind me to guard against "the natives." Once I dodge him, I round the corner of Smith Street to Point Road and face a half a dozen hungry street children begging for money. Beyond them are whistles and hoots, almost always from Indian men, except for an occasional few whites. I asked a black male friend why black men don't harass me on the street. It's not that I want them to harass me; I don't. But I figured there might be a reason. "I wish I could say it is out of respect," my friend told me. "But more likely it's because they think you're coloured and coloured women treat us like dirt on the soles of their shoes. We don't bother with them."

Friday, March 24, I sidestepped a crowd of 100 policemen blocking a section of West Street. They had marched to the offices of provincial Minister of Safety and Security Celani Mtetwa to protest cuts in the police budget announced in parliament recently. Workers inside the five-story building leaned out of windows to watch the policemen below, while the policemen and curious people like myself tilted our heads towards them. I wondered if anyone was thinking what I was thinking, which was, "who do we call if all hell breaks loose -- the police?"

Four days later, on March 28, I dodged a snaggle-toothed man walking too close to me for comfort along West Street. His eyes were firmly planted on my gold watch, which I wear only because my cheaper leather one seems to have disappeared. I lost him when I ducked inside a building that houses the Don Africana library. When I emerged from the building several hours later, I walked out onto West Street and found myself facing hundreds of Zulu men carrying their traditional weapons, which is to say sticks and shields. For a moment I thought I had stepped onto the set of a Hollywood movie, but it was real.

What started as a march to commemorate the killing of 11 Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporters outside an ANC office on March 28 last year, turned into yet another West Street protest. The IFP wants an investigation into the "massacre," allegedly committed by ANC guards. An IFP Youth Brigade official told the crowd: "When no steps are taken to resolve this matter we will make it impossible for police to operate this city." I thought to myself, this guy must have missed last Friday's protest, which incidentally occurred at the same location. Otherwise, he would know that the police don't want to "operate the city" unless they get more money. In fact, since last Friday police have been engaged it what they call a "go slow," meaning they refuse to work longer

than eight hours, weekends or holidays. They also work "slower than normal" during their shifts. That means if somebody gets stabbed, they'll take their own sweet time arriving at the scene.

As I sit writing, I hear the sing-song voices of protestors. I rise from my chair, lean out of a window and look down towards the street. Thirty or so hotel workers march and sway, while gripping cardboard signs that read "No Pay. No Work." It is the second day that they are here, demonstrating against a hotel that shares the same building as my apartment complex.

In grade school, a teacher would ring a bell, signaling the end of recess and the end of Dodge Ball. Here, there seems to be no authority figure to say time out, game over, let's settle down. Even if there were such a someone, I suspect his or her voice would ring hollow, drowned out by a swell of discontent.

Sincere regards,



Sharon F. Griffin

<sup>1</sup>Moller, Valerie, et al. "A Black Township in Durban: A Study of Needs and Problems." (Durban: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Natal, 1978) 6.

<sup>2</sup> Moller 7-11.

<sup>3</sup>Madlingozi, Lindelwa and Kaunda, Lakela. "The Crisis of Homeowners." The Natal Witness 24 March 1995, first ed., sec. 1: 13.

<sup>4</sup>"A Place to Live." Editorial. The Natal Witness 25 March 1995, first ed., sec. 1: 6.

<sup>5</sup>"Townships Pose Major Headache." Sunday Tribune 26 March 1995, first ed., special survey sec.: 9.

<sup>6</sup>"Cash Crunch Coming. Local Level Last in Line." Negotiation News (a publication of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa) 12 September 1994: 1+.

<sup>7</sup>de Wall, D. P. "Survey of Small Businesses in KwaMashu." (Pietermaritzburg: Dept. of Business Administration, University of Natal, 1989) 3.

<sup>8</sup>"Operators Meet to Plan for Weekend Taxi Summit." The Natal Witness 16 March 1995, Echo News ed.: 4.

<sup>9</sup>Cooper, Alan. "Eroding Marriage Sanctity." The Daily News 14. March, 1995; late ed., sec. 1: 5.