

## A BLACK MAMBA RISING: an Introduction to MI S'Dumo Hlatshwayo's poetry

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MI S'dumo Hlatshwayo's oral poems are gathered together (alongside Qabula's and Malange's) in *Black Mamba Rising: South African Worker Poets in Struggle*. Having noted Qabula's contributions elsewhere (Sitas, 1984), I thought that some parallel comment on Hlatshwayo would assist future word-spinners and, restrain some of our academic suburbia's reckless interpretations. His poetry announces very important sentiments and symbols, perhaps some of the most important words and images, to have echoed around this abyss of a 'Thousand hills and valleys'. By locating his work within the projects of the class he sweats for, the resistance culture that stands to claim him and, by tracing the significance of his compositions, some more light could be thrown on a complex cultural transformation in Natal.

I

Hlatshwayo's poem, 'The black mamba rises', appeared in *FOSATU Worker News (FWN)* in November 1984 (*FWN* 33/34). The poem, celebrating the Dunlop workers' struggle and victory caused a sensation beyond union circles: who was this worker and where did he learn his craft? How was it that a young man from the urban slums was able to use a language which was the envy of countryside *izimbongi*? In no time, his poem, alongside Qabula's 'Izimbongo zika Fosatu', (*FWN* 31, 1984) was seen to make an important revival of the Nguni *imbongi* tradition in the service of the black workers' struggle (Sole, 1985; Cronin, 1985; Gunner, 1985). This poem and more that were to follow, are a revival and *transformation* of the tradition and, over and above their political substance, offer an interesting formal mutation of imbongi poetry. Although people with a better sense of the acoustic and linguistic prowess of the Nguni vernaculars, might offer more substantial arguments than my own rather truncated version. What can be communicated here is the sense of wonder and excitement, of 'amabongo' that his work generated in the activities of the Workers' Cultural Local in Durban.

II

'I'll fetch him', Qabula said, 'he works at Dunlop Sports'. He did. Hlatshwayo arrived carrying a jumble of notes in which another two poems were discovered. They were roughly translated into English: 'You will look at them?', 'He will', added Qabula. Little did we know then, that a

creative machine was installing itself in the workers' cultural groups, ready to change everything around it. It started grinding that night: in the course of conversation he announced that he had had a play brewing inside him for at least a week - it would, he calculated, take another week to write it down. Good, we said, wanting to change the topic, knowing that in the Local's worker-gatherings, boasts outnumbered the deeds. A week later, there was half a play there, in another, the whole one: 'USUKU' or 'THE DAY'.<sup>1</sup> On its first presentation I noticed a woman worker from a textile mill, trying to control a few tears trickling down her face.

Bhodwe, the manager, (whose real name is Baldwin, - 'but ... we call him Bhodwe, the pot for cooking tendons and ligaments because he is never satisfied ... however much we try to do his work right'), approaches in the play, his long-service worker Shabalala. We have just witnessed the emotional Zionist funeral of Shabalala's child. She died because the family could not raise enough money for a complex operation - even from Shabalala's fellow workers and comrades in struggle. Bhodwe, who was ready to make an outlay of money only if Shabalala revealed to him the timing and plans for 'the day' - 'usuku' (thus facilitating the death as well), approaches him to make amends.

Shabalala is curt: '... my people, we workers of Africa, our nation, has always been friendly to yours, that's why you are here and not in Europe. That is why you vote and I don't. That is why you detain, exile and kill leaders - but I don't. That's why I cannot sell my labour where I want to. That's why your children are swamping college corridors while my only one is sharing with the ants ...' Shabalala continues in this vein, pile-driving his invective, his accumulated anger, hoarded for over 25 years of obedience.

Was Hlatshwayo through Shabalala, in tracing all these 'gestures of friendship' coding and addressing for us the 'national question' and 'working class politics' in South Africa? In this play we are kept in suspense: poetic reveries, invoking ancestral Africa are juxtaposed with social realist dialogue and settings. Finally, a dramatic climax: when Bhodwe demands for the last time to be given information on the 'day', Hlatshwayo sets us square in the shadow of revolution with an intensity unparalleled to workers' theatre: 'No, no ...' he replies, 'the day ... that day ... the day ... belongs to workers ...'

Then there was another play: the bitter satire, *Gallows for Mr Iscariot Impimpi*.<sup>2</sup> Then, there were many more poems, speeches at mass gatherings, cultural work for mass rallies, more strikes, boycotts and community work, the creation of a Trade Union and Cultural Centre at Clairwood, support for the Sarmcol strikers, the making of their play in a year in which Durban's

townships were aflame. Fanned on by the conviction in the importance of a cultural contribution to the worker's struggle, but also in the necessity to create new institutions in the process of fighting, Hlatshwayo has become a pivotal dynamizer in the cultural struggles of the region.

### III

Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo was born in 1951. He grew up as an 'illegitimate' child in a working-class household in Cato Manor.<sup>3</sup> The family's poverty severed his education in Standard 7, an event which has traumatised him since. It thrust him at the age of 15 into the machinery of the labour market. As he mentioned in *FOSATU Worker News*, his dreams were sunk: '... I wanted to be a poet, control words, many words, that I may woo our multi-cultural South Africa into a single society. I wanted to be a historian, of a good deal of history; that I may harness our past group hostilities into a single South African ... history ... After 34 years of hunger, suffering, struggles, learning to hope, I am only a driver for a rubber company ...' (*FMW* 35, 1985).

He cried when he was forced to leave school. But slowly, alongside the tears came stubbornness - he became determined to continue his self education: he read whatever came his way - from Biology Primers to Zulu History books. But, he was already gleaning the cornerstone of his poetic education through a serious ailment which was 'eating him alive': after the medical profession threw its arms in the air, he was taken to eCibini (or St John's Apostolic church) which was famous for its healing rituals. He was healed. There, in this independent African church of the poor (on these, see Paw, 1975; Kiernan, 1977; Rounds, 1979), he experienced for the first time in his life a community of concern and care. He found a church without status distinctions where ordinary people shared and prayed together. After his healing, after experiencing this communitarian atmosphere he stayed with them distancing himself from his Anglican church roots.

It was there, in the context of the church's fiery and emotional gatherings, where ordinary people hurled their problems, anxieties and superstitions to all, seeking for help, that he got his baptism in words of fire: the lay-preachers, men and women imbued with a prophetic and messianic vision had integrated the *imbongi* tradition of poetry in their religious sermons. In the improvisatory and spontaneous nature of much of their preaching, Hlatshwayo was being schooled in a poetic experience denied to many in the cities. He was discovering there, the power of language and poetry - where Christ sometimes a furious black buffalo cut through the shrub and gorges to proclaim his victory on earth.

The sense of communitarianism he experienced at eCibini, he carried over into all facets of life: it carried him over to participate in many efforts to organise the Clermont community.<sup>4</sup> But, in all this he felt intimidated: there, he found hierarchies operating, education mattered, status was revered - he had none of these, he felt like a 'nobody without qualification'; but he participated - remaining on the sidelines, putting in his share, listening to speeches and hoping for better days tomorrow. But the 1970s rolled on, he was married, there were children to feed and the daily grind continued at Dunlop Sports. When MAWU started organising in his factory, he joined the union - feeling that it was the right thing to do. But, if anything, it was the Dunlop strike (Sitas, 1985) that triggered him to cultural action.

## IV

Qabula's praise-poem and Hlatshwayo's 'Black Mamba Rises' are closely related. Hlatshwayo sat down at St Antony's Hall, in the steamy atmosphere of the Dunlop strike, mesmerised by Qabula's poem. Many workers felt the same, as the poem stirred-up an age-old symbolism of resistance: '... the moving black forest of Africa'. During these disciplined and uncertain days before their victory, it took root in the workers' everyday language. The men would wake up each day and tell their wives that they were off to the 'forest' again to continue their struggle: 'they used to wake up every morning and whenever they bade me farewell, they would say, "Bye-bye, see you later in the afternoon, we're just going to the forest." ... Well for five weeks my husband and son kept going to their 'forest' everyday. It was very tough for the family..I can tell you ...' (FHM 33/34, 1984:10).

'Worker', Qabula incanted, 'about what is that cry, Maye?/You are crying but who is hassling you?/Escape into that forest/the black forest that the employers saw/and ran for safety/The workers saw it too/"it belongs to us" they said/"Let us take refuge in it/to be safe from our hunters ..." Deep into the forest they hid themselves/And when they came out/they were free from fear ...' (FHM 31, 1984). For Qabula, the forest was a symbol from his own trials and tribulations during the Pondoland rebellion, which he harnessed to the image of the swaying heads and fists of mass meetings.<sup>5</sup> On his tongue it was lathed into a metaphor of struggle, a metonymy for FOSATU and an image of unity. For most workers gathered there, his symbolism became as large as their known history: it spoke of the Nkandla and the Impendle forests which were sacred shrines but also had the status of being places of ambush, retreat and resistance - it spoke of Shaka's time, of Cetshwayo's resistance, of Bambatha's revolt. It was given as a praise-name to AWG Champion at the height of ICU organisation in Durban.

Hlatshwayo found his form and confidence - the tongue loosened, the jumble of paper accumulated, the hand moved, and words poured out in response: the machine started working - moved by the poem, moved by the determination and unity of Dunlop workers and moved by their victory he composed 'Black Mamba Rises'. The depth of imagery and metaphor made it an event of significance in worker circles. There: the form he had heard from the lay-preachers of the poor people's churches done by an ordinary worker like himself - Qabula; there: the brotherly context without hierarchies and chiefs - the shop steward led strike. The poem was a combination of the prophetic vision of a coming world - the spiritual far-sightedness of his church poets and his new experience of political hope. The *imbongi* form in the process got uprooted from its conservative, hierarchical, and traditional breaks (see Ong, 1982; Erlmann, 1985) and left to roll forward - a moving forest of symbols. As Qabula continued wandering from one mass-meeting to another with his 'Praise Poem' and songs, like 'Migrant's Lament', Hlatshwayo composed his new poems: 'Workers are a Worried Lot' and 'Africa - A Worker's Lamentation' - both found a new audience on May Day at Curries Fountain. It was Qabula's turn to listen and think of Africa on his 'hyster' at work. It led him back to the countryside, to think about the physical beauty of the world he knew before his entry into the labour market as a migrant. His love for the countryside, its landscapes and seasons started becoming a poem - a lyrical epic which distorts itself into a nightmare of noise and oppression within capitalist industrialisation.

Their co-operation culminated in a remarkable joint effort: the oral poem 'Tears of a Creator - the worker' for COSATU's launch in Durban. But, enough of introductory comment, of tracing the springboards of creativity, - it is time to enter the forest, to examine its workings.

## V

His plays explain how capitalism works and how it fills ordinary lives with paradoxes and contradictions; how, finally, the incessant war of classes haunts, animates and breaks individuals and groups - how also it makes some stronger (this shall be discussed elsewhere in the context of worker plays in Durban). The poems do something different: they attempt to ascribe values to the struggle of workers: aesthetic and metaphoric values. Hlatshwayo is trying to create a new community of visual and interlocking images rooted in popular symbolism. He sees therefore his function as an *imbongi* to be a chronicler - one who *fixes* a new lineage of shadows, of praises and meanings on the poetic register; as one who adorns, with his craft, the common experiences of his class and his people. He is *consciously* transforming tradition propelled by a future he longs for as

opposed to the *izimbongi* of KwaZulu who are attempting to *preserve* social hierarchy by linking it to the past. But both are using all the power of speech and rhetoric that the Zulu vernacular allows. Before addressing the formal innovations Hlatshwayo initiated, his 'politics of metaphor', it is crucial to look at the politics it addresses.

The future is marked by 'usuku'/'the day' (his D Day), the day of judgement, of freedom - it is informed by the knowledge that 'no stone shall stand on top/of the other till eternity ...' The day is a vision, similar to the messianic promise of the lay-preachers. From the pinnacle of the vision Hlatshwayo sends out messengers and orders them to tell the people: 'Tell them, the borrowed must be given back/Tell them - the chained must be chained no more/ Tell them - these are the dictates of the black mamba/the mamba that knows no colour ...' And he turns to his comrades at Dunlop to reassure them that, 'on your side/are your brothers/even at the New Jerusalem/Let it be workers!/ they say/the heaven above also approves God, in a society that 'knows no colour', without exploitation ('the borrowed'), or oppression ('the chained') makes Hlatshwayo yearn for 'usuku' 'on that day:/mountains of lies shall be torn to shreds/the gates of apartheid shall burst asunder/the history books of deception shall be thrown out' (from 'Tears of a creator').

This society will be one of peace: '... What a march/of people's congresses/to come/together we would put power in maize fields/not missiles/together we would/give respect to God/and not to dollars ...' And then, in the midst of this peace and prosperity there shall be new discoveries, there shall be true love and pride: '... We can discover the pride of Africa/covered by the sand dunes/of history/covered by the sand dunes of colonialism ...' to '... deliver the world/from its hunger/poverty/of minerals,/of morals/ and of love ... (from 'We workers are a worried lot').

Like many other black creators he yearns for a past culture not profaned by colonial capitalism. He finds that the sand dunes of colonialism have buried with them a continent of great moral value. They have buried a 'land of many mysteries/enigmas /and many treasures' and a moral order, 'when we were a community of concern/one in grief/ one in joy/Maye! Maye/how we long for you ...' A continent, whose vastness '.../is not known to us/ these days ...' This distance from a past - 'whose people gifted the history of the world' - creates the yearning and propels his plea: 'Mama Africa/return/mayebuyee Africa/resurface ...' In this poem there are great similarities between Hlatshwayo's conception and Africanist poetry - differences occur only in two sub-themes: that liberation does not mean a 'return of the past', and that the *agency* for liberation are the toilers and sufferers of no colour distinction: '... even the "better

off\*/of our own kind /now form alliances with our exploiters ...' Thus, the real South Africa of the future can only resurface: 'from the mudpacks of our imijondolos/from: the miners' sweat in the bowels of the earth/from: our crowded dawn-trains/from: the yawning queues of the unemployed/at the labour offices ...' ('Africa - a worker's lamentation').

Yet, and despite the glowing but vague account of a moral and superior past of Africa animating his verse, his sense of history is *precise*: in contrast with the above his awareness and meticulousness about lineage, chiefships, wars and historical settings for the dramas of what became the Zulu nation, is impressive. His drafts for a historical play on the crucial role of women in changing the course of pre- and post-colonial history he was initiating with women workers at Dunlop Sports; his critiques of official Zulu descent histories; his references to historical events in his poems - through analogy and similes (see below), all of these, show a mastery of local history: '... a lot of it a history of feuds, division and power-mongering ... We must learn not to have a false superiority about our "Zuluness" ...' There is then, a tension in his work between an Africa of the 'past;', a 'golden age' and the history of the Zulu people - a tension, which is a product of modern times, partly, but mostly, a product of his political project: an attempt to deny the popular *mythologies* that are bandied around as a foundation for a Zulu independent nation-state - a bantustan. This forces him into a broader version of a Nguni lineage, within broader and broader lineages that begin to look like all sub-Saharan constellations of linguistic units, to finally embrace the whole of Africa. Yet, at the same time, his cultural roots, the power of his symbolism (again, see below) catapults him back into the wealth of a local tradition. This tension, creative as it is, consumes him daily.

If his struggle with the past haunts him and his yearning for it animates him, there are fewer doubts about the nature of the present, and less about the bearers of change - those who build the bridges from today until tomorrow: 'Awul Mam' Africa ...' he exclaims, 'Since your abduction/ workers have known no rest ...' To Qabula's - 'When I arrived/the children were all crying/they were the workers/ industrial workers/in the factories of Africa' - he replies that 'Dried are our tears/accustomed/to grief/ assailing from all sides ...' And asks his fellow workers whether '... In this society of cities/are we the cursed class?' The present, this society of cities and impoverished countrysides is a violation: 'even water/gift from the skies/has been made scarce/to be paid for dearly/in Rands and dollars/in an Africa/of meandering rivers ...'; an Africa where people are now 'jailed for trespassing ...' It is a society of great paradoxes ruled by racists, oppressors and exploiters: 'Kodwa Hawu! to you, our friends are

foes/our foes are friends ...' ('We workers are a worried lot'). A society where the cursed class from the *imijondolos*, the mines, the unemployment queues was 'stabbed' into submission and put to sleep.

But, this class has been stirred into action: '... the employers have done what ought not to be/why tease the mamba in its century old sleep?' ('Black Mamba Rises'). Once this mamba, shakes off its slumber, 'nothing can distract us/from dismantling exploitation', ('A salute to Samson Cele') now it is on the prowl and venomous. Hlatshwayo sees himself on the crest of this movement - he is its 'regimental imbongi' urging it on: 'Helele/makers of all things ...' To the rest of the world he is its announcer: '... Here is the workers' freedom train! ... Its madeup of old wagons/ repaired and patched up ox-carts/rolling on the road again/back again/ revived/Once capsized by Champion/the wagon - once derailed by Kadalief Here it rolls ahead/to settle accounts with the oppressor ...' Or to the new super federation: 'COSATU/stand up now in dignity/march forward/We are raising our clenched fists behind you/behind us/we call into line/our ancestors in struggle/Maduna and Thomas Mbeki/Ray Alexander and Gana Makhabeni/ JB Marks, Phungula and hundreds more ...' ('Tears of a creator'). Thousands amass into the procession of all 'freedom loving people' for a democratic South Africa without exploitation.

## VI

As mentioned above, Hlatshwayo offers an interesting formal mutation, a *transformation* of *imbongi* poetry over and above the political substance of his lines. The 'politics of metaphor' in his poems involve three tightly-knit components that are separable only for analytical purposes: firstly, his lines are 'shotthrough' with what he calls 'paradoxes' - rapid, jerky contrasts and negations which infuse his delivery with tension. Secondly, he uses the traditional technique of *imbongi* poetry - the subject at hand is adorned with metaphor, simile and metonymy in an additive and aggregative way: all these become qualities of his/her person or deeds. Many meanings and symbols are clustered and concentrated on one subject: he could be a lion but also a blanket, a mole but also an egret and so on. Thirdly, it involves words which in the Zulu vernacular have many literal and metaphoric meanings which allow him to construct a multi-level imagery around them. To borrow from semiotics, these become complex polysemic units of a unique kind (Della Volpe, 1978:122-47).

His 'paradoxes' are everywhere in the poems:: eg in the touching epitaph to his co-worker Mdunge ('Tribute to Mdunge'): 'in the frantic moments of our strikes/you found him calm/... Our Ho Chi Minh/with plastic buckets and brooms/... cleaning the toilets'. Or, in 'Black mamba rising': 'the

victors of wars/but then retreat/the builders of nests/yet like an ant-eater you then desert/heavy are your blows ...'; or, 'busy boiling foreigners' pots/yet yours are lying cold ...'. 'the black mamba that shelters in the songs/yet others shelter in the trees ...', 'devouring them whilst singing/yet the songs are just a decoy ...', 'you black bufallo/black yet with tasty meat ..', 'the black bufallo that turns the foreigners' language/ into confusion/today you are called a Bantu/to-morrow you are called a Communist' ('Black mamba rises').

Furthermore, the question is not *that* Hlatshwayo uses negation alone ('paradoxes', call it what you will), but *what* he contrasts and negates. Here let us examine 'Black mamba rises' to see how he weaves together the *imbongi's* additive method of composition to his paradoxes: the poem's subject is the black working-class (as embodied in the Dunlop strike of his co-workers). The class is an affianced woman but also a black mamba that knows no colour, it is an ant-eater but also an *impi*, it is a black bufallo but also a flock of locusts. It is 'Ngudungudu, the woman/who married without any/lobolo/busy boiling foreigners' pots/yet yours are lying cold metaphoric description of trade union tactics of struggle (quoted above). 'The victors of wars/but then retreat/the builders of nests/but then like an ant-eater/you then desert/heavy are your blows/they leave the employers/unnerved ...' Or his choice of a usually shy but the most venomous of reptiles (with of course added symbolic and mystical connections from Zulu folklore); 'The Black mamba that/shelters in the songs/Yet others shelter - in the trees ...'; the snake which was 'stabbed good and proper during the day/at Sydney Road (the site of the Dunlop factory - AS) right on the premises/to the delight of the police/... Yet it is beginning to tower with rage/... on rising/it was multiheaded' (meaning that the strike arose in Sydney Road, Mobeni, Pine Street, Benoni and Ladysmith). It was also 'the black bufallo/black yet with tasty meat ... the bufallo that pushed men into the forest ...' Or, 'here are the workers/coming like a flood of locusts/ here is the struggle/... Sikhumba and Mgonothi are mesmerized/asking what species of old mamba is this?/Dying and resurrecting like a dangabane flower?' ('Black mamba rises').

Through such 'paradoxes', Hlatshwayo achieves something peculiar: he creates a 'turbulence', a 'restlessness', and through rapid contrasts he undermines the traditional *imbongi* form. If one compares this with the structures of composition in *imbongi* poetry (cf the poetry of Jama, Dingane, Shaka, etc), what is destroyed is the calm authority of a whole-some world - a world where 'meanings' were unambiguous; a world whose cosmology was adorned with metaphors comprising of sturdy subjects. The 'praises' of Jama, Dingane, Shaka, Cetsiwayo and others always generate a

series of positive metaphors and attributes. They are bulls, sparrows, elephants, moles, etc, and by being all that our understanding (sometimes critical) of who they were is enhanced. What happens though in Hlatshwayo's verse is a fracturing of the univocality of meaning and the calm certainty about the world it denoted. Rather, the world appears as a topsy turvy conglomeration of contradictions and, therefore, of contradictory meanings. There is a similar feel, for instance, as in Dhlomo's poetry (as in 'Valley of a thousand hills') where the present world of oppression is constructed through rapid, quicksilver like contrasts (cf Dhlomo, 1985: especially 1941 ff). There is a definite 'modernist' sense in Hlatshwayo's '*izimbongo*'.

The combination of 'paradoxes' with the *imbongi*'s metaphoric power give Hlatshwayo's poetry remarkable prowess. They also create in conjunction a remarkable imagery around the class he sweats for: it is a 'patched-up ox-cart'; it is a 'woman affianced with only the bridegroom's consent'; it is heroic but at the same time like an 'ant-eater, you then desert'; it is led by Ho Chi Minhs with plastic buckets and brooms. The imagery captures simultaneously the class' power and its lack of power, its dignity and its absence of stature.

Already in the above quoted pieces lurks in the shadows the third technique of composition. Let us explore it in the '*Izimbongo of the Toilers of Cotton*' - of which two pieces are available - '*Salute to Samson Cele*' and '*Sprout further Jabulani Gwala*'. In the latter, Gwala is hailed as '*Vukuyibambe*' - which is a verb and a noun, impossible to translate concisely: it is a regiment ready to enter battles, it is a state of being ('being mobilised'), and it is a battle movement/action. All meanings are necessary according to Hlatshwayo. But, let us move on in the poem - '*Vukuyibambe was halted with the spears of retrenchment ...*', '*Yet/you soared up again: an Eagle!*' And now arrives the polysemic possibilities of '*soaring up*' (the battle cry, flight, flames, etc) to be wedded to the additive metaphors, eagle, log, blazing fire - Gwala is also a '*black log*': '*... Sprout black log/of Haza (a place but also a burning temperament)/once you were/used as fuel by Frame's supervisors/used as fuel by Frame's izinduna/... but once alright/you soared up unstoppable/Kloba of Frame/ which now roasts its furnace-stokers' - and playing with to 'soaring up' he switches tracks - '... as you spread your wings/a blazing eagle of fire/over Frame's furnaces ...'*

In the '*Salute to Samson Cele*' (who was gunned down by a hooded gunman during the Frame struggles of 1981), Cele is a tree: '*Foreigners' gunpowder -/anger - provoking sound/ foreigners' gunpowder felled Samson Cele ... on the soil of Gambushe and Mageba/you have become Omnipotent ...*' But Cele

is a tree of a special kind: 'Tree of Magayi/felled/ before maturity/by the destroyers ...' The Magayi trees are never felled, only their bark is used annually. From the felled tree we shift through to the Zulu traditional wooden sleigh/wagon and its later modifications: '... the wagon you organized and harnessed at Frame's/has now reached great distances and peaks which in turn makes Cele its wagon-driver: 'Samson Cele/ambassador of freedom/wagon-driver/shove at the sky/Pass/ Pass on/ these sombre news from Frame/to your superiors/Tell them: the trickster/the red cobra/the devourer of households/is cornered/Tell it to Moses/inform Bambatha of Nkandla/tell Maduna .../that the rubble rejected by the Builders of yesterday/has become the foundation for the houses of tomorrow ...' Finally, in the 'Tears of the creator - the worker', we find 'Kanyamba', the mythical monster-snake that sleeps in the forests of Nkandla or Impendle. This monster-snake occasionally awakes and creates havoc because it is also the tornado and the hurricane that afflicts KwaZulu/Natal: the tornado 'Kanyamba' the monster-snake on the prowl. All the qualities of this tornadosnake are played with to provide metaphoric meaning for the rise of the working-class in the emergence of COSATU.

Hlatshwayo then, drawing from the rich tradition of popular symbolism is moulding in the mass events of worker gatherings an exciting forest of symbols. He and Qabula are at the pinnacle of a revival and mutation of the *imbongi* tradition here amongst factory workers. The Mguni language, to allude to Volosinov (1971), has become 'an arena of struggle' and a vehicle for the sounds of a poetry of liberation.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. USUKU' was first performed at the Lay Ecumenical Centre, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, in 1985 at the Transport and General Workers Union AGM. It has been translated by Norman Mthembu.
2. First performed at the opening of the Clairwood Trade Union and Culture Centre by Ramolao Makhene and William Kentridge, directed by Astrid von Kotze.
3. On Cato Manor/M'Kumbane - Iain Edwards' forthcoming PhD will be the most definitive work on this important black urban concentration; in the meantime this shack/slum-world is described in Maasdorp and Humphreys (eds), 1975.
4. Of course this participation has exposed Hlatshwayo to new influences: black consciousness based poetry in the mid-nineteen seventies (Ndebele and Gwala in particular).
5. Description of this in 'A Life, Cruel beyond Belief', manuscript,

1984, at the moment being expanded into a 'largeish' book.

6. In Qabula, *et al* 1986. First performed at the opening of the Clairwood Trade Union and Cultural Centre, October 1985.

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