

NATHANIEL NAKASA. THE JOURNALIST AS AUTOBIOGRAPHER:

A CRISIS OF IDENTITY

by

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A B S T R A C T

Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa (1937 - 1965) was a South African journalist who reported for Ilanga Lase (Natal) in 1956 and 1957, for Drum magazine from 1958 to 1964 and wrote a column for the Saturday edition of the Rand Daily Mail in 1964. He also founded the literary journal The Classic in 1963.

This essay is the first extended treatment of Nakasa's writing, and views his journalism as part of his own 'autobiography'. As such, his writing reflects his crisis of identity, which resulted from his endeavour to sustain his vision of a broad South African humanism in the face of the apartheid policies of the Government in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Nakasa's death by suicide in New York in 1965 signalled the tragic end of his search for equality and justice.

Nakasa had been labelled 'the black face behind the white mask' and is criticised, particularly by adherents of Black Consciousness, for his evident faith in the tenets of liberalism. This essay attempts to locate Nakasa in the context of opposition by those of humanist inclinations to apartheid in the fifties and sixties and to view sympathetically his commitment to justice and compassion : values which remain relevant and valid in our search for a better society in South Africa. The investigation proceeds by an analysis of his journalism as both the record of the times and, more subjectively, the projection and expression of his own crisis-ridden

personality. An introduction is followed by two sections on his writing, the first dealing with his articles on Drum, the second with his sketches on the Rand Daily Mail. A brief conclusion argues for the continuing interest of Nakasa's writing.

I hereby state that the whole of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, is my own original work and that it has not been submitted for any degree in any other university.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay represents the first extended treatment of the writing of Nat Nakasa. As a journalist on Drum magazine in the late fifties and on the Rand Daily Mail until he left South Africa in 1964, Nakasa contributed many sketches on life under apartheid. In addition, he inspired the creation of the literary journal, The Classic. When looking at the selection of his writing in The World of Nat Nakasa, it struck me that the preface (by the editor, Essop Patel) and the introductory tribute by Nadine Gordimer focus on the 'biographical' presence of Nakasa himself. This is in a way apt. As I shall suggest, Nakasa's journalism cannot be separated from his exploration of his own place in South African human and social life. Noted for their journalistic 'objectivity', Nakasa's sketches nevertheless incorporate his own personality as a reasoning, feeling individual, and his journalism, when taken together, amounts to something of a record of a life: a kind of 'autobiography', in which Nakasa interacts with a society shaped by racial legislation. The record is a tragic one, reflecting a severe crisis of identity. As a person who consistently endeavoured to recognise people above political categories, Nakasa came to see the 'apartheid years' as intractably damaging to human value. In examining his journalism, therefore, I shall in a sense be examining his creative 'autobiographical' response. It is the story of a sensitive human being whose search for a 'common South Africanism' ended in his suicide. If Nakasa was extremely alienated in that his generous

notion of humanity did not accord with the Verwoerdian years, the renewed vision in the 1980s of a non-racial South Africa gives fresh interest to Nakasa's dilemma.

Nathaniel Ndzana Nakasa was born in Natal, in 1937, the second of four children to Joseph Nakasa, a Pondo from Lusikisiki in the Transkei. His mother, a Zulu, was from Natal. The inter-tribal marriage was significantly to influence his self-perception, for the central questions in his writing were to remain 'who are my people?' and 'what is my history?', and he unequivocally rejected the Nationalist government's re-tribalising policies of apartheid:

I am a Pondo, but I don't even know the language of that tribe. I was brought up in a Zulu-speaking home, my mother being a Zulu. Yet I can no longer think in Zulu because that language cannot cope with the demands of our day. I am a South African - my people are South Africans. (1)

Mine is the history of the Great Trek, Gandhi's passive resistance in Johannesburg, the wars of Cetewayo and the dawn raids which gave us the treason trials in 1956. They are part of me. (2).

Nakasa's schooling commenced at the Majnot Primary School in Chesterville, where his family settled when the township was established in 1940. The senior primary phase of his education was completed at the Chesterville Government School, where

his academic potential and flair for the communicative arts were recognised. At this time he formed a debating and cultural club with the help of an enthusiastic friend, Irene Mongayo. This early period of his life was also characterised by his visiting white homes to collect laundry for his mother and by his vending of newspapers from four o'clock in the morning in the streets of Durban.

Nakasa attended the Lutheran Zulu High School in Eshowe, Zululand, until 1954, when he completed standard nine. His secondary-school education under the tutelage of missionaries undoubtedly contributed to his sense of common humanity, a non-racial idealism and a liberal perspective on life and literature. Simultaneously it denied him a richer, or even a particularly sympathetic perspective on his own cultural heritage, including his history and folklore:

The heroes in our school books
and films and all the statues in
our capitals are those of white
men. The only black statue that
I ever saw was that of the great
Zulu king, uShaka. Even that
lies out of the way, far from cities,
and we were taught to despise
the statue as a relic from our
savage past. (3).

This aversion for 'African tradition' was to disadvantage him

seriously in 1965 in the eyes of American blacks who, at the time, were strongly influenced by the 'Back-to-Africa' movement as a search for authentic 'roots'.

Nakasa commenced his career in journalism in September 1956, as a free-lance journalist with Ilanga Lase. His first encounter with the police came soon after his appointment when he observed the special unit of the police arresting people for pass-law infringements. Although the incident was a common occurrence in the fifties, Nakasa made the mistake of photographing the arrests. He was charged with interference and his camera confiscated; but the intervention of his editor helped to quash the charges.

His introduction to Golden City Post, a weekly Johannesburg newspaper and sister paper to Drum, was fortuitous. He chanced upon Miss Togo Shugumani, a popular Johannesburg singer, who was on a concert tour of Durban. She had been robbed of her possessions whilst relaxing on the beach. Nakasa photographed the disconsolate Miss Shugumani, wrote a full account of the mugging, and forwarded his copy to Golden City Post. The editor, Cecil Eprille, was deeply impressed and invited Nakasa to join the paper on a full-time basis. In January 1958 Nakasa joined Drum and remained with the magazine until he left South Africa on an exit permit at the end of 1964 to take up a scholarship in journalism at Harvard University.

Nakasa's early impression of Johannesburg was of 'an incredible

experiment of trying to get on with the business of living without getting too depressed'. [4] He pursued his independent course by refusing to comply with the regulations that required him to live in a male hostel and by trying to ignore the colour bar. A colleague on Drum, Can Themba, described Nakasa as an incongruous phenomenon :

He came, I remember, in the morning with a suitcase and a tennis racquet - ye gods! a tennis racquet. We stared at him. The chaps on Drum at that time had fancied themselves to be poised on a dramatic, implacable kind of life ... He had a puckish, a boyish face, and a name something like Nathaniel Nakasa. We made it Nat. [5]

Nakasa's determination and his quality of mind, however, did not escape the notice of Nadine Gordimer or the editor of Drum, Tom Hopkinson, who said of his junior reporter :

He had a lively look and a quick response... He was a patient

investigator who could press his enquiries close to the one being interviewed whether African gangster or white official. He also had a sense of balance and I soon learned that when he told me something, I could depend on what he said. (6)

Author Nadine Gordimer, with whom Nakasa developed a close personal and professional friendship at the time of The Classic, also thought of him as highly self-motivated :

He carried the youthful confidence in his own interests that marks the city-bred. He was set upon the only course that was valid for him: the course of independent self-realisation. (7)

That self-realisation was achieved, in part, when Nakasa was commissioned to write a weekly (Saturday) column in the Rand Daily Mail. The column, written under the by-line 'As I See It - by Nat Nakasa', attracted a large white readership. This commission was a first for a black journalist, as was his membership

of PEN, the international writers' association. His column in the Rand Daily Mail 'portrayed the peculiar and often distressing circumstances of an African living in "White" South Africa. But even this he has done with remarkable insight and compassion for the fears and hopes of other people, especially the Afrikaner.'(8) The quality of his journalism, including the compassion he displayed, drew the attention of the U.S.-S.A. Leadership Exchange Programme, which led to Nakasa being nominated for the Nieman Scholarship in journalism.

What I have termed Nakasa's crisis of identity can be seen to be the product of a combination of several factors : the expectations of his mission-school education; the failed hope of the fifties that defiance of the colour bar would be effective; and the lack of opportunity for the creative realisation of Nakasa's own literary sensibility, which was typical of the liberal conception of art prevalent in English-speaking circles of the day, according to which humanity was seen in literature ideally to transcend sectional political interests. In fact, Nakasa's intimacy with white liberal writers and intellectuals even accentuated his difficulty 'in attempting to accommodate both African-directed notions of literature's community function and the liberal notion of art's universalising powers'. (9)

The sense of daring individualism that characterised the fifties in the work of the Sophiatown writers gave substance to the figure of the in-between or 'situation', the black person who hovered uneasily between the 'Houghton soiree' and the location shebeen.

As Gordimer said, Nakasa 'belonged not to one world but to both'.
 (10) In addition to straddling two worlds of consciousness, Nakasa's writings also straddled two decades - the fifties and the sixties. The earlier 'fabulous decade' kept alive the hope of non-racialism; the latter period saw the grim repression after Sharpeville, the mass arrests under the ninety-day detention law and incidents of armed revolutionary retaliation. Despite the tensions, Nakasa, like other Drum writers, tried to remain outside politics, but the events of the time obviously impinged on him, and his writings suggest that he recognised a similar dilemma to that of Es'kia Mphahlele who said :

The idealism I shared within the political movements of the fifties that advocated a non-racial society died with the treason trials and Sharpeville. We, the black people, now feel that we should cultivate a distinctive consciousness to buttress and direct the African Humanism that dissipated itself in all that rhetoric of the fifties and the politics of non-racialism.

(11)

Nevertheless, Nakasa continued to disclaim any political affiliation

even after the refusal of his passport:

I have never been a member of
a political party nor have I been
actively connected with politics.
(12)

And despite the fact that he was deeply disturbed by the police killings at Sharpeville and called for a day of mourning, (13) Nakasa wanted to remain aloof from the specific demands of political commitment.

Prior to his departure from South Africa, he stated to his father that 'he had had enough of this country'. He wrote at the time :

...it happens to be true that my
experiences in this country are
steadily dragging me into the
darkness of despair. To that extent,
the powers that be have won a
battle over me. (14)

His six-month period in America was, nonetheless, a time of

disillusionment for him. His non-racial ideals were challenged by the prevalent anti-white sentiment in Harlem with its rejection of any possibility of a black-white brotherhood. The American blacks had rejected Nakasa's own ideal of 'a common, as opposed to a specifically black experience', and his reaction was that

The many faces of Harlem left
me a little frightened. It was
a brand of blackmanship I had
not seen anywhere else before.

(15)

Nakasa's writings reveal the tensions of a writer and human being who attempted to bridge two worlds and failed. In immediate terms, they reveal a dialectic between his personal aspirations and the obstinacy of the state in its determination to turn the African into a 'kaffir'. In reporting on the daily manifestations of repression, Nakasa regards as a yardstick of human worth an internationalising set of values based on freedom, justice and racial equality. In apartheid South Africa he must often have experienced a kind of schizophrenia. Although a victim, he 'never accepted the character of the victim in himself'. (16) He stood at the centre of the extremes of white and black radicalism, reflecting the ambiguous role of the black intellectual of the fifties and sixties. As Gordimer said, 'he had made a place astride the colour bar', (17) but eventually he had to weigh the usefulness

of his position against the needs of his people:

Nat sought for something inside himself that would make language with the confused environment in which he found himself. He sought, fought, struggled, argued, posed - but I doubt he found it. (18).

This essay will support, nevertheless, the idea of Nakasa as an important milestone in the struggle of black writers, in his assertion of artistic integrity and individuality against the obstacles of colour obsession.

THE DRUM DAYS 1958 - 1964

Nakasa's experience with Drum magazine for six years established him as a writer of social commitment and talent. The first two years, however, imposed constraints upon his creativity. The constraining factors were varied: his relative youth; his recent arrival in cosmopolitan Johannesburg; and the magazine's own evolving style with its influence of 'Americanism', in terms of which a racy pace was considered apt for township readers who were supposed to be influenced by B-movies and jazz. In this, Henry Nxumalo's success in investigative journalism had secured Drum a large circulation and had set a standard for the writers who followed him.

Understandably, Nakasa's initial interests and presentation were dictated by imitation rather than by his own initiatives. He traversed fields that had already been reported: shebeens ('Look What We Drink', Drum, January 1958), violence in the city of Johannesburg ('Why Taximen are Terrified', Drum April 1956 and 'Victims of the Knifemen', Drum, March 1959). Although they have not been reprinted in The World of Nat Nakasa, the first articles which reveal his break from the 'traditions' of Drum were 'Do Blacks Hate Whites?' (Drum, December 1958) and 'Do Whites Hate Blacks?' (Drum, January 1959). The articles show Nakasa's capacity for forthright investigation and fearless reporting and testify to his faith in the viability of an open society in South Africa. Perhaps the results of his investigations - particularly

as indicated in the second article - were a source of disillusionment to him. Whereas white editorial control (Drum had white proprietors) probably wished to portray a continuing lack of bitterness among black people, the evidence of Nakasa's investigations suggested that the first years of institutionalised apartheid had left their mark. As examples, there were the names of children, such as 'Zond' abelungu' (hate the white man); 'calculated antagonism that expresses itself at sports meetings at the Rand Stadium when blacks go out of their way to root for the foreign teams and boo the South African teams'; and the refusal of black organisations to align themselves with white groups which had similar objectives. In 'Do Blacks Hate Whites?', Nakasa discovered that the underlying causes of 'black hostility' lay in 'white retention of all power' and in 'the arrogant, untempered, ill-tempered way of exercising that power'. The urban Africans felt frustrated by the deliberate denial of opportunities to 'better themselves':

The reason next in importance is the white organisation of life so as to rob the blacks of opportunities to better themselves. In a land of promise, such as South Africa, the black man thinks he could go very much further than he is allowed.

Nakasa nevertheless also cites examples of humanitarian

action that could override feelings of anger and frustration: there was the case of the black ambulanceman who, despite the taunts and insults by white bystanders, had attempted unsuccessfully to render assistance to a white victim of a street accident; there was also the instance of the nanny who had risked her life to save a white child from a burning house. He speaks of the readiness with which whites donate blood and contribute funds to the victims of the frequent railway disasters. The willingness to seek potential for human good amid systems of authority is reinforced by his concluding observations:

Perhaps, it is a little rough to
 talk of blacks 'hating' the whites.
 Perhaps it is only deep resentment
 at certain policies fostered by
 most whites, certain needless
 cruelties, insults, follies.

The idealising possibility is, however, not entertained in a naive way. Nakasa is intensely aware that 'this resentment, continually bottled down, has led to a situation in which bad feeling on both sides is terribly, wrongly and dangerously near the surface'. The optimistic path, Nakasa found, would require a change in attitude among the more thinking sections of the white community', who in the long run would influence the whole. But, how much time was left to rectify the situation? Nakasa's finding was 'that the moment of turning' for the blacks from loving to hating 'may be

dangerously close'.

White response as reported in 'Do Whites Hate Blacks?', by contrast, revealed a singularly disturbing absence of honesty. Whites appeared to be haunted by fear - 'fear of my neighbours, the "Volk", and of criticisms by the political and other organisations to which they belong'. Their answers were generally evasive and several respondents refused to answer the reporter's questions or to have their responses published. Nakasa confirmed that the cause of white hostility towards blacks was nurtured by the state through its ideology of separation :

The terrible thing unique to South Africa accentuates our danger: it is the correct, the accepted thing on the white side to show a cold hostility, if nothing worse towards the black. 'It's all the better', says the government, 'if not a single white man has a black friend.'

This policy produced a black reaction. Blacks who believed in a black-white brotherhood and maintained social contacts were among the first to feel the black backlash. They were being thought of as 'sellouts.'

Typically, Nakasa makes a case for the small number of whites

who continued to express active sympathy for the plight of the African. Among them, he found sensitivity about, and concern for the future :

They are, in fact, worried about the attitude of the whites, which they consider disastrous to the future of the country as a whole.

However, his conclusion questions his own best hopes. 'Is it all wishful thinking' that the majority of whites would 'revise their attitudes towards blacks for the better?' The reality lies in his conjecture - how long will the black millions be able to support the contempt, hostility and the arrogance of many whites, in a world where change is at the same time so rapid and so certain?

The two articles referred to here reveal Nakasa's objective, balanced perception of the reality of race relations in South Africa. His was not a blinkered vision, nor did he simply espouse a dream of a non-racial society. He was intensely aware of the groundwork that had to be laid before one could build the foundations of a society free of racial prejudice. The small band of white liberals, he realised, was inconsequential in influencing the destiny of this country. His own perception of change lay in eradicating pettiness in attitudes as a prerequisite for social reconstruction.

His writing throughout the six-year period on Drum was to display

a commitment to improved social relations. In common with the writers of the fifties, he was to display his distaste for political extremism and violence at the same time as he confirmed his confidence in individual acts of courage and commitment. Common threads that run through his work are the influence of his mission-school education and his own liberal consciousness that studiously avoided the confusions and chaos of party political involvement. His pursuit of a broad orientation in a milieu of racial antagonism, however, was to test his own self-confidence. Although he continued to entertain a deep-rooted belief, common among the young liberals of the fifties, that to disregard the colour bar would be to destroy it, later events in his life were to reveal, tragically, the intractability of 'Baasskap'. Nonetheless, he managed to sustain the belief, which is evident in his earlier writing, that appeals to the white man's conscience and Christianity, to his sense of common decency and humanity, would result in social change.

Given the circumstances of the time, it seems to us remarkable that Nakasa could continue to entertain the hope of a non-racial society, and even his own writing sometimes reveals the futility of that hope. For example, in 'Fringe Country: Where There Is No Colour Bar' (Drum, March 1961), he acknowledges the inevitable destruction by officialdom of that narrow band of non-racial groupings 'which lived life between two worlds - between pure white society and the all black townships'. He notes that in spite of the young liberals' determination 'to live and play together as humans', the shared community at weddings, house parties,

at jazz evenings in restaurants in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and in shebeens 'was like getting a bit of sunshine on a winter day - with the knowledge that soon, very soon, it would all be gone'. Nakasa is intensely aware that blacks like himself who were living on the fringe - on the social 'no-man's land' - could not continue to hold out indefinitely against the insults and the harassments of police, against lost jobs and homes, against the very tensions of their everyday lives. He commented in the article 'Fringe Country' on the justifications for apartheid: in education, in tribal consciousness and race pride amongst Afrikaner and African. In fact, he believed that racial separation was being engendered as a social value!

Nakasa's refusal to adopt a sectarian perspective is also revealed in the selection and shaping of his material for interviews and reports. A generous open-mindedness, for example, characterises his interviews with two leading women, Madie-Hall, the wife of Dr A.B. Xuma, President of the African National Congress for three terms (1940 - 1949), and Lucy Mvubelo, Organising Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union (African Branch). His profile on Madie-Hall, in the article 'Mummy Goes Home' (Drum, March 1963), presents the American woman as a resourceful and deeply committed champion of her African sisters. She started the Zenzele Young Women's Christian Association to provide communication skills, leadership training and literacy among

African women, and succeeded in procuring several United States grants for local women to travel abroad for study. Throughout, Nakasa emphasises her internationalism and her refusal to become embroiled in party politics :

'I decided to stay out because this is a foreign country to me (after 23 years in this country). I didn't want to get involved in controversial matters'

The warmth of the conclusion attests to Nakasa's belief in individual human achievement over and above the organisation of political life :

The women of Zenzele called her 'Mummy'. As I left her, standing grey-haired and matronly I realised that that was what she was - 'Mummy' to the smart social workers and new feminine intelligentsia, who will take over the leadership from her.

A similar sense of the person behind the public figure is found in 'Woman at the Top' [Drum, November 1962]. Lucy Mvubelo is presented as 'a powerful personality' who is confident and

resourceful when dealing with factory owners, yet sympathetic and caring in her attitude to employees. A highly successful organising secretary, she has travelled the world representing the interests of workers. Yet she had resigned an even more influential position as the first Vice-president of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) because her professional and personal integrity had been endangered by the 'political movements' that were directing the affairs of the Congress. In both portraits Nakasa erases political analysis in favour of the promotion of the human being as a valuable agent in the world.

A further example of Nakasa's intention to emphasise his subject's commitment to retain independence of judgment and action is apparent in the interview with Philip Kgosana, the student who, at the time of the Sharpeville trouble in 1960, led a PAC-organised march from Langa and Nyanga to the Houses of Assembly in the centre of Cape Town. Kgosana was advised by Patrick Duncan, a white liberal, to redirect the march to the Caledon Square Police Headquarters. Here Colonel I. B. S. Terblanche received Kgosana with courtesy and, despite the tensions of the time, refused to use armed force to disband the march. Instead, the Colonel undertook to deliver Kgosana's petition to the Minister of Justice, if the marchers disbanded. Kgosana agreed to disband, and was promptly arrested. The article, 'How I Got Out and Why' (Drum, April 1961), narrates, in Kgosana's words, his escape from South Africa to Swaziland and then to Basutoland (now Lesotho), where the interview took place. Nakasa carefully

avoids references to Kgosana's role in the march or to the defiance which was well organised in the Cape Peninsula. Instead, he emphasises the courage and determination of Kgosana as a young man who had to escape secretly from his own country and adopt Basutoland as his new home:

'Already politics is choking my
life, my own little life which
I led before all these explosions
took place around me. From
today I am myself - and on my
own.'

The last statement is an affirmation of the young man's sense of independence and freedom from the harrowing effects of extreme political pressures. It is a view that Nakasa at the time seemed to support in a 'universalising' kind of way.

The increasing repression after 1960, however, marked a new phase in Nakasa's development and response. He began to feel a greater need to explore the effects, on the lives of Africans, of laws and regulations that were destroying institutions and uprooting communities. The closure of Fort Hare, for example, had already provoked Nakasa to make an impassioned plea in 'What Are They Doing To Our College?' (Drum, June 1959) against the destruction of the tertiary institution that was foremost, in Africa,

in producing leaders and thinkers who had a proud record in refusing to submit to the dehumanising laws of apartheid. The students represented a microcosm of a new Pan Africa, regardless of race, tribal affiliation or political belief. In a manner which, prior to Sharpeville, would have been unusual for Nakasa, he portrays with poignancy and anger the last graduation ceremony of Fort Hare as an 'open university' that had grown from humble origins to become a kind of symbol of independent Africa. To Nakasa, the demise of Fort Hare suggested something about the death of humane values. He saw a cruel blow to his own philosophy of non-racialism in a non-partitioned country, for the university had not only attempted to project a non-racial atmosphere, but had also enshrined non-racialism in its policy. Nakasa's final comment is an unqualified attack on the State and its policies :

Government plans for dealing with Fort Hare have no shred of justification in common morals or common sense. Fort Hare is to be destroyed as an institution of higher education, not because it has not been doing its job well, but because it has been doing it too well. It is proving to all the world that - given proper training and opportunities - the African and Coloured student

can be fully the equal of any white in any field. It is thus making nonsense of the supposed 'philosophical basis' of apartheid. For that reason it must be closed, and a tribal college which will prove what the Government wants it to prove, must take its place. The Government has power to order the change - but the reasons why it is doing so will be apparent to the whole world.

This signals a new directness in Nakasa's attack. Another indicting article concerned the State's full support for the penurious wages paid to black employees.

In 'Is it Higher Wages at Last?' (Drum, July 1960), Nakasa addresses the Wage Determination Act which empowered employers to pay discriminatory wages that were well below the 'bread-line' (poverty datum line). The miserable living conditions of lowly paid employees is presented with disturbing starkness, and Nakasa's appeal is to return dignity to the black man by recognising the real effects of poverty on the full human being. Slyly he quotes City Councillor, Harry Goldberg, the Chairman of the Association for Improved Wages -

'Businessmen know that more pay means greater efficiency and a better economy' -

and the appeal to the pragmatism of the business world is followed by a quote from a labourer who puts the situation in the ideal perspective :

'Brother,' he bellowed, 'This is the heart of all our troubles. If they could just let us stand on our own two feet - who knows? we may even find a place in the sun to stand on.'

By introducing the direct speech of actual characters, Nakasa, like the other Drum journalists, utilised story-telling techniques to dramatise and lend vividness to facts and statistics. The use of the human voice is also, of course, confirmation of the high regard which Nakasa placed on the person as an actor in society:

'Three pounds just isn't enough,' he says. Dannie doesn't bother about a place in the sun. Not even about his false teeth which he has been hoping to buy for the last six years! I asked his wife when the family would be settling down for lunch, because I wanted a photograph of them eating. She smiled shyly at first. Then, swiftly, her face turned

grim. 'We don't have lunch on Sunday,' she said. 'We could never afford it.'

A disturbing consequence of poor salaries as an overall norm was the suspicion among reasonably fair-minded employers that even if they were to increase the wages of their employees, other employers would not follow suit, thereby disadvantaging them. And many smaller businessmen did use wage determination as an excuse to pay starvation wages. Shifting from the dramatic presentation of actual victims, Nakasa itemises his appeal. In summary, what is needed is :

1. a growing realisation that to keep millions of people living below the breadline is morally wrong, encourages ill-feeling and hostility, and makes for inefficiency;
2. a growing realisation that cheap labour is wasted labour. What modern industry needs is trained or partly trained men who stay with the same firm because they like it, because it pays them decently and treats them properly, and because it gives them those opportunities for advancement which every human being needs;
3. finally, the growing realisation that the prosperity of our country can only be built on a solid home market.

For obvious reasons the lead must come from

the Government. In the climate of opinion that exists throughout commerce and industry at this moment, a bold, decisive call from high authority would meet with a tremendous response.

As we can see, the journalistic programme of social reform is infected with Nakasa's idealism. In fact, the entire indictment is set in an ironical frame, in which 'progressive' possibilities are marshalled in order to condemn those who do not subscribe to the reformist impulse of capitalism;

There is a bold cry going up in the country. This time it's louder than ever before. It's stronger, better organised, and backed by solid determination. Big businessmen, industrialists, bazaar-owners, politicians and leading churchmen - all the people who count are involved. They are saying: PAY THE BLACK MAN MORE AND LET HIM STAND ON HIS OWN FEET.

The analytical Marxist will no doubt see a weakness here. By chiding business into better conduct was Nakasa not in danger of missing the insidious alliance of race and capitalism in South African oppression? To expect such a response from Nakasa, however, would be expecting 'unhistorical' responses. Drum was,

after all, itself a white capitalist venture, and protest tended to stop short of economic analysis. But we would also be doing violence to Nakasa as a person. What he lacks in acute economic analysis he makes up for in his generosity towards human potential. He regards unfairness and injustice as a deep violation of what it is to be a human being. If many South Africans persistently violated his ideals, South Africa, rather than Nakasa, should be seen as the loser. Such is the Olympian perspective, at least. In the real circumstances of life, Nakasa, as we shall see, suffered the terrible disillusionment of the idealist.

The conflict between Nakasa's social observations and his impulse towards humane reasonableness reaches its highest point of tension in his writing on the tragedy produced by laws that deny land-ownership rights to Africans and 'the cockeyed and false' system of 'reserve living'. The two consecutive articles, 'I Saw Them Starve' (Drum, November 1962) and 'Give Them Their Daily Bread' (Drum, December 1962) explore the facts of starvation, malnutrition, disease and the death of children, products of a combination of the prevailing drought and State legislation, in the Northern Transvaal and in the Zululand area of Natal. When examined together, the articles provide horrifying evidence of the high incidence of kwashiorkor among children and pellagra among adults - both diseases being the direct result of malnutrition. The figures quoted by Nakasa represent only the official statistics and do not include the numbers of children who have died without benefit of treatment or hospitalisation. Nakasa attributes the malnutrition in the Northern Transvaal to the State's termination of the school-feeding scheme which 'costs so little in money yet

so much in life'. On top of this, the absence of basic nourishment such as milk and milk products in the home, nullifies the efforts of doctors to remedy the situation, as the children are returned to an impoverished environment. As Nakasa states with devastating simplicity, the heart of the problem is

that the people just cannot live
on the land they have.

In these articles Nakasa adopts a style of comparisons : between the natural and the human environment; between the children in hospital and the children at home; between the committed doctor and the indifferent official. The effect of such contrasts is to render the pathos of the situation and the desperation of the victims. Both natural and human environments, for example, conjure up a picture of unrelieved misery :

After driving through drought-stricken villages, where goats chew newspapers, I stepped into the childrens' ward at Jane Furse Hospital, Sekukuniland. There were two rows of beds and cots carrying dozens of babies, victims of malnutrition.

And the suffering is evident at home and in the hospital :

Her flabby skin hung from her

bones, like an oversize vest. 'Skin and bones,' said the doctor, 'That's what happens to them after treatment. This one has been here for ten days. She came here swollen with nothing but fluid. Mrs Thobejane spoke to me inside her mud hut, her traditional dress hanging from her shoulders. Her family possessions consisted of a few thread-bare blankets, a packet of salt and two black pots. The four children stood nearby with dry lips and bulging tummies. There should have been seven. Three others died before they were a year old.'

'What will your children eat today?'

I asked...

'There is no food today,' she said.

'There may be some tomorrow.'

'Where will it come from?' I asked.

'I can't say. It depends on the neighbours.'

In a further contrast, the doctor's desperation in the face of shortages of food and funds underlines the bland indifference of the authorities to the horrors of disease and death:

Another doctor in the Nongoma district told me that the position was far worse than the figures indicated. 'Make no mistake,' he said, 'thousands of children are severely malnourished. The basic cause of the malnourishment is that the people just cannot find money to buy the foods that will prevent malnutrition. Something big has to be done to eradicate this killer from our midst.'

But the Assistant Bantu Affairs Commissioner proved to be both ill-informed and unconcerned about the magnitude of the suffering in the area under his control :

He told me that poor relief rations were given where necessary on a scale laid down by the State. When I asked him how much poor relief food was given out each month, he told me, 'Not a lot. We haven't had occasion to give out a lot of relief.'

Nakasa was well aware of the racial dimension to the problem

of malnutrition and disease, and his purpose was to shock the conscience of society. Again, the humane idealist believed that society was collectively amenable to being shocked. In South Africa, however, the very racial divide has tended to ensure that black suffering remains somehow beyond the human interest of white society where power resides. Like the entire liberal ethos of the fifties, Nakasa held faith in persuasion. Hence, the depth of his despair when the ameliorative vision proved so vulnerable in the 1960s to the dictates of a police state.

Perhaps the most painful experience in his six years with Drum was Nakasa's report, 'Little Boy's Story of Death on the Farm' (Drum, April 1962), which recounts the brutal slaying of Fios Sibisi, a twenty-one year old farm labourer, by the farmer Marthinus Johannes Celliers, his son Marthinus J. Celliers and Anthony M. Meyer. The reason for the killing was the apparent theft of an axe. The main thrust of Nakasa's report is given to the actual testimony by a twelve-year old boy, who witnessed the beating to death of Fios. Nakasa's deliberate withholding of authorial intervention allows the candid evidence, told with child-like simplicity and innocence, to speak for itself. The method reveals Nakasa's perfect judgment as a journalist. Yet 'craft' has not superseded his concern as a compassionate human being:

'the accused thrashed Fios [with
three rubber hoses] many times
until late that night. While they
were thrashing him, Fios cried.
Accused number 2 said that Fios

should not make a noise...After thrashing Fios, accused No. 2 went into the house and returned with hot water in a bucket. It was a red bucket about eight inches long...Accused No. 1 then poured the hot water on Fios's back...'

' I asked Fios why he could not get up. Fios said Accused No. 2 had hit him too hard with his clenched fist. He had kicked him in the chest. Fios asked for water and I gave it to him. I then left the kraal and when I came back I saw that Fios was dead'.

The other evidence recorded in Nakasa's report revealed that the beating had commenced on Friday afternoon and ended on Saturday afternoon. Fios was still alive at one o'clock on Saturday afternoon. The reporter visited the home of the Sibisis, parents of Fios. They were dependent for their livelihood on the young Fios, whose age was determined by the district surgeon to be eighteen. The final question is asked by the victim's sister - 'Pappa, why did Fios have to die?' The question is also a question of conscience. Placed as it is at the end of the article, the question demands an answer from the reader and, by extension, from South

Africa as a whole. The killing and maiming of farm labourers has continued to the present day with light sentences frequently imposed on the perpetrators. If pleas such as Nakasa's have often gone unheeded, does the fault lie with their tendency to grant human life value outside the determinism of sociopolitical action? Or does the concern expressed here for frail humanity force us to locate the fault, by sharp contrast, in a society so thoroughly brutalised by its own laws and prejudices?

Njabulo S. Ndebele has questioned the assumption that all writing of any consequence to black people must be overtly political, and he illustrates his point by referring to the township storytellers

who have woven masterpieces of entertainment and instruction. The vast majority of the stories were either tragedies or comedies about lovers, township jealousies, the worries of widows; about consulting medicine men for luck at horse racing, or luck for getting a job or for winning a football match... they have woven stories about helicopter weddings, about African soldiers seeing ships, the sea and Europe for the first time in World War II. And we have to face the truth here; there were proportionally fewer overtly political stories. When they talked politics, they talked politics; when

they told stories they told stories.
 If any political concept crept into
 the stories, it was domesticated
 by a fundamental interest in the
 evocation of the general quality
 of African life in the township

This observation has relevance to Nakasa's practice as a journalist and writer. As we saw in his profiles of personalities, he was willing to give the political figure a rich human presence. Similarly, he was ready to demystify those township legends created by the writers of the time, in which glamour was conferred on the lives of tsotsis and boxers as well as politicians.

In his portrait of Dr A.B. Xuma (Drum, March 1962), Nakasa looks at the record of an achievement and at the family man behind the political front. The purpose is to examine Xuma not as a failed politician, or as 'the man between' who was an enigma to the masses, but as a human being who was faced with a real dilemma of having to make choices as an individual, based on his personal sense of the social realities of his time. Perhaps, many features in Xuma's life echoed Nakasa's own uncertainty about how to respond as a black person in an extremely divisive society. Xuma's contribution to the policies of the African National Congress during his three-term office as President was dynamic. He directed the attention of Congress away from its focus on individual laws to a comprehensive assault on the system of apartheid. He introduced the ideals of the Atlantic Charter into his 'African Claims', a document that challenged the Smuts government in

a profoundly ethical way. The African Claims contained a Bill of Rights, for example, which was to provide the basis for future Congress constitutions and which paved the way for the 1955 Kliptown Congress and the Freedom Charter.

Such facts could not have provided the sole interest to township folk, however, who in the daily round would have been attuned to tales of individual anguish and personal pain and joy. Nakasa, therefore, concentrates his discussion on Xuma the full human being who, although of quiet disposition, was a man of great intellectual ability. He had studied in a variety of countries, including America, Germany and Great Britain. [His wife, Madie-Hall, believed that his life would have been less complicated had he been allowed to continue his studies.] Even at university, he had demonstrated qualities of resilience and self-reliance by paying his own way:

Some times he found work on the mines in Alabama. He often did jobs like shovelling snow off sidewalks in winter or keeping boilers in university buildings.

At other times he worked as a waiter in passenger trains.

His string of medical degrees did nothing to eradicate his innate shyness, for 'he had little to say at the dinner table'. Nevertheless Dr Xuma, like Nakasa himself, was a persuasive orator who 'made a tremendous impression' at the Conference of the Students' Christian Association.

Nakasa saw Dr Xuma as both an individual and as a representative of 'all the confusion in the Congress in those days'. He was able 'to pull Congress into shape', but his 'way of doing things' - including his attendance at 'the big tribal dances in Zululand in honour of the Royal family' (1947) and his unequivocal rejection of mass action against the state (Congress had resolved to boycott the Royal visit and to adopt a more militant stance) - led to his fall from grace. Yet Nakasa can add that his ousting was remembered 'with a sense of pity' because the pressure came from the more militant members of the Youth League who were 'fire-eaters'. And the picture is rounded and 'balanced' by our being reminded that 'it was the same Dr Xuma who signed a pact with Dr Dadoo of the S.A. Indian Congress for a united front between Indians and Africans'. In this act he had stood up to the Africanists who feared domination of Congress by the Indians:

If you cannot meet the next man
on an equal footing without fearing
him, there is something wrong
with you. You are accepting
a position of inferiority to him.

[2]

Finally, the portrait is a sympathetic and generous portrayal of a political leader whose moderation and ability to compromise is seen not so much as a personal weakness, but as representing a difficult period of transition during Xuma's presidency. Certainly he failed to make the adjustments that time and change required

of him, and he chose to pursue his own beliefs regardless of the circumstances. In this regard, Nakasa was to suffer a similar dilemma: his own liberally inclined vision could not accommodate the transition in South Africa between the fifties and sixties. He, too, 'fell' from grace. In *Dr Xuma*, Nakasa obviously perceived the tensions, the doubts and the difficulties of belief that dominated his own life. Possibly this empathy accounts for the sympathetic portrait. At the same time, the profile gives form and shape to Nakasa's journalistic commitment to eradicate 'myth' from the minds of his readers and to present the evidence in all its complexity.

In similar vein, Nakasa interrogated the amalgams of fact and myth that characterised the Sophiatown epoch in its attempts to evoke glamour and vibrancy as a defence against the squalor of apartheid. Again his approach is to identify the human action and motivation, not simply as a means of destroying the myth but as a reminder to his readers that black people are people who are governed by 'universally' recognisable character traits and behavioural patterns. In Sophiatown, heroes were made of gangsters, soccer stars and boxing personalities. One such 'legend' concerned Ezekiel Dhlamini, who was to be romanticised in Harry Bloom's King Kong - The African Jazz Opera [3] which tells the story 'of an African struggling by brute strength to burst out of the limitations of segregated life'. In the preface, Bloom stated that the opera also portrayed another side of 'the African character' - that of 'youthful strength and courage, of communal warmheartedness and laughter'. In Bloom's jazz opera, Dhlamini is presented as the flamboyant but tragic hero of the townships

'who made his own rules and tried to batter his way to a life of his own choosing'. Nakasa, on the other hand, preferred a non-romanticised biography which provides a more objective perspective on the life of 'the brash bully'. In 'The Life and Death of King Kong' (Drum, February 1959), Dhlamini is presented both critically and humanely. His 'individuality' is thoroughly woven with his social self, a 'simple son of nature, confused by the roaring modern world', who drifts from training gyms, singing and dancing 'hang-outs' to a life of boxing, crime and showmanship, from murder to imprisonment and death. The portrait is factual in its details, honest in its appraisal, and sympathetic in its interest in the plight of the man who would have been king. When Dhlamini asked the judge, who tried him for the murder of his girl-friend, to pass the death sentence, it was refused, and the ex-boxing hero could not bear the dullness of life in prison:

It was the dull disciplined life of jail he must have hated. In the outside world he was surrounded by crowds of people. People who talked about his fame and his might. This admiration was part of his life. Not the grim-faced crowds like the bunch of hard-labour convicts who saw him hurl his life away; saw him drown himself in a dam...

The journalist and the sensitive human being equally direct the

writing in this fine 'human portrait'.

Looking back, we may perceive Nakasa as the maker of culture in the broad sense of being concerned with ultimate questions about life, moral values and social being as these arose from the South African world of the fifties and early sixties. He infuses his portraits and reports with 'character' interest, vividness and fact interlinked to actual living experience, and we are led into a 'sympathetic pact' with his purpose of transforming social understanding. In his dissatisfaction with spectacles of protest, Ndebele (4) has called for 'a consistently original intellectual and analytical base from which to domesticate information and turn it into a truly transforming tool of liberation'. In this respect, Nakasa had already, in the late 1950s, seen the need for objective analysis that eschewed romanticism, myth and 'slogans of resistance', so that information could be used as a means of social revaluation. Unlike his colleague Can Themba, he was never duped by the 'derring-do', brashness and bravado of the Sophiatown subculture. In focusing on human lives, he undermined the 'cult of the individual' to remind us of the vulnerable person's doubts and uncertainties of living in a fractured society.

Drum gave Nakasa the opportunity to develop his literary independence and style, and his sober journalism finally seemed to part company with the flamboyancy of the picture-periodical. Yet, even before he moved to the Rand Daily Mail he must have sensed, in his refusal to evade the 'evidence', that his efforts to touch conscience and common sense in South Africa might be doomed to fail.

THE RAND DAILY MAIL

What was becoming Nakasa's crisis of identity intensified in 1964, ironically the year of his wide recognition as a journalist. In 1964 he achieved several notable distinctions : he was commissioned to write a weekly article for the Saturday edition of the Rand Daily Mail - the first black person to write for a 'white' newspaper; he was nominated as the first black member of PEN, the international writers' organisation; and he was the first black to be awarded the Nieman Fellowship to study journalism at Harvard University. He had already begun publication of the literary journal The Classic, in 1963. Yet 1964 also saw his sense of growing despair, which was to culminate in his untimely death in 1965.

Written as essays in the column he chose to call 'As I See It', his articles for the Rand Daily Mail reveal a complex personality that ranged from romanticism and idealism to terrible disillusionment. His writing in part testified to his own personal fears and doubts about his ability to remain objective and free of bitterness, especially after being refused a passport to travel to America in pursuance of the Nieman Scholarship. Towards the end of 1964, his writing began to reveal an obsession with his private thoughts (as in the article 'Living with my Private Thoughts'), and a compulsion to escape through the medium of his writing (as in 'Oh to be an Anonymous Houseboy'). These articles reflect a strong 'autobiographical' element rather than a concern with the more general problems of race relations, and an effect of the state's action against him was to increase the satirical stance of his writing particularly towards whites. At the same

time, he developed a greater sympathy for his own people as he challenged white categorisations of the black person. The changes in his style may be seen as an indication of his increasing trauma. Some critics, including Marxist-materialists and adherents of Black Consciousness, have of course seen Nakasa's crisis as the inevitable result of his liberal predisposition, which was always uneasy with the aspirations of the African masses. In consequence Mongane Serote, for one, is almost prepared to gloss over the real gradations of Nakasa's struggle. As I am suggesting, Nakasa's limitations as much as his struggle can be sympathetically understood within the historical consciousness available to him as a particular class-based individual in his time. What I am prepared to allow Nakasa is his fundamental humanity, a valuable asset in the context of the dehumanised 1960s.

His disillusionment is evident in the kind of topics he chose to write on as well as in his evolution of style. For example, the article 'Johannesburg, the City with Two Faces' (later published in The Classic, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1966, under the title, 'Johannesburg Johannesburg') is reminiscent of the young Nakasa newly arrived in the City and eager for its sights and sounds. By the information given, it is apparent that he is writing for a predominantly white audience and not as a black speaking to blacks. His romantic image of Johannesburg, he feels, is tarnished by the number of black messengers on their bicycles, by the unemployed sitting on the pavements and the hundreds of illiterate 'mine-boys' who, having just been recruited, are wandering the streets with loaves of bread under their arms:

They looked like prisoners to

me. Some had blank, innocent faces and gazed longingly at women passing by. I resented them because I felt a responsibility towards them. They spoiled my image of Johannesburg as the throbbing giant which threw up sophisticated gangsters, brave politicians and intellectuals who challenged white authority.

Later in the year he was to drop the pseudo air of gullibility (a device initially for establishing rapport with white readers) and direct attention to the facts of 'mine-boys' as suffering, anonymous people who were mercilessly exploited by employers and by the police. These were the real human beings who, by official decree, could simply be 'endorsed out' of South Africa. Initially, however, Nakasa saw his relationship to Johannesburg as a part 'of an incredible experiment'. He chose to be a 'wanderer' who 'believed that the best way to live with the colour bar in Johannesburg was to ignore it'. In the first eighteen months he savoured the atmosphere and challenged the restrictions placed on blacks. It became a sort of game. It was inevitable, though, that he would come to see his 'bohemian' activities as pretension.

His criticisms of the Bantustan Policy in the three articles, 'The Contented Transkeians' [RDM 18/04/64], 'Meeting the New

MP's (RDM 09/05/64) and 'The Isolated Visitors' (RDM 29/10/64), provide the basis of his satirical style. In showing his scorn for the direction South Africa was taking in partitioning the country into so-called 'homelands', Nakasa was highly critical of the ignorance and political naivety of the 69 chiefs, constituting 63% of the Transkei Legislative Assembly, who supported Kaizer Matanzima. Nakasa was also bitter about the manner in which they were hidden from journalists and the general public when they visited 'South Africa', or even when they attended the inauguration ceremony of the Legislative Assembly. The inadequacy of the chiefs - he said - revealed the real nature of Transkeian independence.

Nakasa also addressed the fact that, in the Transkei, South Africa's ninety-day detention law and emergency Proclamation 400 were very much in force. His questions about such matters to Transkeian visitors remained unanswered, and he reported wryly:

In jest, I asked the visitors: 'How does it feel to be free?' I wanted to know what changes had been introduced since the advent of 'self-rule'. The answers they gave to these and other questions are not so important. What matters is that these men, two attorneys, showed little interest in such subjects. And the most serious question they asked me was, 'Have you people had rains here lately?'

In giving his article 'The Contented Transkeians' the sub-title 'They're like the people who live next to Mt. Etna', Nakasa implied that the pattern of oppression, so well known to South Africans, was routine in the Transkei:

The Transkeians left me with the impression that they have come to accept oppressive laws as being simply part of the hazard of living, the way people do who live in volcanic countries...

The possibility of sudden death from volcanic eruption has been accommodated in their minds, not as a terrifying thought, but as just another sad reality.

The sardonic perspective continues in his description of the chiefs:

Many of the chiefs in the House are illiterate or semi-literate, One has to be led into the House and into his seat because he is blind. When told of this, a Johannesburg observer quipped bitterly that he did not think that it would prove much of a handicap.

And Nakasa's interview, in 'Meeting the New MPs', with the white Mayor of Umtata concludes the article with a characteristically satiric flourish:

'We may not invite non-whites into our homes, naturally, but we have very good human relations with them.'

In the article, 'The Isolated Visitors', Nakasa is bitter at the secrecy surrounding the visit to Sophiatown of the Chief Minister of Transkei (Nakasa had been unsuccessful in gaining an audience with the Chief Minister):

The general secrecy which surrounds the Chief Minister's movements has caused a lot of surprise in Soweto. Eyebrows were raised, too, when the visitors turned up escorted by a host of policemen. This was, after all, the first time African leaders had been seen enjoying so much police protection in Johannesburg. When not in jail, Soweto leaders are often on the run from the police.

The satirical style evident in his three articles on the Transkei

attained a greater degree of subtlety in his address to the Afrikaner youth and to his white readership in general ('Afrikaner Youth Get a Raw Deal', RDM 25/04/64). These essays reflect Nakasa's skills of literary persuasion; they endeavour to compel white readers to be introspective and to consider the cruelty they were perpetrating on blacks. In the first article, he transfers the character of the victim from the black person to the Afrikaner youth, for he found that the 'grip' of authority was firmer on the latter. The restraints imposed on young Afrikaners by their institutions and their religion, he says, have deprived them of the 'will or desire to see the stamp of their youth on projects and programmes'. At the same time, they are deprived of the possibility of generating or experiencing 'intellectual ferment'.

In 'The Cruelty of Closed Eyes', Nakasa endeavours to persuade his white readers to examine the failures of conscience of which they were guilty. Many of their thoughtless actions have needlessly degraded blacks. As an example, Nakasa cites the instance of the black labourer who was made to sit at the back of an open truck on a bitterly cold Free State morning. When the driver's attention was drawn to the discomfort of his employee, he admitted that he simply had not thought about it. Other daily examples include workers who have to sit on pavements to eat their lunch simply because no thought has been given to providing eating venues. There are the signs refusing admission to blacks through the main entrance of buildings, or signs equating blacks with dogs by denying access to both - all the paraphernalia of apartheid serves to humiliate and denigrate black South Africans. Emphasising his theme of inequality and dehumanisation, Nakasa points to

the fact that similar treatment of whites would occasion an uproar, and the ironical mode is used to project the image of the white man as a God-fearing, law-abiding and an upright citizen, who could surely not be calculatingly evil!

Nakasa did not confine his attack to the Afrikaners. He also attacked, as did Jack Cope, that section of the English-speaking white community which dissociated itself from the full implications of apartheid. Cope expressed it succinctly:

What they witness is, to them,
not their policy, not their law,
not their outlook and tradition,
not their republic, not their shame.
Yet they continue to live in the
country, they are part of it, enjoy
its plush and privileges; they
possess and love it as a bride
(1).

To these South Africans, Nakasa pointed out that the indignities heaped on blacks

might be eliminated if white South
Africa could be made to give
even casual thought to them.

while his appeal to the Afrikaner conscience rings with a bitter sarcasm:

The Afrikaner people, for instance, are noted for their religious outlook on life. These are the people who are most concerned about public morals and sport on Sunday. Rightly or wrongly they even take the trouble to seek justification for apartheid in the Bible. I doubt whether such men could be deliberately immoral in their dealings with others.

Of course, few Afrikaners would have read the Rand Daily Mail, and if Nakasa did not always see the full implications of his relation to his specific readers, his purpose is really to extend his condemnation beyond any narrow indictment of the Afrikaner. Finally, it is white South Africa at large which stands accused of complacency and moral torpor:

Most white South Africans have simply never opened their eyes to the reality of there being other humans besides the whites in this country. They do not 'do unto others', but unto an unidentified mass of 'natives'.

What is interesting about this comment is its movement towards group identification. A similar shift from the earlier emphasis

on the individual above the group can be seen in 'Breaking Down the Old Superman Image' (RDM, 25/07/84). Here Nakasa challenges his own early perception of the white man as superior, which he traces back to his early experiences as a youth in Durban:

It was in those days that I came face-to-face with the material and social superiority of what I knew superficially as 'the white man'. The white man I knew then was something of a Superman.

In interrogating himself, Nakasa identifies the image of the superior white man as engendered and supported by a variety of social mechanisms: American B-movies depicted the cowboy as capable of vanquishing thousands of Red Indians; 'in Church the Devil was a black horror and God was a white fatherly figure', telephones, ships and aeroplanes he had regarded as 'the white man's magic'. For Nakasa, this image of the white man had had a negative consequence: 'I learned to despise blackness and look up to those who were white'. However, he also had to learn that the concept the 'white man' as all-embracing was untenable, for he had come to know individual whites as 'friends or strangers, mothers and sons'. Unpicking the image of the white man as a superbeing in the minds of many blacks, he points to the examples of Joe Louis, Louis Armstrong, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and Kwameh Nkrumah. These are seen as both talented individuals and 'types' of African achievement. Ironically, final proof of the collapse of white superiority in South Africa commenced - says Nakasa - with the promulgation of Job Reservation Laws with their purpose

of protecting white advantage: 'The South African Government is doing more than anyone else to destroy the image of white superiority.' Nakasa's conclusion is direct and bitter:

For we realise only too clearly
that it is not the African, supposed
to be centuries behind everyone
else, who is being protected by
such laws. It is simply not possible
to be forever overawed by people
who are afraid to compete with
us on the open labour market,
and who seem to fear so much
else besides as Africa begins to
awaken.

In 'Mental Corrosion' (RDM, 07/03/64), Nakasa attacked the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill as an indication of the 'process which has been corroding white minds in South Africa over the years'. The heinousness of the Bill lies in its power to deny blacks recognition as human beings and to 'treat Africans as labour and not as individuals, as human beings with human sentiments and desires'. The effects of the dehumanising Bill are to be seen in group marriages in which up to fifteen men are married when they respond with 'Yebo' to the Bantu Commissioner's question to his interpreter:

'Amos, will you ask these boys
if they want to take these girls
for their lawfully wedded wives...?'

The Bill also separates husbands from their families, giving cause for resentment and anger:

You'd think they lived in another world (the whites); a world without wives and husbands, or children and family life. I don't think they even see us.

While the Group Areas Act had been responsible for the Sophiatown removals in the fifties, the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill had the power once again to displace those residents who had rebuilt their homes in Soweto. Permanence meant retaining one's job. In this article Nakasa argues forcefully against the categorisation of black people as labour units, and the threat of apartheid to the idea of black community meant the impoverishment of every black person. In recognising the full impact of apartheid, Nakasa's concern for his people intensified during the year 1964, and he used to advantage the platform which the Rand Daily Mail provided in order to champion the cause of black people as the oppressed rather than to focus on individual profiles.

In order to reconstitute the image of black people as real and social human beings in the minds of his white readers, Nakasa challenged the white stereotypes of blacks as 'remarkably patient people', as 'born musicians' and as a people generally contented with their lot. 'The Myth of the Born Musicians' [RDM, 19/07/64] again reveals Nakasa's increasing sympathy for the idea of a black community. He argues that the apparent camaraderie among

blacks, manifest in their cheerfulness and willingness to burst into song and dance, has beguiled the casual observer. These tendencies are indicative of bitter humour as a reaction to 'the government's feeble attempts to make apartheid work'. Nakasa cites examples of ludicrous attempts to enforce practices of segregation: the denial to Africans the right to walk on the city's pavements; the lie that motor cars are far too complicated for Africans to drive; and that Africans 'would cause serious trouble if they were allowed to drink brandy and wine'. The irony was that Africans were already driving motor vehicles successfully and that the shebeens stocked large quantities of 'white' liquor. Nakasa does admit that the 'patience attributed to blacks' is partly the product of a lack of their own 'fervent interest in their political advancement'. If he had been accused of a similar lack of fervour, he is now determined to analyse human behaviour in close relation to politics. Still harbouring his own liberal universalising ideals, however, his analysis of oppression does not anticipate Black Consciousness in indicting the 'Eurocentric' liberal, but locates the problem in the tribal system which had historically stifled individual initiative. This is logical against the background of attempts at retribalisation. Nakasa nonetheless predicts now, without apparent regret, that a revolutionary spirit will be engendered in the black consciousness.

To a person committed to a broad South Africanism, where colour would be irrelevant, however, we can see that the necessary shift to notions of groups, black communities and even revolutionary action must have left a deep scar on Nakasa. Certainly his crisis became compulsive after he was awarded the Nieman Fellowship in recognition of the 'liberal objectivity'

which he himself should have prized, but which by this stage he perhaps secretly suspected could be taken to represent a kind of defeat; a confirmation that the international black man was easily assimilable into liberal white society, while South Africa stormed on in another direction. Nevertheless, Nakasa could not really have had the hard-line Black Consciousness commitments which would only emerge towards the end of the 1960s. Faced with the repression of apartheid, he grasped at the chance to leave South Africa and enter the world of human life. The refusal of his passport conferred a kind of legitimacy on his writing as protest, but also stood in danger of confining Nakasa to the very sectarian role that offended his ideals and spirit. Against such bureaucratic interference, he directed his writing to a stern examination of his own thoughts, doubts and fears. His waning faith in the future led him to question his identity and his strength to avoid bitterness - two aspects of his personality that he had previously considered to be inviolable.

'Castles in the Air' (RDM, 11/04/64) reflects on his life in the event of his being denied a passport:

Heaven knows, the last thing
I want is an exit permit. I've
seen enough of my friends leave
the country on those things. Some
of them are now living as exiles
in Europe, England and America.
Nearly all of them write miserable
letters reminiscing about the
good old days in South Africa.

His anxiety was to crystallise into dismay and disappointment over the next four months. Yet he retains his idea of a broader South Africanism when he makes a plea to be treated as a son of South Africa and not as a specific category of citizen. In 'It Is Difficult to Decide My Identity' (RDM, 20/06/64) his cry is for recognition not as member of the Pondo tribe or as a Zulu. He argues that he has no claim to being called an African as he was 'more at home with an Afrikaner than with a West African':

I have never owned an assegai
or any of those magnificent Zulu
shields. Neither do I propose
to be in tribal dress when I go
to the U.S. this year for my
scholarship. I am just not a
tribesman, whether I like it or
not. I am, inescapably, a part
of the city slums, the factory
machines and our beloved
shebeens. I am a South African.

Passports were rarely refused to whites, and Nakasa's assertion of his South Africanness was implicitly a criticism of a sectarian government. The criticism was repeated in strong terms in the article 'Oh to be an Anonymous Houseboy' (RDM, 15/08/64):

Those of my friends who are white,
those of them who have felt as
I do now, have been able to do

something about it...Like me today, they felt disillusioned and sick at heart...But being white, they found no difficulty in getting away from it all. The facilities were laid on for them to quit.

For me, the facilities laid on are of a different kind. They are designed to lead me into despair.

The journalist has been superseded now by the subjective autobiographer, and the writing is as much concerned with strategies of escape and survival as with the facts of reportage. In this article Nakasa explores the emasculation of the African male in jobs such as house-boy, mine pipe-boy and general mine work. Yet he entertains the thought that had he the 'advantage' of such anonymity, the matter of a passport would not even be an issue. Such fantasy of evasion, or bizarre transformation, however, cannot be sustained. The 'journalist' admits that the option 'would be sinking to the depths of despair on my part', and in the final comment the psychological subject edges aside the reporter:

It happens to be true that my experiences in this country are steadily dragging me into the darkness of despair.

...The powers that be have won a battle over me.

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When the passport was denied, Nakasa accepted an exit permit and, in a dark mood, left South Africa at the end of 1964. Stripped of his citizenship and declared a 'prohibited immigrant', Nakasa responds bitterly :

What this means is that self-
 confessed Europeans are in a
 position to declare me, an African,
 a prohibited immigrant, bang
 on South African soil.

('A Native of Nowhere'

RDM,19/09/64)

While in the United States, Nakasa wrote for the New York Times - some of the articles that he sent home have been recorded in print. (1) 'Mr Nakasa Goes to Harlem' (2) reveals that his initiation in America was not a pleasant experience; he found New York to be an urban slum and the South Africans whom he met - Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba - longed for home. Although he was not himself a victim of Bantu Education, his first criticism of the Act was prompted by the experience of Makeba's daughter. He had met her when she was reciting her own poetry in Greenwich Village, and he muses about her future had she been in South Africa:

I wondered if she knew that Bantu
 education would have taught her
 to weave grass mats instead of
 learning about the 20th century.

She might have grown up into
another washerwoman.

Nakasa perceived Harlem as hostile to himself; he was given a cold reception wherever he went, and the attitude of the Harlemites destroyed any romantic notions he might have had of the place as a source of vitality. Black Americans resented having their lives portrayed by an outsider - a tourist writer - who could not have hoped to understand their passions and their perceptions. What Nakasa was encountering were the nascent Black Power sentiments that would culminate in Stokely Carmichael's march in 1968 - the Black Power rhetoric which would influence Steve Biko's SASO in 1968, and attack the liberal-humanist inclinations of writers of the 1950s. Such a rejection of black-white brotherhood frightened Nakasa who, all his life in South Africa, had favoured the common as opposed to the specifically black experience. His impressions of Harlem are startling:

This aspect of Harlem's many
faces left me a little frightened.
I am, by nature, somewhat easy
to scare, but this was something
else, something quite apart from
my unbrave make-up. It was a
brand of blackmanship as I had
not met anywhere else before.

The many faces of Harlem included those that distrusted
whites, or disliked Africans from Africa. There were also those

that were deeply concerned with returning to cultural roots. Nakasa was an outsider to all these groups, as he was an African who had little to offer on black culture, African history or folklore. All the groups had one object in common: they strove to 'find a place in the sun for black America'. Although some people he met were fascinated with the clicks of the Zulu tongue, which he demonstrated, he could not satisfy the curiosity and demands of those who belonged to the Back-to-Africa movement. Nakasa wrote urgently to Obed Kunene, his life-long friend and editor of Ilanga Lase, requesting a bundle of the books on Zulu traditional practice which he had despised as a student at the Lutheran Mission School. Before the books could be collected, news of Nakasa's death as a result of a fall from the seventh floor of a Manhattan high-rise building, reached his family and friends in Durban. His death on 14 July 1965, at the age of 28, was reportedly by suicide. Symbolically, it suggested the death of any ideal of South Africanism at least for the next twenty years.

WRITING vs REALITY

Nakasa's contribution to the criticism of South African literature and writing is presented comprehensively in his talk to the English Academy of Southern Africa - 'Writing in South Africa Today' (The Classic Vol. I. No. 1. 1963). Nakasa reflected on much of the current thinking about the writer's relevance in a multicultural society. For example, Jack Cope in 1961 (Contrast, Vol. I, No. 3, 1961) was critical of the 'race-theme' writers of his time. He found that, whilst novels based on the theme of race conveyed 'outward frankness, realism and punch' in dealing with race relations or on the relations between the white oppressor and the black oppressed, the writing tended to be distorted by the 'pull of racialism'. These writers, he argued, 'see much but they do not see enough of the picture' and as a consequence cannot liberate their readers as they have not liberated themselves. Cope called for a 'vision penetrating beyond the silhouettes to the man and woman of reality, a sensuous identity with this world and people'. The writer had to hold 'not to the forms of truth only, but to its mood and inward spirit'.

Nakasa also called for a shared nationhood among writers and the ideal of common experience which would empower them to 'illuminate all aspects of our life from a central point in the social structure, as members of a single community'. He had found that black writers suffered a common debility with the white writer in that their writing was also grounded in their critical attitude towards racism, exploitation and inequality. They were unable to write outside of their compartmentalised base of experience. Nakasa went on to cite Sarah Gertrude Millin's God's

Step Children, as an example of 'a misleading portrayal of the Coloured community' in South Africa. But he also commented that, whilst the portrayal of Khumalo in Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country is 'seen at much closer range', the characterisation of meekness did not fully accord with reality. He commented that 'the black man's life is too rugged to allow for such a smooth flow of life where problems are overcome by appeals to heaven'; the black man in South Africa has not surrendered to 'dumb humility'. Nadine Gordimer's A World of Strangers (1958) was, to Nakasa, the South African novel that best depicted the black man in South Africa not as a curious phenomenon but as one who 'is left alone to move about without confinement to a tightrope based on a stereotype image of the black man'. That Gordimer's theme is the very difficulty of any cross-racial communication perhaps reminds us of the problematic nature of Nakasa's hopes.

Nakasa's appeal to South African writers was, therefore, that they should reach out beyond the conflicts of apartheid to the perception of a single community with 'common ideals, moral values and common national aspirations'. His appeal underscores his own vision as a writer. As we have seen, he regarded his ideal as the experience beyond racial confinement, where the attitudes and actions of all the people of South Africa would find liberation. An aptly summarising obituary appeared in the Rand Daily Mail (10/09/64):

He has portrayed the peculiar
and often distressing circumstances
of an African living in 'White'
South Africa. But even this he

has done with remarkable insight
and compassion for the fears
and hopes of other people, especially
the Afrikaner.

Some later writers, notably Mongane Wally Serote, would say that 'Nat saw white liberals as perfect' and that 'the black bitterness in his heart was an impetus that made him look for and willing to find truth in a whole network of lies woven by whites'. (1) Such a view of Nakasa, from the perspective of Black Consciousness in the 1970s, indicates the degree to which the hope of a common society in South Africa would collapse in the face of Verwoerdian repression during the 'silent decade' of the sixties. However, from our own vantage point today, we can place Nakasa in dialogue with renewed hopes for a non-racial, democratic South Africa. I say dialogue for the norm of the 1980s is more 'African-directed' than Nakasa, writing in the context of liberal opposition to apartheid, could have contemplated. Nonetheless, we need not dismiss Nakasa's ideals. In essence, his commitment to equality, justice and compassion remains something worth striving for, and the interest of his writing does not depend on any static catalogue of values. As I have tried to show, Nakasa's writing lives in its experiential struggle. His journalistic 'objectivity' was pitted against his 'autobiographical' presence in a society in crisis. His own crisis of identity encapsulates his involvement as a sensitive being in a severe social milieu. In spite of new challenges over the last twenty years, this remains the 'story' of 'writing in South Africa today'.

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