

Crossing Borders:
A Critical Study of
Michael Dingake's *My Fight Against Apartheid* (1987)
and
Helao Shityuwete's *Never Follow The Wolf:
The Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter* (1990)

by

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DECLARATION

This study represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use was made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing their autobiographies has not, until recently, been given priority as a historico-cultural activity by Southern African political activists. The former President-General of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli, was among the early few who engaged in the writing of political autobiography with his *Let My People Go* (1962). Other than him, Z.K. Matthews, who wrote *Freedom For My People* (1981), goes down in South African history as one of the pioneering political autobiographers. (Strictly speaking, both Luthuli and Matthews related their life stories to editors.) During the 1960's and 1970's it was the practice to collect speeches and / or writings by the people's leaders and, afterwards, compile them as political autobiographies. Among these are Nelson Mandela's *No Easy Walk To Freedom* (1965) and *The Struggle Is My Life: His speeches and writings brought together with historical documents and accounts of Mandela in prison by fellow prisoners* (1978) and Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like* (1978).

Together with the understandable number of biographies of political leaders - Iain Christie's *Samora Machel* (1988), Mary Benson's *Nelson Mandela* (1986) and Benjamin Pogrand's *Sobukwe and Apartheid* (1990), among others - there has been a distinct resurgence of political autobiography in Southern Africa since the late 1980's. (Some of these autobiographies were unbanned together with mass organisations like the ANC, PAC and SACP in 1990.) Among the most significant of these autobiographies are Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1985), Helen Joseph's *Side By Side. The Autobiography of Helen Joseph* (1986), Frank Chikane's *No Life Of My Own: An Autobiography* (1988), Albie Sachs's *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* (1990), and more recently, Helen Suzman's *In No Uncertain Terms* (1993) and Ronnie Kasrils's *Armed and Dangerous* (1993).

I would, however, like to consider in this dissertation two lesser-known contemporary political autobiographies: the Bechuanaland-born Michael Dingake's *My Fight Against Apartheid* (1987) and Helao Shityuwete's *Never Follow The Wolf: The Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter* (1990). My reasons for choosing these works are based primarily on the fact that they typify a Southern African political thinking, particularly because the autobiographers represent a consciousness of the dominant mass organisations

in their respective countries of operation: Michael Dingake is an African National Congress (ANC) member and Namibia's Helao Shityuwete is a member of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO). Both autobiographers suffered considerably under apartheid South Africa at one stage or another, and also served long sentences on Robben Island. I propose to examine these two Southern African works, neither of which has received much critical attention, in terms of the concept of 'crossing borders' which I postulate as a way of reading South African political autobiographies. Dingake and Shityuwete, originally from the margins of the South African political struggle, were both drawn into its 'centre'. Their works, written in Botswana and Namibia respectively, show that this struggle has a larger context in Southern Africa.

CHAPTER ONE: 'CROSSING BORDERS'

1.1 'Crossing Borders': the Current Debate in South Africa

'Crossing borders' has been seized upon as a critical concept in the present-day South African literary debate, especially in the attempt to breach the divisions left by the South African system. From several accounts by people who left the country into exile in the past, 'crossing borders' can be seen as a disintegrative factor; a part of South African society became disengaged, and the wholeness of the nation, of its literature and of many other facets of its life was ruptured. The current debate, however, evinces a shift towards 'crossing borders' as a means of reintegrating not only South African society but also the hitherto divided streams of South African literature.

This shift can be seen in the title, *Crossing Borders*, given by Ampie Coetzee and James Polley to their book about the historic meeting in July 1989 of South African and exiled ANC writers at the Victoria Falls. The meeting, the editors seem to acknowledge, was another form of crossing borders, a step towards unifying South African society, literature and culture. The book itself is an account of the proceedings of the conference in Zimbabwe where a group of South African writers literally crossed the borders of their country to meet their counterparts, the exiled ANC writers, to initiate a reconstruction programme towards a new South Africa. Thus the title of the book, *Crossing Borders*, signifies not only the reunion of these compatriots but also cultural reintegration and regeneration in a larger context. The ANC group was represented by participants from Lusaka, Amsterdam, Ireland and Paris, and included Steve Tshwete, Jeremy Cronin, Willie Kgositsile, Patrick Fitzgerald, Barbara Masekela, Albie Sachs, Essop Pahad, Gillian Slovo, Mongane Serote, Marius Schoon and Breyten Breytenbach. The South African delegation comprised such writers as André Brink, Tennie du Plessis, Marlene van Niekerk, Ampie Coetzee, Menàn du Plessis, Enenne van Heerden, Koos Prinsloo and Hein Willemse. In essence, all their presentations show that the 'border' is perceived in a new light; it is consciously transformed from being a barrier, a divide, a boundary, a landmark of limitations and even a battlefield to now being viewed as a bridge, a podium for regeneration and a pipeline for reformation. Most of the concerns documented in *Crossing Borders* indicate a positive historical shift in the South African

socio-cultural formation. It is against this backdrop that Steve Tshwete articulates his cause from the ANC perspective:

We aspire towards a South Africa where all our people will live together as brothers, a South Africa which will encourage all cultural and linguistic traits to grow unhindered, a South Africa in which the people will be free to express themselves in whatever language, to engage in their own cultural activities without being inhibited in any way by the government. We see as a major point of development: the unity of all South Africans in the final analysis as a single nation. (Coetzee & Polley 1990: 15)

What Tshwete desires is replacement of the divisions between races, sexes and creeds in South Africa by a true democracy. The proceedings in *Crossing Borders* represent a preparation for such a change in paradigm. It is important to note that both groups of writers, exiled ANC and South African, see themselves as disintegrated entities hankering for a lost unity, as divided parties who can only be whole again once they have 'crossed borders'. It is in this vein that Charles Malan agrees with Barbara Masekela that:

[T]here are no us/them distinctions at a very basic human level... From within and from outside the system, we have only one common enemy, apartheid. Not our black or our white sons. And only one common goal, a peaceful, democratic South Africa. (1990: 52)

The emphasis here is on a refusal to allow further divisive 'borders' between South African peoples, and on the development, instead, of a complementary South African platform.

Further evidence of the currency of 'crossing borders' in the South African literary debate may be found in the proliferation of books dealing with this subject. Many writers have turned the border into the subject of focus. A review of Attie van Niekerk's recently published *Saam In Afrika*, for example, describes the book as "an attempt to address the quandary posed by political divisions in this country ... a willingness to show that the future of South Africa is dependent on the *building of bridges* by working together." (Reddy 1992: 19, my italics)

Again, from the *New Nation Writers Conference* held in December 1991 at the University of Witwatersrand another book dealing with the theme 'Exile and Literature', titled *Out Of Exile: South African Writers Speak* (Goddard and Wessels 1992), has emerged. It is essentially a collection of interviews in which some exiled writers explain the standpoints from which they made their inputs into the conference. The conference was

attended by well-known writers from exile some of whom, like Lewis Nkosi, Laretta Ngcobo, Daniel Kunene and Dennis Brutus, were visiting the country for the first time after many years. Other writers from exile included such figures as Albie Sachs, Mbulelo Mzamane, Breyten Breytenbach and Keorapetse Kgositsile, to mention a few.

The whole thrust of the conference was the creation of a ‘multicultural society’, and in his address on this topic Masaoki Miyamoto stressed the idea of crossing even linguistic borders as a decisive factor in attaining the ideally democratic, multicultural society:

So, my proposal here is that African writers should be linguistically adventurous enough to be borderless to build a democratic multilingual culture. In a sense, writers are privileged to go beyond the linguistic border. They don’t need passport or visa to do so. (Miyamoto 1991: 5).

He further suggests that ‘trans-ethnic languages’ could be utilised as vehicles for breaching these borders - because borders, it seems, *need* to be crossed. In agreement with this suggestion is Lewis Nkosi’s call for linguistic borderlessness; he believes that a South African literature would "fructify our canon" if it included all forms of literature that shaped it, including those in the vernacular languages (Goddard & Wessels 1992: 32). André Brink, also present at this conference, uses the term ‘translingual solidarity’ to support Miyamoto’s and Nkosi’s calls. (Brink 1991: 2)

In various other local literary debates, including those in *The Weekly Mail*, the issue of ‘crossing borders’ remains topical. But to take it further, I will place the debate within a broader international discourse.

1.2 ‘Crossing Borders’ in the International Debate

The problem of being a ‘borderline case’ - to borrow a term from that notable white South African ‘situation’, Breyten Breytenbach - is not unique to South Africa (and thus to South African literature) only. It is equally an international problem. That people are displaced is a worldwide phenomenon; they find themselves in a ‘no-man’s land’ and then document their adverse situation there.

The fact that the *XIIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature*

Association held in Munich in 1988 restricted its focus to 'Spaces and Boundaries', is evidence enough of the issue of 'borders' as current in the international literary debate. In raising the question of the border, Derek Rubin of Amsterdam cites the Chicago sociologist Robert E Park's discussion of "migration as one of the forms of change which... plays a significant role in the evolution of civilization." (1990: 90) Rubin refers to Park's use of the term "'marginal man' to denote a type of personality which is created as a result of migration and mobility, and which can be found wherever individuals are grappling with the need to reconcile two conflicting worlds or cultures" (Rubin 1990: 90). Park is mainly talking about the Jews of the Diaspora who, he says, are historically and typically examples of "marginal man", a concept that can be taken to refer to a person who has been victimised and obliged to cross borders, both in his physical and cultural worlds. Exiles all over the world experience this predicament of living in an alien context and of being caught between the past and the present. It is a situation where they are forced to reject their past (which they may not escape) and embrace the present (in which a possibility of rejection always looms). Although the exile's "situation deprives him of the sense of security and assurance afforded by belonging fully to a group" (Rubin 1990: 91), Rubin elaborates on this idea by suggesting that: "[T]he experience of marginality is characterised by a *duality*.... the fact that the "marginal man" is not bound by full allegiance to one group, to one tradition, to one set of received ideas, *liberates him in a unique way*". (Rubin 1990: 91, my italics) Just as social theory has come to regard 'crossing borders' as a vital component in the 'evolution of civilization', so contemporary literary theory now has as part of its agenda to reposition writers from the margins ('the marginalised') back into the mainstream of literary culture.

In his presentation at the Munich conference, Hein Viljoen based his argument on borders in South Africa. He concurs with Derrida that borders are essentially "undecidables" and says "they are in a sense part of one space, or of another, and yet of none". (Viljoen 1990: 118). He goes on to note the border that exists between races in South Africa which has culminated in societies opposing each other. Viljoen grants that such a scenario has seen the rise of the Afrikaans "Border" literature. He suggests, furthermore, that there is a new range of literature of the "inner frontier" which is not necessarily based on skirmishes along the literal frontiers of South Africa. This literature of the "inner frontier" reveals heightened polarity between "us" and the "other"- the "freedom fighters" and the "security forces" , the

"children" and the "police", the "people" and the "system", the "masses" and the "enemy" or the opposite of this, depending on the persuasion of the writer. All these oppositional aspects define tension in South Africa as shown in recent fiction, for example, Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto*. South African literature also crosses borders from history to fiction in a distinctive way.

This whole discussion takes us back to South Africa as another form of borderland, a 'No-man's land', a contested land, particularly in literature produced in the 80's. The title, *Grounds of Contest* (1990), by which Van Wyk Smith calls his survey of South African English literature, provides us with a metaphor for the setting, South Africa, that relates to Breytenbach's ironical reference to South Africa as "St Albino" or "the homeland of exile" (1986: 77). It becomes interesting to note that in his subtitle 'Writing and Transgression' Viljoen goes on to point out that the act of writing is itself a vehicle for transgressing the border. What becomes Viljoen's most significant contribution to my study is his assertion that:

However arbitrary spacing or the making of boundaries may be, the transgression of any boundary or limit invariably becomes significant. In textual terms a border was defined by Lotman (1977:240) as a normally impenetrable barrier between two mutually complementary subsets of a semantic field. The barrier, the semantic field and the hero-agent are for Lotman the elements of plot. Crossing the barrier constitutes an event. (Viljoen 1990: 119)

What is important here, as in earlier works cited in this dissertation, is that whereas borders tend to marginalise, in order for people to avert the experience of marginality, and as a necessary step for cultural growth, borders *should be transgressed*.

1.3 'Crossing Borders' in the Post-colonial Debate

If the post-colonial literary discourse concentrates on the issue of re-drawing frontiers between the metropolitan centre and its margins, the forming of 'centres' on the former 'edges' and thus 'marginalising' the former (Euro-)centre, it follows then that post-colonialism is about transgressing borders.

Post-colonial discourse is of the perception that literature does not have to be judged

in terms of a monocentric European 'standard'. This literary debate engenders a consciousness of the self-sufficiency of these newly recognised 'autonomies'; the discourse demystifies the imperial processes, and disallows the 'metropolis' from exercising its hegemony over the former 'colonised'. These former colonies then embark on the processes of 'decolonising' and 'metropolising' themselves. It is such a consciousness that has helped reorder all assumptions that history has imbued English literature with. Ashcroft et al state:

Post-colonial literary theory, then, has begun to deal with the problems of transmuting time into space, with the present struggling out of the past, and, like much recent post-colonial literature, it attempts to construct a future. The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of the difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognise cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity', and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilised. (Ashcroft et al 1989: 36)

For Ashcroft et al, 'crossing borders' promises the post-colonial world parity with the former colonisers. Not only does their argument recall Rubin's phrase, "evolution of civilisation" discussed above, but it also reinforces the suggestion that 'crossing borders' is a foundation for any regeneration. Post-coloniality, then, marks a shift from monocentrism to pluricentrism in literature, the fundamental force being cross-culturality. Literatures of the former 'margins' receive recognition as literatures of the 'centre' in their own right. In the context of my discussion of Southern African autobiography, therefore, it is important to note that political autobiographies of a particular kind are claiming the former centrality of the more conventional autobiographies of the colonisers. Ashcroft et al observe that:

A characteristic of dominated literatures is an inevitable tendency towards subversion, and a study of the subversive strategies employed by post-colonial writers would reveal both the configurations of domination and the imaginative and creative responses to this condition. Directly or indirectly in Salman Rushdie's phrase, the 'Empire writes back' to the imperial 'centre', not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarise centre and periphery in the first place. (Ashcroft et al 1989: 33)

In keeping with the discussion of 'crossing borders', then, is this post-colonial consciousness of the need to dismantle the polarity that exists between nations, between races, between men and women, between exiles and insiders, the 'marginalised' and the imperial, the disadvantaged and advantaged groups, and now between the 'centre' and the 'periphery'.

In post-colonial literature, then, 'crossing borders' should be seen as a way of revoking the domination of one group by another, one culture by another. I concur with Ashcroft et al:

For in one sense all post-colonial literatures are cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between 'worlds', a gap in which the simultaneous processes of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practice. (Ashcroft et al 1989: 39)

This observation, more than anything else, stresses the idea of what may be called 'borderlessness' in literature and culture.

The idea of cross-culturality is also addressed by Hooper (1992) in her attempt to investigate the question of "cultural translation". She suggests that a narrator is, in many ways, a cultural translator. She introduces the concept "interface" between various cultures in literature. She explores the problems posed by 'cross-culturing' by examining narrator/audience cultural differences and how these can be made compatible without compromising the value of each culture. Hooper notes:

Since the concept of cultural translation developed specifically in order to address the issue of cross-culturality ... and since ... translation is a form of narration, the concept can fruitfully be used to address cross-culturality in literature. (1992: 70)

Cultural translation, then, implies "something other than venturing in to other people's world and venturing out again" (Hooper 1992: 72); it allows, in literary terms, for 'ascendency' and 'descendency' of cultures, on equal terms, in such a way that a "cross-border reader" and a "cross-border narrator" do not feel threatened in the "interface".

What I hope to have shown so far, is that the concern with crossing borders may not be located within the South African and international literary debates only, but further underpins all post-colonial literary discourses as well. I will now give a brief survey of black South African autobiography and define its narrative contours in terms of the notion of the border. I propose to establish the importance of 'crossing borders' as both a theme and strategy for narrative configuration in black South African autobiographical writing in the past.

1.4 The Concept of the 'Border' in Black S.A. Autobiography

The long-standing significance of the concept of 'crossing borders' can be seen, for example, in the way many South African black autobiographies in the past have ended with a literal account of the protagonist's difficulty in crossing the border in order to leave the country. Abrahams's *Tell Freedom* (1954) concludes with the protagonist travelling to Natal under difficult circumstances to await a chance of 'skipping' the country which only comes when, pretending to be one of the crew, he boards a ship destined for abroad. In *Blame Me On History* (1963) Modisane endeavours unsuccessfully to get a passport and resorts to leaving South Africa illegally. After a careful study of the train schedules, and via a circuitous route, he travels from Johannesburg to Francistown, gets off the train, then takes a Cape Town train on a ticket from Francistown to Bulawayo, to avoid inquiry about his travelling documents. In *Down Second Avenue* (1959) Mphahlele relates how he perseveres for five months "only to be told that I couldn't have a passport". (1959: 207) Records about him have been kept by the Security Branch and he is allowed to leave only after he is given assistance by a church minister and after a series of consultations with officials. At the end of *Africa My Music* (1984) Mphahlele describes his difficulty in crossing the border back into the country after spending about twenty years in exile. He is initially denied access to the country of his birth unless he stays in Lebowa and renounces his British citizenship. Naboth Mokgatle, the subject of *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African* (1971), is another of the many South Africans who leave the country without a passport. The only document he has, an affidavit drafted by himself and signed by his Indian friend, sees him through the border. He leaves the country even though he knows that without a passport or visa no country will host him. Maggie Resha, in *My Life in the Struggle: 'Mangoana 0 Tsoara Thipa ka Bohaleng* (1991), describes how, dressed in her nurse's attire, she leaves South Africa with her two little girls to follow her husband who had already escaped abroad. Without a valid passport, she travels through Lobatsi, to Plumtree, to Bulawayo, and to Northern Rhodesia before arriving in Dar es Salaam. Resha experiences the crisis of 'crossing' the border when she goes from the Northern Rhodesian to the Tanganyikan immigration desks which are in the same office; in a dramatic scene, she explains how she could literally run from one desk across to another to avoid arrest and deportation by Northern Rhodesian officials. In *Asking For Trouble: Autobiography of a Banned Journalist* (1980), Donald Woods tells of how -

in what may be described a near-miraculous escape - disguised as a priest, he sneaks out of his house under the nose of a Security Branch officer and heads for the border, carrying a false passport. After frightening encounters, he succeeds in crossing and goes to Maseru, then to Botswana, and then to Lusaka before flying off to London. All such accounts usually come as the culmination of life stories centred around the protagonists' heightened awareness of their experiences in a country of restrictive political frontiers.

In all these autobiographies the concept of the border has been expanded, furthermore, to shape the narrative. In his autobiography *Tell Freedom*, Abrahams develops his narrative within a cross-border framework. Abrahams's life is characterised by the literal crossing of borders right up to the end. Born in the Transvaal, and spending all his childhood life in the slums of Elsburg and later Vrededorp, he never experiences a stable life. He is forced by the death of his father to stay with an aunt in Vrededorp. Later he enters the greater world of urban Johannesburg to look for work. With the help of contacts, he leaves Johannesburg for a college near Pietersburg. Assisted by friends, again, he ends up in the Cape in search of work. He tries fruitlessly to get himself a passport to go to England. Eventually, in an arduous journey, he leaves Cape Town for Durban, from where he sails to exile in England. Abrahams's life is one of literally extending the frontiers of his world. The many borders that his life history shows him to cross represent the multiplicity of borders in the general life of black people in South Africa in the past. At one stage Abrahams explicitly places his growing impression of South African peoples in terms of his growing awareness of the borders he is crossing:

I had got off the train twice. Once in the Orange Free State, and once on the borders of Cape Province. I had spent four days moving from one village to the next. I had built up a picture of non-European life. But for slight differences of detail, the picture had been the same as in the Transvaal... As I had neared the Cape border, I had noticed the numerical increase of Coloureds over Africans. (1981: 266)

Abrahams's racial position is an important one in relation to the notion of the border. Being born a 'Coloured', of 'mixed blood', he is caught up in the position of a 'borderline case', situated between the two opposing societal groups. Neither the whites nor the blacks recognise his allegiance as one of them, and he thus finds himself a racial outcast in some kind of a 'no-man's land'. Abrahams's case also proves, however, that transgressing borders

is a condition for cultural development. The intricate cross-border format of Abrahams's autobiography begins with the young Abrahams returning to his birthplace, Vrededorp, from Aunt Liza's Elsburg. It should be noted that the older Abrahams finally also comes back to his country of origin, in the form of a text though.

Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me On History* also belongs to the category of autobiographies concerned with the theme of crossing borders. Modisane cryptically employs varying strategies to heighten the idea of crossing borders in his text. He devotes much of his narrative to the 'pass laws' as a way of preparing us for the border problem in South Africa in the past, where a life document served as a travelling document; a pass[port] was a prerequisite for crossing everyday borders.

Modisane's preoccupation with the theme of crossing borders may be seen, for example, in the way he describes himself as a 'situation'. He is totally dissatisfied with his life as a black person. As a 'decent' middle class black, he cannot bear the degradations of the order-of-the-day life for blacks in the South African urban world. Other than the colour of his skin, he sees nothing else to differentiate him from the white man. But the reality of the matter is that he is perceived as a 'non-white', to be treated like the rest of his kind. Thus most of his autobiography documents the agony and frustration of a man who, having moved across the border between black and white cultures, is consequently being rejected by both. The white people do not accept him as one of them, because of his skin colour, but nor do the black people accept him back; they call him a 'situation', someone who can boast no allegiance to or security from any group. Like Abrahams, he is caught in a 'no-man's land', between the two 'worlds' which he can only resolve by leaving the country.

In *Down Second Avenue* Mphahlele describes the many geographical borders he crossed from Maupaneng-Leshoana-Marabastad-Natal-Johannesburg and finally to Nigeria. Like his contemporary, Abrahams, Mphahlele is making a statement about the life of a black South African ensnared by 'borders'. In South Africa you either observed the borders set by the government, or you remained a borderline case forever. Hence leaving the country was a frequent solution in the past.

As further evidence of Mphahlele's concern with the theme of crossing borders, we may look at how he describes how he was forced to 'cross floors' from teaching to journalism because of his ideological beliefs:

That did not pain me so much as the necessity to be in Drum when I did not really want to be a journalist. I wanted to teach and I wanted to be a writer. During those thirty months, I had to live two lives. A life of subediting and reporting and fiction editing during the day, and a life of study and creative writing in the night. Try hard as I might, I couldn't find a comfortable meeting point between the two. My prose was suffering under severe journalistic demands and I was fighting to keep my head steady above it all. (1959: 194)

The dilemma of wanting to teach and write in the system that he rejects and that has terminated his services as a teacher and writer is the one that makes Mphahlele another kind of a 'borderline case'. He adores teaching and writing but he may not do it; he dislikes journalism but has to do it to survive. Faced with such a situation, Mphahlele, like Abrahams and Modisane, sees going out of the country as the only option.

In *Africa My Music* Mphahlele develops his theme of the 'borders' more broadly. He defines a cross-border mode of a different kind. His narrative here is based predominantly on his life around the world as an exile. In an impatient tone of homesickness and outrage, he describes his exilic life as characterised by living in space with no borders, a land in which he has no 'identity'. He finds himself helplessly travelling from country to country, plying between Europe, America and Africa. As he moves from one university to another, teaching, he seems to be troubled by the fact that his knowledge and experiences are imparted to the 'wrong' people. South African students, he reckons, are most in need of these. Mphahlele laments: "If only, if only ah these days the *if-onlys* seem to come from unexpected corners, ... - if only I could teach in my own native land or continent!" (1984: 163) These words dramatise the frustration of living in an alien context, the exilic problem of being on the 'margin' of existence. They explain the need for a bridge to connect the exile with his origins, the 'wanderer' and home. Mphahlele further attests that:

The children who have fled across the borders have undertaken so much at a tender age, have hit the long, tortuous, uncertain, often soul-mutilating road of exile. My personal experience, like that of hundreds of my fellow-exiles, has been that once the sense of adventure began to wear off, *nostalgia* and the distance from meaningful involvement, from relevance, began to gnaw at one's vitals. (1984: 177: my italics)

There is a symbiotic link between the exile and his home-country, and until the space is filled, until the 'border' is re-crossed, the exile is bound to remain 'afloat'; his life will be wasted on the margin, living as a borderline case. And to reinforce this need to 'recross' the border, in his autobiography Mphahlele gives a lengthy account of how he eventually bridged the 'margin' of exile back into South Africa.

If in Abrahams's, Modisane's and Mphahlele's life stories it is largely the content which is concerned with the theme of 'crossing borders', then, in Mokgatle's *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African* this theme is more fully integrated into the actual narration. Being a writer whose story is set in the period between early 20's and 50's, Mokgatle is trapped in the Western literary forms dominant in South African writing at the time; he divides up his story according to the order which the events happened, at the same time defining the contours of his narrative in terms of plots and subplots. My concern, however, is not so much with his subscription to Western literary traditions but with how his text represents the cross-border paradigm.

In telling his life history, Mokgatle finds himself recounting the genesis of his conservative tribal village, even before his birth. His narration centres on the 'emigration' of his people to Phokeng where he is later to be born. Although this section of the text may be seen as a subplot because it does not concern itself with the protagonist directly, it is also a plot in its own right which, in my view, prepares us for the later 'emigration' to exile by Mokgatle himself.

In another 'subplot', young Mokgatle is 'posted' to the cattle-posts, far away from home, Phokeng, much against his will. He says:

[I] became homesick. I was exiled from Phokeng and separated from the woman who gave birth to me, whom I loved dearly and knew that she had me in her thoughts all the time. Time and exile took a toll of my memories and strength. (Mokgatle 1971: 94)

These words prefigure the homesickness in exile from South Africa, the country which "gave birth to [him]", from the perspective of later exilic developments in his story.

The ill-treatment of young Mokgatle by his uncle which eventually results in his going

to Rustenburg indicates another model of crossing borders. His fugitive escape in this particular incident is not just reminiscent of other South African life stories describing 'skipping the country', but it also describes the qualities needed for exile: fearlessness, resolution and optimism:

When I left my mother and Phokeng, I had graduated from the fear that I could only live under my mother or parents' guardianship, protection and guidance. My exile to the cattle-posts a few years before had shown me that, away from parents, life goes on just the same. I knew then that wherever one went, one was bound to make friends and find help. (1971: 108)

It is in the 'main plot', however, where the theme is fully stated. The protagonist crosses the border from conservative tribal traditions to an 'enlightened' urban world. He is exposed to working for recompense as opposed to doing work for its own sake (which he does in Phokeng). Implied here is the move from the traditional subsistence economic policies across to the capitalistic economic principles of the urban world. He further transcends the borders of naively and is exposed to the life of participation and activism.

One other autobiographical work crafted to show the idea of crossing borders is Donald Woods's *Asking For Trouble: Autobiography of a Banned Journalist*. The book, I agree, is not a black South African autobiography, but it is still heavily informed by black experience. In this text, Woods gives a detailed account of his life as a journalist in a country of restrictive politico-racial frontiers, and of his friendship with Steve Biko which incurs for him (Woods) everyday police surveillance, harassment and persecution. Woods is a white man, but not the 'supremacist' he might appear to be, and Biko is a black man, an ardent proponent of black consciousness - these two men, each in his own way a writer, manage to bridge the boundaries of racial distrust and hate. I want to suggest that, like the other autobiographers discussed so far, Woods should be seen as a 'borderline case', a white man running the black course, in South African racialistic terms. But he comes readily to explain his stand in their friendship:

As our friendship with Steve grew, with his wife Ntsiki, and with Mamphela and other members of the group, we began to live in [perhaps, between] the two worlds. One was the white suburban world and the other was the radically different Biko world where Security Police harassment, jailing and physical danger were a part of everyday existence. In the white world you talked of who had dined with whom, and in the black world of who had been

arrested or searched that week. (Woods 1980: 253)

In this extract Woods confirms his *strategic position* in a 'no-man's land', between "the two worlds".

1.5 'Crossing Borders' to Robben Island

A great deal of black South African political autobiography narrates the protagonists' induction into a life of activism. The inevitable outcome of this is the conflict of the subjects with the apartheid authorities and, finally, either exile, on the one hand, or detention and imprisonment on the other. To complement those autobiographies of Abrahams, Mphahlele and Resha that are written from the perspective of exile, there are those texts where imprisonment or detention is the motive for their being written: First's *117 Days: An Account of Confinement and Interrogation under the South African Ninety-Day Detention Law* (1965), Mashinini's *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography* (1989), Makhoere's *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid* (1988), Dlamini's *Hell-Hole, Robben Island: Reminiscence of a Political Prisoner in South Africa* (n.d.), Naidoo's *Island In Chains: Ten Years In Robben Island as told by Indres Naidoo* (1982), Lewin's *Bandiet. Seven Years in a South African Prison* (1981), Mbeki's *Learning from Robben Island: The Prison Writings of Govan Mbeki* (1991) and Lekota's *Prison Letters to a Daughter* (1991), to mention a few. The autobiographies of imprisonment and those of exile are in many ways comparable. Imprisonment is often portrayed as inner exile. It is against this background that I propose to focus on (political) imprisonment as another form of crossing the border. Imprisonment implies moving from the 'centre' of the society to its 'margins'. Davies (1990), in his study of prison writing, also sees "the [prisoner] as writing not only in a margin of the society that imprisons, but also in a margin of the prison itself" (Davies 1990: 4). Imprisonment represents a crossing over from 'outside' to 'inside' (exemplified by Jeremy Cronin's title of his prison poems, *Inside*); but imprisonment on Robben Island, in particular, may be seen as the epitome of such a consciousness. In as much as going to exile is an ultimate form of crossing borders, imprisonment on Robben Island has been the ultimate form of internal exile. The prisoner is banished from his country to the prison island off the tip of the subcontinent. Another way of looking at it is that exile to Robben Island was intended by the system to make the prisoner effectively absent from society.

Most autobiographers introduce the crossing to Robben Island by relating first the physical journey in prison vans to the Cape, and then by boat to the island. To further develop this theme of removal from society they frequently cite incidents where, in prison, they are transferred to solitary confinement, another border being placed between them and other prisoners in the communal cells. When the prisoner arrives on Robben island, he soon discovers that he has literally crossed from the larger structure of the South African system to a smaller but identical one. The structures of authority in the island prison world are shaped in exactly the same way as those of the apartheid government, the only autonomy exercised by the smaller structure being its misapplication of some of these policies and regulations (see Jacobs 1992: 79-81). Robben Island is the place where the protagonist no longer fights the system from 'without' but from 'within', where the struggle is brought from outside to be waged inside. And, most importantly, Robben Islanders - because individually part of a body of prisoners in identical circumstances - learn to see themselves within a broader communal perspective. The presence of other like prisoners reduces the possibility of individuation. In a sense, then, imprisonment on Robben Island forces the prisoner, in a much more dramatic way than even other forms of activism, to cross the border from an individual self to a communal self. Prison memoirists tend to define themselves in terms of group-oriented activities: enforced labour, group-training and informal discussions leave little or no room for individuation.

1.6 South African Autobiography as a 'Cross-border' Genre

Black South African autobiography has traditionally 'crossed borders' from a singular to a plural self in its documentation of collective experience, particularly in testimonial writing (see Gititi 1991). Thus as Abrahams, for example, gives an account of himself, he quite consciously gives testimony about the adverse circumstances of all people of colour, and consequently, all disadvantaged groups in South Africa. As the other autobiographies also reveal, the experience of the protagonist is representative of experiences of other people in circumstances similar to his or her own. Hence 'Abrahams' or 'Modisane' or 'Resha' can be taken to read 'black South African'. This may be said without underplaying the individuality of the protagonists. As much as their texts document events from the protagonists' particular perspectives, making them the central characters of the South African

past in a specific epoch, they nonetheless remain paradigmatic records of the circumstances of many other people who live in the same period. While being the autobiographies of the protagonists as subjects, each one of them also represents an episode in the life history of the collective South African subject.

Another common practice in the writing of these black autobiographies in the past is their description of the use of false documents as a means of leaving the country, for example, Woods's and Mokgatle's documents. The autobiographical texts, therefore, I suggest, may be seen as genuine (travelling) documents by the autobiographers in response to the fake documents they used in the past to go into exile. In Mokgatle's text, in particular, he reveals his true self in relation to his country. He even acknowledges that he is 'an unknown South African' because his travelling documents to exile could not render him 'knowable' at the time. Therefore black South African autobiography marks the crossing of the border from 'unknowing' a person to knowing him, to use Mokgatle's words.

Another approach to black South African autobiographical writing according to the notion of the border is shown in Woods's text. While being the autobiography of Woods, it still describes Biko's experiences, among others; it has Biko's biography. Interestingly, a cross-border design is shown where the autobiography 'writes' biography. More examples of this may be seen towards the end of Mphahlele's autobiography, *Africa My Music*, where he gives brief biographies of other South Africans who died in exile. That strategy is also employed by Resha in her autobiography where she devotes much of her narrative to writing the biography of her husband, Robert Resha; also included in her autobiography is Johnny Makatini's biography.

Even more interestingly, South African autobiography frequently combines prison memoir with autobiography as conventionally known: autobiography as a "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular, the story of his personality" (Lejeune 1989: 4). 'Autobiography' thus becomes neither one nor the other of these, but both. In such a case, the prison memoir becomes an occasion for writing the more integrative autobiography. This hybrid form has become a norm in Southern Africa.

1.7 The Life Stories of Michael Dingake and Helao Shityuwete

Having considered the concept of the ‘border’ in the current South African, international and post-colonial literary discourses, and having looked at the ways in which it has shaped black South African autobiography in the past, especially in relation to imprisonment on Robben Island and in relation to autobiography as a genre, I will now turn to the autobiographies of Michael Dingake, *My Fight Against Apartheid* (1987), and Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow The Wolf: The Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter* (1990) in terms of this model of ‘crossing borders’. The two works of Dingake and Shityuwete have not been able to secure as much critical attention as the other major South African autobiographies. It is my contention that these works belong - despite their obvious differences of the one being written by a ‘South African’ from Botswana and the other by a Namibian - to a definable tradition of Southern African autobiographical writing. *My Fight Against Apartheid* and *Never Follow The Wolf* help to define the mode of contemporary black Southern African autobiography and exemplify its ‘cross-border’ nature that I have described in this Chapter. Dingake’s and Shityuwete’s texts, like those of Kuzwayo, Mphahlele, Resha and others, narrate the life of a person who, in his attempt to secure better education, is frustrated by the politics of his country and eventually ends up in political activism. Their autobiographies, like those of Makhoere, Mashinini and First, among others, are testimonies of detention in South African prisons. Above all, their texts, like the ones written by Mbeki, Naidoo, Dlamini and Lekota, offer detailed accounts of imprisonment on Robben Island as long-term prisoners. But specifically, I will consider how the experiences of Dingake and Shityuwete in their respective autobiographies reveal a ‘self’ that has literally crossed physical borders during a life of resistance, and figuratively ‘crosses borders’ from an individual to a collective self. I hope also to show that their autobiographies, in the tradition of black South African autobiography, represent the crossing of generic borders from a Western-type individualist autobiography to a more ‘communal’ African one.

CHAPTER TWO

MICHAEL DINGAKE: *MY FIGHT AGAINST APARTHEID*

Dingake's autobiography recounts his life from his childhood in the rural area of Bobonong in Bechuanaland up to his eventual return to the independent Botswana after his release from prison at the age of 53. Barret J. Mandel has observed, however, that 'no life is an artistic unity' (1968: 216). Following this, Tsiga states that "individual experiences in life, whatever their connections, are not an uninterrupted sequence" (Tsiga 1987: 2). Life is not uncomplicatedly sequential; it consists of distinct experiences which culminate at certain points. For the purposes of this discussion I will call such points 'bridges'. Human experience, therefore, may be conceived of as a set of 'plains' and 'bridges' where a person moves from one set of circumstances to the next, right up to the end. Since I believe that in writing his autobiography Dingake is mainly concerned with the 'bridges' that demarcate the episodes in his life and how he crosses them, I want to apply this model in a cross-border reading of his text.

Dingake uses the word 'cross' or its variants and synonyms a number of times in the opening pages of his text, among them "skipped the border" (3), "limped to international orbit" (3), "buffer-zone" (6), "across the borders" (6), and "crossing from the Transvaal" (6). All these expressions form part of a language of crossing borders and introduce the cross-border discourse in this autobiography.

The structure of Dingake's text is itself a representation of a cross-border paradigm. The text is divided into five chapters, with the first one of these, about a ninth of the book, specifically dealing with his formal education in his formative years, both in Bobonong and in Roodepoort. The second chapter, about a quarter of the text in length, narrates his informal education in the urban townships of Johannesburg, Sophiatown and Alexandra, and his growing involvement in the ANC resistance campaigns in and around Johannesburg. Another quarter of the book, in the form of Chapter Three, records the climax of Dingake's political career. It begins with his journey to Tanzania and tells of his return to Johannesburg, his kidnapping in Rhodesia and his detention, interrogation, trial and sentencing in South Africa. The fourth chapter, and the longest, just over a third of the

entire document, gives the details of his experience of imprisonment on Robben Island. One sixteenth of the book, Chapter Five, is devoted to his release from the prison island.

To a large extent, each one of these chapters relates to a certain aspect of black autobiographical writing in South Africa. More specifically, Chapter One, whose main thrust is Dingake's pursuit of education which results in his first political awareness, has close affinities with the tradition of telling how the protagonist acquired an education in other major black South African autobiographies. Chapter Two belongs more to the category of autobiographies which focus predominantly on township life and describe how this shapes the character of the protagonist (see Moloi (1991), Mattera (1987) and Modisane (1963)), telling, in Mphahlele's words, about the particular "tyranny of place" (1981: 8). In recounting the protagonist's growing political activism, Chapter Two also bears close resemblance to the autobiography of an activist like Maggie Resha. Chapters Three and Four of the text constitute a memoir of Dingake's detention, trial and lengthy period of imprisonment, which is a feature common to most testimonial texts. Dingake's narrative structure bridges, in a distinctive way, all these autobiographical sub-genres and combines them into one text.

* * *

Dingake spends his early "formative years" in Bobonong in Bechuanaland. As he grows older, he goes to a Catholic mission school in Roodepoort outside Johannesburg and gets 'indoctrinated' (1987: 20) with Christian values. On completion of his Junior Certificate at Pax Secondary, he discovers that his father is unable to fund his education any further. He goes to live in Alexandra in the hope that he will earn some money to proceed with his studies. He is exposed to the squalid life of black urban areas: Sophiatown and Alexandra. The restrictive laws of the South African government frustrate him like they do other black people in these areas. He finds himself on the brink of hooliganism. He, however, explains his situation:

Blacks are not born thieves and criminals. In South Africa many come up against a system that gives them two options: obey the law and common ethics and perish; or disobey the law and ignore dictates of conscience and survive. Many opt for survival one way or the other and by so doing risk the sanctions

of the laws that force them to turn to unethical standards of social interrelationship. (1987: 37)

He turns eventually to political involvement and joins the ANC; he becomes active and participates in ANC 'subversive' activities: mass mobilisation, defiance campaigns and strike actions. When the ANC operates clandestinely after its ban, Dingake becomes a prominent figure. He leaves the country 'illegally' for Tanzania (8 1) before coming back to South Africa. He is tracked by the police even when he goes back to Bechuanaland, and finally detained by Ian Smith's security forces in Rhodesia while travelling from Bechuanaland to Lusaka. They hand him over to the South African police, by whom he is tortured and interrogated. He is tried, and sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island for fifteen years. Upon his release, he is "repatriated" to his by then independent country, Botswana.

As the above exposition shows, his life is characterised by repeated crossing of boundaries. There are, therefore, two concurrent developments taking place in this text: first, there is Dingake, in the course of his life, crossing literal and metaphorical borders; secondly, there are the separate phases of Dingake's life being pieced together by what I have called narrative 'bridges'. I propose to trace these developments in Dingake's autobiography in an analysis of the boundaries and of his theme of crossing borders.

For example, Dingake opens his narrative by referring to how, when he was still a young child, his people had to 'limp into the international orbit' (3), to the foreign land abroad to fight alongside their coloniser, Britain, against Germany in the Second World War. He, interestingly, goes on to furnish us with the effects of such a move: splitting of families and loss of livestock. Crossing borders incurs for some people frustration. He says:

Voices were many and diverse. Affirmative and negative. Some asked simple and straight-forward questions: Where is Germany? Where is England? Where is Poland? Who will look after our wives, our children, our cattle, goats and dogs while we are away in foreign lands fighting the war we did not provoke? (1987: 2)

What Dingake does in the opening chapter is to articulate at the outset the theme which will pattern his narrative. Even his anecdote about a 'Maguge' who would not be recruited to take part in the war but "skipped the border and sought sanctuary among his clan in Rhodesia" (1987: 3) indicates this.

In this opening chapter, the narrating adult Dingake shows, in a conspicuous way, the linguistic frontiers being crossed by the young protagonist in his quest for education. His language indicates the 'translingualism' of the adult who has outgrown linguistic confines. Although the text is written in English, his command of the language is informed by and played off against a diversity of languages. Dingake addresses his reader also in Setswana, "*Ya gaetsho k e e e naka lehibidu*" (2), Zulu, "*Wafa wafa, wasala wasala...*" (3), Afrikaans, "*Kan jy Hollands praat jong...*" (8), "'Fanakalo', [a crude mixture of Zulu and English] ...'*Tata lapa, beka lapa...*'" (8), "tsotsi-taal" (17), the particular Jewish pronunciation of English "*Vhat you vant here? Get away! Get away from my shop*"(13), as well as the accent of a missionary teacher, Brother Celeste, "*In ze name of ze father and of ze son*" (20) and, even more interesting, the occasional Latin expressions such as "*casus belli*" (12). Dingake renders all these different languages in the original, together with an English translation in brackets, to emphasise the importance of crossing linguistic barriers so as to have access to their codes and ideologies. Dingake's references to his teacher Mr Olifant, a linguist, who, besides English and Setswana, also speaks Xhosa and Afrikaans (9) and to his father's miner friend, Ra Thuso, are important in relation to his theme: "I learnt [from Dad and Ra Thuso] of the heterogenous nationalities employed on the mines. Tsonga, Swahili, Sesotho, Setswana, Chinyanja, Xhosa, Zulu, were some of the languages spoken in the mine compounds in addition to Fanakalo, the special mine lingua created by the white miners. To impress his linguistic abilities on me, Rathuso now and then addressed me in Zulu" (1987: 11).

Apart from this, Dingake's opening chapter parades many other instances of boundaries being transgressed. This idea surfaces again when he describes his breakthrough of going to the Rand, like three of his other school mates, to further his studies there: "The four of us were pioneers - the first Babirwa contingent to go in quest of education outside Bobonong and outside Bechuanaland" (1987: 10). He moves from the village life to school life; he leaves the confines of the "Kgotla" (1) to experience the new life under the dictates of the school. He says:

At thirteen, there was nothing much more to explore in Bobonong. The opportunity to visit new regions was welcome. Exciting new discoveries lay outside the village precincts. The spirit of adventure was gathering momentum. It felt good to be on the threshold of a new experience. (1987:

10)

In South Africa Dingake learns about the "Colour Bye" (12). He notes that "not only was the phrase [colour bar] strange, the concept was completely strange also. Bobonong was absolutely free of this prejudice" (12). What emerges, therefore, is that his arrival in South Africa signifies a crossing from innocence and ignorance to the awareness of racial tension. At school Dingake crosses yet another border; he is exposed to political education on the other side of the 'pure' education that he is used to. Teacher Masipha introduces him to politics with his mention of political figures like Moses Kotane and Walter Sisulu. Dingake is expected to strike a balance between the two 'educations'. He comments: "Education and politics in Masipha's view were two strands of the same rope that Africans had to use to lift themselves to heights of respectability" (1987: 15). At Pax, Dingake acquires a religious education through the influence of Brother Celeste. He says: "In-ze-name saw me as a devout Catholic who might one day sacrifice his life for his religion and be canonized for it. I was converted to Catholicism during my first term at Pax". (1987: 20-21) Dingake crosses, furthermore, an ideological barrier. After "indoctrination" with Christian ideology at school, he is helped across by Dr Vilakazi's visit to their school to yet another way of thinking: black consciousness. After this African intellectual's visit, young Dingake finds himself within a new and conflicting ideological camp. He explains:

Before the doctor's talk, it is true, I had never felt ashamed of my blackness nor had I ever felt called upon to be specifically proud of my colour. But with the rampant prejudice against our colour by white people in South Africa, I often wondered why the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent creator created a colour so hideous and execrable in the eyes of others. (1987: 24)

* * *

Chapters One and Two are separated by a distinct barrier. While the chapter heading "Colour Stigma" indicates a further development of the theme of racial discrimination from Chapter One, in Chapter Two the reader is immediately placed in a different world: that of "Kofiefie" (Sophiatown). Moving from the first chapter to this one, Dingake crosses from his formal education in Chapter One, to the informal and more pragmatic education of the urban townships of Sophiatown and Alexandra. Even as he arrives in the urban world, he sees life from the perspective of division and borderedness: Johannesburg is divided between

black and white areas, the black townships are themselves divided between 'Dark City' Alexandra and Sophiatown with street lights (27). In each of these townships the dwellers are further divided between the 'clevers' and the 'moegoes'. Dingake also cites an incident where different gangs in Sophiatown drew a frontier between themselves:

Mbutani and Vivian ... were leaders of the Berlin gang in Sophiatown. They were mortal enemies of the Young Americans, another gang in the area. The two gangs effectively divided Sophiatown into two war zones. Toby Street to Meyer Street was more or less the undisputed area of the Young Americans, while Ray Street to Johannes Road belonged to the Berliners. (1987: 28)

Later when describing the reign of the Msomi gang in Alexandra, Dingake notes:

People outside Alexandra could not understand how Alexandrians could live in Alexandra. Some top Spoilers *emigrated* from the township, fleeing from their rivals. They sojourned in some of the big towns, Durban, Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, etc, and hoped for better days when they could return to Alexandra. (1987: 44 my italics)

Interestingly, even when he talks about the "poor white problem" in South Africa in the late 1930's, Dingake thinks in terms of *migration*. He describes how these whites emigrated from the farms to the urban areas "to try their fortunes in the towns" (38). He calls it "another Great Trek by the same people" (1987: 38).

An important cross-border development shown in this chapter is Dingake's shift from the personal discourse of his life in the township to the public one as he becomes more involved with the ANC:

The Programme of Action of 1949 was a new departure in the history of the ANC. It ushered in a new era, a decade of militant forms of struggle, it was farewell to deputations, petitions and ineffectual protest. The Programme of Action was confrontational. It called for sacrifices on the part of the liberation movement. (1987: 52)

Dingake's singular voice is shown to have fused with the collective voice of the "liberation movement" as subject. This fusion dates back to the day when, for the first time, his voice was absorbed into a song of resistance. Recalling that event, he says:

A solid phalanx of defiers singing a defiant song marched past me to their rendezvous with certain arrest. Before I knew my mind I had fallen in step with them, singing the revolutionary song and feeling some perspiration of conflict-anxiety ooze through the pores of my skin. (1987: 53)

Most of the incidents that Dingake cites in the second chapter show that the significant phases in his own life are now demarcated by milestones in the history of the black South

African liberation struggle. And like some of his contemporary autobiographers (Modisane immediately comes to mind here), Dingake also raises, in a communal voice, the issue of the pass laws. 'Passes' served as passports for crossing, on a daily basis, the barriers set up by the government in South Africa. He describes how pass laws affected not only himself but the rest of "urban Africans":

Passes - permits, reference books, identity documents, passports, whatever the official form of the moment - are a nightmare to Africans in South Africa. Nightly, they dream of raids in their homes for passes, dream of being stopped in the streets for passes, dream of queuing up at the pass office for passes. These dreams come irrespective of whether one is employed or unemployed. Pass dreams, unlike other dreams, come true. The raids and harassment through the pass laws are inescapable. A pass carrier has no place to hide. (1987: 30)

Apparently, not only did a pass help a person to cross the border of unemployment, but it also helped him to sleep, to walk, to eat, to relax, to run - in short, it helped a person to live. For a black South African a 'pass' was a way of life.

The mixed marriage of Seretse Khama and the Englishwoman, Ruth Williams, in 1949 is used by Dingake to talk about the racial prohibitions introduced by the South African government in the same year. He recounts, "Legislation was introduced in parliament as a matter of urgency. Two such laws were the Immorality Act which prohibited carnal relations across the colour-line and the Mixed Marriages Act which prohibited inter-racial marriages". (49)

Dingake also devotes much of his narrative to discussing the resistance campaigns of the 1950's leading to the Sharpeville Massacre and the pass burnings that took place afterwards. When the State of Emergency was declared in 1960, he says: "A few days before its declaration there was widespread rumour and speculation about it, and many activists simply skipped the country or went underground to avoid the wide net" (57). The use of the word 'simply' in the extract suggests that 'crossing borders' - either going into exile or underground - was the people's way of survival. He further refers to several volunteers who went abroad in order to be trained when 'MK' was to be formed.

Narrating the events around the Rivonia Trial, Dingake describes the difficult

conditions under which, as part of the ANC group, he attended a conference in Lobatse in Bechuanaland in 1962:

Delegates came from all over South Africa and abroad - London, Egypt and Dar es Salaam. Travel restrictions across South African borders were not tight at the time but the police did their utmost to disorganise delegates to the conference from centres within the country. Delegates who had unintentionally left their passes at home were stopped on the way and held in police stations until the conference was over. Our delegation came across a police roadblock at the Lobatse borderpost. The priest collar and gown I wore to disguise our destination and mission became an embarrassment... (1987: 69)

The incident reveals a 'borderpost' not only as a gateway to the reintegration of those 'within the country' with those 'abroad', but also as a place of ambivalent identity.

Dingake uses the language of 'emigration' and 'crossing borders' throughout his autobiography and configures his narrative so as to represent himself as crossing from an individual person to a communal agent in his depiction of the historical circumstances of his time. He voluntarily enters the narrative no-man's land between self and community, between speaking of the first person and speaking for the third person.

As explained in Chapter One of this study, the concept of a 'no-man's land' is a focal point in the current cross-border discourses. Dingake first introduces this concept to describe Alexandra which he calls "a black freehold title area ... *something of a no man's land*, a reservoir of cheap labour, and a dumping ground for superfluous and redundant labour". (1987: 46, my italics) The people of this township, relegated to that 'margin' of livelihood, are going through the *experience of marginality*. In order to qualify the idea of a 'no man's land', Dingake says of this place: "Alexandra was not all crime and politics. Between the two extremities existed a large area, neither black nor white. An expanse of grey area..." (1987: 55) Alexandra is a cross-over between the rural life of blacks and the urban demands of Johannesburg, a cross-over between the white urban world and the black residential area.

When Viljoen quotes Jacques Derrida referring to borders as "undecidables", he goes on to say, in his (Viljoen's) terms, "[borders] are in a sense part of one space, or of another, and yet of none" (Viljoen 1990: 118). If this is the nature of a border, then someone who is on the border is, in a sense, no less part of one space, or of another, and yet of none.

Breyten Breytenbach, as I have also mentioned before, calls such a person a 'borderline case' who lives in ambivalent space, 'in something of a no-man's land'. This is my view of Dingake, quite apart from his fellow Alexandrians who are typically 'borderline cases'. Dingake acknowledges his marginality, but turns its ambivalence to his advantage. Marginality becomes the condition for his development.

In his autobiography, Dingake portrays himself as something of a 'situation', to adapt the parlance of Sophiatown. He is originally a Motswana from Bechuanaland, in possession of a British passport. (Bechuanaland was still a British colony.) On the other hand, he is what may be termed a 'black South African political activist', whose interests are less in his native country, Bechuanaland, than in South Africa. He mentions towards the end of his autobiography that some of his countrymen regard him as a 'renegade' (236). He quotes them as saying: "You have fought a good fight. You are a hero. It is time, however, you devoted some time to the welfare of your family and your country..." (236)

In Chapter Three, he further develops this notion of his being a 'situation' of sorts by relating how, when eventually detained in Khami, Rhodesia, he found the South African and Rhodesian governments toying with him, confirming his sense of his ambivalence in relation to the border and the precariousness of his position. He recalls:

In Khami there was much to reflect upon. The politics of the region and my own fate. Everyday of my stay in Khami convinced me of an international plot - between South Africa and Rhodesia - to consign me to the 'haven' of 'disappeared' persons. I did not want to disappear without trace. I smuggled out two letters. One to my wife and one to the sender of the fateful telegram... (1987: 94)

This is what it is like to live in a no-man's land, Dingake cautions. It means a person does not have 'identity' in that place and, for that very fact, can possibly "disappear without trace".

* * *

Chapter Three begins by repeating the narrative transition which we saw at the beginning of the previous chapter. As in the earlier instance, the chapter heading, "Kidnapped", suggests further development of the theme of Dingake's underground activism and at the same time

introduces the reader to the completely new setting, Tanzania. While Dingake moves across borders in the opening section of this chapter, he also shifts from voluntary activism to obligatory carrying out of underground activities for the movement. Even when he realises the dangers in going to Rhodesia, at one stage, he nonetheless manages to honour his allegiance and says: "In the end, however, my sense of loyalty to the South African freedom struggle prevailed" (1987: 88). But again, as he moves out to Africa, Dingake paradoxically moves deeper into the realities of South Africa.

He travels from Tanzania back to Johannesburg, and because of a "security police hunt" (86), he flees to Bechuanaland where police surveillance doubles: "[b]oth the Bechuanaland and South African security police were involved, working independently and jointly" (86). In Bechuanaland he gets an official order from the movement summoning him to, Lusaka, and boards a train to Bulawayo. He is "kidnapped" by Ian Smith's security police at Figtree railway station and detained by them in Central Police Station in Bulawayo early in December 1965. This detention marks Dingake's entry into the system of prisons, first in Rhodesia and later in South Africa, which culminates in his imprisonment on Robben Island. He is, at first, moved from Central Police Station to Grey Street gaol, from there to Khambi medium security prison (92). On 5 January 1966 he is transferred to Khambi maximum prison from which he is later returned to Grey Street gaol (95).

Dingake was aware before he set out on this fateful journey that Bechuanaland and Rhodesia, the one a British protectorate and the other supposedly independent, were still effectively part of the South African 'colonial' system:

It was equally unsafe in Bechuanaland. Bechuanaland was in all respects a satellite of South Africa. Secondly, Tennyson [who had sent the fateful letter] expected me to travel through Rhodesia which had just declared unilateral independence. For many years we had known an unholy alliance between South Africa, Portuguese East Africa and Rhodesia. Travelling through Rhodesia could be courting disaster. (1987: 88)

This awareness is now confirmed. The theme of crossing borders is fully dramatised at the Beitbridge borderpost. After four weeks of detention in Rhodesian prisons (95), Dingake is driven to this borderpost and handed over to the South African security police. He crosses from the Rhodesian side of the border to the South African side, but he also travels from the 'colonial' margins of the apartheid state to its 'centre' of intelligence, Pretoria's Compol

Building (96). Dingake's journey still deeper into the heart of the South African prison world takes him through Marshall Square Police Station (99), Pretoria Local (99) and Jeppe Police Station (107) where he is initially detained, tortured and interrogated. Dingake records an important border that he crosses from detention to being held as an awaiting-trial prisoner:

In the charge office I was fingerprinted and formally charged with statutory sabotage and other related counts. The charge sheet covered the period 1962 to 1965. From that moment I became an awaiting-trial prisoner. I was no longer a 180-day detainee, living under a cloud of complete uncertainty, a helpless client of the whims of the security police. (1987: 119)

Eventual imprisonment on Robben Island is gradually becoming a certainty: his "'longing' to join the long incarcerated comrades now became a deliberate psychological effort". He had, in his words, "crossed the Rubicon" (118). His subsequent imprisonment at No. 4 during his trial (123), at Leeuwkop in transit (136) and finally on Robben Island (140) leads him to the very centre of the system. Dingake cannot help noting when he is first transported across "the Limpopo river into the Transvaal, South Africa" (96) that he is entering a prison world. He uses the metaphor of prison to describe South Africa which "imprison[s] the whole population", where the majority of whites "live in the Maximum Prison of Fear", in the "Ultra-Maximum Prison of Prejudice" and in the "Central Prison of Greed", whereas the "Blacks are always in one prison or other" (122-23).

* * *

Chapter Four employs the same kind of narrative bridge as the earlier chapters. The chapter title, "Robben Island", suggests, once again, the ultimate development of the theme of prisons that pervades Chapter Three. The reader experiences, again in this instance, an abrupt shift to a new location: Robben Island. As Dingake is transported from Leeuwkop prison in Pretoria at the end of the previous chapter to the prison island at the beginning of this one, he has finally arrived at the island, nine kilometres off the southern tip of Africa, that is the symbolic heart of the South African penal universe. (see Jacobs, 1992) But what becomes even more remarkable about Dingake's case is that, even as a convicted prisoner, he is taken back to the Pretoria Local and Leeuwkop prisons to be tortured again by the security police in order to make a statement before being returned to Robben Island (158).

This arrival and re-arrival at Robben Island has been narratively prefigured in the earlier chapters of Dingake's autobiography. His accounts of his many 'visits' to different prisons all point ahead to this climax. In the section of Chapter Three sub-titled "The Tragedy of Rivonia" (68), he describes the discovery of the hideout of the leaders of the ANC and their arrest. All the Rivonia trialists are imprisoned on Robben Island. The event is used by Dingake as a narrative strategy to prepare his reader for the idea of the Island being an inevitable destination in his resistance struggle. The police van, the "kwela kwela" (30), and later the prison "high truck" (138) to which Dingake refers, are part of a succession of vehicles in the different stages of his "Journey to the 'Far Waters'" (1987: 139). While the "fateful train journey" (90) during which Dingake is kidnapped and detained in Rhodesia in the previous chapter is significant as a factual detail, the account is equally important as a preparation for the 'involuntary' journey of the protagonist destined for Robben Island.

On Robben Island, Dingake changes identity. As he enters prison, he crosses over from being Michael Dingake to a "new identity as prisoner number 277/66" (1987: 140). Later, when he returns to the prison island after he had been taken to Pretoria for further interrogation, he changes to prisoner 130/67 again. This replacement of his name by a number is a measure of his de-personalisation in prison. Like Moses Dlamini in *Hell-Hole Robben Island: Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner in South Africa* and Indres Naidoo in *Island in Chains: Ten Years on Robben Island as told by Indres Naidoo to Albie Sachs*, both of whom use their numbers for their names on the title-pages of their prison memoirs, the one placing his prison number 872/63 before his real name and the other giving 885/63 as his only name, Dingake cites his prison number as a symbol of the effacement of his individuality. His imprisonment on Robben Island is an attempt by the system to silence him, to deprive him of his identity and to consign him "to the 'haven' of 'disappeared' persons" (94). But, Dingake turns his drastic marginalisation here to an advantage. He uses his new identity as prisoner 130/67 to speak for the multitude of nameless prisoners on the prison island. Dingake's individual voice merges with the clamouring voices of other Robben Islanders. His testimony becomes subsumed within the 'we' that the narrative direction takes and the singular 'I' is voluntarily surrendered. His own personal activities become meaningful only when discussed within a broader communal frame. His educational progress, for example, is now narrated from the perspective of group effort. The whole

group engages the superiors for the improvement of study conditions in prison. The hunger strike, the prisoners' principal weapon, is communal. For the strike to be effective, every prisoner has to participate. In this light, the 'we' in prison is inevitable, however hard the warders - themselves the products of the system of 'divide-and-rule' - try to convert it to 'I'. On one occasion, Dingake comments how the censors try to maintain the division among prisoners even in the letters they write:

The use of the word 'we' was taboo in the censors' dictionary of usages. 'We' meant one had assumed, unlawfully, the role of spokesman for other prisoners. It did not matter that in that particular context the 'We' used was the royal 'we', it had to come out, the whole letter of 500 words had to be rewritten. 'Scratch the 'we' and I'll write 'I',' you might plead... (1987: 167)

What becomes important is that Dingake realises that he does not exist apart from others but interdependently with them. 'We' becomes an expression of solidarity. To emphasise this solidarity, Dingake describes the way in which one prisoner serves to "stand up among" (Daymond 1992: 35) and speak on behalf of the rest of the group:

The following morning the newly appointed committee was on the ball. It recommended that inmates near the entrance should not delay the visitor(s) by raising trivial personal complaints. Comrade Mandela was to be our spokesman on general complaints. (1987: 148)

This chapter is the longest and, here, Dingake states his case more fully. Imprisonment on Robben Island introduces to the narrative the most stringently policed border: that between the life 'outside' and the life 'inside'. The prisoner is cut off from the outside world; he can only reach out to it through limited means. But the prison authorities do not allow these, and even where they do, they are strictly censored. Life inside prison is also characterised by intense divisions and borders. There are divisions inside prison between the common-law prisoners and political prisoners. Political prisoners are further divided: while others are in the communal cells, there are also those in the segregation cells (140). The communal cells section is further subdivided into smaller communal cells. (One is reminded of the divisions in the urban black townships in Chapter Two.) Prison, therefore, is a microcosm of the social compartmentalisation outside. Even on a simple issue like 'the soccer ground' there still emerges another border dividing political prisoners. Dingake says:

This innovation was however not completely welcome. There was a division in the ranks of prisoners. Some felt it was a necessary and appreciated recreational facility ... Others felt differently. The introduction of sports

facilities was a propaganda stunt that could only benefit the enemy. (1987: 141)

Prison authorities try to prevent prisoners from crossing the various boundaries. Dingake dramatises his success in crossing some of these borders when he tells how he was "hopping from section to section to meet many of the scattered comrades [he] knew" (143) in the first few days of his imprisonment.

The structural subdivision of the chapter hinges on the separation between the worlds inside and outside prison. The chapter has six subsections: "Letters and Visits", "Studies", "Religion", "News", "Food" and "Nelson Mandela". All the subsections show an intensified collective battle to overcome this separation. Dingake relates how important a letter is to a prisoner (159). When it is brought to the cell, it is valued not only by its recipient, but it is shared among all prisoners, discussed and recited. After receiving his first letter in prison, Dingake says: "I read the letter several times and informed my colleagues: my family is fine. All around there were expressions of delight" (159). A letter then turns into a means of overcoming the barrier between the prisoner and his family, but it also brings the prisoners together and furthermore makes them see themselves as belonging to a big, unpartitioned family. To emphasise the idea of enforced separation, Dingake refers to "non-contact" visits on Robben Island in the sixties and early seventies:

Visitors stood on one side, in cubicles partitioned from corresponding cubicles in which prisoners sat facing them. Through the glass partition visitor and prisoner saw each other and chatted for a half-hour. At the announcement of time-up, visitor and visited interrupted their conversation, stood up, looked at each other wistfully and turned their backs on each other and the transparent partitions that divided them, maybe to see each other in another 12 months through the same glass dividers. (1987: 161)

When Dingake discusses the relaxation of some of these prison rules by the authorities in later years, he interprets those concessions as indications of barriers beginning to yield (161). We learn from Dingake that visits were later allowed for up to forty-five minutes. But each visit for a prisoner, as in the case of a letter, is a communal experience for all the inmates and enthusiastically welcomed by them:

After a visit, the visited prisoner assumed an aura of unusual importance, he became an instant VIP with his fellow inmates pressing upon him and plying him with inquisitive questions. How is your family? How is so and so? Questions and questions. Most of the questions expressed goodwill and concern for the welfare of the people outside the gaol walls. (1987: 161)

Even though the prisoners may not physically reach their own people outside, they are able to overcome the distance, at least emotionally, by rehearsing the visits of others. The persistence with which the prisoner attempts to cross this frontier can be seen in the way Dingake appeals for fifteen years to the authorities, including ministers Kruger, Pelsler and Vorster, for his wife to be allowed to visit him on Robben Island. He says: "I wished and made representations whenever an opportunity presented itself" (163). Even though Dingake himself receives only three visits in fifteen years, he is happy for the public attention on Mandela who, on the average, receives one visit every month. Each visit to Mandela, as their leader, is a visit for all of them. Commenting on the incident involving the son of a prisoner who was upset with his father for sharing his letters with other inmates, Dingake says:

Had he known what his letters meant to the less fortunate inmates who did not enjoy regular correspondence of their own, he would not have been as mad as he was with his father. In fact he would have been very proud to know how much he was contributing to the unbroken spirits of the community. (1987: 165)

Censorship is a crucial means employed by the South African Prisons Department to thwart communication between 'inside' and the 'outside'. Dingake tells how initially letters, both in and out of prison, were censored. (This is before the later systematic introduction of the prisoners' self-censorship.) He recounts how, at first, the 'undesirable' sections of the letter were cut out and later underlined with a red pen (166). After complaints by the inmates and their families to the prison officials, photographs, also "important means of contact" (168) and initially disallowed in prison, are later added to the prisoners' list of privileges.

Study conditions on the island are strictly regulated. Prisoners are not permitted to lend or exchange books, which denies access to education to those prisoners who are without substantial financial backing. Student prisoners may only register with specific educational institutions, namely, the University of South Africa and the Rapid Results College. Post-graduate study is not allowed, which accounts for Dingake's three junior degrees when he comes out of prison. All these factors serve to ensure that prisoners do not go beyond a certain limit. The prisoners, however, constantly test this limit. For example, they organise

literacy classes and study groups:

Classes were organised for all standards including beginners and subjects, with teachers for lower classes being appointed by the 'head teacher' who was Dr Neville Alexander. University students arranged their own discussion groups when they were not teaching or helping others. (1987: 173-4)

As a further attempt at dismantling the polarity that the system creates, the political prisoners encourage not only the less educated prisoners but also the warders to study (177). The inclusion of the warders in the study programme, in particular, marks an important cross-over in the history of prisons; it represents the establishment of bridges between the former adversaries, and a victory over the 'Verkramptes' in the South African government who do not see wisdom in allowing the "terrorists" to study.

When Dingake discusses 'Religion' in prison, he introduces his reader to different denominations. There is, on the one hand, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) which he says "is playing a progressive role in the struggle for freedom" (188); on the other hand, there are some Christian Churches which he charges with furthering the aims of the apartheid government. The church ministers who visit them in prison differ: there are Rev Jones whose sermon was always "misdirected" (189) and Rev Bosman, who is "undisguisedly pro-government" (189), but on the other side of the divide is Father Hughes "who was everybody's darling" (192).

The news, in all its forms, is an important aspect of life in prison. Prisoners realise that news connects them with the outside world; hence newspapers, in prison, are the most valuable items. Dingake's inclusion of this subsection in the chapter is significant. Being forbidden in prison, newspapers, usually only scraps, are smuggled in by the prisoners and hidden under their sleeping mats. The inmates later memorise the news items and share them with their fellows. Recalling one important piece of news he received while they were in their routine workspans in prison, and how it raced around prisoners at high speed, Dingake says:

This news of Dr Verwoerd's death was the fastest news to come our way in all my years on Robben Island, including the last years of my incarceration, when A-group prisoners were officially allowed to buy newspapers. Apparently what happened was that some 'nice' warder heard it over the radio, whispered it to one prisoner, who relayed it to the next prisoner until it reached all workspans and every prisoner on the Island. (1987: 198)

He testifies how they used to fight tirelessly for the privilege of being allowed to buy newspapers, a fight which they eventually win.

Another aspect of the segregation between prisoners is Food. The prison diet, its quality and quantity, are determined by the racial group to which the prisoner belongs:

Apparently on that basis, traditional Coloured, Indian and African diet did not include milk; Africans did not eat bread nor jam; Africans ate less meat than Coloured, and Coloureds and Indian less than Whites, etc, etc. Only an apartheid practitioner can follow the logic of this web of racial diet theory. (1987: 206)

In order to beat the "racial-diet" discrimination, the prisoners share their food and engage in food strikes.

The last subsection is devoted to discussing Nelson Mandela. It is important that, in concluding this specifically 'bordered' chapter, Dingake should focus on Mandela, particularly because Mandela is seen as a symbol of the unity of prisoners. Dingake here crosses a generic border, including in his own autobiography a brief biographical tribute to Mandela.

* * *

The first paragraph of Chapter Five begins with a metaphorical recapitulation of the theme of the border dealt with in the previous chapters. To begin this section, Dingake says: "Nineteen-eighty came to an end on December 31 in line with the Anno Domini calendar years before it. Nineteen-eighty had been the year that *stood between me and freedom* more than all the years put together after 1966". (227, my italics) When we meet Dingake in this chapter, he is on the brink of a new experience. He has served his sentence and is about to be released. He expresses sentiments of anguish about his friends - they have by now become his family - and apprehension about his destiny:

Although I had lived every day of the 15 years for 1981, I now felt lukewarm on the threshold of my home-going, mainly because I was leaving so many of my dear comrades behind. Excitement in me was also being smothered by thoughts, vague, uncertain, confused, speculative and tremulous about my future. (1987: 227)

His release is, however, not only his individual glory, it is a source of elation for the rest of

the prison community, including those sentenced to life imprisonment:

At 12 midnight the prison walls shook and reverberated with a cacophony of sounds: thumping of the walls, clanking of grilles and iron bars, rattling of mugs, spoons and any instrument, all sort of percussions capable of making a racket ... They were obviously more excited than I was. It was a sign of deep empathy that only co-sufferers can reflect. (1987: 227)

Later in this closing chapter, Dingake also writes brief biographical sketches of some of these prisoners he leaves behind on the island: Ahmed 'Kathy' Kathrada, Wilton 'Bribri' Nkwayi, Walter 'Tyopo' Sisulu, Billy 'Monna' Nair, Lalloo 'Isubhai' Chiba, Elias 'Mokone' Motswaledi, Govan 'Zizi' Mbeki, Raymond 'Ndobe' Mhlaba, James Mncedisi Mange, Kwedi 'George' Mkalipi, Andrew 'Clox' Mlangeni, Nelson 'Madiba' Mandela and Andimba Toivo ja Toivo. Until they come out of prison and write their own life histories, their stories will form part of Dingake's story - they are given voice.

In the outside world into which Dingake emerges the colonial frontiers are collapsing. In the Republic of China, in Vietnam, in Nicaragua and in Africa the architects of segregation, domination and oppression are making way for the "patriotic forces" who are intent upon the "reunification of their colonially divided countr[ies]" (228). 'Inside', the prison, too, has become less rigid: "the granite was crumbling right at its heart" (228). There are many concessions that have been "wrung" (228) out of the prison authorities as a result of the resistance struggle of the inmates.

Dingake's apprehension about his "new adventure" (229) deepens as the problem of his 'repatriation' to Botswana is mentioned. He recalls the incident at the Beitbridge border where, fifteen years earlier, instead of being repatriated, he was handed over to the South African security police. But Dingake's account of repatriation now needs to be understood against the whole background of his life story in this autobiography. Dingake retraces the route that he has followed from childhood up to his life on Robben Island; he re-crosses his borders back to where he started. His route from the prison island takes him through the still unliberated South Africa, via Leeuwkop Prison, to the independent Botswana.

The final border that Dingake crosses is at Tlokweng. He says: "As I struggled with my carton of books across No-man's land, my eyes were searching for my wife in the cluster

of welcomers outside the Botswana Immigration Office" (233). One can picture the drama of this particular event: On the South African side of the border are police who have come to deliver Dingake, at the centre - the 'No-man's land' - is a man passing over to a free state, and on the Botswana side are jubilant welcomers, including Dingake's wife whom he has not seen for fifteen years. His journey back to Botswana culminates in Bobonong. He says: "The climax of my welcome occurred in Bobonong, where I was born" (235) - but also where he begins his narrative. Welcoming his son, Dingake's father says, "Ah, Knowledge!" (236), the translation of Dingake's Setswana name, Kitso. This name, which fades early in the narrative (5), regains its prominence and finds its true meaning only in this closing section of Dingake's autobiography as his father greets him. Now, after his circuitous journey in the course of which he has gained the knowledge of the struggle and of life's other realities, Dingake may be called 'Knowledge'. His name now has a symbolic meaning.

But what becomes Dingake's lasting achievement is the political philosophy that has crystallised out of all his trials. His belief that "Apartheid is a matter [not only of South African but] of international concern" (238) embodies all that his autobiography depicts; he rejects the placing of a border between South Africa and the rest of the world. The whole world should be functional in bringing apartheid to an end because it is a crime "against humanity" (239), a crime which should be combated in a joint effort. Dingake says:

Since apartheid affects humanity as a whole, because of its inhuman character, it must be fought by all mankind and eradicated root and branch from all elements of society. Those who suffer most under apartheid will inevitably be in the frontline. Their major weapon will neither be the AK-47 nor the grenade, although these must form ingredients of the arsenal. The critical weapon will be maximum unity of the oppressed. (1987: 239)

As if to argue this point with more subtlety, Dingake later censures those Botswana who discriminate against South African refugees in Botswana - the 'Batswakwa'. He mentions that black South Africans accepted the 'Batswakwa' from Botswana in their country before Botswana was granted independence: "Today we can boast of national leaders who are leading us in the righteous path of independence, who are products of the hospitality and magnanimity of our black brothers across the border" (1987: 241). This Africanist philosophy whose emphasis is on the idea of borderlessness is summed up by the closing sentences of Dingake's autobiography - "Africa cannot be free until all Africans are free. It is not yet uhuru. Not yet!" (241)

CHAPTER THREE

HELAO SHITYUWETE: *NEVER FOLLOW THE WOLF: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NAMIBIAN FREEDOM FIGHTER*

In this chapter I propose to show how the idea of crossing borders is inscribed into Helao Shityuwete's autobiography. Like Dingake, Shityuwete records a number of borders that he has crossed in his life of resistance. His whole history consists of a set of fragmented episodes from his journey across literal and figurative frontiers from childhood to adulthood. The course of Shityuwete's life, which is much more complex than Dingake's rather direct one, is characterised by many 'goings' and 'comings', 'crossings' and 'recrossings': Shityuwete starts his life in Evale, Southern Angola; he goes to school at Endola, Namibia; he becomes an Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) activist, then a SWAPO cadre and finally a prisoner on Robben Island before his eventual release to Namibia.

Like Dingake's text, Shityuwete's autobiography is structured in terms of a cross-border model. The twenty-three chapters can be divided into five distinct phases. The first five chapters (phase one) recount his early life: his pursuit of education, his induction into contract work and his initial experience of repression. The second phase (Chapters 6 - 12) is a development of the previous one: continued exposure to oppression, serious political activism, his travels abroad and return on Mission G2. The third phase (Chapters 13 - 17) contains an account of his arrest, interrogation, torture, detention, trial and sentencing. The fourth phase (Chapters 18 - 22) relates his imprisonment on Robben Island. The last phase, only six pages long, tells of his release. All these phases connect into one coherent life story.

And, as in Dingake's text, each of the phases can be seen to represent a specific sub-genre of black South African autobiographical writing. As part of the overall structure, Shityuwete offers his reader three maps by way of preface to his text. The first one, a map of Namibia, depicts the colonial frontiers drawn around Namibia: South African, Botswanan, Zambian and Angolan. The second map shows another colonial border running between the once united Okwanyama and Evale areas, where Shityuwete comes from. The third map traces Shityuwete's route from Namibia to Dar es Salaam and back on Mission G2. These maps are given to the reader as cartographical guides to Shityuwete's life journey through

the countries of Southern Africa moving towards independence from colonial domination. The last map, in particular, is an iconic introduction to the life journey to be narrated (viii-x).

In the first chapter, "Childhood", Shityuwete establishes the thematic pattern of his narrative and introduces its cross-border discourse. In the first paragraph he refers to "King Samuel Maharero who died in exile in Bechuanaland ... where he and some of the Namibian people had been driven by the Germans" (1). Shityuwete begins his life story with the historical moment when an indigenous people were driven to exile by colonial occupation and division. On the same page, he describes his mother as having had to suffer the consequences of artificial colonial frontiers and live "in an area straddling the Angola / Namibia border" (1). The related ideas of exile and of the border are introduced early in the story. Shityuwete mentions how as a child his mother and his uncle 'stole' him from his father and took him to the Oukwanyama area of Southern Angola: "They picked me up and put me on the horse's back behind my uncle and, with my mother in the lead, we set off towards the Evale / Oukwanyama borders" (2). (His mother had previously left his father.) Shityuwete once again uses the fact of his large family separated on either side of the Angolan / Namibian divide as a narrative strategy to highlight the motif of borders in the story. Referring to the death of his father, he says: "Though I was very sad at the loss of my father, I was pleased to be reunited with the rest of my brothers and sisters, some of whom I had not met before, and did not meet thereafter". (1990: 4)

Later, Shityuwete moves with his aunt from Oshimukwa to Endola in Namibia to get an education, and the frontiers of his world are metaphorically extended. The trip exposes him to "people of different colour" (8), the Portuguese, where he first encounters cross-culturality; he is "taught ... a few Portuguese words like bon dia.... bo a noit.... and atte a manha..." (9). As their trip continues, this journey takes Shityuwete back across the Namibian border:

We left Ondyiva early in the morning for Omupanda, which is 25 miles from the Namibian border. We walked for the whole day and arrived there in the middle of the night. After a short rest we set off for the border and Engela, the Finnish Mission just inside Namibia. We crossed the border at midnight and arrived in Engela in the early hours of the morning. (1990: 10)

As he crosses the border, Shityuwete leaves behind him the illiteracy, naively and informal,

home education and enters a new world of school, where he studies a wide range of subjects.

His chapter on "Contract Work" describes the continuation of the journey started back at Evale. Shityuwete has passed standard five but because of "Apartheid 'Bantu Education'" (13) which does not allow him beyond that class, he is faced with yet another transition to make. From formal school education, therefore, he is forced into the notorious 'contract work' which provides labour for towns, farms and mines. Referring to the white farming community of Outjo where he is sent, Shityuwete describes these people who treat their contract labourers so harshly in terms of their own migrations: "descendants of the 'Angola Boers', Afrikaners who had trekked into Angola but were brought back by the South African government to colonise Namibia" (13). (Dingake also registers the poor-white Afrikaners as migrants in his autobiography - see Chapter Two.) But as Shityuwete bribes his way into contract work (16), he begins to notice the corruptions and the repressive, capitalistic practices of the South African government. He says: "No one who had ever been on a forced contract of employment liked to repeat the experience, but poverty and large-scale unemployment forced people to do it again and again. The whole process was utterly dehumanising. (1990: 17) This realisation precipitates Shityuwete's involvement in activities to counteract this marginal social position he is in. He is later introduced to "workers' problems" (23) and to the idea of a workers' union by Ndadi, and becomes an OPO member. Even as he returns to Endola from his contract work, Shityuwete expresses his wish to proceed with his travels: "I told [Aunt Beata] about my intentions of going to further my studies in Angola. I also told her about my involvement with OPO and that in addition to my academic ambitions I had to develop my political education" (30).

When he begins his next chapter, "Angola", Shityuwete has made arrangements with Ya Toivo, Nuyoma and Kuhangwa to go to Angola. He says: "It was early April 1960 when we decided to meet and make final arrangements for the journey" (32). As this journey continues, Shityuwete becomes more conscious of his precarious position as a black Namibian and gets more fully involved in the liberation movement. His visit to Angola is unsuccessful, and Shityuwete begins his next chapter with a reference to his return home and his renewed sense of urgency: "My journey back home, though uneventful, was not a pleasant one. My mind was preoccupied I had too much to do, both politically and

academically, I had no time to spare" (38). As his involvement with OPO grows, Shityuwete acts as a representative of the organisation. His narration centres on discussions with his comrades and on his carrying out the activities of OPO. His individual life is told only in relation to the movement - even his description of something as personal as his illness, for example:

My three weeks in hospital badly affected my political activities. My colleagues were being intimidated and hunted down by the authorities and many had gone into hiding. It was difficult for me to contact any of them and I was unaware whether SWAPO was off the ground because no one could brief me. (1990: 46)

Shityuwete opens his fifth chapter, "Return to Angola", with an account of his "second trip to Angola" (47) and his irregular border-crossing:

My plan was to find a passage through Angola to go abroad. I collected some money, said goodbye to my aunt then left for the Oshikango Administration Offices for travelling papers. I crossed the border into Angola without bothering to present my documents at the Angolan border post - a mistake I was soon to regret. (1990: 47)

It is remarkable how in this chapter the narration changes from the account of his political involvement in the previous chapter to a subjective account of his trials and tribulations in Angola. He is detained for appearing suspicious. After satisfying his captors of his innocence, he says: "... I decided to catch a plane to Ondyiva from where I could easily cross into Namibia, before the Portuguese changed their minds about releasing me" (54). But at the Ondyiva airstrip he is again arrested and later driven to the Angolan-Namibian border. He relates: "They handed me to the border guards who told me never to cross the border into Angola again" (55). The idea of 'going' and 'coming', 'crossing' and 'recrossing' is foregrounded by Shityuwete in this first phase of his narrative. The protagonist's shift from an individual to a public discourse and back again, is narrated against these trips to and from Angola.

* * *

The second section of my discussion begins with Shityuwete's active involvement in the liberation struggle in Chapter Six. He demarcates this transition by drawing the reader's attention to his central metaphor in the opening sentence:

The border posts between Angola and Namibia at Oshikango are about one mile apart and, in the nineteen-sixties, there was little traffic between the two countries. Even if there had been transport, I could not have got any because of heavy floods. I therefore crossed the border on foot and walked to Oshikango on the Namibian side. (1990: 56)

Throughout this section, Shityuwete continues to employ border crossings as markers for the important stages in the development of his autobiographical narrative. His voice, from this chapter onwards, is again a communal one and describes his activities as part of the SWAPO movement. His focus is on the psychological war between the manipulative South African government and SWAPO. His narration concerns his underground activities as a result of the persecution and harassment of SWAPO members. At one stage he notes: "It was obvious to me that the police were watching my every move. The game of cat and mouse was beginning to unnerve me" (62).

Because of the 'blacklisting' of Shityuwete and his comrades they are forced to suspend their activities, however. In Chapter Seven the protagonist acquires a new identity: Shityuwete becomes a domestic worker; his funds have dried up even though he still retains the hope of studying abroad. When his job ends, he becomes a "shondoro", an alien, without residential rights or job prospects" (73):

As a shondoro, my situation was worse than that of residents. Every night I had to lie half-awake listening for any police entering the Location on their raid - I would then rush out of the house to find a place to hide in. But there were no safe hiding places in the Location. (1990: 73-74)

He portrays himself in all respects as a man who experiences marginality in a contested land, Namibia.

In "Across the desert to Bechuanaland", Chapter Eight, Shityuwete once again begins the chapter by recounting how he leaves Namibia. Disguised as members of a bogus football team, he and five SWAPO comrades pretend they are going to play against a local team in Gobabis (77). As in previous instances, Shityuwete puts forward as the reason for going abroad his eagerness to get education, more than politics for its own sake:

Although, as SWAPO members, we were increasingly harassed and pressurised by the authorities, we were not leaving the country for these reasons, and we did not regard ourselves as political fugitives. We were, rather, academic refugees, people thirsty for education which was denied us in Namibia. We wanted to take up education from wherever it was available.

(1990: 77)

Shityuwete later returns to Namibia as this particular trip also proves unsuccessful, but which he, however, is able to accommodate: "We were disappointed at our failure to go through. To my friends this was their first failure to find their way abroad; it was my fourth failed attempt" (79). Shityuwete's determination to obtain an education remains dominant, and soon motivates still another attempt to leave the country. He again sets off to Bechuanaland together with the Shilunga brothers:

We set out for the border in the early afternoon and got there at dusk. As a precautionary measure, we surveyed the border area and waited until it was dark and safe enough to cross... Before we crossed into Bechuanaland, [our guide whom we had hired] lined us up in a single file, then led the way and told us to step in his footsteps. We made the momentous crossing in the pitch dark - though the border consisted only of two wire fences of 10 yards apart, it seemed to have taken us years to cross. (1990: 81-82)

After a not uneventful journey, they arrive in Francistown where they are welcomed into a 'White House' and form part of the confraternity of freedom fighters in this house which is "conspicuously placed in the centre of the township" (86). He recalls:

There we found many others who had fled from South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia. From South Africa there were members of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and from Lesotho members of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). SWAPO and SWANU members from Namibia made up the rest of the White House community. We were a sociable community whose members shared a common goal; freedom and independence for our respective countries. We all wanted to be free from foreign domination and persecution and yearned to be independent and to run our own affairs. (1990: 86-87)

"We are travellers", the ninth chapter, further develops the idea of (political) exodus when it spells out Tanganyika as the destination of these 'travellers' - the South African security agents have infiltrated Bechuanaland and bomb-blasted the new building for refugees. As a by now familiar feature of the overall narrative design, Shityuwete starts the first paragraph of this new chapter by indicating yet another instance of crossing the border:

We were determined to head as soon as possible for the only independent Southern African country - Tanganyika, which had been independent since 1961 and had just become the United Republic of Tanzania. To get there, we had to travel through Northern Rhodesia. (1990: 89)

These activists are gravitating from their own countries where they have been marginalised towards the African state which, because of its independence, assumes the status of 'centre'.

Borders, in this autobiography as in Dingake's, are depicted as places of ambivalent authority. In the immigration offices in Livingstone, Shityuwete mentions two incidents which dramatise this. First, Southern Rhodesian police are threatened with arrest for attempting to pursue a "criminal" (90) who runs across from their side of the frontier to the Northern Rhodesian side. The 'criminal', a ZAPU activist, is taken to safety across the river. Secondly, Joseph Maxton, the co-ordinator of the activists in this particular incident, runs to the Southern Rhodesian side as he is wanted for 'misconduct' in Northern Rhodesia (90). Both incidents reveal the border as being under the jurisdiction of both sides, and neither side. When the time comes for these activists to travel across the river by ferry into Northern Rhodesia, they sing a song appropriate to the occasion:

We are travellers
 Give way for us to pass
 With no desire to go back
 We will reach our destination. (1990: 91)

They certainly do. They arrive in Lusaka and travel safely to Dar es Salaam. This place, they learn on arrival, is an emergent paradigm of cross-culturality. Describing the city and its inhabitants, Shityuwete says:

It was made up of various sections: the old city ... with its mainly Indian and Arab-speaking communities; the ever-present slums; and the harbour area with its modern offices, hotels, banks, railways and warehouses. The harbour area was the centre of trade and its population was mainly affluent foreigners; many vestiges of the colonial era were in evidence here. New suburbs were coming up around the city which were mainly settled by the up-and-coming affluent black population, who were newly employed in the civil services or had found their way into the private as well as public sector occupations for the first time. (1990: 94)

Shityuwete starts his tenth chapter, "Armed Struggle" by reviewing the repression back in his home-country as a way of preparing his reader for his sudden switchover in Dar es Salaam from academic to military training (95-96). While this choice marks another important transition in his life, it also provides him with the chance of travelling further to Ghana, where he receives his training:

We flew much of the breath of Africa westward, passing over the Nile and chasing the sun. We overflew several West African countries and refuelled in Lagos, Nigeria. After many hours of flight we finally landed at Accra airport where we were met by African Centre personnel. They saw us through the immigration as quickly as they could... (1990: 98)

This particular chapter concludes with Shityuwete and his comrades 'graduating' as fully-fledged revolutionaries and cadres, and provides a relevant 'bridge' to the next chapter, "Mission G2", which begins with the account of the selection of cadres to be sent back to Namibia. Even as they set out for Namibia, Shityuwete notes the border as the place of questionable motives and of dramas. He says: "We experienced some problems at the Tanzanian-Zambian border" (101). In one of the border incidents, there was a "Portuguese-speaking fellow who was at the border post the whole time [they] were there and whose presence baffled [them]" (102). Shityuwete finds it worth observing that:

He seemed to have no intention of actually crossing the border in either direction and had no obvious function either - indeed it seemed unlikely that a Portuguese-speaker could have any official business on a border post between two English-speaking countries". (1990: 102)

He further mentions the problematic hostility towards them of the Zambians manning the border. This chapter also describes the hardships experienced by Shityuwete and his group as they travel back to Namibia. They have to be on the alert at all times, not only against their main enemies, the South African security police and agents, but against the colonialists from other African countries as well. Shityuwete uses the Zambian-Angolan border at Cuanga as a further narrative marker to dramatise the larger struggle against colonialism:

To cross the river here would mean we would cross it into the Angolan territory, inviting the possibility of encountering Portuguese troops rather than the South Africans we were prepared for. But we did not care any more. They were all the same and whoever we met, daggers would be drawn. The Portuguese colonialists in Angola, too, regarded all freedom fighters as one and the same and they would not have hesitated to fire at anyone they thought of as their enemy ... Self-protection was our priority. (1990: 108)

Under the chapter heading "Never follow the wolf" Shityuwete describes their adventurous passage from foreign soil back to Namibia. They avoid exposure to the security police at all costs, although the people they encounter spy on them. Despite their trials, they finally re-enter their country unscathed. On arrival Shityuwete says:

I heaved a huge sigh of relief when I found myself on firm ground. This was the land I loved so dearly and had left two years ago. This was the country I had deserted because it could not offer a bright future for me or my descendants. I returned to you, my Namibia, fully prepared to liberate you from the abhorrent system of apartheid perpetuated by the racist regime in Pretoria. (1990: 118)

In Namibia, however, Shityuwete and his comrades do not escape the spotlight of the security

police. They are wanted and word goes round that there are "terrorists" who have entered the country. The police activity is extreme.

* * *

It has been suggested earlier that each of the phases in this text can be seen in relation to a specific aspect of black South African autobiography. The first phase of Shityuwete's autobiography (as in the first section of Dingake's) with its account of his continually frustrated yearning to farther his studies, may be likened to the stories of Mphahlele and Abrahams. The second phase resembles the autobiographies of political activists like Maggie Resha, Dr Goonam and the trade unionist, Emma Mashinini. (For a long time before his meaningful political involvement, Shityuwete is an OPO member, initially a trade unionist organisation which later develops into the SWAPO movement.) The next two phases, however, more closely resemble the prison memoir in which the memoirists use, as the occasion for narrating their lives, their experiences of detention or imprisonment. Like Caesarina Kona Makhoere and Molefe Pheto, Shityuwete goes through harsh treatment in detention and in prison, but more specifically, like Moses Dlamini and Indres Naidoo, he also tells in his autobiography about his survival when serving his long sentence (twenty years) on Robben Island.

* * *

The third phase begins with Shityuwete mentioning the indolence of his comrade-in-arms, Castro, in the midst of an intensive police search: the police are using horses (124) and "helicopters and spotters [are] flying low" (125). The police activity in the previous phase is even more intense here, and we are also prepared for the arrest of these men - Shityuwete and Castro no longer see eye to eye. Three days (126) into the country, they are captured and arrested: "Like Jesus on his way to Golgotha, we too were led away on a similar road. The only difference was that ours ended on Robben Island, the Golgotha to black South African freedom fighters". (1990: 128)

The processes of intimidation and abuse, interrogation and torture then begin in

Namibia. This first experience of detention serves to prepare the reader for the even harsher torture in Pretoria. Shityuwete and his comrades are flown to South Africa from Namibia, and another important frontier is crossed:

The Dakota touched down at No 1 Voortrekkerhoogte Air Force base, Pretoria. The door of the plane opened and looking down I saw two columns of uniformed South African Police, all armed with sten submachine guns ... Handcuffed and in leg irons, we descended the steps into waiting Special Branch cars. (1990: 131)

They now enter the capital of torture: Pretoria with its Compol Building. During Shityuwete's brutal interrogation under the command of the notorious Captain 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel, a "bulging file ... marked top secret/strictly confidential" (140-141) and which he later learns is his own, is placed before him. Shityuwete is confronted with their version of his biography. With all the details contained in it about his journey to Dar es Salaam and back, part of his life history is narrated there.

Shityuwete and his comrades - it is difficult to view them individually at this stage - are first detained in Pretoria Local Prison and later 'housed' in Leeuwkop. Once in detention, the only variation in their life is provided by the visits to the Compol Building where they are tortured further. Later on, during the trial, they are introduced to other apartheid structures - the courts: they are charged in the magistrate's court and sentenced in the Supreme Court. In these courts they discover their new identities; Helao Shityuwete, for one, becomes "Accused No 7".

The sentencing of these activists to imprisonment on Robben Island constitutes the climax of this phase of the narrative. The comrades-in-arms prepare for their change to being fellow-prisoners on the Island. The earlier major transitions - the venture by Shityuwete into Angola at the end of the first phase and his return to Namibia with which phase two ends - have been part of the narrative build-up to this sentence.

* * *

It is appropriate that, before relating his first experiences on the island, like Dingake, Shityuwete should begin this fourth phase by telling how they are taken from Pretoria to the

Cape:

We left Pretoria at about noon on 9 February. The three-ton van carrying us was too small for a group of 31 people packed together like sardines and who had to travel a distance of over 900 miles. We were handcuffed in pairs and each had leg irons on. There was hardly any space in which to move our limbs without discomforting others. (1990: 180)

All the complicated journeying in Shityuwete's life culminates in the crossing to Robben Island on the "Blouberg, the Robben Island prison boat" (181). When they arrive on the prison island, they are told to "strip" and put on the "prison garb". The ritual of stripping off the civilian clothes and putting on the prison uniform marks their entry into prison life and symbolises the stripping away of the 'civilian self' and adoption of the 'prison self'. The prison dress is intended to reduce the inmates to uniformity; Shityuwete reminisces: "We were ordered to strip and find something from the pile to put on. Each one of us had to take two pairs of shorts, two khaki shirts and two canvas jackets. There were no shoes and we were still barefoot". (1990: 183) He tells how the prison warders attempted "to burn all our personal belongings" (186) on their first day on the prison island. At a later stage, Shityuwete records how their sense of self-respect is undermined in prison: "there are no doors on the toilets so privacy is non-existent" (187). After all the rituals involved in the process of inducting them to prison life, he says: "We were now confirmed Robben Island Prison *community* members" (1990: 186, my italics). Like Dingake, Shityuwete refers to the changing of identities as an important transition in prison. From the moment he enters prison, he is no longer to be known as Helao Shityuwete but as prisoner "5/68" (216). All this, however, marks the beginning of the collective consciousness among the prisoners.

Shityuwete, like Dingake, presents Robben Island as a microcosm of the apartheid state with its divisions. Besides cutting the prisoners off from the outside world, Robben Island also has borders within itself. He says, "[t]he prison had a brick section and a zinc section" (182). There are, again, common-law prisoners (188) and political prisoners. Political prisoners are themselves divided, some are allocated to communal cells while others are restricted to solitary confinement ("Makulukutu"). Later Shityuwete recounts how the Namibians are set apart from other political prisoners: "The authorities did not want us to meet with the rest of the political prisoners. We, as Namibians, were in total isolation" (199). And at an even later stage, he recalls how they were separated from others when they

were all, in fact, being marched to Makulukutu: "We were not allowed to meet or be seen by anyone. When the way was cleared, they marched us through several gates in the passage" (209).

Despite all these inhibitions, the prisoners manage to break some of the prison barriers. Like Dingake, Shityuwete also recounts the inmates' various attempts at overcoming the communication barrier between themselves inside prison and the outside world. The prison authorities do not allow any newspapers and therefore news has to be gathered clandestinely:

We quickly managed to hide our bundles of papers which had been smuggled in despite intensive searches ... We quickly spread the papers near to the entrance and covered them with a sisal mat then went back to our beds as if nothing was happening. (1990: 190)

The prisoners devise ways of communicating with fellow-inmates in other cells, and even those in distant sections. Shityuwete recounts some of these ways:

The first step was to throw three stones in one direction at intervals, after which they were to be reciprocated. If they were not reciprocated, that meant that the coast was not clear on the other side. If it was, then parcels of paper were thrown across. (1990: 190-191)

To communicate with distant inmates they establish a method which takes the message via the kitchen. The "coded messages" are dug into the plates of food. Shityuwete says: "We on our part were always vigilant, looking for hidden messages on our plates, or in the food which might have escaped the caterer's attention" (191). The hunger strike, another concerted reaction against separationist practices in prison, is effectively used by inmates. Sometimes they use the professionals among themselves in their fight against the system. He says: "With lawyers in our midst, we realised that there were other means than hunger strikes to force the issues in prison" (221).

This section of the autobiography takes as its subject not the individual on the title-page but the entire body of prisoners. Shityuwete devotes a large portion of his text to talking about his fellow inmates on Robben Island. As he narrates, he also reveals confraternity with freedom fighters from South Africa. He says:

When we arrived on Robben Island, we were informed by other prisoners that there were over 900 inmates on the island. These comprised mainly ANC and PAC members who had been convicted in the early 1960's. (1990: 189)

As a narrative strategy to shift the focus from himself and place it on others, he talks about "Nelson 'Madiba' Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Wilton Nkwayi, Andrew Mlangeni, Ahmed Kathrada and Govan Mbeki of the ANC as well as Robert Sobukwe, John Nyati and Jafta 'Jeff' Masemola" (189). Shityuwete's autobiography further contains the biographical sketches of John Shipponeni and Festus Nehale whose experiences in prison remain indelible in his memory (194-198).

As a sign of solidarity and a documentation of collective experience, Shityuwete bases his narrative on what affects them as a group rather than himself as an individual. A narrating 'we' takes over from the autobiographical 'I', for example, when his group complains of being kept in the cells, and are given work to do:

We did not know what would have happened if we had refused to clear away the rubbish. But because we wanted to get fresh air and believed the Commanding Officer's word that it was only temporary, we did not make a fuss. We made some crude tools out of rusting iron and ropes. With these, we pulled all the old cars ... (1990: 193)

Group activities like this are utilised by most prison memoirists to exhibit the idea of communal consciousness in prison. Others include hunger strikes, discussions, meals and group labour.

Certain visitors from outside are also useful in bringing about improved prison conditions. Shityuwete mentions as part of these the International Committee of the Red Cross (225) and its delegation headed by Dr Meullierlo. With the help of such organisations and of their lawyers, and their own resistance strategies, they challenge the prison authorities. Like Dingake, Shityuwete describes how some of the main prison barriers are forced to yield:

After the ICRC left and we had served our six months of deprivation, things started improving. A number of restrictions were removed. Many people were allowed to study. The discriminatory diet was replaced with a non-discriminatory one. We were allowed to go out to work again and sports activities resumed. (1990: 226)

And, as in Dingake's narrative, the reader is similarly being prepared for the final opening of the prison gates for the subject.

The last phase describes the return journey of the protagonist to freedom that begins when the prisoners are given back what was earlier confiscated from them. They are carried back in the "truck" (248) and the "Dakota" (249) to a country itself moving towards independence. Shityuwete identifies one final border: "After a couple of hours we flew over the Orange River and entered Namibian airspace" (249). The Windhoek he arrives in "was a changed place" (249). He is finally released from Windhoek Central Prison where he receives a certificate of discharge: "This is to certify that Helao Joseph Shityuwete was released from prison on 10 May 1984, Windhoek'" (251). At the end of Shityuwete's narrative he is not only reunited with the people of Namibia after twenty years, but, as a concluding symbol of the struggle that has taken him beyond narrow, national borders, he tells how he is telephoned by "Jacob Hannai, SWAPO's Deputy Chief Representative for Western Europe [who] was on the other end of the line in the London office" (253).

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show that Dingake and Shityuwete, both originally from the margins of the South African struggle, were drawn into its centre and that their works, written in countries adjacent to South Africa, reveal how both activists have literally and conceptually crossed borders to arrive finally at an awareness of the South African freedom struggle having a larger context in the subcontinent. Furthermore, from the perspective of post-colonialism, each of these works serves to re-position the centre: South African autobiography can be written from Namibia or Botswana or, for that matter, London. As Viljoen suggests (p.9 of this study), the act of writing is itself a vehicle for transgressing the border. For both Dingake and Shityuwete their autobiography becomes part of their activism.

But more specifically, I hope to have shown the crossing of generic borders in these two political autobiographies. By concentrating less on their 'individual selves' than on their 'collective selves', Dingake and Shityuwete in their autobiographical introspection and self-explanation - what Curtin calls "recollective reflection" (1974: 344) - participate in an act that Daymond calls "to stand up among" others (1991: 35) in Southern African black autobiographical writing. The autobiographer shares authority by placing the rest of his group behind him. When he describes an event, he becomes inclusive, so that when he tells about his situation, he finds himself recounting the experiences of others, giving them voice. Thus his testimony becomes pluralistic. Both Dingake and Shityuwete, in their autobiographies, should be seen as in intense interaction with others; showing solidarity, they are able to extend their selfhood to accommodate others in similar circumstances:

The testimonial text is generally a linear, first-person narrative with a (potentially) social and collective significant experience(s). The narrative voice can be that of a typical or extraordinary witness or protagonist who metonymically represents other individuals or groups whose experiences are similar to that of the narrator. As a representative text, therefore, the testimonial document facilitates dialogue with other voices, and in the process comments on, reproduces, questions and reorders historical events in such a way that its projection of a vision of society in need of transformation is rendered credible. Although premised on the 'I' of the 'narrator', the testimonial text is often pluralistic - giving evidence, bearing witness, writing (auto)biography, paying homage, etc, for a 'we' and utilising the popular tradition to draw certain tropes from it. (Gititi 1991: 48)

This suggests that the 'self' that the black Southern African autobiographer records is

comprehensible only within a collective paradigm of the self. Tsiga suggests: "[T]he society can emerge into a community of homogenous personalities which discounts the value of individuality so that the autobiographer becomes unable to uphold his uniqueness as an issue in his autobiography" (1987: 23).

Under these circumstances, the Southern African autobiography has been said to proclaim an "anti-autobiography" stance (Burness 1970: 82-95) in which the society of the protagonist becomes the focus instead of the protagonist himself; the life history of the autobiographer may be seen as "less an individual phenomenon than a social one" (Olney 1973: 246). Stephen Butterfield may have had black Southern Africans in mind as well when he asserted that:

The "self" of black autobiography ... is not an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan. The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political identity, drawing sustenance from the past experience of the group... (1974: 3)

This assertion recalls Lewis Nkosi's opinion that every black man in South Africa (autobiographers in the forefront) "suffers group craziness" as opposed to "individual craziness" (Tsiga 1987: 28). The black South African life story has, therefore, established conventions of its own. It has crossed generic borders from the Western-oriented individualist autobiography to the Africanist communal one where the stress falls on the hybridity of its form.

Tsiga has noted this shift: "autobiography is [now] a mode of myriad dimensions, each cutting across traditional boundaries to add to its overall richness and complexity" (Tsiga 1987: 2). In this new breed of autobiography, the protagonist convokes his society as he 'drafts a manifesto' where its ideology, aspirations, history, beliefs, ambitions, and sometimes customs become matters of fundamental importance:

Even as [the autobiographer] writes the book he must employ his society's values to make his case. Autobiography is thereby a document of ideological significance; it is as much a personal history as a general manifesto, exploiting and embodying the dominant beliefs and aspirations of its historical context. (Tsiga 1987: 5)

Unlike the Western autobiography which is "essentially inward and personal" (Cockshut 1984: 11), Southern African autobiography tells of the people who shape the protagonist's

life, who suffer under similar circumstances with him and who share in his glories and aspirations. In acknowledging this Southern African 'mystification', Olney concludes: "Thus owing to the pervasiveness of the social experience, and consequent upon the intimacy of individual and group existence, the personal realm fades unobtrusively into the communal" (Olney 1973: 25).

I have also argued that although 'borders' can polarise, they are also places of ambivalent authority and identity. Out of this consciousness that I have traced in these two autobiographies has emerged a concept of ambivalent authorship. The autobiographies of Dingake and Shityuwete show as authors the names that appear on the title-pages, but there are, however, many other 'authors' whose names are registered in the narratives. Their life stories are the stories of both the protagonists and all other oppressed peoples.

The hybrid form of Dingake's and Shityuwete's texts extends further to bridge distinct autobiographical sub-genres. Both these writers give an account of their general life history (conventional autobiography); they testify as victims of brutal police torture, interrogation and detention (testimonial writing), and finally document their life as prisoners on Robben Island (prison memoir). In one interconnected sequence of events, they narrate the lives of sufferers, of prisoners and yet of themselves, in texts that cross borders to combine the history of a black freedom struggle with an act of self-narration.

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