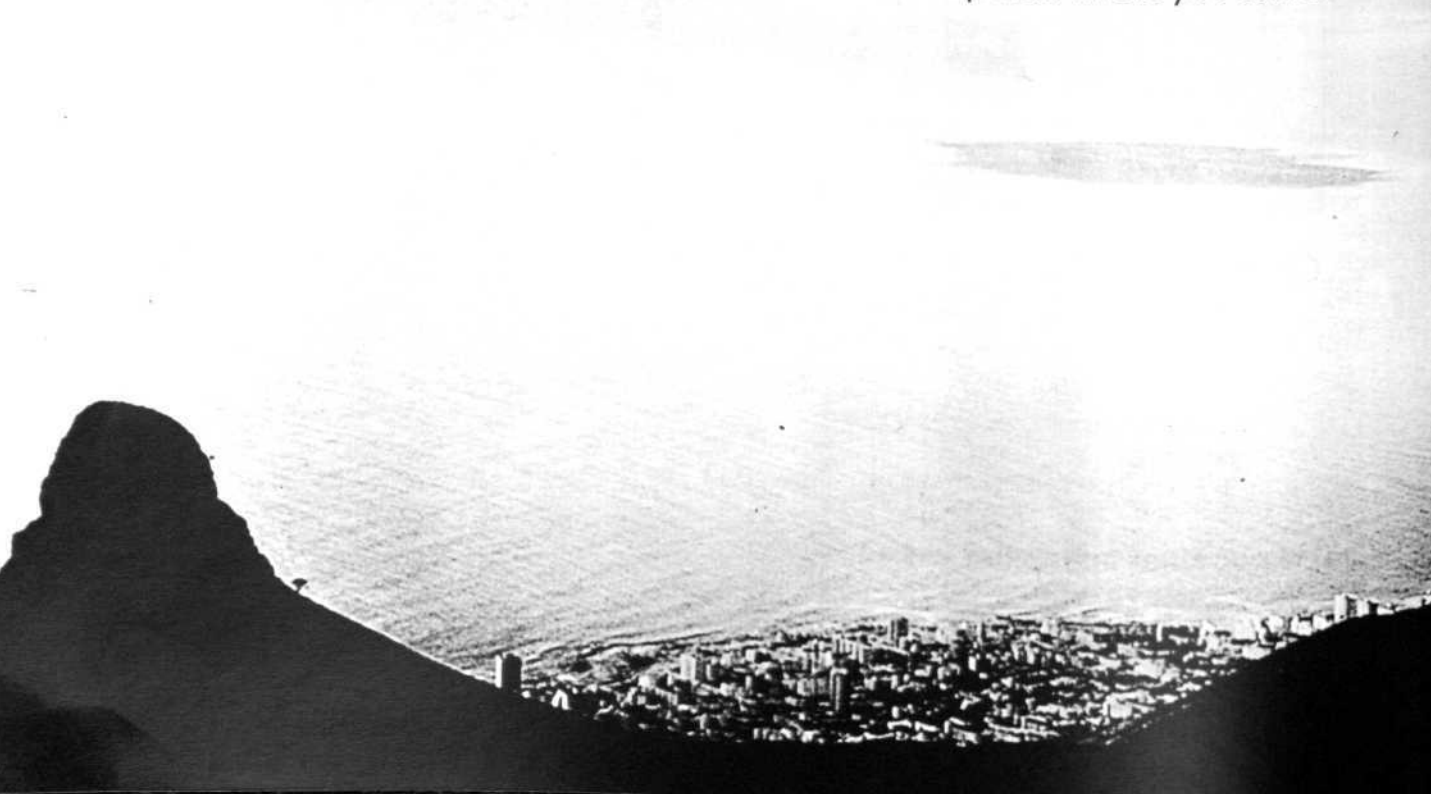


EXTENSION 13, Belhar is a wind-swept coloured ghetto forty minutes' drive from Cape Town proper, although it might be even further for all it matters in terms of the scenery that makes the city such a popular tourist destination. It is certainly a long way from Table Mountain, the famous landmark that can suddenly surprise you when you turn a corner; a long way from the traffic-free, cobbled Greenmarket Square with its makeshift stalls selling 'ethnic' artefacts from Zimbabwe and former Zaire and even Nigeria; a long way from the art galleries and the Italian cafes and the V&A Waterfront development where you can sit

All God's chillun got colour

By Adewale Maja-Pearce

EXTENSION 13, Belhar is a wind-swept coloured ghetto forty minutes' drive from Cape Town proper, although it might be even further for all it matters in terms of the scenery that makes the city such a popular tourist destination. It is certainly a long way from Table Mountain, the famous landmark that can suddenly surprise you when you turn a corner; a long way from the traffic-free, cobbled Greenmarket Square with its makeshift stalls selling 'ethnic' artefacts from Zimbabwe and former Zaire and even Nigeria; a long way from the art galleries and the Italian cafes and the V&A Waterfront development where you can sit



and watch the boats sailing in and out of the harbour.

I visited Extension 13 a couple of times in search of a coloured gangster called Lapepa. The coloured gangs are a prominent feature of life in the Western Cape province. According to received mythology, the first gangster was a mine worker called Pomabaza who set up shop in the 1820's when he realised that robbing the company was more lucrative than working for it. He settled in a place called Maritzburg and recruited two other men but one of them turned out to be a sodomite. This led to a disagreement and the formation of a rival gang. All three later met up again in a prison in Durban and agreed to co-operate in exploiting the system to their mutual benefit.

There are currently an estimated 127 gangs with about 80,000 members out of a total coloured population in the entire province of just over two million. Most members are recruited in the prisons, where they are taught gang history and sworn to a code of conduct which they take with them to the outside world. According to Roger Friedman, a local journalist who wrote about them extensively, 'their adherence to the code is the essence of their power and ability to survive; in a sense they are hostage to it'. Some of the more prominent gangs are the 24 gang, also known as the Royal Air Force, which plans and executes prison escapes; the 25 gang, the Pig Fives, which engages in sodomy and smuggling; and the 28 gang, Kamp van Nongoloza, which 'engages in sodomy as an organised activity within the functions of the "silver line", and in violence as part of the "golden line"'. It also smuggles and robs, and usually conducts its activities at night.'

It was Friedman who gave me Lapepa's cellular telephone number but Lapepa was evidently a busy man. 'He's not 'ere at the moment,' were the exact words spoken by the same person each time I rang. 'I'll call later,' I'd say, and he'd say, 'No problem.' I finally got to talk to the man himself and we arranged to meet at his headquarters the next day. It was a tricky place to find but he obligingly arranged to meet my taxi at a nearby petrol station. He was eager to be interviewed. This was because the gangsters were just then engaged in a public relations exercise following the 'execution' the previous August of Rashaad Staggie, co-leader with his twin brother, Rashied, of a particularly notorious gang known as the Hard Livings, by a Muslim vigilante group, People against Gangsterism and Drugs, or Pagad for short.

Pagad (motto: 'We fear no one but Allah') emerged in early 1996 with the avowed aim of ridding the ghettos of the gangsters once and for all, principally by fire-bombing their houses. It was said to include veterans of armed Islamic campaigns in places like Bosnia, Lebanon and Afghanistan, and was also believed to have links with a home-grown Islamic fundamentalist body known as Qibla, which collaborated during the anti-apartheid struggle with the

former military wing of the extremist Pan-African Congress (motto: 'One settler, one bullet'). According to police figures, Pagad carried out twenty-three acts of 'naked terrorism' in the first three months of 1997 compared with ninety-six cases of gang-related crime in the same period, but the authorities feared that independent 'cells' within Pagad were running out of control and that, in consequence, 'the energy unleashed could reproduce itself in a pattern of militancy with a life of its own'.

The murder of Rashaad Staggie took place after dark in a more up-market coloured area called Virginia Water, not far from the famous District 6. It seems that trouble was expected that night because there was a newspaper photographer already at the scene. The dramatic results were published world-wide. The first photo showed masked Pagad members laying siege to a house. The caption underneath said that they believed Rashied Staggie to be inside dealing drugs with a Nigerian gang and they wanted him to come out so they could kill him. The next photo showed Rashaad sitting alone in his BMW. He had driven over when he heard what was happening. He appeared to be smiling. The next photo showed Rashaad slumped over the steering wheel. There was blood everywhere. Nobody ever discovered who fired the first shot. The penultimate photo showed Rashaad fleeing from his vehicle in flames. He had been doused with petrol and set alight. The final photo showed a smouldering corpse on the tarmac just a few feet from the car.

A coloured musician I later spent some time with in Mitchell's Plain, the largest of all the coloured ghettos and even further out than Extension 13, summed up the prevailing view of the gangs by calling them 'filth'. He said this as we stood on a corner near his house and watched a carload of them cruise by. It was difficult to mistake them with their studied air of menace straight out of the movies. The following week-end, in the early hours of the morning, a middle-aged couple of some standing in the community were shot dead by a gang not far from where we had stood. Their corpses were thrown onto a rubbish dump and their car used to carry out a series of robberies at all-night petrol stations in the vicinity. The murdered woman's daughter said in a subsequent newspaper interview that the bullet had passed through her mother's throat and exited from the back of her head. Filth indeed: my musician friend said that Rashaad Staggie had the number 28 tattooed on his left hand between his thumb and forefinger, which meant that he sodomised new inmates in the prison.

Following the death of his twin brother, Rashied Staggie got together with other prominent gangsters and announced that they were now reformed, and that they would henceforth cease all intra-gang warfare that was part of the hell of living in the ghettos. They even pledged to assist the police in clamping down on crime, to which end they formed an umbrella organisation called the Community Outreach Forum, or Core for short. While I was there, Core made a

great show about apprehending three men who robbed and raped an 82 year-old woman in yet another coloured ghetto called Manenburg, which also happened to be Staggie's turf. According to the newspaper report, 'The Police, called at about 7.30pm to a Manenburg pool-room where the suspects were held, received a warm welcome from Core members, instead of the usual cold shoulder'. Staggie himself, with his newly-acquired taste for publicity, also took the opportunity to assure the people of Cape Town that he considered rape to be 'the lowest thing'.

The problem for the authorities, however, was that Core pointedly refused to discuss gang involvement in the drugs trade - chiefly dagga, mandrax and cocaine - on the grounds that 'drugs is not a priority'. This obviously made it difficult for the ANC government to be seen to be negotiating with them, except that Core had a trump card, which was the city's (ultimately doomed) bid to host the 2004 Olympic Games. Cape Town was on the short list of five with only three months to go before the International Olympic Committee was due to announce its decision. Five leading members of the Committee were in fact in town at that very moment enjoying Cape lobsters and Cape wine in one of the many restaurants on the V&A Waterfront, from where you could also watch the boats taking tourists to Robben Island, President Mandela's home for seventeen years in the bad old days; in the days when, as Staggie was quick to point out, soldiers of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, relied on the very same gangsters they now shirked for safe houses and safe routes.

The

idea that all the coloured gangs were united in their support of the revolutionary struggle is a fanciful interpretation of recent history since the gangs themselves only flourished with the collusion of the apartheid state, which used them to control their own communities. Nevertheless, the fact that some among them were sympathetic to the cause, either because of rivalry with other gangs or because they were astute enough to see which way the wind was blowing or because they were simply fed-up with the entire apartheid structure was especially valuable in the only province where the coloureds were in the majority, and the only province which went against the national trend in the first-ever democratic elections in 1994 and voted for the otherwise reviled National Party. This was the same party which sought to deny the very existence of the coloureds in the first place by forbidding inter-racial marriage; the same party whose leader's wife could so casually refer to them as 'left-overs' and 'non-people' at the height of the elections, so sure was her husband of their votes; and the same party which forcibly moved 60,000 of them from their homes in District 6 at the foot of Table Mountain to Extension 13, where you can't see Table Mountain even on a clear day.

There was a cruel but presumably unintended irony in

the names given to the streets in Extension 13: Organ, Ukelele, Wagner, Symphony, all of them dreamt up by a committee of white civil servants who weren't going to live there, hence the absence of 'beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion', just row upon row of single-storey boxes with a little patch of ground in front of each, and then long stretches of wasteland strewn with shopping bags and empty beer cans. I was admonished more than once by indignant ANC activists who knew better than me to go and see the squatter camps where the blacks lived and then compare the two, but this was the familiar response of the 'political lumberjacks', as Bessie Head put it, 'busy making capital on human lives'. Richard Rive, another coloured writer, also from Cape Town, put it a different way in his famous novel, 'Buckingham Palace': District 6: 'Poor and dilapidated as Buckingham Palace is, we could sit on our front stoep at night and see the outlines of Table Mountain... We could sit on the back porch and see the ships at anchor in Table Bay... Where we were living in Azalea Court, when we opened the front door we could see only washing-lines and more washing-lines and the opposite courts.'

Lapepa's headquarters, a shebeen-cum-nightclub he was just then busy renovating, occupied one corner of a square. The place would have been difficult to miss, partly because of the dozen or so young men loitering about the entrance, half-in and half-out, with that vague look of people waiting for somebody to arrive or something to happen, and partly because of the crude but colourful mural on the outside wall painted in the black, green, gold, red, blue and white - rainbow nation, indeed! - of the new South African flag. At the top of the mural were the disembodied faces of three young men with the names Hammer, Milky and Benny written underneath. They were looking down from above some clouds at the scene below, which showed the two roads of crime, one leading to prison, the other to the graveyard. I was told later that all three of them were shot dead by a rival gang the previous year only weeks before the truce came into effect, which presumably meant that the young men currently hanging about the entrance to the club where the fallen comrades of blessed memory had also stood less than a year ago, also with that same vague expectation, might live a little longer.

Lapepa, who told me that his real name was Ernie Peters, was the leader of The Firm. There was little concrete information about his gang ('a mysterious outfit', according to a newspaper report), although more than one person believed that it specialised in child pornography and child prostitution, in addition to selling drugs. Whatever the case, Lapepa was also a leading light in Core. It was at his club that I was to encounter Rashied Staggie, but that was later, on my second visit. This time I only saw Lapepa. He was in his mid-thirties and dark-skinned, almost black in fact and would have been taken as such in a country with a less attenuated response to colour. There was nothing particularly gangsterish about him, unlike some of the others I was to meet. He was of average height and build,



Title-page picture: shows aerial view of Cape Town through the mountains. Patch of land in the middle of the water is Robben Island

© For all Cape Town, East Rand and Soweto pictures: Jide Adeniyi Jones

Downtown in Cape Town, the evening of ANC victory at the first post-Apartheid polls

clean-shaven, with lots of gold rings on his fingers. The only distinctive feature about him was his missing upper front teeth, all four incisors, but this wasn't unusual among coloureds.

Lapepa himself played up to the clean-cut image. He told me that he didn't drink alcohol or do drugs and that, unlike most of the other gangsters, he had never been to prison, but he was quick to add that he had already fathered nine children by almost as many women, although he didn't say how many women, exactly, and I didn't ask him. I asked instead about his gang. He said that it was formed seven years ago by shebeen owners like himself to provide mutual protection against extortion by the other gangs, principally the Americans, the Scorpions and the Sexy Boys. But that was during apartheid when getting a liquor licence was next to impossible if you weren't white. These days he just wanted what he'd always wanted, which was to run a successful business and provide a positive role model (his words) for the lighties, the children. The only problem, he said, was that the coloureds were still second in the queue now that the blacks had political power. But that was the coloured's lot for you, he added, always on the shitty end of the deal, and then he glanced at me in a knowing way, whereupon we both laughed. At that moment he didn't think I was British or Nigerian or Anglo-Nigerian or whatever I was trying to claim but just another coloured, and at that moment I thought so, too. Part of the point of being coloured, after all, is that almost any story fits, proof of which is that anybody can parent a coloured child, but by drawing me into his orbit, by letting me know that he considered me one of them, a brother, he was also exploiting the other point about being coloured, which is that you're the ultimate outsider, forever craving acceptance from those who belong, i.e. everybody else. But everybody else is necessarily untrustworthy, which is why coloureds can only really trust each other. Lapepa watched me as I paused over my notebook and failed to write anything, then he shrugged and said that he had to go to a meeting. We arranged to link up the following Sunday, when there was to be a gathering of the clans for the regular monthly pow-

wow with the Olympic Bid Committee, and he delivered me into the hands of Ricardo, who was to drive me back. 'There's no reason why you should spend all that money on a taxi,' he said, offering me his hand.

Ricardo was a light-skinned eighteen year-old, tall and gangly and quick to smile. He told me that his nick-name was 'Donkey', which somehow fitted. Like Lapepa, he sported a lot of gold rings on his fingers; like Lapepa also, he was missing his upper front four teeth. He said he had them extracted three years ago by the dentist because everybody did it. Then he laughed. It was so that he could give better head, he said, just like the coloured women with missing teeth could give a better blow-job. He started laughing again but then broke off abruptly as we approached a corner. Five young men were standing on the verge with their hands rammed into the pockets of their leather jackets to keep from the cold of a late afternoon winter's day and pointedly stared at us. Ricardo stared back at them as we drove past, and it was only after we were out of range that he told me that they had tried to shoot him the previous night when he pulled into a nearby petrol station. He said that he was lucky to be alive. He could have shown me the bullet holes in the car he'd been driving if he had thought about it when we were still at the club. I asked him if it was true that his gang had renounced violence and he said, yes, it was. I asked him whether he had personally killed people in the old days. He hesitated a moment and then said, yes, he had. I asked him how many he had killed but he just laughed nervously and wouldn't say any more. There was an awkward silence and then I asked him if it was okay to light a spliff and he laughed with relief and nodded. When we reached the city, I had to direct him to Long Street, the best known street in Cape Town. He said that he rarely came into the city proper, that he was born in Extension 13 and had lived there all his life. I invited him up for a drink in the first-floor lounge of Bob's Bar and Bistro, the backpacker place I was putting up in. He refused at first and only agreed out of politeness when I pressed him. He hurried a soft drink and then took off, promising me a 'lekker skaaf', a nice smoke, the next time

I visited.

I arrived the following Sunday at noon as arranged. Lapepa wasn't around. He had been in already and gone out again but I was assured that he would presently return. It was a dull, cold, overcast June day with occasional gusts of wind blowing from the sea, always threatening to rain but never quite managing to do so - a typical Winter's day in Cape Town, I was told. The same young men as before were hanging around the entrance of the club, zipped up in their leather jackets against the cold. They might not have moved in the intervening week. Only one person was busy. He was sweeping the public area which led into the club itself. The odd customer dropped by for a bottle of brandy or a can of beer from the off-licence, a makeshift, cage-like construction of plywood and glass to the immediate right as you stepped inside. Ricardo fetched me a can of beer from the big, glass-fronted refrigerator stacked from top to bottom with all the different brands available in the country. By-and-by I noticed a middle-aged coloured man on the other side of the square pushing a large wheelbarrow stacked high with vegetables. He had a peculiar gait, as if one leg was longer than the other and he couldn't bend the longer one at the knee. He parked his wheelbarrow directly opposite us and began calling out his wares. Otherwise, it was a quiet Sunday afternoon, just a few children and the odd mongrel dog playing under the solitary tree on the patch of green in front.

An hour passed. I couldn't join in the conversation because it was conducted exclusively in Afrikaans, the 'pidgin Dutch' evolved by coloured society out of the linguistic mix of the early Cape settlers and the indigenous Africans from the seventeenth century onwards; the very mix, in fact, which brought the coloured people into existence in the first place. The irony was that Afrikaans had become so identified with the boere, the white man, that most coloureds had forgotten its origins and were liable to apologise for their proficiency in the language of the oppressor. But the ability of the boere to hijack the language was only partly accounted for by their overweening arrogance. The coloureds themselves, who can hardly believe that they possess anything approaching a culture since 'a race made up of weak materials and without the capacity for spiritual or intellectual growth' is hardly liable to produce anything more exalted than gangsterism. The quote is from Sarah Gertrude Millin, the white South African writer, from her celebrated novel, *God's Step-Children*: ' "We are all God's children," the Rev.

Andrew Flood said. "But is God Himself not white?" asked Cachas. And, as the Rev. Andrew Flood hesitated for a reply, she made a suggestion. "Perhaps we brown people are His step-children," she said.'

The author makes Cachas, debase herself out of her mouth in order to evade her own racism, except that a writer with a more inclusive vision of humanity might have had Cachas say the very same as an expression of the self-loathing that lies at the heart of the coloured condition. 'Being coloured is like excrement,' said my musician friend; and it was obvious, even as he spoke, that his anger went deeper than an otherwise reasonable hatred of parasites whose existence in such large numbers challenged ability to protect his fifteen year-old daughter.

The coloured is at once the symbol and the victim of the racial lie, a sort of mongrel compromise - half-caste, mixed-race, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon...: the terms are legion - to be mocked and despised for that very reason. But one irony of apartheid was that the blacks were equally culpable in exploiting the concept of race in which the colour of one's skin assumed a value in its own right. It is telling, for instance, that both blacks and whites subscribe to the apartheid conflation of 'black' and 'African' as though the two were synonymous, the blacks for authenticity in the land of their birth; the whites because they needed to maintain the fiction that they constituted an outpost of European progress. To be a coloured, in other words, is to be defined in terms of what you're not; 'not a White person or a Native', neither one thing nor the other. This is another way of saying that you exist in limbo - 'an intermediate state or condition of awaiting a decision'; 'a state of neglect or oblivion' - which is hardly the easiest of places to live. The concomitant spiritual emptiness, even nihilism, which this condition bespeaks was everywhere evident in the vacant expressions of the young men hanging about the entrance to Lapepa's club and ready to sacrifice their lives - Hammer, Milky and Benny - in order to prove their right to exist.

'Come,' Ricardo said, sensing that I was getting bored or perhaps anxious to fulfil his role as my minder; 'let's go and have a lekker skaaf.' He rubbed his hands together. 'It's cold,' he added, 'so you must have some smoke in your belly to warm up, no?', and then he laughed at himself and apologised for his poor English, but I said that his English was better than he thought. We passed close to the vegetable seller, who had all the while been watching us approach. He followed us into the yard, making an odd creaking sound as he walked, dragging one leg behind the other and up the steps to the enclosed porch that led directly into a narrow kitchen. The dealer, a rasta man with a knitted hat, a beard and a ready smile, welcomed me and said that we should smoke outside because his woman didn't like the smell of it. I could see his woman from where I was standing. She was watching television in the overcrowded living-room. She looked as if she didn't like a lot of things about her life.

The dealer asked me if I wanted to smoke bottle top or



Soweto

slow boat. The former, which entailed packing the ganga into the inverted neck of a broken bottle top, was generally preferred because you got a big hit quickly. The trick was to draw the smoke deep into your lungs at one go and then let it out slowly. I was content to roll a joint and take my time. The vegetable seller, meanwhile, was standing up against the wall looking expectantly as the bottle top made its rounds. Ricardo, noticing, nudged me in the ribs and said in a loud voice that the man used to be a big-time gangster until three years ago when he fell under a train and lost his legs. He used to be tall in those days, Ricardo said, taller even than me, but look at him now, 'short-short', barely five-and-a-half feet. The vegetable seller laughed along with everyone else and in the moment of merriment caused by his misfortune begged a quick hit. Nobody responded; they mightn't even have heard him. He shifted his position, making that creaking noise again. One leg must have been amputated above the knee, which was why it wouldn't bend, and then I realised that the sound I heard was made by newspapers packed tightly together between the limbs and the prosthetics. I wondered whether he had been pushed by a rival, or whether he had fallen by accident while showing off, as I had seen some men do by running along the platform and then somersaulting into the carriage at the last possible moment, but I didn't want to ask Ricardo in front of him and I forgot later.

Meanwhile, in the cramped courtyard outside with the obligatory rusting car frame overgrown with weeds, a child of about ten was terrorising a black terrier by kicking a football at it. The terrier, in turn, driven to distraction by this senseless provocation, would immediately round on another

dog, also a terrier, which was watching from a short distance. This went on for a few minutes, the boy pelting the dog, the dog attacking the other until the whole scene threatened to turn ugly as the dogs got madder and madder, baring their teeth and growling deep in the back of their throats, whereupon the assembled adults harried and kicked them into the street. Nobody thought to admonish the child, who wandered off to play with some friends on the green.

Ricardo excused himself and went over to the club to see what was happening. I asked the rasta to bring me a glass, which I filled with beer and passed to the retired gangster. The rasta, glancing at the can in my hand, asked me if I drank a lot of beer and before I could answer he said that I should lay off the white man's Babylon and stick to the weed; that Jah had given us the weed to help us through the myriad travails of life, just like Bob Marley said. It was quite a little sermon. He clenched his fist and tapped his chest and then extended his arm. We grazed knuckles. 'Peace, brother,' he said. Presently, Ricardo returned to announce that Staggie had arrived and was currently being interviewed by some French journalists. On our way out, just as we reached the broken front gate, the gangster-turned-hawker let rip a stream of expletives, shouting at us that we should go and fuck ourselves, that we were shit and that he was going to fuck us up.

Some chairs had been arranged in a three-quarter circle in a clearing in the club proper. Staggie was sitting in the middle, with two of the journalists on one side and two bodyguards on the other. Staggie himself was a compact, light-skinned man in his early forties, not particularly good-looking - rather ugly, in fact - but with a certain charisma.

The bodyguards were straight out of central casting. One was a tall, rangy, gorgeous-looking black man in his twenties, six foot tall with regular features, a beautiful physique and the confidence that went with it. He wore two gold earrings in one ear and one in the other; he had a gold chain round his neck and ten gold rings on his fingers, seven on one hand and three on the other. He wore black corduroy trousers and a fawn-coloured leather jacket and he carried a gun on his right hip, but inside the waistband so that it wasn't immediately obvious. His short hair was slicked back with oil. He was ever alert, his eyes constantly roaming over the assembled company. From time-to-time Staggie would ask him for the English equivalent of an Afrikaans word and he would give it without hesitation, but always a little modestly, playing down his embarrassment of riches. His companion, by contrast, was a big bruiser of a coloured man with a surly expression who appeared to be asleep most of the time the interview was taking place, his hands rammed into the pockets of his trench coat and his legs stretched out before him. I never saw him smile once, either then or afterwards, and by the end of the day I thought him the more dangerous. It was something in his look, a sense of dispassionate violence, as if cutting your throat would be just like slicing a melon. I didn't see a gun on him and perhaps he didn't need one.

Staggie, for his part, merely repeated what I had already read ad nauseam in the local press, i.e. that the Nigerian gangs were entirely responsible for the cocaine problem in the country, and that some police officers in Cape Town were corrupt. The French interviewer seemed pleased enough with what he was told, which I found rather surprising. He might have asked, for instance, whether we were supposed to believe that a foreign gang from the other end of the continent could just march in and usurp Staggie's authority without so much as a by-your-leave, and that Staggie himself, to say nothing of his bodyguards, would take the matter lying down. In fact I knew perfectly well that the Nigerian gangs worked hand-in-glove with the coloured gangs and even depended on them for distribution networks because some of the many Nigerians in Cape Town who knew about the less-than-salubrious activities of their compatriots told me so.

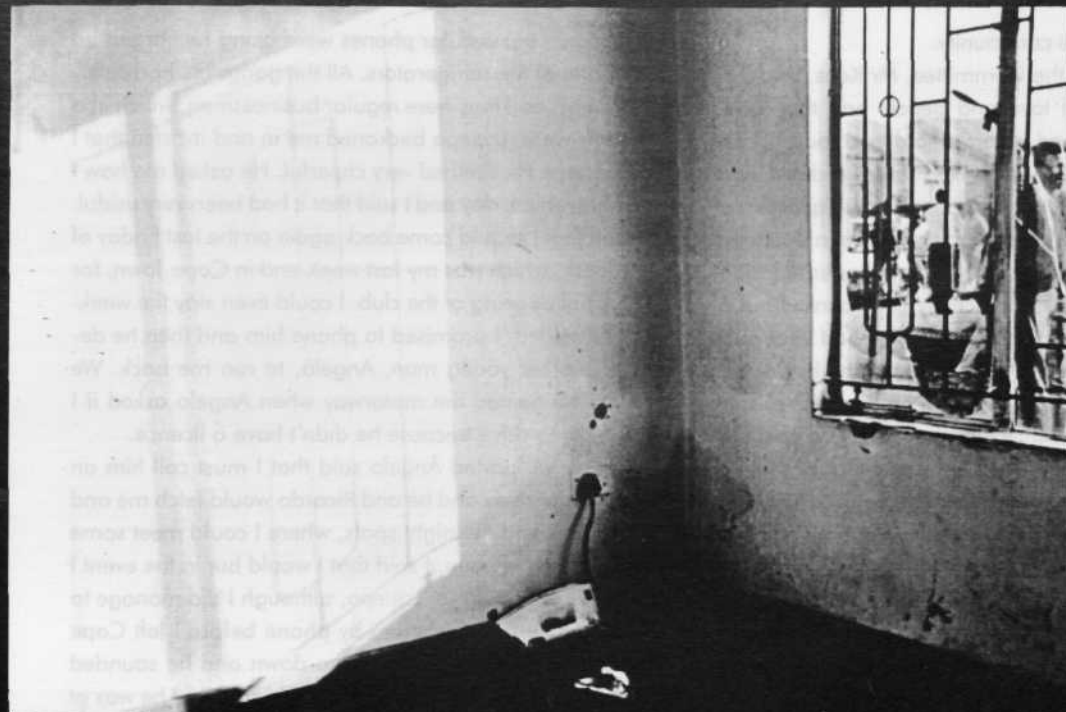
The interviewer, a tall, angular man in early middle-age, had allowed himself to be seduced by the glamour of the event and showed how much on the way out by asking the bodyguard if he could see the gun. The bodyguard obliged, nestling the big black chunk of metal in the palm of his hand. He had beautiful hands, with long slender fingers and manicured nails. Outside, where it was still threatening to rain, they all posed for the group photograph. They were joined by a third gangster whose name I never discovered, a neat, dapper coloured man about five-and-a-half feet tall with silver collar studs and silver sleeve braces and he favoured stripes: striped shirt and striped trousers and a striped tie. His short hair was neatly parted to

one side, and when he squatted on the grass verge between Staggie and Lapepa, the three of them directly facing the departed triumvirate immortalised on the garish mural, he took the precaution of hitching up his trousers to avoid spoiling the creases. He had brought his wife along, a pretty young coloured woman in her twenties who sat quietly in the brand-new BMW nursing a new-born baby.

We waited for the best part of an hour but the threatened rain never came and nobody seemed to mind the sudden gusts. The vegetable seller across the way called out his wares - potatoes, cauliflowers, onions, tomatoes, peppers... - in a sing-song Afrikaans, sweeter on the ear than the way the boere spoke it. For someone who had lost his legs he couldn't seem to stay still. He kept limping up and down the street, this way and that, and you could hear the creaking of the tightly-packed newspapers even from where we were. By and by two coloured girls of sixteen or thereabouts came out of one of the houses and started across the patch of green. Half-way along they suddenly realised who was around and became flustered but the gangsters ignored them. The girls strolled to the end of the green, loitered a moment, then re-traced their steps. The gangsters were glamorous, all right, more glamorous, certainly, than their parents eking out a living - no money for this, no money for that - in the little boxes the white man had shoved them into.

From time-to-time a car would pull up and disgorge two or three foot soldiers. They included a pair of twins, eighteen or so, fair-skinned with close-cropped hair and perfectly round faces. They were dressed identically in faded blue denims, white pumps and long-sleeved orange shirts, everything spick and span. Another foot soldier, a middle-aged coloured man with a woollen hat pulled tightly over his head, also with the regulation jeans and pumps, interested me because he was older than the others. He was in fact Staggie's contemporary (and mine) but obviously hadn't made it beyond the lower rungs, still taking orders alongside men half his age in a world of men where brute force counted. He never said anything to anybody, either then or later, and after it was all over he split by himself, his hands rammed deep into the pockets of his leather jacket.

Presently, a white mini-bus arrived and we were set to go. The gang leaders went in their own cars with their bodyguards; I went with the others in the mini-bus. We pulled in first at a petrol station to fill up, and then I spent the next hour thinking that I was going to die in a ghastly road accident. The driver, a short man who had to sit right up against the steering wheel in order to manipulate the pedals, obviously thought that his honour depended on overtaking everything in sight, even uphill on a bend. Going downhill was worse because the faster we went the harder the vehicle was rocked by the sudden gusts. My companions didn't seem the least bit concerned, perhaps because they were already careless of their lives, or perhaps because they were observing the code. For the most part they sat in silence watching the scenery speed by. Occasionally, one of them



East Rand

would turn to his neighbour and mutter something and his neighbour would grunt in reply, but otherwise they kept whatever thoughts they might have been having to themselves. None of them took the slightest interest in me. At one stage, Lapepa drew level with us in his blue Ford coupe and pretended to race us for a few miles, now hanging back, now surging forward, his powerful engine responding effortlessly to the slightest pressure on the gas pedal. And then, suddenly, he looked straight at me and laughed in a way that I hated, smug and vicious at the same time. He was mocking me, telling me that I would never find out anything about him, and that everything we read in the newspapers was bullshit.

The meeting was held in the community hall of a village called Hawstonia. Everybody was seated by the time we arrived. There were about seventy people present altogether. The three members of the Olympic Bid Committee, all of them white, sat at a wooden table in front facing the rest of us; Staggie, Lapepa and stripes distributed themselves among the masses, one to the left, one in the centre, one to the right. The meeting, which was conducted in Afrikaans, was opened by the local priest, Father Arrison, who led the prayers, and then everybody was welcomed to the Hawstonia Inn by Mr Bucchianeri, the principal of a local coloured school. The discussion proper was kicked off by Ivan Waldeck, a reformed gangster who claimed to have had a 'holistic revelation' while serving ten years for murder and now worked as a social worker in the coloured ghettos. He said that he had come to the meeting to state Core's objectives because gangsters had a place in the community and should not be turned away. He said that he 'felt strongly that gangs should co-operate in order to stop

drugs and not be sent away'. He was then followed by Willem Sampie, a member of the Olympic Bid Committee, who started by wishing all the mothers present a Happy Mother's Day and said that he felt it would be 'a good thing' if the Games could take place in Cape Town. He was then followed by Rashied Staggie, who said that everybody was different and that he, personally, was a 'champion of peace' and in favour of the Games, and that 'nobody was born to be a gangster' so that 'people should have faith'. He added that 'wisdom and insight were needed for forgiveness' and that the community 'had to tell the gangsters to stop their gang activities but they should not turn them away'. He opined, finally, that 'honesty was the most important aspect of the Olympic Bid'.

Staggie was followed by Mr Nel, another member of the Committee, who felt that 'violence had various causes', including poor housing and 'too little development'. He also said that the purpose of the Olympic bid 'was to develop sport and the people'. He was then followed by Father Arrison, who said that 'people had to be honest' and that he would undertake to get the help of the Church. He was followed by Mr Bucchianeri, who said that he knew of at least four girls in his school who smoked dagga on a regular basis, and that he was hereby extending an invitation to all the members of the Committee to come to the school and address the students. He was followed by Ivan Waldeck, who said that the entire community should 'stand together' and 'not only the people present here'. He was then followed by Staggie, who said that the police should also be involved 'in order to drive out drugs and smugglers' because the gangs 'were not the only ones causing trouble'. He said that there should be 'prayer action' to

solve the problems in the community.

Another member of the Committee, Mr Kees, said that he was 'a champion of love and peace' and that Cape Town should be developed 'in order to attract tourism'. He was then followed by someone called simply Richard, who demanded to know what had happened to the question of illegal liquor sales by the gangs, which had been discussed at the previous meeting. A policeman, Superintendent Albertyn, said that a raid had recently been carried out at one of the shebeens 'and that several cases had been submitted to the State Prosecutor'. He was followed by another gangster, Ernest 'Lastig' Solomons, formerly of the prison-based 28 Gang and currently with the Firm, who said that 'people should stop their gossiping', and that one of his friends had been assaulted during the raid. He added, however, that he 'did not wish to cause trouble', and that 'he wanted peace'. He was then followed by Staggie who said that Mr Solomons should go to the police with the problem because 'a person who did wrong should pay for his deeds'. He also said that he himself had 'lost trust in the police', although recent developments, which he didn't specify, 'had brought about an improvement'. Mr Bucchianeri then requested a proposal for the next meeting, which was fixed for the second Sunday in July. Ivan Waldeck closed the meeting with a prayer

It was twilight outside when we left the Inn although it was barely six o'clock. The gangsters gathered in groups around the entrance of a general store nearby. A dozen or so local coloured girls sashayed to and fro but nobody paid them any mind. I wasn't sure why we were waiting. An hour passed. Staggie, who had been inside the store talking to the proprietor, came out and passed directly in front of me, glancing at me as he did so. This was my cue to accost him but I let the opportunity slip. Why? Partly because I had expected Lapepa to introduce me when we were still at his club but he didn't and then the moment was gone; and now, with the dark settling around us and the cold wind blowing through my flimsy jacket, the glamour that had earlier seduced all of us, not just the French crew, didn't seem so glamorous now, just intimidating. Presently, they all started trooping through a side door that led up to a night club, which also turned out to belong to Lapepa. I followed them in but sat on my own. I was tired of all this gangster business and just wanted to go but I was dependent on them for transport back and first we had to eat. Two middle-aged coloured women appeared with a big, three-legged cooking pot which they put down in the middle of the floor. Another woman came with paper plates and plastic forks. Everybody queued up for their dollop of meat stew with rice.

The drive back wasn't as nerve-racking as the drive down, perhaps because there was less traffic on the road, or perhaps because it was dark and I couldn't see how fast we were travelling. Lapepa was already back at base when we arrived. He and some of his henchmen, including Ricardo, were huddled against the cold in the partitioned-

off section. Four cellular phones were being recharged on top of one of the refrigerators. All the gangsters had cellular phones, as if they were regular businessmen, which in a way they were. Lapepa beckoned me in and insisted that I have a beer. He seemed very cheerful. He asked me how I had enjoyed the day and I said that it had been very useful. He said that I should come back again on the last Friday of the month, which was my last week-end in Cape Town, for the formal opening of the club. I could even stay the week-end, he added. I promised to phone him and then he detailed another young man, Angelo, to run me back. We had barely gained the motorway when Angelo asked if I knew how to drive because he didn't have a licence.

Before we parted Angelo said that I must call him on the coming Friday and he and Ricardo would fetch me and take me around the night spots, where I could meet some nice coloured women. I said that I would but in the event I didn't call either him or Lapepa, although I did manage to speak to Ricardo once more by phone before I left Cape Town. It was difficult tracking him down and he sounded subdued when I finally got through. He said that he was at a different place now and he seemed anxious that we should meet, but it was expensive getting there by taxi and I was advised against the trains as being too dangerous because of the coloured gangs that prey on lone commuters. GR

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