

PAUL HOGARTH

## In Strydom's South Africa

excerpts from a diary



I have made drawings in many places under all kinds of conditions, yet those drawings were the most difficult of all to get; in the psychological rather than the practical sense. Interest and intention would be often misunderstood by both sides in an atmosphere of bitter racial prejudice. My skin was white and that of the ones I sought to depict black. I found an unexpected sensitivity to any sympathetic portrayal of the African which would bring forth a remark like "you actually like the munts don't you?" In Rhodesia, one white location official could not appreciate that I wanted to draw African women **with** their clothes on remarking "I know all about you artist chaps." In fact there was a resistance to the African being portrayed as he is, an often superior human being to that which his master usually was.

One often had to work in an atmosphere of deep silent hatred of all white men; in South Africa you cannot **talk** or even show sympathy for the African; that time has long since passed. You have to prove it like Father Huddleston and those European progressives now on trial.

Now and then I would make contact and a sense of solidarity briefly and memorably established; as many drawings couldn't

have been made without the active help of Africans. Leafing through the pages of a diary I endeavoured to keep, it now reads like something out of Mayhew's records of the Victorian poor. Visually, South [Africa] provides the same extremes of wealth and abject squalid poverty.

**Johannesburg Airport:** Doris Lessing is refused entry and sent back on the same plane to Rhodesia. After prolonged interrogation I am allowed in presumably because my attitude towards African freedom is less well-known. My luggage and equipment is thoroughly searched and scrutinised, books are shaken. I leave the airport building realising that whatever I hope to do will probably have to be smuggled out. The airline bus speeds along a verdant plain fringed with silos and long-horned cattle; soon passing through Wembleys and Harrows-in-exile although more luxuriantly gardened. Drive-in cinemas, bowling alleys, supermarkets and idyllic garden restaurants give Californian accent and looking across the city, the skyscrapers soar impetuously above the yellow mine dumps.

Early one morning a few days later, found me shaking hands with white shift-boss of a gold mine. Shortly afterwards racing down an inclined shaft at terrifying speed. Looking back, square of white the size of postage stamp all that is left of daylight. Then we clambered out on the twenty-second level—a mile or so beneath—and turned off a passage to worm our way down slopes streaming with water. Above our heads lay glinting strata of quartz and rock in which lay gold. Further ahead, hundreds of African miners hacked and drilled the rockface. Illuminated by carbide flarelight it was an unforgettable spectacle of intense human labour. White technicians and miners—those who worked underground—on the whole, sympathetic to Africans; helped them and had sense of facing same dangers.

**Johannesburg, April:** Was drawing an African "beer-hall" which was packed to suffocation point and very reminiscent of namesake's **Gin Lane**. With sense of apprehension made the drawing after having witnessed earlier in the day a prostrate young African with blood on his face in back of police car. Feeling of constant tension would explode with shattering force. Police car suddenly screeched behind and armed white police sprang out demanding passes from now silent crowd. As they arrested and pushed Africans into pick-up van a voice cried out: "Draw **this** white man!" A cry remembered like a theme song.

Visiting living quarters of the gold-miners. In compounds were housed three thousand Africans from all over the Union and East Africa; Zulu's, Hottentots, Swazis, a great variety of types and faces. Peasants from the kraal wearing decorated blankets; some dressed in European-style clothes with wide brimmed stetsons

and narrow trousers. Rest day was<sup>1</sup> Sunday and the men danced to relayed jazz and bop recordings. Tribal Africans worked out highly original dance-routines to the strident open rhythms. In one corner a group worked out a traditional type tribal dance which satirised white shift-boss.

Next day visited Sophiatown. A stalwart African in tribal costume drunk and feebly endeavouring to perform war-dance and grovelling in dust for pennies. Huddleston's school deserted with its windows broken. Not far away lay poor white district composed of poorly-paid Afrikaaner railway workers, whose living standards seemed hardly above that of the urban African. Apparently less friction between them and Africans than one might have supposed.

A day at the Orlando Shelters, one of first of Jo'burg's shanty towns, built in protest against endless delays to provide housing. On parched sun-scorched hillside lived thirty thousand Africans in "lean-to's" of wire, breeze-block and flattened tins, On what looks like surface of the moon and the shell-wracked landscapes of 1914-18 War, check-shirted tsotis gangs stroll like bucan-eers. Like homeward bound survivors of the Thirty Years War, old men drift by with staring eyes—dagga addicts. Twilight falls and in flares of countless fires, determination to survive is expressed in the singing and laughter which fill the clear and star-lit sky.

**Johannesburg, April:** One night drew portraits of several African leaders, they came to the house I was staying in closed cars from various townships outside city. Oldest of trio was the veteran trade union leader 'Uncle JB' who led the now legendary Gold Miner's Strike of 1946, when hundred thousand African miners marched on Johannesburg. Banned from membership in union or organisation, he is now a small shopkeeper in a township. A giant with a voice and personality like Robeson's. "We'll win in the end" he boomed and one lost any doubt immediately.

**Capetown, April:** The dawn sky was trimmed with crimson as we set for Capetown and the sun rose swiftly as we sped along the wide straight highway which led to the Karoo desert. Passed through half-remembered places of the Boer War, then outlandish communities and now expanding industrial towns. More than in Jo'burg Africans as industrial workers are to be seen.

Something of an anti-climax to see workings of parliament or assembly particularly in a near Fascist regime. One tends to think more of effect of laws—that are so ardently discussed—nave on unfortunate recipients and one had almost sense of democracy about essentially undemocratic government. Nationalist seats occupied by phalanx of obdurate looking men who glared belligerently and at times benignly at opposition. United Party opposite



Chief Lutulli, President of African National Congress,  
he is now on trial in Johannesburg



Left: Orlando Shelters

Above: Mother and Child

mostly urbane courtly types with the confidence of experience; they laughed (and chuckled at the crudities of the then Minister of Interior Donges.

Pretoria, April. The Krager monument dominates a facade of Victorian government buildings. Old president's stern Calvinist visage looks down on hundreds of Africans assembled on wide steps of the Justice building awaiting opening of High Court. In surrounding gardens, burghers intently read *Die Transvaaler* while maimed ex-African miners flick dust off bronze statues of the pioneers. Applied for police permit to visit nearby African village and



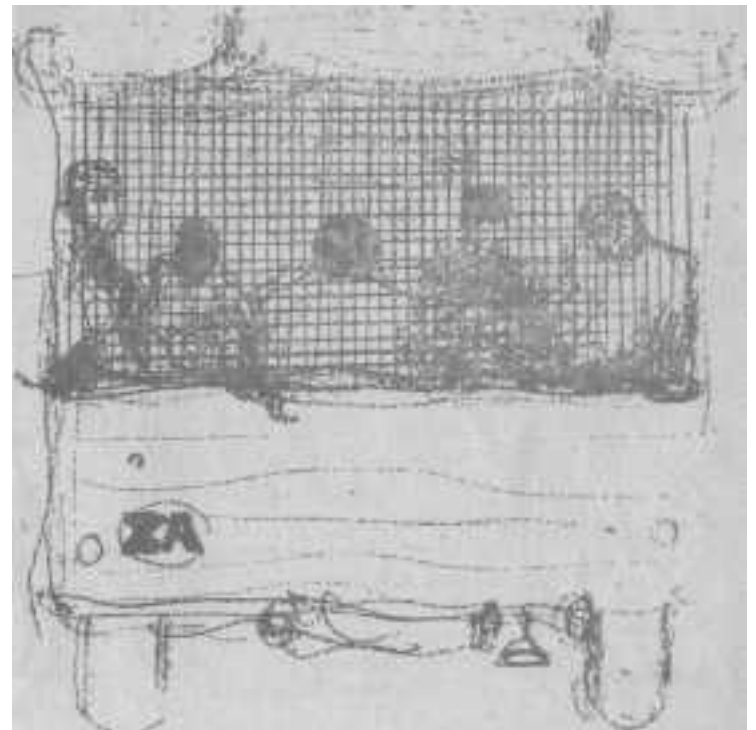
witnessed scene where an Afrikaaner official was charging Africans with not carrying passes. To an elderly African worker whose face was contorted with apprehension at what would happen to his family whilst he was doing six-months hard on a farm, he shouted "I don't want to know your bloody troubles" A line of woeful faces were glimpsed behind him like a mournful pilgrimage.

Port Elizabeth, mid-April: On way stopped for lunch at motel called *Trek* and gazed at colour prints of every major British defeat in Boer War—*Colenso*, *Spion Kop* and *Elandslaagt* and realised—when the waitress did not remember to bring our order—that the War wasn't really over. Road cleaves through verdant countryside with traditional Dutch colonial-style farmhouses surrounded by huge orchards. Ragged Africans—subdued and subservient in these parts—tended cattle. Then Port Elizabeth, major

industrial centre with variety of enterprises including huge General Motors Plant. Africans here most industrialised in Union hence emergence of strongly organised unions. Here the African has developed into settled urban worker with the tastes of his white counterpart. PE regarded by Strydom as most dangerous centre of African national movement because of the disciplined and mature character of the resistance.

Durban, late April: A super Brighton. High buildings line white sandy beaches which are all forbidden to non-Europeans. All seats clearly labelled "For Europeans." The Durban scene is that of the South African middle-class at eternal leisure and this can be a frightening and appalling spectacle. Africans are humiliated in the street by some withered or paunchy creature whose only possession is that they have a white skin and more money than humanity.

Nearby Merebank is an Indian quarter; their houses are mostly freehold but for last twenty years government has banned further building and has tried to move families off as district has been



scheduled for industrial development. Recently, everyone was served with notice to quit or complete appropriation; no alternative site was proposed. Result is extreme overcrowding: twenty to thirty persons live in one-storied shacks. Durban is the scene of a three-way racial conflict, between Whites and non-whites, between Indian and African because the better-organised Indian is being replaced by cheap unorganised African labour in the new industries.

Intense racial conflict is one aspect but so is unity of action between the African, Indian and European. Moreover, it has become a characteristic of South African political life that the ideas of the sectarians no longer have any meaning or influence in a situation which demands utmost flexibility and freedom of approach; there's no room for bureaucrats when the party offices have been raided. Either you become a real socialist at that point or go into retirement. South Africa was a depressing place to be in when one saw grotesque injustices and the grossest inhumanity but it was a country where one found the ideas of racial equality and human rights bringing together all kinds of people whatever their colour or creed. It was all very reminiscent of the thirties in this respect. More than one ever realised, successful co-operation between black, brown and white offered a tonic in these disillusioning times of ours.



Durban: Indian Family

