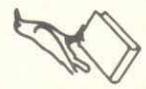


**DEFIANT** *desire*

---

Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron

---



Ravan Press — Johannesburg

---

First published by Ravan Press  
PO Box 31134 Braamfontein 2017  
South Africa

© Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

First published 1994

ISBN 0 86975 435 1

Cover illustrations: Mallory de Kock  
DTP setting and design: Ingrid Obery, Ravan Press  
Index: Edwin Cameron  
Photographs reproduced with permission from Bailey's African Photo Archives

Printed by Sigma Press, Pretoria

## Contents

---

Acknowledgements .....	viii
Etymological note: On "moffie" .....	x

### **One** — *Overviews*

---

DEFIANT desire .....	3
<i>Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron</i>	
A DIFFERENT FIGHT FOR FREEDOM: A history of South African lesbian and gay organisation — the 1950s to the 1990s .....	14
<i>Mark Gevisser</i>	

### **Two** — *Where we stand: Moffies and the laager*

---

'UNAPPREHENDED FELONS': Gays and lesbians and the law in South Africa .....	89
<i>Edwin Cameron</i>	
KEEPING SODOM OUT OF THE LAAGER: The policing of sexual minorities in South Africa .....	99
<i>Glen Retief</i>	

### **Three** — *Making space: Queer societies*

---

A DRAG AT MADAME COSTELLO'S: Cape moffie life and the popular press in the 1950s and 1960s .....	115
<i>Dhiannaraj Chetty</i>	
LESBIAN GANGSTER: The Gertie Williams story .....	128
<i>Excerpted from Drum Magazine by Dhiannaraj Chetty</i>	
JOHANNESBURG'S 'HEALTH CLUBS': Places of erotic langour or prison-houses of desire? .....	134
<i>Peter Galli and Luis Rafael</i>	
MOFFIES AND MANVROUE: Gay and lesbian life histories in contemporary Cape Town .....	140
<i>Jack Lewis and Francois Loots</i>	

books. I started reading at *reproductive system* and then worked my way through from *cervix* to *vulva*. *Homosexuality* was among the entries.

It was also that year that a man pushed open the door of the public toilet in the town one Saturday afternoon when I was standing there reading the graffiti on the wall. He was wearing a gold ring which chafed the skin off the head of my cock. When I saw him from the school bus two years later he was pushing a pram with a baby in it, a rundown woman at his side.

At the beginning of Standard 8 I fell in love with a new Dutch girl in the school with red hair and blue eyes. I watched her every break at the tuck shop, but when at last I scraped up the courage to talk to her she called me a *klootzak*. By October that year I was writing poems for a new English boy in Standard 9. I only watched him during breaks where he stood to one side. Once I sneaked into his classroom to take an exercise book from his bookcase and read his name: Grant Thayer.

It was on a Sunday afternoon the following year that I took Bonzo for a walk in the stretch of veld behind the swimming pool. (My dad had forbidden us to swim on Sundays.) A distance in front of me a man in a khaki shirt and pants was walking. I didn't take notice of him until I came across him at a drift where he was lying behind a heap of earth. His pants were unbuttoned and when he saw me he immediately stopped masturbating. I walked closer. My breath was racing. 'Sawubona', I said when he jumped up. 'He wants to bathe,' he said and pointed to the ash dams. We stood watching each other for a time. His muscled diaphragm was moving up and down rapidly. Then I said: 'I want your thing.' I pointed to his pants. 'No, he hasn't got money, *baas*,' he replied, flustered. I jumped away and headed into the veld. (Had I but known that afternoon that my dad would tell me years later, when I told him I fuck men, that my sister had not been in hospital for her back in 1967 but in a Dutch Reformed Church home for unmarried mothers.) Only when I ran into a wire fence did I calm down. I whistled for Bonzo. He came running through the long grass and we started walking back to the residential area. When I eventually looked in the direction of the ash dams again, I spotted him immediately. He was standing on the heap of earth. Above his head his khaki shirt flapped wildly in his hands. Without looking back again, I just kept on walking home along the fence.

## My childhood as an adult molester:

*A Salt River moffie*

Zackie Achmat

*Family history, of course, has its own dietary laws. One is supposed to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood. Unfortunately this makes the stories less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of halal. Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, I arrive at the unspeakable part; and, undaunted, press on.*

— Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

There is no place called Salt River. There are no people called moffies. Children don't have sex. Muslim men don't beat or oppress their wives. This testimony is fantasy because everything is fantasy. In real life, no-one has sex. Names and places in this fantastical testimony have been changed to protect the guilty. Everyone is guilty. Guilty of enjoying sex...

I am South African, black, male, 28, unfree and gay. For many years of my life, in fact, I have been militantly gay. During a religious instruction period in Standard 7 or 8, the teacher, Mr F (a Christian) asked me: 'Which religion do you follow?' Reply: 'I'm an atheist.' Gasps in the class. Sharon: 'Ah, he's just a show off.' Mr F: 'Why are you an atheist?' Reply: 'Sir, my parents were born and remain devout Muslims. For many years I was a good Islamic scholar. I fucked it in Standard 5. Then I converted to Catholicism for two weeks. Now I am an atheist.' A low murmur spreads across the class. 'Why? Well, its written in the Quraan and the Bible that homosexuals will burn in hell. I've done nothing wrong and I don't want to end up in hell for it.'

Pandemonium in the class! Sharon the dolly-bird rises from the back where she is holed up with the *manne*<sup>1</sup>, struts like the Madonna to my desk with tears in her eyes for the blasphemy, and hastily leaves her sticky paw print across my face. From then on even my best friends in class refuse to acknowledge my existence. They still won't.

I have learnt that gay people combine honesty sometimes bordering on brutality with lies, lies and more lies, in order to survive.

\* \* \*

My first sexual memory at three. I can barely walk. I'm in Johannesburg, in Fietas (Vrededorp — before Group Areas evictions), in a room with my biological parents. A rare occasion in itself — that's why I remember it so vividly. I'm lying on my tummy. Ma has just bathed me. I'm ready to go to sleep. My dad hobbles across the room and starts serenading my mom in the most romantic deep voice. My mom is moved by Nat King Cole's *Mona Lisa*. Her name is Mona. She rises from the bed where she is tending me. She looks like an angel towering above my dad. She stoops down to let him embrace her in a grotesque waltz. Sex? From that moment I disliked my father and thought my mother unclean.

My birth certificate says: Cape Malay born in the Transvaal. I was born in Johannesburg; Baragwanath Hospital to be exact. But I grew up in Salt River. As children, my sister, Fika, and I were given to my grandparents when they moved to Cape Town. Fika and I were always used as pawns in the battle between my parents and grandparents. South African Railways seemed central to this struggle, shunted as we were up and down the country from Johannesburg to Cape Town to Johannesburg and back to Cape Town.

My parents lived in Fietas. My dad grew up in Sophiatown and my mom in Fietas. My parents had a room in a yard with several other families. Some were relatives, others just friends. We shared toilets, trials (*fahfee*<sup>2</sup> losses) and tribulations (domestic violence). Our house was next to a field, and a mosque adjoined it on 23rd Street. The street was the border between Mayfair and Fietas. Mayfair was a white working class area then, not the mixed-race suburb it is now.

We had regular wars with the poor white kids. They were children's wars, fought with fists, sticks and stones. We were all poor, so it was not class war. Boys and girls fought on both sides in rare displays of gender solidarity. So it was not a battle of the sexes. It was plain children's war in which the dividing line was race.

My best friend was Nomvula, the daughter of Beauty, the *shebeen*<sup>3</sup> queen. Every Saturday afternoon Nomvula and I had great fun. We would get lollipops, we would take her doll and Fika's (Fika would take my gun) and nurse our children on the steps of the stoep. Kippie Moeketsi, Spokes Mashiane, Dollar Brand would play loudly from the yard and we would watch the migrant workers gather on the field next to the mosque, dancing, arguing, conversing and relaxing.

1 guys/men

2 illegal Chinese gambling game

3 illegal tavern

We would watch Beauty serve the *mqombothi*, home-brewed beer, stored during the week in the entrance to our yard. Then would come the best part. Almost every Saturday without fail, Nomvula and I would scream with fear and delight as the *gumba-gumba*<sup>4</sup> arrived to chase the men. It was grown men chasing grown men. Grown men hitting other grown men. It was the children's war played by adults. Except some adults were armed and others not; many were taken away. It was only ten years later that I realised what the pass laws were. It was only then that I realised that almost 20 million men, women and children were thrown into prisons because of these laws. But those Saturdays, Nomvula and I enjoyed ourselves. Later we learnt fear.

My first schooldays were at Krause Street Primary. I was there for only three months until the railways claimed Fika and me. One evening before school started, my dad was supposed to buy my school uniform, but didn't. He never discussed finance with my mom. Sometimes he gave her money for food, sometimes not. That night she waited for him. We were all meant to have supper at Grannie's (his mother, who had had seven husbands). He arrived late, without the school uniform. They fought.

My mother, pregnant every second year, was preparing one of the babies' bottles. The milk she used to feed the babies was S26, mostly supplied by sisters or friends. He hit her several times.

She retaliated. He was covered in S26. My mom ran; he couldn't follow her because he is disabled. Fika and I cried in tune to the hit song on the radio — *Blue, Blue, My World Is Blue*. Since then the song has had a definite associations with my mom and dad.

The next day Beauty the shebeen queen from Transkei bought me a school uniform. I went to school a day late but with a shiny uniform. My dad was not all that bad. The yard's children had a collective nanny — Aunty Emma. Grannie was very racist. Aunty Emma always sat at the table and had her supper with us. Grannie was invited to supper one day. She saw Aunty Emma at the table and refused to cross the threshold: she would not sit down with 'a kaffir'. My father insisted that Grannie would not be welcome unless she treated Aunty Emma with respect. Grannie stayed away for two years, but Aunty Emma never left the table.

One afternoon, when I arrived back from school, my mom was being interrogated by two white policemen. They were very rough with her. They searched the house. My mom's only pride in her marriage was her trousseau, especially the white linen. It was dirtied and damaged, soiled like her marriage, as they searched the rooms. My mom was in tears but adamant: she would not tell them who was illegally brewing beer. They wanted to arrest her because the beer had been found in our part of the yard. Beauty arrived and told them that 'the shebeen queen only comes on Saturdays' and that my mom knew nothing. They left.

Many more fights between my mom and dad. Many more songs; *Blue, Blue, My World Is Blue*. Fika and I had to pack our baggage; the railways sent two tickets. My mom was too heart-broken to come to the station to say goodbye, but

4 police truck

as the train pulled out of Park Station, moving west, it passed Mayfair-Fietas. And there, running along the fence was my mom shouting 'Zayne! Fika! My children!' I swear I could see the tears. Nomvula and Beauty just stood there waving. I wanted to jump off the train. I didn't. Until then I had loved my mother; since then I have only pitied her — all love disappeared. She did not fight to keep us. She did not fight to keep the children she loved and who loved her in turn. Since that time I have mistrusted love.

\* \* \*

Another sexual memory. I'm living with my grandparents in Salt River. Like Table Mountain, tranquility reigns through the presence of Mammie, my grandma — when it is not shattered by the demanding growls of my wonderful grandfather. My mom's eldest brother, Ebrahim, visits every Saturday at lunchtime. My uncle retires to the couch in the dining room, where he removes his size nine shoes. I'm hiding under a chair between the couch and the imbuia sideboard of the dining room suite. He snores! I emerge from the hideout. His face turned towards heaven, his feet in the direction of Mecca, my lips touch his. I get an erection. He wakes up and soothingly says: 'Never do that again.' He never told anyone. I have discovered I'm gay.

At the same time I have discovered the stigma, the taunting, the disgust, the degrees of toleration in the person of Sis Gamat. At my youngest aunt's wedding in 1968, Sis Gamat is called in to do the cooking. Sis Gamat is a moffie. Sis Gamat sends all the women into hysterics; the men twitter nervously around him and ignore him. I hear the whispers: 'Sis Gamat likes men.' They tease my aunt: 'Sis Gamat smaak jou man.'<sup>5</sup> I wonder — am I like Sis Gamat? For the next three years, I take the keenest interest in cooking and kitchens.

Mogamat or Muhammad is the name of the last prophet of Allah in the Muslim religion, Islam. It is a name most often given to Muslim boys. Gamat is diminutive for Mogamat. *Gamat* is also the derogatory slang used to refer to Muslims. I have a poster of the gay film *Looking For Langston*; I stole it from a cinema during a film festival. The poster is ornately defaced with the word *SIS*. *Sis* means dirty in local slang. *Sis* or *sisi* can also mean sister. Sissy we know means faggot. More than 20 years after my aunt was married, if a man or boy is referred to as 'Sis Gamat' in our family, it means he's gay or considered effeminate.

\* \* \*

1970 was a great year for family crisis. The railway was to carry my mother and her newborn twins and the two older sisters to Cape Town for the last time. My father had sold all her furniture and the goodwill on the house and just put her on the train. For the next five years they would live together for a few months at a time; for the next two years my mother would struggle against the patriarchs of the Muslim Judicial Council to get a divorce from my father.

5 Sis Gamat wants your man!

My eldest aunt, Nana, who took responsibility for my mom and all her children, had meantime married. She did not want to, but Mammie said: 'My kind, voor ek my oë toe maak, moet ek voel jy is besorgd.'<sup>6</sup> Nana looked after the whole family but Ouma felt she needed to be looked after by a husband. Dutifully, she found my youngest aunt's brother-in-law, the village idiot, and married him because: 'Ek soek nie 'n man wat op my kop kak nie. Kyk maar net vir Mona.'<sup>7</sup>

Just before Mammie died in 1970, a 'squatter' family moved into the back of the garage in the yard: the mother Sis Kulsum and the father Boeta Dienie. They lived in a room with six children. Upstairs, in our single bedroom flat with Mammie and Daddy (my grandfather), were my mom's six children — the railways brought all of them to Cape Town; the youngest, the twins a year old, always dozing in that ugly turquoise twin pram. Nana and her husband also lived with us, as did Fatima, my youngest aunt's daughter.

Twelve people in a single bedroomed flat in Salt River. There was no electricity. The only personal privacy was to be found in the outside toilet. All the adults (and later even I) developed the habit of sitting in the toilet for at least half an hour. Every night we had to fetch Bertha before we could go to sleep. Bertha was big. She spent the days on the balcony and the nights in the kitchen. Bertha was a king size mattress which slept six children in front of the black coal stove in the kitchen. We were never cold.

My grandfather, Daddy, never once beat my grandmother, but he terrorised her daily. When he was around, my father beat my mother weekly. All of us eight children were beaten every second day: by my mom, my aunt, my father and, god help us, the monthly beating from Daddy.

Boeta Dienie beat his family too. He must have been nearly seven feet tall; the blackest man I have ever seen. Always blacker with grease, often drunk, regularly beating everyone in his family — twice, three times a day. Thereafter he would escape to one of the three toilets in the yard for some privacy.

After one such beating... It's about 5pm when he enters the toilet. I'm deeply, sexually aroused by this man. I dream, I fantasise, I think only of him all the time. I sit at the bottom of the 19-step concrete staircase, right opposite the toilet. I hear him cough with smoke-damaged lungs. I hear him gnash his teeth. He must be aware of my presence. It's 6pm. It's 6.30pm. It's 6.35pm. My mother goes mad: 'You must get ready to go to mosque!' Boeta Dienie coughs. He uses newspaper to clean-up (*Subaganallah*)<sup>8</sup>. He pulls the chain. He comes out of the toilet. He pretends not to see me, but his pants are unzipped and in them is the biggest erection I have ever seen. He goes to beat his wife.

Our family felt superior to Boeta Dienie's family. The adults thought we were better because we were poor, clean and godly. They were poorer, dirty and they drank. But Mammie liked Boeta Dienie and his wife. She died while Fika and I said her last prayers with her. Jerry, her cat, disappeared that same day.

6 My child, before I close my eyes I must make sure you're taken care of.

7 I'm not looking for a man who's going to shit all over me. Just look at Mona.

8 Allah help us!

Smarting from Boeta Dienie's ambiguous rejection, I tried to repress my sexual desires. I turned to religion, joining the Tableegh — a religious sect, fundamentalist in the extreme. Here I learnt to do 'political house-visits'. Of course we refused to speak to the women if their husbands were not at home. Maybe it was the fact that the Tableegh wore flowing robes that attracted me — it always made the male body look so supple.

But religion — its dogma, its intolerance — did not captivate me. I turned to books. I read voraciously; anything and everything printed. *True Confessions* (especially the stories about naughty priests), Shakespeare's *Collected Plays*, *See, Kyk, Keur, Sister Louise, Ruiter in Swart, Grensreger, Anne of Green Gables*, James Hadley Chase, *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In the magazines and photostories I always looked at the men. My parents' quarrels seemed so remote from the real love in these magazines. But nothing, not one word about Sis Gamat, moffies or gays.

\* \* \*

By now I was nine years old and knew I was a moffie. At school the boys called me that. There was one boy called Rashied. He wanted me to kiss him; I refused. He went to my grandfather and told him I had kissed a girl in the toilet. On one of the rare occasions that Nana and my mother spoke to each other I heard them say: '*En dis die wit mans wat so van moffies hou. Jy kry nie 'n bruin man of 'n Native wat met moffies rondgaan nie.*'<sup>9</sup> But what about me, then? I was not white, I was black. Could they not see? Moffies are not coloured or black; moffies, Fika would say years later, are a different nation.

Peter Moffie was the other moffie I knew. He was a different nation. He wore a wig. He wore the best dresses. His high heels were the envy of all the women in our family. Not once did anyone see him with his stockings ripped. Everyone hated Peter Moffie. He lived in Fenton Road. White men in fancy cars brought him home. But very often they did not. Then he used the bus.

He would get off at the bus stop near us. We knew what time he would arrive from work and we would lie waiting for him. I would lead five or ten children, all throwing stones at Peter Moffie. Shouting: 'Moffie! Moffie!' I can still see his bulging eyes filled with tears; I can see him holding his head high, dignified, while I tried to exorcise the *Shaytaan*. It did not work.

The *Shaytaan*, of course, is Satan. And stonethrowing has a particularly important place in Islam. It is not only used to punish adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals and thieves, it has a far more cathartic function. The *Shaytaan* is not only in the world, but is also within the individual. When Muslims go to Mecca and reach Mount Arafat, one of the holiest places in Islamic mythology, the place where Abraham had to sacrifice his son, they have to cast the *Shaytaan* out of their persons, with stones.

<sup>9</sup> And it's the white man who likes moffies! You never see a brown man or a Native going round with moffies.

A few weeks ago Fika said to me: 'Hey! Did you know Peter Moffie was dead?' Now Peter is dead, and what can I say. There is no-one to ask for forgiveness. In Islam, you have to be forgiven personally by the one you have wronged. I won't be forgiven.

There was a boy in my class. He was so beautiful, everyone noticed him. Shy, reticent, he never played with anyone and refused to make friends even with me. Today he is out of the closet and lives in Observatory; a fashion designer. His sister, Tanya, was the school's cheerleader. She was boyish and strong. I fell in love with both of them, but her in particular. I still blush when I see her, and often wonder whether falling in love with Tanya was a way of exorcising the *Shaytaan* or whether there was a genuine bisexual side to my desire. I would like to develop it.

\* \* \*

In 1972 I turned ten. I discovered active sex and never turned back. Nana was still working in a clothing factory. She has worked in the industry for more than 40 years. At the time she was supporting all my mother's children, her father, her husband and, at times, her younger brother. Nana was the most self-sacrificing person I have ever met. Once I fractured my ankle, jumping over six milk crates on a Sunday afternoon, and the next morning she took off work. We did not have money for bus fare so she carried me on her back from lower Rochester Road to Woodstock Hospital, a distance of five kilometers.

The division of labour in our family was as follows. Nana worked in the factory and cooked on Sundays. Ma looked after the children, did the washing and cooking during the week. And I, being the oldest, had responsibility for the household budget and shopping, as well as scrubbing and polishing the floors after school and before *Madressah*<sup>10</sup>. One afternoon while polishing the floors (God, it had to shine!) I had the most wonderful fantasy. A tall, strong, powerful man holds me down on the floor, kisses me, and fucks me. Today most people won't believe I had this fantasy. They just don't have imaginations.

A few weeks later. Sunday. Nana is cooking. I am sent to the shop to buy tomatoes. Being myself, I daydream all the way there and on my way back a car's hooter stirs me from it. It is a kombi, maybe a Hi-Ace. A white man beckons me. He opens the passenger door in the middle of the Main Road and shows me his cock. It is hard as a rock. He begs me to get into the vehicle. I drop the tomatoes and run.

In the kitchen Nana, who cooks on Sundays, bellows: 'Where's the damn tomatoes?' I run back; the tomatoes are squashed. Forgetting the tomatoes for a minute, I run up and down looking for the kombi, wishing I had got into it. At home I earn a hiding because I cannot account for the tomatoes. I'm not allowed to tell the truth because children are not allowed to discuss their sexual desires.

I continued reading. I read two books a day. At night, I did not go to sleep; I'd read at the kitchen table instead. During the day, I'd sleep at my desk at school. The Salt River Public Library was and still is a mobile unit. It was clean and neat,

<sup>10</sup> Muslim school

but despite being open only two afternoons a week, I read most of its books in three months.

The coloured librarian, Mrs Kies, was very prim and neat. She was one of those people who believed that 'coloured people should better themselves through education', and the fact that I read so much made me an ideal guinea pig to prove that 'whites and coloured are equal when educated'. Embarrassed that she had no more books in the mobile, she hit on a wonderful plan: 'I am going to write to the Chief Librarian at Observatory Library (the white library) and tell them that you have read all the books here. They have a huge library which is open daily. I will beg them to let you use it.' I was thrilled at the prospect of a big library, though sceptical even then about the notion of equality through education.

Observatory Library had shelves and shelves filled with books. It had spaces to sit and read. It was quiet, there were no intrusions of street life. You could read and study and escape life at Salt River. I used to bunk *Madressah* to go to the library. At this stage my daily schedule looked something like this. Wake up at six in the morning, light the coal stove, make breakfast for the kids. Go back to sleep till 8.15 am. Then Fika would wake me rudely, because she had to knot my tie and do my shoelaces before going to school. I would stand there in my underpants with a tie and shoes and socks. I'd dress leisurely, eat something, get to school just after prayers, and sleep through class.

When school closed I would run home. Get to my grandfather's radio, where we would sit down and listen to those wonderfully romantic Afrikaans serials. I can still hear Miets, Gerhard and Ma Matilda of *Ompad*. I could never forget Tant Ralie. I hated weekends and public holidays, because I missed *Die Geheim van Nantes*, *Ongewenste Vreemdeling* and *Die Dans van die Vlaminke*. After the serials I would clean the house, do shopping and pretend to make off for *Madressah*. Instead, I would go to the library.

Observatory Library was then only open to whites. But, armed with my letter from Mrs Kies, I became one of the few coloureds to use it. The Cape Town City Council has always been liberal. But at that stage the liberalism did not extend to toilets. I could use their library, read and borrow their books, but I was not allowed into their toilets. One afternoon, I desperately needed to go; despite my insistence that it was an emergency, I was directed to the nearest public toilets.

Any toilet in Muslim mythology — whether whites only, blacks only, mixed, public or private — is evil. The *Shaytaan* dwells in the toilets. You enter them with your left foot reciting a special toilet prayer. After using a toilet, all Muslims must wash themselves three times, reciting another prayer. This process is known as *Istinjaa*. It is *haraam* (forbidden) to leave the toilet without washing. On leaving, you set out on the right foot, completing the cycle of toilet prayers.

Observatory Station is two minutes walk away from the library. I had to rush there. I walked into the Whites Only toilets; there were no guards. As I entered, three or four men hastily moved in all directions. I was driven by natural forces into one of the two cubicles. The toilet doors were painted a railway orange-brown colour. The black of koki pens transformed them into works of art. It was

not the drawing, it was not the misspelt words or even the rhyme and rhythm of prison gang poetry, that transformed these symbols into art. It was what they said. They spoke of unspoken, unwritten and unsung love. They celebrated sex between men. They advertised sex between men. They told wonderfully erotic stories of sex between men. I loved it. Toilet doors became galleries for the art of love between men.

The men who were there waited for me to finish, but I would not leave. I stayed in that toilet till 7pm. Then I went home where I got a hiding for missing early evening prayers. I rushed to mosque for *Eshaai*<sup>11</sup> but I did not pray. I went to the mosque toilets, hoping to find the songs of love between men on the walls. I forgot toilet prayers; maybe that is why I did not find any drawings, messages, stories, desires on the doors and walls. I waited till all the men had left the mosque.

The next day I returned to Observatory toilets via the library. There was a man. A white man, about 20 years old. He had brown hair. He tried to pretend that I was not there. He looked at me and looked away. I stood at the tap. I looked at him. Eventually, I walked up to him and put my arms around him. He whispered nervously: 'You are only a child. Go home.' He spoke softly and he was strong, but I wouldn't go. I always suspected that learning poetry and Quranic verses by rote would have some use. Now it did. I could recite the poetry of the toilet walls to him. I had memorised it. He saw that I was not going to relent. I had an erection and so did he.

He kissed me. He held me. But he could not hold out against me. He would not enter me, but he entered me. He was gentle. He fucked me slowly, carefully, but with tremendous power and passion. I felt him everywhere. I could taste him in my mouth. We came together. I had an orgasm which came from inside my arse, exploding out of my cock. We kissed and I insisted that he meet me the next day. I went to meet him completely in love. He wanted to give me a present. I refused because I would not have known how to explain it at home. He had to return to Jo'burg. He left. I cried. But I soon got over it. I had the toilets.

I had sex at the toilets every day, sometimes twice or three times a day. I would go to the library to get books, which I would read in the toilet, so that when something happened I would be there. Almost all the men were scared to touch me because of my age. But once they discovered that I was into it, they enjoyed themselves. I had sex with anyone who wanted to: old, young, black or white, fat or thin, it did not matter. The sex and tenderness mattered, and there was lots of both.

Apartheid worked in mysterious ways. From denying me the use of one set of toilets, it opened the world of another set to me. But apartheid was not just about toilets. At ten I knew some things about apartheid. It was about sitting upstairs in the bus. It was about using separate entrances at the post offices. Apartheid meant that Salt River was a coloured area and Observatory, like Mayfair was a white working class area.

Apartheid also meant that my dad's mother, Grannie, not only refused to eat with Auntie Emma, but blatantly favoured her fairer-skinned grandchildren. She

<sup>11</sup> last of the five daily prayers

gave the darker ones less food, smaller presents — if she did not forget their birthdays entirely. This has caused intolerable strains in our family. This is what I knew about apartheid. Apartheid forced me to use Observatory Station toilets, but apartheid was destroyed in those toilets. By men who had sex with men, regardless of race or class.

\* \* \*

1973. 'Man is dead but his spirit lives.' This was the slogan of the African workers in Durban. Apartheid had killed thousands through pass laws, land laws, starvation and plain brutality. I only learnt the significance of the Durban Strikes years later. But that year I discovered love in the compounds.

In Salt River there was a coloured building contractor. He employed about 30 African men and one white worker to oversee them. He had four Bedford trucks. The men were all migrants from the Transkei. They were housed in a dilapidated room. The room was covered in soot from cooking on a primus stove or over an open fire. It was not larger than the flat my parents lived in. In the bitter cold Salt River nights, these grown up men did not even have a mattress.

The white supervisor was named — rather appropriately — Whitey. He lived with the men. He was an ex-con. He had never been to school. He had one front tooth missing. He had red hair and a scraggly red beard. He very seldom laughed, but when he did, his green eyes shone. Whitey was extremely thin. I became friends with Whitey and Khaya. They asked me to read to them. I read them stories. I wrote letters for the families of the workers in the Transkei. They were workers, but the machines and tools their boss owned were much better looked after than they were. They didn't have any bathrooms. They had no place to wash. Khaya's skin was cracking. His eyes were bloodshot. He always coughed long and hard. Khaya and Whitey both only had one set of clothing each. They would ask me if they could wash it at the tap in our yard.

One day I went to the shop and was mugged by some of the gangsters. Khaya and Whitey rounded up all the workers and, within minutes, they had forced the gangsters to apologise to every adult member of my family individually and to return the grocery money.

Whitey tried to teach me to play rugby. In the cold winter nights, he and Khaya sat in one of the Bedford trucks drinking. I tried to drink but they wouldn't let me. The toilets had emboldened me: sitting in the truck with them I waited till they were drunk, and then I started playing with them. They tried to stop me but I would not hear any of it. I started having sex with Khaya and Whitey. Sometimes together, mostly with one or the other. I let them fuck me. At first they did not want to, like all the other men. Then they insisted they'd only fuck me between the legs, but eventually passion ruled and I would be happy. Less than five hundred meters from my parents home.

Coloured communities have a higher proportion of gangsters than any other community. Salt River had gangs. Ice used to stand on the corner, with the Wonder Kids. He was their leader. At night he would sing. And the songs he sang I

could hear in Bertha the bed. I fantasised about him. I was in love with him. Whenever I went to the shop I would find an excuse to speak to him. Eventually, one night I asked him to sing. He sang. He was alone on the corner. I returned from the shop and he called me over. We went into the lane and he kissed me. Nothing more.

The Wonder Kids sold liquor to the workers of the construction company. One of the Wonder Kids was a boy called Qader. His mother was a very religious Auntie, a Salt River paragon of virtue. One night we were all asleep when we heard a cry from the quarters of the workers. I ran out onto the balcony and saw Qader and some boys running away. The ambulance arrived and I ran downstairs. Qader had stabbed Khaya in the heart. Khaya had tried to stop him selling liquor to the men. Qader was 18. His mother went to see the dead body in the room. She fainted and they had to carry her home. Qader was arrested. Khaya was now dead. A dead African migrant worker, killed by a coloured gangster whose mother managed to raise the bribe for the white policeman investigating the murder. Qader was released without charges.

\* \* \*

For weeks I could not sleep or eat. My aunt and mom did not know what was wrong. I could not tell them either. At school some boys continued calling me a moffie, some maliciously, some out of sexual interest. 'Unisex' was a word that fired Imam Omar of Tennyson Street Mosque up to apoplectic heights when he preached on Fridays. Fashions were unisex, so were hairdressers. According to the Imam, men and women who were fashionably unisex would burn in *Jahannum*.<sup>12</sup> The word 'unisex' taught me more about moffies. Salt River's famous moffies were Doulah Moffie and Hakkie Moffie. They owned unisex hairdressers. But their hair-dressing salons were unisex long before the word or the fashions were coined.

Doulah Moffie's hairdressing salon is still in Lower Main Road. Back then (and now) it was a meeting place for moffies. Moffies were men who dressed like women, or who dressed in high style. Moffies were men who were really women in spirit. They spoke like women, flirted openly with men and kept men. The moffies in these salons had wonderful parties. But the moffie hairdressers were also places where 'straight' men could go for a 'regular blow job' as a blow-dry was then known. My youngest aunt's husband visited moffie hairdressers regularly. In the community, all fashionable women had their hair done at the hairdressers. At *Eid* after the Fast, virtually every Muslim household had members in the moffie hairdressers getting blow-dry's.

The community in Salt River and elsewhere has always had ambiguous attitudes towards the hairdressers, ranging from feigned disgust to sexual curiosity and its satisfaction. But the verbal and sometimes physical abuse horrified me. *Eid* was the only time I really visited the hairdressers. My mom and aunt always had to force me to get a haircut — I was sent home from school three or four times a year because I always refused.

I hated having my hair cut. I also hated the way the moffies were treated; I feared being treated the same way. When I was about six I loved dressing up in my mom's clothing. But when I got a little older I started hating high heels. I wanted to be like the other boys at school; except, I also wanted to have sex with them.

At school, the Adams boys were friends with my sister Fika and me. Yaseen, the older brother, and I were in the same class; his younger brother Hasim and Fika were in the same class. Hasim and I were friends because we loved reading; Yaseen and Fika loved playing 'cowboys and crooks' and 'Russians and Americans'. Yaseen was very macho; he did judo and karate at school. He was a soccer player and he smoked. Some cousin of ours got married and my mom and aunt went to their place for the weekend to help with the cooking. So Yaseen came to stay over with us. He brought with him a black-and-white photograph of a man fucking a man, and showed it to me. We slept on my mom's bed and fucked so hard that the mirror on the dressing table broke. It's broken to this day. I got a terrible hiding for that broken mirror, but it did not hurt nearly as much as Yaseen teasing me and smooching with Fatima at school.

Ten years later, in 1983, Nana phoned me at the flat where I lived with my lover. I was worried as Daniel handed me the telephone, because she never phones. Her only words were: '*Ek moet met jou praat.*'<sup>13</sup> I jumped into the car and drove to Salt River. Had someone died? My mother? My father? No, the catastrophe was worse. Yaseen Adams, who had gone to an Islamic college in Greytown, Natal (and had always been held up as the example of a good Muslim youth) had returned to Salt River. Was he an Imam? No! *Subaganallah!* He has moved into a hairdressers with Abassie Moffie!

Yaseen lived with Abassie Moffie for eight years. Every week, in a fit of jealous rage, he would beat Abassie in the hairdressers. The customers would watch, many of the women shaking their heads in solidarity with Abassie. Once I went to have my hair cut and Yaseen washed my hair. We chatted about our families. When Abassie came to cut my hair, he said: 'Yaseen told me that he has not enjoyed sex with anyone as with you.' I felt flattered but I could not help thinking that Abassie, one of Salt River's sexiest moffies, could find a better lover than Yaseen; one who would not beat or rob the poor boy. I remembered what a bully Yaseen had become at school after we had sex. Once he beat me so bad, I had to tell my mom I fell off a bicycle in the road.

\* \* \*

One morning, instead of going to school, I told my mom and aunt I needed to speak to them. I started speaking slowly and deliberately: '*Ma and Nana weet ek is nie soos ander laaities nie. Ek hou nie van hulle games and onoselheid nie. Ek hou ook nie van meisies nie. Die anner kinders sê ek is 'n moffie.*'<sup>14</sup> Almost simultaneously they said: '*Moenie sulke dinge sê nie. Jy weet daar's niks verkeerd met jou*

<sup>13</sup> I must talk to you.

<sup>14</sup> Ma and Nana, you know I'm not like the other boys. I don't like their games and nonsense. I also don't like girls. The other kids say I'm a moffie.

*nie. As jy weer iets hiervan se dan trek ons jou gatvel af.*'<sup>15</sup> So much for trying to come out.

At night, for the next few weeks, I just cried. I did not visit the toilets or cruise. In the end I decided to kill myself because no-one wanted to discuss my desire for men with me. One morning, after giving the youngsters breakfast, I emptied out the medicine box. There were Panados, vitamins, Phensics, Amasecs. In all I must have swallowed about sixty pills.

At home we did not have a bathroom. There was only one sink in the kitchen from which we got water for everything. We were not allowed to wash dishes or food in that sink because we also had to wash ourselves there. The next thing I remember is standing at that white sink in the kitchen, my head spinning. I puked a rainbow of pills. I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked up. It was my aunt rubbing my back. She had tears in her eyes and said: '*Moet dit nooit weer doen nie, dis 'n coward se way en jy is nie 'n coward nie.*'<sup>16</sup> I cried, she dried my tears and walked me to school. That afternoon I visited my grandmother's grave and tried to speak to her about Khaya's death. I could not forget him.

\* \* \*

In 1974, I left the Muslim primary school and went to a Christian school. At this new school the boys were particularly snooty: English and cruel. They teased me mercilessly because I came from an Afrikaans school. To their disgust I took the English and Afrikaans class prizes. Only one thing helped me survive — sex.

My best friend at this time was Danny. He went to Dryden Street Primary. We were the same age and in the same standard. But Danny decided to leave school in Standard 5. They had a huge family; the three brothers and two sisters had all been in jail or reformatory. Danny was a very quiet and reserved kid; even my aunt thought he was sweet.

Danny was one of Salt River's best athletes. He would have been better than the Lakay family, but no-one encouraged him. I hated school sports, but I have always enjoyed long-distance running on my own. Danny and I started running long-distance together. One evening, about an hour before sunset, he asked me to run to Rhodes Memorial with him. We ran up Rochester Road, past Groote Schuur Hospital, crossed over the highway and went through the University. Then we reached the lions at Rhodes Memorial. I'll never forget the beautiful lilies. Danny was taller than I. His black hair was short and his shorts were tight. I noticed his erection but did not do anything. As the sun set we sat among the lilies and Danny kissed me. We made love. We ran to Rhodes Memorial every Monday evening. Why Mondays? I don't know.

Ida was my best friend. She was a year ahead of me at school. We did everything together: we bunked, laughed, cried, lied, wore each other's clothing, organised dates. We hardly ever needed to communicate our desires to each other

<sup>15</sup> Don't say such things! You know there's nothing wrong with you. If we hear any more of this we're going to whip your hide off.

<sup>16</sup> Don't ever do that again. That's a coward's way and you're not a coward.

— we translated each other's feelings instinctively. When she was at Salt River High in Standard 7, I was still in Standard 6 at Wesley. I used to bunk school and attend her English classes. I remember them doing *Romeo and Juliet* as a setwork.

All Ida's classmates knew why I attended her English classes: I was in love with the English teacher, Mr Jordan. He used to let me read all the parts — Romeo, Mercutio, Benvolio, the Nurse, even Juliet. I would read for 15 minutes without stopping and the class loved it: they could escape Shakespeare while I courted their teacher. While reading I would slowly unbutton my shirt allowing my chest and silver St Christopher chain to show. He would stare all the time, blushing.

The entire school was fascinated. I was from another school and a lower standard and the teacher was in love. But I could not stand the tension of making love through the pages of Shakespeare; I was pining for Mr Jordan like Romeo for Juliet. Ida decided to act. One Sunday morning, while my aunt was busy making *koeksisters*, Ida fetched me for swimming lessons. She dragged me to the teacher's house in Observatory, which she had tracked down by following him home one Friday afternoon. I was shy — it's one thing seducing your teacher through Shakespeare, and quite another making out with him when he is not really your teacher. Ida would have none of this coyness — she rang the doorbell. Mr Jordan came to the door in a pair of shorts and Ida just pushed me in the door and waved goodbye. I stayed, and went back daily for three months.

Then disaster struck. My grandfather Daddy died the same week that *The Towering Inferno* opened at The Palace in Salt River. I have still not seen the film. My grandfather was a great man. He had come to South Africa from India without any education. He could speak Hindi, Urdu, Gujerati, and here, in South Africa, he learnt English, Zulu, Tswana and Afrikaans. He also learnt to read and write. Every morning and afternoon he would send me to buy the *Cape Times* and *The Argus*. He would read them to me and discuss the news of the day. The only time I saw him really cry was when he read about the Indo-Pakistani wars in 1972. He would get up much earlier than *Subuh* (dawn prayers) or at midnight for *Tahajud* (special supplications) to pray for an end to the wars. 'They are brothers,' he would say, 'how can they kill each other?'

I owe much to him. His death also meant that the simmering civil war between my mom and aunt, my mom and my dad, my dad and my aunt came to a head. All of us were devastated by his death.

I remember the *Ghatam* after Daddy died. All the men were busy praying and all the women were in the kitchen talking, cooking. All my mom's sisters, cousins, neighbours and friends were there. Ida's mom, Safie, was also there. The subject turned to children, and my mom was congratulated on what wonderfully obedient kids she had. Safie sensed that it was time for eulogies: I was, she said, the most wonderful friend Ida had ever had. She went even further, proclaiming loudly: 'Zayne is mos 'n moffie en ek voel Ida is altyd in safe hande met hom. Hy sal mos niks met haar maak nie.'<sup>17</sup> My poor mom and aunt learnt the meaning of

<sup>17</sup> Zayne's a moffie and I feel Ida's in safe hands with him. He won't get up to any mischief with her.

the saying: If you try to force reality out through the door, it just comes in through the window.

\* \* \*

By now, January 1976, Ida and I were regularly bunking school. Saunders Rock was one of our favourite haunts, and there we pestered white men for suntan oil, Coke, food and lifts. I had to supply sexual favours in return for the more earthly material goods.

Observatory Station had introduced me to the world of toilet sex. I never got great grades for maths but logic was never a problem. I quickly deduced that if men had sex at Observatory Station they would have sex at other stations. It was around this time that I discovered the most important stations of all, Newlands and Rondebosch.

Last year I was browsing at Exclusive Books in Hillbrow. I noticed a man in his forties starting to cruise me. I walked up to him and said: 'Hallo, your name is Don'. He turned red: 'How do you know my name?' I smiled. He said: 'Can I buy you a drink?' I told him to drop the formalities and asked where he lived. As we walked to his flat, I informed him that, in 1976, he lived in Kalk Bay and worked in the South African Navy. By now Don was sure that I was working for Military Intelligence. I assured him I was not. As he put his arm around me I told him that he had a lover called Hein. Shocked, he asked me to describe his house, which I did in detail. I even remembered the name of the dog: Abigail!

Don had forgotten that, way back in 1976, he had picked me up at Rondebosch Station. He was stunningly beautiful then: a navy boy, blond curls and blue eyes...

We enter the train (they still ran late in those days), get carried away, start fucking. Both of us with our pants down, the train whizzing past Steenberg, Retreat, Muizenberg, we are suddenly aware of the presence of three ticket examiners. They stare, then, silently, intimidated, they turn around and go back to where they came from. As we pull into Kalk Bay Station they return and ask politely for our tickets.

Don and I reach his home in Kalk Bay. We are thrashing around in his bed when our luck runs out. Hein returns. He was supposed to have spent the night with some friends in town, but he didn't. At two in the morning, he and Don storm up and down, in and out. Don shows me to the guest room. In order to demonstrate to his boyfriend that it did not really mean anything, Don offers me money the next morning when I wake up. I refuse...

As we finished our coffee in Don's Hillbrow flat, I pointed out to him that I would expect him to pay for sex this time round, and that I did not think he could afford it. I departed as I did 15 years before, in 1976.

\* \* \*

The youth revolt of 1976 sealed the fate of apartheid, and has become part of the legend of struggles against racism throughout the world. On 17 June, my Afrikaans

teacher told me to come to her house, to watch the news on television. We heard that youth in Soweto were revolting against Afrikaans, and that their revolt was communist-inspired. We also heard that scores of students were shot and killed.

The next few months were very tense at school. First University of Western Cape students boycotted, and they were followed by students in Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu. At Salt River High we had two campuses, one on Kent Street and the other at Rochester Road. I was at Kent Street and Ida at Rochester Road. On 1 September, a Wednesday, the African students marched into town. The next day we locked the principal in his office after stoning him with eggs. He had a terrible complex about his height, and was a reactionary Muslim from Bo Kaap. Then we held a mass meeting. We decided to form a Students' Representative Council and to boycott classes. *Jock of the Bushveld*, and all our history textbooks, were to be burnt. While our meeting was in progress, hundreds of students from the Rochester Road campus streamed into the school; we were also marching to town!

Why did we participate in the strikes and struggles of 1976? The deaths of so many children shocked the whole country. The police brutality unified the coloured and African youth. We found rebellion exciting. In the end, we rebelled not only against the state, but also against teachers, principals, parents and stuck-up students called prefects. All of us had witnessed racism and all of us were scarred by it. Apartheid was part of our bodies; it was not simply a system.

We marched through Victoria Road, into Darling Street, up Plein Street. Ida and I were marching together. The seniors taught us songs: *We Shall Overcome*; *This land is your land*; *Senzenina* reverberated as Salt River High students became the first coloured students to march into town. As we marched along Parliament Street, and down into Adderley Street, the riot police charged. We overran the flower sellers and ran into shops. Ida and I were beaten. We fled into the post office and sat down. The pursuing riot policeman ran straight past us. We then regrouped with other students near the Parade and started marching again.

It was a Thursday. Every Thursday morning my mom would go to town to the magistrates court with Mogamat, Nana's son, to collect the R28 a week my dad had to pay for the maintenance of the six kids. Sometimes she would return crying, and then we would know that he had not paid a cent. Apparently when my dad appeared in court he had told the magistrate: '*Edelagbare, ek kan nie elke week hof toe kom nie om geld te betaal nie want ek is kreupel.*'<sup>18</sup> The magistrate replied: '*Meneer, jy was nie kreupel toe jy ses babas gemaak het nie.*'<sup>19</sup>

Just as we turned into Darling Street, I saw my mom and Mogamat. I saw a riot policeman knock my little cousin down as he ran in our direction. It was then that my mom saw us.

At two o'clock in the afternoon on Thursday, 2 September 1976, we got a lift from a truckdriver back to Salt River. Tired, Ida and I went to find other students and we all decided to march back into town the next day. As I reached home, my mom and aunt were waiting with belts. They gave me a hiding worse than the

<sup>18</sup> Your honour, I can't come to court every week because I'm a cripple.

<sup>19</sup> Sir, you weren't a cripple when you made six babies.

one I had got from the police. My aunt said: '*Jy kan nie teen die Boere baklei met jou kaalhande nie. Beter mense soos Dr Dadoo, Ahmed Timol en Solly Sachs kon nie die boere klaarmaak nie. En julle is net kinders.*'<sup>20</sup> My mom and aunt believed that we would get shot. And they were not wrong: scores of students in Manenberg, Bonteheuwel, Langa and Guguletu were shot and even killed. But that night I hated my mom and aunt. I sought solace elsewhere.

The Caltex Garage in Lower Main Road had a night-watchman. He was from Queenstown. He called me over as I escaped from home. My body was aching all over from the beatings. I felt miserable. The watchman made me some tea over his open fire. I told him what happened and he started caressing my body. He stripped my clothes off and stared, transfixed by my legs. I thought it was the blue marks of the belt but it wasn't! '*Imfene!*' he cried as he started pulling the hairs on my legs. He had never touched anyone with hairy legs. He laughed as he fucked me and insisted that I was related to the baboons.

1976 changed my life forever. In the next few years, I became a political activist and was detained several times. Family-life became intolerable. I left home and lived on the streets and with friends. Later I met Daniel, who became my lover for almost ten years. In those years I discovered that sex is political and that, as moffies and letties, we had to be part of a revolution to change everything. It was the beginning of a life of sex and politics.

<sup>20</sup> You can't battle the Boers with your bare hands. Better people than you, like Dr Dadoo, Ahmed Timol and Solly Sachs couldn't finish the Boers off. And you're just children!