

MIXED METAPHORS

**By
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About the play

Mixed Metaphors is a two-women play featuring a performance poet, **Lerato January** aged 24, and **Cindy Petersen**, a 22-year-old arts journalist, and is targeted particularly at a young audience of under 35.

The play explores the challenges and role of young people in contemporary South African society. It is set in 2006, thirty years after the 1976 uprisings. It shows how young people of the same age, with similar histories can make different choices, and it explores these choices without necessarily favouring one or the other, emphasising the complexity of contemporary South Africa.

Structure

The play interweaves four distinct thrusts, each having its own style/s. These are

- a. a documentary film that Cindy is making about her father
- b. Lerato's performance poetry
- c. the scenes featuring the development of Cindy and Lerato's relationship and
- d. technology in the form of video, information technology, etc that serve as forms of communication and information providers.

To distinguish between these thrusts and forms, it is recommended that different music be used to introduce each one every time it is about to be used e.g. contemporary African jazz for the documentary, hip hop for the poetry, kwaito for the Cindy/Lerato scenes and contemporary world music for the technological scenes.

Setting

It is recommended that the set be as simple as possible as the screen and video technology will be used to set the scenes. There are five or six settings for particular scenes between Cindy and Lerato including a café, Lerato's home, Cindy's workstation, Cindy's home and a trendy bar. These are introduced or set on the screen, with basic props being used to support Cindy and Lerato in performance within those scenes.

The actress who plays Lerato and the director must find a performance style that suits each poem. Some can be recited with little movement, others with lots of gesture, still others simply with speed and passion. The poems are meant to be performed, rather than simply read. Some of it can be textured with images projected onto the screen.

The stage and screen are silent and empty when the lights go down to signal the beginning of the play. Contemporary African jazz plays. The screen comes to life with archival footage of 1976 protests, police response, rallies and funerals. An image of Moses (Moss to his friends) Mashishi fades up, and then is replaced by an interviewee, all of these in Cindy's film about her father.

Interview 1: *(African male in his late forties/early fifties dressed in golf clothes, with the interview clearly taking place on a golf course).* I remember him for a lot of things. But the thing that I remember most was his sense of humour. He had a great sense of humour. And you must remember, there wasn't very much to laugh about in those days. I'm talking 1976, 77. It came naturally to him, but I think he also did it to keep our spirits up. Once we got picked up by the boers, and as they were about to put us into the van, he asked one of them "Sersant, what is the fare for this taxi?" Even the policeman smiled. But I think he felt obliged to give Moss a light klap on the back of his head anyway as he got into the van. And Moss said "Ai, these white people. They just want to touch my hair." We all packed up laughing. I mean, some of us had blood dripping in our faces, others were in pain from the sjamboks. But we laughed all the way to the police station. He was fearless. And that quality made other people around him believe that the impossible was possible. *(Beat)* Maybe we don't call each other comrade anymore, but if ever there was a comrade, it was him. You wanted to be on his side. In his team. He could make things happen. *(Beat, then, more sombre)* I think if he were around today, he'd be making a huge contribution....

Film continues with interviewee playing golf as the first poem is done. African music fades into hip hop. Spotlight comes up on Lerato in performance. The tone of this poem is light, delivered with a smile and tongue firmly in the cheek.

Lerato: where have all the comrades gone
a few years passing
where have all the comrades gone
since a short while ago

some still suffer from struggle fatigue
and now find solace in suburban life
with a wife
a dog
two-and-a-quarter children
and a two-metre high electric fence

others went on management courses
bought portable computers

became consultants
overnight experts to advise their former comrades
on what they should do
how they should do it
all for a comradely fee
of course

still others you won't know anymore
for they have grown snouts
now stuck deep in the trough of public funds
as reward for trading the democracy of
participation
principle
people
for a foreign, exile version of
follow-the-leader democracy
where a few decide for the many
where the masses are herded
every five years as voting fodder

while the new and the old elites do the tango
buying influence
buying policies
buying power
that gives them their democratic right
they say
to make the chasm between rich and poor
into an ever-widening abyss

then there are those who still call each other comrade
who smoke a little less but
still spend hours in meetings
on committees
bemoaning their comrades who've reached their sell-out date

digging new trenches for
new battles around
privatisation
HIV/AIDS
loss of jobs
housing
public transport
land
service delivery

it is they who give voice to the voiceless

they who serve as the guardians of democracy
they who watchdog an arrogant leadership

long live
comrades
long live

Lights go down on Lerato. Contemporary African music. Screen changes to second interviewee, a woman this time.

Interview 2: *(a chic African woman in her early fifties, being interviewed in the foyer of an upmarket hotel)* Moss had a real...presence. People were attracted to him. And I must say, women in particular. He was a real charmer. He was a good-looking and he had a kind of magnetism. I was on the SRC at Fort Hare University with him. You know, you get brainy people. People who study hard and do really well in exams and you just have to admire them. Well, Moss wasn't one of those. I don't think he ever studied. He was too busy in workshops teaching other students about nationalism, socialism, darwinism and every other "ism" you could think of. But he never failed a single subject in the time that he was there. He had a stunning mind. Which made him more attractive. He could grasp an argument quicker than anyone else, and come up with a response just like that. I'm glad to say that we've moved beyond all the "isms" of our youth and have come to see that capitalism is not the evil we thought it was then. I'm sure that Moss will be embarrassed to remember his anti-capitalism antics now. But I'll be the first to admit that how we got here, and a lot of what we enjoy today we owe to people like Moss Mashishi.

Screen blacks out, hip hop music and lights come up on Lerato in performance.

Lerato: yesterday's monsters
their hands dripping blood
now shaking hands
as ministers of
safety
welfare
justice

yesterday's democrats
now silencing
critical thought
voices
minds
for these are not in the

national interest

yesterday's anti-racists
now marching under the banner of race
to advance their careers
their bank accounts
their social standing

but yesterday's workers
today's unemployed
yesterday's victims
still struggle today
yesterday's poor
more desperate this morning
yesterday's jobless
turn to crime today

but as they whose lives
have changed for the better
would say
you can't expect change overnight

Lights fade on Lerato. The next sequence is taken up with a poetry chat room happening "live" on screen. The pseudonyms are the names used by participants in the chat room. The screen runs "live" as a contemporary, popular kwaito song plays at high volume.

Nigger: I think it's just a phase. Ten years from now, no-one will remember this poetry.

Heita: That's what they said about hip hop.

Riddim: Hip hop's big bizniz now. It's NOT gonna go away.

Nigger: I doubt this poetry's going to be big business.

Goldfinger: And if it does, we should kill it. Big business IS the problem.

Riddim: What's your case Goldfinger? Feeling guilty about the bling on your finger?

Goldfinger: Fuck you Riddim!

Nigger: Okay, so can we come back to the question: what are the reasons for the rise of poetry among youth over the last ten years?

Spotlight come up on Cindy typing. It emerges that she's Nigger. Chatroom exchange continues on screen with Cindy typing her bits in synchronicity with the screen.

Goldfinger: There's a helluva lot of stuff about identity right now.

Heita: Sure! If I hear one more sister doing a poem about "I'm an African queen" with her Model C accent, I'm going to moer somebody!

Goldfinger: I think people are trying to celebrate who they are. And they're using poetry to do that.

Riddim: I don't think so. I think it's simply about having a voice. To say whatever's on their minds. The previous generation had freedom songs, slogans, posters. This one has hip hop. Kwaito. Poetry.

Nigger: Then I'm glad to be part of *this* generation....I'm glad the struggle's over.

Chat room exchange ends. Spotlight fades on Cindy. Light comes up on Lerato in performance.

Lerato: Where once marched young lions
Now flirt fat cats
In late model sedans that purr
Where once young lions roared.

Struggle T-shirts grew into corporate golf shirts
Struggle slogans into designer labels
And struggle fists are now clenched around
Drivers
Seven irons
Putters

The lion has evolved into a cat
Hip cat
Brand cat
Cool cat
The cat who got the milk
As the Freedom Charter
With its promises for all
Rests in peace
Buried
By the Mining Charter
Banking Charter
Fishing Charter

Every industry charter
That says it's smarter
Rather to give to a few

In the jungles
The concrete jungles
The lions sleep tonight
In electric fence cages

While the hungry hyenas
The desperate dogs
And vicious vultures
Circle

Lights fade on Lerato in performance. Screen comes to life with shopping mall exterior, then interior, then café within the mall where Lerato and Cindy are meeting for an interview.

Lerato: *(holding newspaper)* I must say, I wasn't expecting...this.

Cindy: What were you expecting?

Lerato: I don't know...but not this.

Cindy: This *is* your first show, right?

Lerato: That's why I was hoping for something a bit more....

Cindy: Patronising?

Lerato: I'm not asking for any favours....

Cindy: This is my first job too. I also need to prove myself.

Lerato: To the white woman at the top...?

Cindy: *(Beat)* So now you're going to lay a trip on me... *(sarcastically)*
sister? You think I should cut you some slack because
you're..."black like me"?

Lerato: You're what? Twenty-two?

Cindy: So what?

Lerato: So what do *you* know about protest poetry anyway? (*reads*) “Some would come away from this show with the impression of a dinosaur, feeding in the Jurassic Park of protest poetry....”

Cindy: (*approvingly*) My editor liked that....

Lerato: (*ignoring her, continues to read*) “*Poetry for Patriots* featuring *emerging* performance poet Lerato January is not for those seeking a light night out.” *Emerging?*

Cindy: This *is* your first show....

Lerato: How come I never read about “emerging” *white* writers or musicians or actors? Or is it only black artists who...*emerge*?

Cindy: (*snorts*) You have some serious issues, sister....

Lerato: Cool it with the sister crap! We’re not sisters....

Cindy: Whatever....

Lerato: (*reads again*) “Frankly, I can’t think why anyone would want to buy a ticket for this show. Unless the alternative is to watch a South African horror movie about child rape. Or family murder”. (*looking at Thandi, then, with sarcasm*) You’re wasted as a critic...(then *emphasising...*) girl. (*throws newspaper on the table dismissively*). You should be a stand-up comic. (*attracts the waitron’s attention by making a writing sign in the air*) Could I get the bill?

Cindy: (*surprised*) Hey, what about our interview?

Lerato: It’s not happening...! (*gets up to go*) Maybe there are artists who are happy to talk to murderers.... Not me!

Cindy: Murderers?

Lerato: You’ve probably killed my show.

Cindy: You could have told me over the phone....

Lerato: (*putting her face as close to Cindy’s as she can*) I wanted to have the pleasure of telling you to your face. (*Beat. Turns away, scratching in her pockets, then, under her breath*) Shit! (*sighs*) (*she looks at Cindy*) You invited me, right?

Cindy: It’s okay. The paper will pay for your coffee.

Lerato: Good. Have a nice life. (*turns to go*)

Cindy: But I can't do it if I don't interview you. (*Lerato turns to her*) It wouldn't be ethical.

Lerato: (*Beat*) Ten minutes. (*sits down again*). (*Beat, beat. Cindy sets up her tape recorder*) If you hated the show so much, why do you want to do this interview?

Cindy: I didn't hate the show....

Lerato: "I can't think why anyone would want buy a ticket for this show..." That's your idea of a compliment?

Cindy: (*Beat*) Why would *you* say people should buy a ticket to your show? It's not a very...comfortable experience.

Lerato: Neither is riding a roller coaster. But people pay to do it. For the thrill. I think my show offers a kind of thrill. A Cobra experience of the mind.

Cindy: Do you think anything good has happened in the last eleven years?

Lerato: Lots of things.

Cindy: So how come your show doesn't have any...celebratory poetry?

Lerato: I'm not the SABC. I'm an artist! Art reflects its times.

Cindy: You only see the bad.

Lerato: I see where things need to be made better.

Cindy: (*picks up the newspaper*) "Whether you agree with her or not, this sister has rhythm. The targets are pointed. The poetry is powerful, the passion visible...Yada, yada, yada... the issues raised in this explosive poetry show are issues that affect and challenge us all." (*putting down the newspaper*) See? You only see the bad. I didn't *hate* the show.

Lerato: (*changing the subject in the light of Cindy's point above*) What's your training?

Cindy: Oh yes, I've been warned. Artists prefer their critics unqualified. It makes them feel better when they get a bad review. (*proudly, but*

not in an alienating way) I have an honours in Creative Writing from UCT.

Lerato: Okay, one of those....

Cindy: One of which?

Lerato: A wannabe writer who goes to university and has all the talent trained out of her, and now has to work as a critic.

Cindy: I majored in English and French literature...

Lerato: (*cynically*) Right, those two indigenous *African* languages....

Cindy: And I'm doing a Masters in African Film and Media Studies. Part-time.

Lerato: An arts journalist with a Masters? Aren't you overqualified?

Cindy bursts out laughing.

Lerato: (*suspiciously*) What's so funny?

Cindy: Nothing...

Lerato: Yeah, right!

Cindy: (*diplomatically*) Artists are just like politicians....(*Lerato looks at her quizzically*) They love it when the media says how great they are, but hate it when we do our jobs as critics.

Lerato: (*Beat, then, on the defensive*) You can say what you want....

Cindy: Sure! Everyone believes in media freedom. Until the media has an opinion that's different to theirs.

Lerato: You have the right to your opinions. Not the right to the final word.

Cindy: Okay, look. Let's get this over with.

Lerato: (*Beat*) You haven't answered my question...

Cindy: Why do I want to do this interview with you?

Lerato: Is it to fill your local content quota?

Cindy: We don't have a local content quota....

Lerato: Maybe you should. Then we'd have less crap about Hollywood, and more space for local art.

Cindy: Hollywood pays the rent.

Lerato: So why are you interviewing me? It's not like I'm ever going to buy an ad in your rag...

Cindy: Curiosity. I want to know where your poetry comes from. Poetry's a happening thing in our country right now. I want to know why. And what you think about it. And.... (*pauses*)

Lerato: And what?

Cindy: (*thinks about it, then*) Nothing....

Lerato: Is this a habit of yours?

Cindy: (*quietly*) When I was watching you the other night...I imagined that that was how my dad was when he was young. The passion, the anger, the use of language....

Lerato: Your dad was a poet?

Cindy: No. I don't think so. But he inspired people....

Lerato: My dad was a poet. That's where I got it from.

Cindy: Hang on. (*gets out her notebook*) This is the stuff of the interview.

Lerato: (*picking up the tape recorder*) Is this thing on?

Cindy: Sorry, I should've asked. You don't mind being recorded?

Lerato: I prefer it. Less chance of being misquoted.

Cindy: Well, I can't guarantee that. Sometimes the sub-editors do their own thing....

Lerato: Then I want to see the final copy before it's printed.

Cindy: Are you serious?

Lerato: I'm not going to allow some sub-editor to make me sound like an arsehole.

Cindy: That's not how it works, Lerato.

Lerato: I just want to see the final version. That's all.

Cindy: I'll see what I can do.

Lerato: *(in a way that suggests "How difficult was that?")* Thank you.

Cindy: Okay, let's get the basics out of the way. Where did you train?

Lerato: You mean....

Cindy: Where did you learn to write poetry?

Lerato: I haven't had any formal training.

Cindy: *(incredulously)* You've had no training....?

Lerato: I've attended a lot of poetry workshops...

Cindy: *(sensing her defensiveness)* It's okay. I'm not going to lay a trip on you about your lack of training as an artist....

Lerato: I did a BA in Gender Studies.

Cindy: What does that qualify you to do?

Lerato: Not very much.

Cindy: So how do you make a living?

Lerato: *Not* from poetry. Especially my kind of poetry.

Lights go down on the café scene. Hip Hop music. Lights come up on Lerato in performance.

Lerato: when the rulers by race
their generals
and foot soldiers
lie
and for a few sorry words
are rewarded with
handshakes

forgiveness
cleared conscience

and when those they
abused
still have to
beg
plead
fight
for the paltry promise of silver

then the cock flings back his neck
and crows
long and
loud

and when hundreds die daily of AIDS
and our rulers dither
and have to be forced
to do what is right
by a court they still hold in
sometime contempt

then crows the cock again
and again
and again
eight hundred times a day

when shack dwellers see
corvettes go by
when the jobless hear
new jets in the sky
when the landless smell
fumes of tanks nearby
when arms make more sense
than people who cry
for food
shelter
medicine

then the cock crows
the cock crows again

and when we choose to
defend dictators
airbrush assassins

pardon pariahs
have tea with torturers

the chicks will come home
to the rooster
who crows
loud
who crows
long
for a people betrayed

ideals sold out
sealed
with a Judas kiss
auctioned
for thirty pieces of silver

Lights come down on this scene. Screen flashes into life with a further excerpt from the film Cindy is making about her father. Cindy is outside a council house in Langa, narrating her story.

Cindy: This is the house where Moses Samuel Mashishi was born on 27 April 1956, the second of four brothers. His mother was a primary school teacher (*image of his mother*) and his father a minister with the Congregational Church. (*image of his father in a ministerial collar*). Moses was the only one who was politically active in his family. I asked his younger brother, Lazarus, why....

Lazarus: (*early forties, also a church minister*) Moses was the black sheep. He was always doing something different. When we went to Sunday school, Moses would be the one that bunked. When my dad read from the Bible, Moses was always the one to question things. All the brothers studied theology. Only Moses went to university. My father was against it. But Moses got a bursary.

Cindy: And how did the family feel about his political involvement?

Lazarus: My parents weren't very happy. My father always used to quote Romans 13 to Moses, "The government is put there by God". Moses rebelled against that. He called Christianity a white man's religion to keep black people oppressed. (*Beat*) (*then, implying that his rebelliousness led to his death*) He's dead today. But all the other brothers are alive and doing well.

Lights come up on Cindy typing at her workstation.

Lerato: (*storms in sporting a swollen lip and her left arm in a sling*) I hope you're happy!

Cindy: My God, Lerato! What happened to you?

Lerato: I want to speak to your editor.

Cindy: What's wrong? (*Beat*) Talk to me....

Lerato: I don't want to talk to you! I want to talk to your editor!

Cindy: Lerato, please...tell me what happened.

Lerato: (*pointing alternately to her swollen lip, arm and lifts her top to reveal a bruise*) This happened! And this happened! And this happened!

Cindy: Calm down...please....

Lerato: Don't...fucking tell me to calm down! Just take me to your editor!

Cindy: She's not here.

Lerato: What do you mean she's not here?

Cindy: She's out on a story....

Lerato: Don't give me that shit! You're covering for her.

Cindy: Lerato, please....

Lerato: I'm going to make sure you both lose your fucking jobs!

Cindy: (*firmly*) Are you going to tell me what this is all about before I lose my job?

Lerato: You said that you were going to send the interview to me *before* it went into the newspaper.

Cindy: I said I'll try....

Lerato: Well, did you? Because sure as hell, nothing came through to me.....

Cindy: I asked the sub-editors to send it to you...

Lerato: And did they?

Cindy: They're normally quite good about....

Lerato: Just answer the fucking question! Did they?

Cindy: I don't know.

Lerato: Of course! How would you know? You're just an affirmative action, *emerging* arts journalist!

Cindy: (*angrily*) What's your case girl?

Lerato: (*Beat*) I got beaten up.

Cindy: What?

Lerato: Because of you!

Cindy: (*initially speechless, then*) Me?

Lerato: After the show last night. Two guys. They were waiting for me in the car park....

Cindy: Please tell me you're joking....

Lerato: One of them asked for my autograph. As I stopped, the second guy hit me with his fist....

Cindy: Oh my God....

Lerato: (*getting a bit emotional*) I fell to the ground and then one of them kicked me....

Cindy: This is terrible!

Lerato: (*close to tears, a mixture of anger and memory*) And then he twisted my arm so far back I thought he was going to break it.

Cindy: I'm so sorry, Lerato....

Lerato: All through the show, these guys were heckling. Booing. It's like they came there to disrupt the show.

Cindy: Who were they? Do you know?

Lerato: I've never seen them before.

Cindy: Why do you think I have something to do with it?

Lerato: Because as I lay on the ground last night, one of them took out a cutting of the interview you did with me. And as his friend poured his beer over me, he said "This is what you get for talking shit." And then he tried to stuff the cutting into my mouth. Fortunately, other people came into the car park and these...fuckwits just climbed into their four-by-four like nothing happened. And left.

Cindy: *(going up to her, and attempts to give Lerato a hug, but she turns away)* I am so sorry. Really.

Lerato: I've been called all kinds of things before. But I've never been beaten up.

Cindy: Did you get their number plate or something?

Lerato: No, Columbo. I was too busy checking to see that I had all my body parts.

Cindy: Did anybody else see something?

Lerato: I suppose....

Cindy: So what are you going to do?

Lerato: What do you mean what am I going to do?

Cindy: Are you going to lay charges?

Lerato: You mean after I get you and your editor fired?

Cindy: With all due respect, Lerato....*(tapers off)*

Lerato: What? With all due respect what?

Cindy: Have you even read the interview?

Lerato: *After* those thugs were kind enough to leave me a copy....

Cindy: And is there anything in it that you would have changed?

Lerato: That's not the point!

Cindy: Lerato, even if you had approved the interview beforehand, those guys could still have come after you....

Lerato: That's not the fucking point!

Cindy: Whatever is in that interview is a hundred times milder than any of the poetry in the show itself.

Lerato: The point is....

Cindy: What?

Lerato: (*changing tack*) It's unprofessional. You said that you would send the interview to me for approval before it was published. You didn't. The first I got to know about it was when some asshole was trying to ram it down my throat....

Cindy: And so you're coming here to get me fired. Because you think that that led to your being assaulted.

Lerato: They read your interview! That's why they came to the show! Something in it must have set them off.

Cindy: What?

Lerato: How the fuck should I know?

Cindy: So why don't you go after them? They're the ones who beat you up.

Lerato: Don't worry, I will.

Cindy: Actually, I can understand if you're scared...I would be.

Lerato: (*trying to be tough*) I'm not scared!

Cindy: Is it easier to come after us, Lerato? Two women arts journalists? So maybe you'll get us fired. And then? Those thugs can come to your show again and again and beat you up every night. I know it's trendy to blame the media for one's troubles, but....

Lerato: (*Beat*) What time are you expecting her back?

Cindy: I don't know. Some time this afternoon.

Lerato: Then I'll wait.

Lerato sits down. They sit in silence for a little while. Then, Cindy breaks the silence.

Cindy: I want to do a follow-up story on this. For the main section of the newspaper.

Lerato: Now you want to get me killed....

Cindy: They're trying to intimidate you, Lerato.

Lerato: *(Beat)* I know....

Cindy: To stop you from saying what you want...

Lerato: I'm sure if I were a guy, this wouldn't have happened...

Cindy: We must expose it Lerato. Placing you in the public spotlight will be a way of protecting you from this kind of thing.

There is a pause as Lerato considers what Thandi is saying. Then, Lerato lightens up.

Lerato: *(Beat, beat)* Right! I can see the headline "Ass-kicking poet gets her ass kicked"

Cindy: *(taking her up)* "Censorship board...alive and...kicking" *(they both start to laugh)*

Lerato: "Pearls cast before swine get aggro" *(they laugh more)*

Cindy: "Autograph hunters catch some lip" *(They both laugh, then Lerato changes her expression)*

Lerato: *(gently touching her swollen lip)* That's not funny...*(then bursts out laughing)*

Cindy: *(goes up to her)* I'm really sorry about what happened to you. Really, really, really....

End of interview loop.

Lerato: It's not your fault.

Cindy: *(humouring her)* So you're not going to get me fired?

Lerato: I'm sorry for the things I said earlier. I was...

Cindy: It's cool. Don't worry about it.

Lerato: *(after a little pause)* I thought your interview was quite good. I wouldn't have changed a thing.

Cindy: Wow. Thanks.

Lerato: You're right. It would have happened anyway. *(Beat)* I suppose... the only real surprise is that it didn't happen sooner. *(Beat)* The funny thing is...I don't know what I feel more. Anger or relief.

Cindy: Anger, surely?

Lerato: *(Beat)* I really thought...they were going to rape me. That's my worst fear.

Cindy: *(reaches out to her)* Mine too. *(Beat)* That poem in your show...was probably the one that got to me most.

Lights fade on this scene, hip hop music and screen comes to life with Lerato in performance. She performs the following poem on screen.

Lerato: she was a baby
a toddler
a kid

he was an uncle
a neighbour
her cousin

she needed counselling
advice
to talk

he was a teacher
policeman
a priest

she was a daughter
a sister
a girl

he was a father
a husband

her guardian

she was a tourist
investor
a journalist

he was a gangster
convicted
paroled

she was a mother
a granny
an aunt

he was a gardener
a hawker
the plumber

she was a party girl
elegant
poised

he was a doctor
a lawyer
her friend

she fought him off
shouted no
begged and pleaded

he was too strong
wouldn't hear
didn't care

she still has nightmares
carries scars
freely weeps

he has forgotten
still walks free
and will do it
again

Screen goes dark. Lights come up on the scene at Cindy's work again

Cindy: Are you going to continue?

Lerato: With the show?

Cindy: You can't perform like that, surely?

Lerato: What do you think?

Cindy: If it were me...let's put it this way. If I had to choose between freedom of expression and having a beautiful face....

Lerato: You'd choose a beautiful face.

Cindy: Exactly!

Lerato: Well in my case...since I don't have a beautiful face, I have to sacrifice what I have left for the sake of democracy.

Cindy: Always the martyr....

Lerato: Or always the fool.

Cindy: *You* said it.

Lights go down on this scene and come up on Lerato in performance, minus the sling and swollen lip as this is an excerpt from his show as seen by Cindy a week ago.

Lerato: I am not a patriot
for pointing out naked emperors
for not joining the chorus of praise singers
for allegiance to country, not party

I am a traitor
for practising constitutional freedoms
for choosing the margins not mainstream
for saying what others but think

I am anti-transformation
for still sprouting non-racist mantra
for being happy with grey amidst black and white
for not being a brother to opportunism

I am a sell-out
for donating my poetry to resistance
for refusing to live in denial
for declining thirty pieces of silver

I am an apartheid spy
for not turning a blind eye to corruption
for loyalty to principle not expedience
for daring to uphold the law

I am an ultra-leftist
for supporting human rights in Zimbabwe
for believing HIV causes AIDS
for not being a millionaire socialist

I am a racist
for breaking the silence with a whisper
for preferring thought to propaganda
for standing up amidst the prostrate
for repeated conspiracy with the questions what, how, why

I am a danger to society
for not martyring my mind
for not terminating my tongue
for not sacrificing my soul

I have been here before
but then as a communist
an atheist
a Marxist
anarchist

and I am here again
as some other "ist"
this time as artist

labels they come and labels they go
hard on the footsteps of those
who defend new privilege with old morality
who appropriate history for contemporary pillaging
who now crucify the people on their electoral crosses

I have been here before and I shall be here again
for as long as the poor – like Truth – are with us

Chatroom comes alive on screen again.

Riddim: I don't have very much sympathy.

Goldfinger: What do you mean? She got beaten up! And in Cape Town!
You'd expect that kind of thing here in Joburg.

Riddim: I'm not condoning what happened to her. But then I also think
she's beating up poetry.

Goldfinger: I think she's on the cutting edge of what poetry should be doing
right now.

Riddim: Kak! It's taking us back to the days of "culture as a weapon of
struggle".

Goldfinger: What's wrong with that?

Riddim: As soon as you use art as a vehicle for politics, you compromise
art. The message becomes more important than the form. And
then the form becomes boring.

Goldfinger: I'll tell you what's boring. Old farts maintaining some outdated
notion of what art should be. So it loses its relevance to new
generations of people. She's making poetry relevant to young
people now!

Riddim: Then Nigger was right. This poetry will be forgotten in ten years
time.

Goldfinger: So what? As long as it has meaning for its audience now.

Chatroom ends. Camera introduces the audience to Lerato's home on screen as if in a car taking the N2, then turning off into one of the "coloured" townships/ suburbs. On screen, the exterior of Lerato's house is shown, then the inside, and finally, there is a still of the living room. Lerato is assuming a variety of poses with her arm in a sling and a swollen lip as Cindy takes photos of her. As they talk, so a variety of images – 10-15 – of Lerato in various poses loops on screen.

Lerato: *(posing awkwardly)* I'm not enjoying this.

Cindy: *(smiles at the thought of making her squirm)* Just relax....

Lerato: How many more are you going to take?

Cindy: I want some for our library for future use.

Lerato: No ways! These are for *this* story only. I don't want to have a
swollen lip in future stories.

Cindy: (*ignoring her*) Just be natural, okay.

Lerato: I *am* being natural....(*Beat*) When does the story come out?

Cindy: Tomorrow....

Lerato: (*Beat*) Did you find the place okay?

Cindy: Your directions were excellent.

Lerato: I didn't really expect you to come.

Cindy: Why?

Lerato: (*imitating her*) "Is it safe for a woman to drive there on her own?"
When last were you in a township?

Cindy: Can you blame me? With all your poetry about crime...

Lights go down on this scene and screen comes to life with slide-like images and headlines of gangsterism and crime, taken mainly from newspapers, while Lerato "voices-over" the following poem, perhaps with a song by Godessa about crime in the background.

Lerato: mama
the Americans have invaded
they occupy our land
they're fighting the Sexy Boys mama

mama
where are the cameras
why aren't they watching our war
why aren't we on tv mama

mama
why can't I play in the park
why can't I go to the shop by myself
why can't I walk to Dezi's house mama

mama
on Monday it was Lulu
Tuesday it was Tyrone
whose funeral is it today mama

mama
look there's a tv camera

there are five men in suits
I've seen them before on tv mama

mama
see now they're going
look at their nice cars
and all those police with them mama

mama
they hugged Tyrone's mom
and shook hands with Lulu's dad
don't you want to be on tv mama

The images on the screen become those of barbed wire, electric fences, trellidors, burglar bars, boom gates, beware of the dogs signs, security patrols and armed response signs, etc as Lerato recites the following poem as a voice over.

Lerato: where once were walls imposed between us
we now build walls of hate
with bricks of fear
and mortar of insecurity

free at last to know our neighbour
and then perhaps to love him
we retreat instead behind
barriers
fences
gates
alarms
barbed wire
electric current moats

for fear now rules us
as we willingly construct greater walls
than our race-rulers could have done
with booms
suburban guards
fenced-in laagers with
limited
entries and exits for
pass carriers

what apartheid began
crime has perfected
unleashing in us

our suppressed racism
so that we become like
the dogs we keep
to keep us safe

they whom we don't know
we fear
we suspect
we treat with disrespect
hostage to our need for security

our could-be-neighbour
our should-be-friend
our would-be-partner
becomes our enemy
remains the other
an ever constant threat

there shall be peace and security

who will liberate us again
who will make us feel safe
that we may break down the double walls
that now stand between us
and our neighbour
between our past and
our futures

though released from our past
we are self-fulfilling prophecies
racists in the making

for the sake of the rainbow
give me peace I plead
keep me safe I beg

Screen goes dark. Lights come up on Lerato and Cindy still in Lerato's house. Cindy looks around. She looks at various pictures of Lerato's family. As she does so, they come up on screen. Lerato enters with a glass of water and gives it to Cindy. The images of Lerato's family appear on the screen when Thandi and Lerato talk about them.

Cindy: Who's this?

Lerato: That's my younger sister Eleanor and her husband on their wedding day. *(image of husband and wife, about 28 years old each, appears)*

Cindy: They're in Australia....?

Lerato: Ja. They have two kids now.

Cindy: And your mom's visiting them at the moment....

Lerato: No, that's my other sister, Charlene, in Toronto. *(image of his sister, husband in their early thirties and three daughters appears)*. They just got divorced recently, so my mom's there to support her. *(image of younger brother appears)* And that's the black sheep brother, Allan.

Cindy: He's quite good looking.

Lerato: He looks a bit different now. His face has a few tattoos on it....

Cindy: How long does he still have to serve?

Lerato: Another sixteen months or so.

Cindy: It must be hard....

Lerato: Having a criminal for a sibling? It's standard around here.

Cindy: Drugs, hey?

Lerato: Usual story. Matriculates. Gets an average pass. Can't get any work. Needs money. Gets into the drugs trade. Gets arrested, comes out, can't get work, gets into drugs, gets arrested...

Picture of Lerato's mom appears.

Cindy: You look like your mom.

Lerato: That's what everyone says. But I was pretty close to my dad. Especially after his accident.

Image of Lerato's dad in a wheelchair.

Cindy: Lerato...

Lerato: What?

Cindy: That's an...African name.

Lerato: I know. My parents said that if we were serious about a building a non-racial society, then we need to embrace each other's cultures. But I used to get teased at school. They called me "kaffirtjie". So my parents gave me another name, Abigail. But now I've reclaimed my name. And I'm proud of it.

Cindy: You've had a tough life.

Lerato: Like I said...it's pretty normal around here.

Cindy: And it must have been hard with your dad in a wheelchair...

Lerato: He's basically why I continued to live at home. My sisters emigrated. My younger brother was at school and then in and out of jail. My mom couldn't physically take care of all my dad's needs. So I stuck around, and helped with dressing him, taking him to the loo, taking him for rides around the neighbourhood....

Cindy: You deserve a medal.

Lerato: Not really. It was the most formative years of my life. My father's body was up to shit, but his mind was as sharp as a razor. He basically taught me everything about poetry. It was the most intense mentorship one could hope for.

Cindy: You must miss him.

Lerato: Every night when I perform, I imagine that he's in the audience. Watching me with a little smile on his face. Proud, but always urging me to do better, to be braver....

Cindy: And who are these? (*Image of a young, sixteen-year-old African girl and a younger boy and girl come up on screen*)

Lerato: That's Bongzi and her sister Lebo. And their little brother Simphiwe. Bongzi's the one that really deserves a medal. Both her parents died of AIDS. So she's bringing up her siblings. She's seventeen.

Cindy: And the connection?

Lerato: Our family supports them. We give them money and groceries every month. Pay for their schooling....

Cindy: Wow!

Lerato: It's no big deal. *(Beat)* We can't change the world. But we can make a difference...to someone's life.

Cindy: *(Beat)* *(Suddenly feeling inadequate, but wanting to be relevant too)* Did I tell you that I'm making a movie about my dad?

Lerato: *(ripping her off)* So you're an *emerging* film-maker as well....

Cindy: It's my thesis project for my Masters.

Lerato: He must be proud of you....

Cindy: He died about fourteen years ago.

Lerato: I'm sorry....*(Beat)* How's it going?

Cindy: It's cool. I've shot a few interviews with people who knew him. It's just a short, ten-to-fifteen minute documentary. *(Beat)* I never really knew my dad. It feels like I'm only getting to know him now.

Lights fade on this scene. The documentary movie flashes up on screen. Cindy is narrating again.

Cindy: Moses performed well at secondary school and was accepted both at UCT and the University of Fort Hare. However, as a black African student, he was not granted a permit to pursue his legal studies at UCT. *(image of Moses graduating)* He was elated at being able to attend Fort Hare University and follow in the footsteps of his heroes, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela.

After graduating, he returned to Cape Town where he applied his legal mind not at a normal law firm, but at the Lagunya – the Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga – Advice Office, helping people with a range of legal and other challenges they faced. It also served as a base from which he organized members of the community, and recruited members for anti-apartheid organizations.

Movie excerpt ends.

Scene comes up on Cindy and Lerato at Lerato's home.

Lerato: How did your dad die?

Cindy: Car accident.

Lerato: As well.

Cindy: As well as who?

Lerato: My dad. He wasn't killed, thank God. But he was paralysed in a car accident.

Lerato's cell phone rings.

Lerato: Hallo?

Voice: If you report what happened to you last night, you'll be sorry.

Lerato: *(with a degree of fear)* Excuse me?

Voice: You heard me.

Lerato: Who's this?

Voice: We know where you live. *(phone goes dead)*

Lerato turns to Cindy, shocked.

Cindy: What's up?

Screen flickers into darkness. Then, camera picks up on Cindy and Lerato – still with a sling - getting out of Cindy's car. They walk to the SABC Studios in Sea Point.

Lerato: I'm nervous.

Cindy: You'll be fine.

Lerato: I've never been on television before.

Cindy: It's no big deal.

Lerato: You're so connected.

Cindy: Unathi's an old school friend.

Lerato: And you're sure she's okay about me being on the programme too?

Cindy: She says the more controversial, the better. It will up the viewership. And keep her in a job.

Lerato: Controversial?

Cindy: She heard about your show. And I told her about your current... problems. And she agrees...the more profile you have, the less chance of those thugs coming after you again.

The next sequence is all played out on the screen. It is a recorded discussion between Cindy, Lerato and the host, Unathi, of the Young Country programme.

Unathi: *Good evening and welcome to the third edition of Young Country where tomorrow's movers and shakers get to talk about our young country. I'm Unathi Mbele and in the studio are our first two guests, Cindy Petersen, an arts journalist and film-maker, and Lerato January, a performance poet who's been making the news recently. This year we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the 1976 student uprisings. Many of our current crop of outstanding political and business leaders comes from that generation of youth.*

Today we ask the question: how different are the youth of today, and what impact will they have in thirty years time? Cindy, perhaps we can start with some opening thoughts from you.

Cindy: *Thanks Unathi. I'd like to get something off my chest at the outset. One thing that really irritates me are the comparisons made between the 1976 generation and the youth of today. Everyone goes on about today's youth being apolitical and consumerist and self-centred. I don't know what they want us to do. I thought "the struggle" was so that our generation could have a better life. And now it seems like everyone's resentful that we're actually enjoying that better life.*

Unathi: *Good, strong points to kick off our show. Lerato, an opening comment from you perhaps?*

Lerato: *Well, first of all, thank you for inviting me onto the programme. I haven't really thought of an opening comment. But in response to Cindy's comment, maybe there is a better life now, but it's a better life for a few. The struggle against apartheid may be over, but there are still many other struggles for youth to be engaged in.*

Unathi: *Like?*

Lerato: *Like unemployment. Many young people simply don't have jobs. I think that's a ticking time bomb. And there's AIDS. Probably more young people die of AIDS in a month than all those who died in*

1976. Then there's the abuse of young women...All of these have a political dimension. If there's anything that today's youth can learn from the 76 generation, it's that they should be more politically engaged.

Cindy: *(cutting in) Oh please! Everything in this country is politics! Education, sports teams, business...Enough already!*

Unathi: *Cindy, how do you think youth should respond to the challenges that Lerato has raised?*

Cindy: *I have a problem talking about "the youth" as if they're some kind of homogenous mass. We're not! Lerato and I are more or less the same age, but we're different. These are such massive challenges that Lerato has raised, I wouldn't know where to begin. All I can do is start with myself. To try to improve my own life. Take whatever opportunities are available and make the most of them.*

Unathi: *Whatever the challenges, our country certainly is alive with possibilities for young people right now.*

Cindy: *Exactly! We can get bogged down and depressed by unemployment, crime, AIDS, the matric pass rate, but there are young people out there who are doing things! I'm excited by the young entrepreneurs, the hip fashion designers, the bright young things in the media, the layer of young professionals who are out there, and all those incredibly talented, new musicians, actors and poets. Like Lerato.*

Lerato: *I'm happy for them too. But I'm sure that most of them have had good education, or parents with resources or political connections...And in the context of the masses of youth, they represent a drop in the ocean.*

Thandi: *The thing is, change and progress have to start somewhere. It takes individuals to make a difference. The masses can be involved in protests and bring pressure towards change, but it is individuals who actually do things. And as they succeed, so the benefits will flow to others.*

Lerato: *The trickle down effect...*

Unathi: *The what?*

Lerato: *It you're at the top of the pyramid, then it's okay. But if you're one of the millions at the bottom, then the view's not that great.*

Unathi: *We're going to go for a commercial break, but I'd like to give our guests an opportunity for a concluding comment.*

Cindy: *I just want to say to the 1976 generation, to our parents, our teachers, our politicians...stop laying a trip on us. Your generation fought for our freedom. And we thank you for that. But give us the chance to define what that freedom means for us.*

Unathi: *Lerato?*

Lerato: *What freedom means for us depends on our access to resources, to jobs, to health, to education. I would like our generation to be more assertive in claiming the freedoms that we all have on paper, but which only a few really enjoy at the moment.*

Unathi: *Thank you to our guests – Cindy and Lerato - for their stimulating contributions. After the break, we'll be interviewing Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, one time student activist and now a billionaire as a role model for today's youth.*

Screen goes dark. Lights come up on Thandi and Lerato in the SABC foyer. They're both switching on their cellphones.

Lerato: What was that all about?

Cindy: You were good. You didn't look nervous at all.

Lerato: Did you really believe everything you said in there?

Cindy: Did you believe everything you said?

Lerato: Every word....*(putting her phone to her ear to listen to her messages)*

Cindy: Ditto...*(puts her phone to her ear too)*. I think Unathi was happy with how it went....

Lerato listens to her voice message and puts up her hand signalling Cindy to stop talking.

Cindy: *(whispering)* What?

Lerato: *(slightly shocked, ends listening to the message)* It's the police. They've made an arrest.

Screen comes to life with Lerato and Thandi driving towards the police station where Lerato is to attempt to identify her assailants in an identity parade.

Lerato: Thanks for coming with me.

Cindy: Hey, I'm interested in the story. It got me onto the front page for the first time! *(Beat)* I hope they'll let me sit in on the identity parade.

Lerato: I'll say you're my sister...

Cindy: *(teasing her)* "Cool it with the sister crap. We're not sisters...."

Lerato: *(smiles, beat, then)* Thanks for letting me stay at your place....

Cindy: I hope they put away those thugs for a long time.

Lerato: They'll probably just get out on bail....

Cindy: *(sensing her fear)* You can stay as long as you want....

Lerato: Thanks. *(Beat)* Can we talk about something else?

Cindy: Sure.

They drive in silence for a bit.

Cindy: How did you find Bongi and Simphiwe and her sister?

Lerato: Treatment Action Campaign. They invited the public to donate money every month to raise funds for anti-retrovirals for activists who need ARVs. Our family got involved. We supported their mother...her husband had already died of AIDS. But it was too late for her. She died shortly afterwards too, so now we support the kids...

Cindy: The more I get to know you, the more I understand where your poetry's coming from.

Screen goes dark. Spotlight comes up on Lerato in performance.

Lerato: *(addressing performance audience)* You would remember that prior to the Iraqi war, South Africa tried to play a role in getting Saddam Hussein's government to do away with the weapons of mass destruction. That they didn't have.... It was a time when we boasted to the world that we were the first country willingly to do

away with such weapons. This poem is entitled *Charity begins in your own backyard* and was written at that time.

so it's off to Baghdad we go
to teach them how to do away with their
weapons of mass destruction
while nature's weapon of greater destruction
freely roams the hills of KwaZulu Natal
the townships of Johannesburg
the informal settlements of Limpopo

hollow braggarts
we strut the world stages
boasting of how we did humanity a favour
forsaking the path of inhuman weapons
voluntarily giving up our right to eliminate
hundreds of thousands

while back at home
behind the coffin curtain
courts have to threaten
people have to march
doctors have to risk their jobs
to oblige us to do something
anything
to save our own
to show our humanity
to our neighbours
friends
family

we dilly and dally
no shuttle diplomacy
no urgency
no night long discussions
teleconferences
to devise a plan
to curb a war
to save millions of lives

oh no
we wring our hands
take out newspaper ads
do cost analyses
if only we had the funds

for you see
we've spent many millions
invested billions
in weapons of lesser destruction

our hands are tied
if only we could
we'd like to but
at the end of the day
we must be responsible

and so it is that
the Trojan horse of mass destruction
grows among us
thrives among us
takes its toll among us
fostered by denial
nurtured by arrogance
let loose by vanity

of course
if our predecessors had
done what we do
we'd have accused them of racism
piled on the pressure
increased the boycotts
isolated the regime
intensified the armed struggle
for how could they
cynically
callously
coldly
leave so many to die

behind our legitimacy
and the screen of morality
less than a decade after the
miracle birth of the darling nation
lies a tale of shame
of an atrocity being wreaked
on the civilian population

it is time for regime change

Lerato: My next poem is in honour of a fellow artist, a half-Jewish, half-Afrikaans cross-dresser, from whom I draw much inspiration, Pieter Dirk Uys.

they rolled in the aisles
when he mocked their oppressors
they rocked with delight
when he sent them all up
they didn't mind when he
poked fun at their foibles

but when the fool accused the Emperor of genocide

the laughter stopped
the joking ceased
they spluttered into their cocktails
stirred by embarrassment
shaken with anger

he's over the top
he's gone too far
that's too much
the fool's gone mad
we should have known
the fool is white

but what is it then when hundreds die daily
and the emperor does nothing but pontificate
presiding over the silent slaughter
with a pipe and a mouse and a new travel date

the dogs of war
the doctors of spin
are unleashed to protect
the emperor again

what a great democracy
where the fool is free
to be foolish
though we don't agree
we defend his right
to say what he wants
though he's out of his tree

they deride

and they mock
ridicule
and poke fun
at the fool
now banished
from the emperor's court

and the foolish emperor
and the country's physician
walk freely where Idi
and Idi-ots
have gone before

Lights go down on Lerato in performance. Lights come up on Lerato and Cindy getting out of their car outside the police station. Screen goes dark. Lights come up on Cindy and Lerato looking at the audience as if they are looking from behind a one-way glass at a range of suspects from which Lerato is to make a selection.

Lerato: I'm nervous....

Cindy: *(holding her hand)* It's okay to be nervous.

Images of different men come up on screen, one by one.

Lerato: *(as each image flashes up)* No. No. No. No. No. No. *(in the last image, the man is looking slightly away from the "window")* Can you ask number six to look straight at us please? *(image of the same man looking straight ahead on the screen appears)* That's him! That's one of them!

Cindy: *(shocked, quietly)* It can't be...

Lerato: You know him?

Cindy: Leroy Ladwana....

Lerato: Don't tell me he's a friend of yours!

Cindy: They used to be our neighbours. In Zimbabwe.

Lerato: Zimbabwe?

Cindy: My dad was always on the run from the security police. His father and my mom's father were both ministers in the Congregational Church. So, his father arranged for my dad to stay with my mom's family in Athlone...a coloured area, thinking that he would be safer

there. That's where he met my mom. My mom fell pregnant with me, but by the time I was born, my dad had been arrested and jailed for "furthering the aims of a banned organization". My mom's family was harassed quite a lot after that because they'd "harboured a dangerous criminal". To avoid the constant harassment, my mom's family moved to Bulawayo. That was in '84. I was just a few months old.

Hip hop music. Lights go down on this scene and come up on Lerato in performance.

Lerato: *(addressing audience)* My next poem is called *The Zimbabwean Torturer's Menu*

freshly-squeezed genitals
on a bed of toasted
earlobes
layered with pickled tongues and
sprinkled with sautéed finger nails

generous lashings of buttocks
richly marinated in its own
blood
urine
tears
sweat
saliva
snot with a
side order of rich
gravy
to dull the taste

grilled minds
drained legs
aged hearts
spiced with
taunts
threats
mocking laughter and
garnished with
ground toes

now available in large portions

served with a hammer
a tweezer

a groan

best enjoyed with a chilled
South African wine

Lights go down on Lerato and come up on Cindy seated on a sofa at her home with a drink in her hand. Only she is lit up as she tells the story.

Cindy: My mom married a Zimbabwean and we came back here in 1991. My stepfather was a successful businessman and with things changing here, he thought it would be good for his business to establish a base in Johannesburg. I was seven years old. That's when I first met my real dad.

Lerato: *(Beat)* Are you sure you're okay about me pressing charges...

Cindy: I still can't believe it. We used to play in the street together.

Lerato: I don't know if there's any point...

Cindy: No, you must.

Lerato: His dad's the director-general of public works....

Cindy: Exactly. Put them on the front pages of the newspaper, and they'll never do this to you again.

Lerato: *(Beat, half-teasing)* And that way you'll get onto the front page of the newspaper again!

Cindy: *(teasing back)* Am I really *that* shallow...?

Screen breaks into life with MTV videos. Lerato and Cindy are at a club, dancing. The music is reasonably loud, and when they talk, it goes softer. They both have drinks in their hands.

Lerato: I've never had a full house before.

Cindy: *(celebratory scream)* Whooooaa! *(lifts her drink in the air as if to toast Lerato)* You should get beaten up more often. *(they laugh)*

They dance.

Lerato: You were right! Controversy's good for the show.

Cindy: Is that a "thank you" I hear?

Lerato: I suppose...

They dance more to the changing videos on screen.

Cindy: (*Beat*) Have you had a standing ovation before?

Lerato: Never with so many people.

They dance.

Lerato: So this is where the trendoids hang out....

Cindy: For this week. There'll be a new spot next week.

Lerato: I'm not sure you can be my friend...you'll turn me into a bourgeois!
(*they laugh*)

Screen goes dark. Lights come up on Cindy and Lerato at Cindy's place. They're a bit drunk and giggly. They're sitting next to each other on the floor, backs against the sofa.

Lerato: I hope I didn't spoil your chances...(giggles)

Cindy: (*laughs*) No, you saved me!

Lerato: You could've come home in a Volvo....

Cindy: I was scared of going to bed with a Mini...(they burst out laughing)

Lerato: He was cute.

Cindy: I don't do "cute"....(they laugh again)

Lerato: You think he took us seriously?

Cindy: We were dancing together most of the night....

Lerato: (*drunkly*) Sorry, brother, she's with me....! (*they laugh*)

Cindy: You should have seen his face! I'm sure it's like Zuma's whenever he sees the Scorpions. (*laughter*)

Lerato: And then...what about that guy with the shaven head? Hi, sies! He could have been your father...

Cindy: No-one can be my father....

Lerato: I didn't mean to bring up memories....

Cindy: When you told me about your father the other day, I was a bit envious.

Lerato: I did register that you went a bit quiet....

Cindy: Politics...stole my father.

Lerato: Do you want to talk about this...now?

Cindy: I never had my father. When I was born, he was in jail. As I grew up, he was in another country. When we could see each other, he was too involved in politics in another city. And then, just as he was coming back into my life, he died. (*Beat*) And now they think they can make it up to me by naming a street after him.

Lerato: Really? Where?

Cindy: (*sighs*) Langa.

Lerato: Why Langa?

Cindy: He was born there. And now they want to honour all those from the township who played a major role in the struggle since 1976.

Lerato: That's quite an honour.

Cindy: I'd rather have my father than a street called Moses Mashishi Avenue...Anyway, I always thought an avenue had trees on both sides. Like in Bulawayo. You should see the road they're thinking....(*looks at Lerato*) What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost....

Lerato: Moss Mashishi...was your father?

Cindy: Moses...yes.

Lerato: But you're...Cindy Petersen.

Cindy: That's my mother's name. Did you know my dad?

Lerato: I met him....

Cindy: Where?

Lerato: At our house. Uncle Moss....

Cindy: Uncle Moss?

Lerato: He was a friend of my parents'. They were activists in the UDF together....He was always very kind to me.

Cindy: (*Beat*) I'm afraid...

Lerato: Of what?

Cindy: Of what you're about to tell me....

Moment of silence. They look at each other from across the room.

Lerato: (*beat, quietly*) Your dad and my dad were in the car together when they had that accident.

Cindy: (*emotionally*) No! (*gets up and moves away from Lerato*)

Lerato: (*faraway expression*) Your dad...Uncle Moss...died on the spot.

Cindy: (*emotionally, accusingly*) And *your* dad was driving!

Lerato: No...!

Cindy: (*screaming*) He was drunk!

Lerato: Cindy...!

Cindy: Your father...he *killed* my dad!

Lerato: It was an accident....(*she tries to reach out to Thandi*)

Cindy: (*moves away from her*) Don't touch me!

Lerato: (*moving towards her*) Cindy, please....

Cindy: Don't you dare touch me!

Lerato: I know this must be...

Cindy: Get away from me!

Lerato: Cindy...

Cindy: Get away, Lerato!

Lerato: You need to know....

Cindy: *(putting her hands over her ears)* I've heard enough!

Lerato: But...

Cindy: *(almost pleadingly, breaks down)* Go away! Please! Just go...please....go....

*Lerato, hurt, looks at Cindy with her back towards her, and turns to leave.
Fade to black.*

Lights go down. Music plays throughout the next sequences. They come up on Lerato calling from a landline.

Lerato: Cindy, hi. It's me again. Please call me.

Lights go down. Writing comes up on screen as spotlight picks up Lerato sending an email to Cindy.

Lerato: Cindy, not sure where you are. Worried about you. Please mail or call me.

Lights go down. Writing comes up on screen as spotlight picks up Lerato sending an sms to Cindy.

Lerato: C, pls call. Evn 2 say u r ok.

Lights go down. Music continues to play. Lerato is sitting at her computer. She is updating her blog on a daily basis.

Lerato: We're the most unlikely friends. Yet our lives are intertwined in a most amazing way. Same country. Similar histories. Completely different outlooks. I suppose you could say we're a metaphor for where we are today.

Lights fade. They come up signalling another day.

Lerato: *(typing again)* It's three days now and I've heard nothing. She's not at work. She's not answering calls. She's not at her house. If anyone reading this blog knows where she is, please let me know she's okay.

Lights down. They come up to signal another day.

Lerato: *(typing, composing a poem about Cindy)*

Mix
Oil and water
Don't mix
Good mix
Bad mix
Cindy's in the mix
Mixed bag
Mixed blessings
Mixed feelings
Mixed doubles
Mixed up
Mixed metaphor

The front door bell rings. The door opens on screen. Cindy is standing there.

Cindy: *(they stare at each other without saying a word)* I brought some things for you.

Lerato: I was worried...

Cindy: *(gives her the envelope)* Open it.

Lerato: What is it?

Cindy: Open it.

Lerato opens the envelope. She takes out a photograph. An image comes up on the screen of Lerato's father and mother with Cindy's father in struggle T-shirts, laughing. Lerato's mother's in the middle; the men have their arms around her.

Cindy: You were right. They were close.

Lerato: Where have you been?

Cindy: I went to Joburg. To talk to my mom.

Lerato: *(taking out another photograph, image of a young girl baby comes up on screen)* Is this you?

Cindy: No. *(Beat)* It's you.

Moment of silent tension.

Lerato: I'm getting that feeling...

Cindy: Which one?

Lerato: Fear...of what you're about to tell me.

Cindy: My father and your parents were comrades. Your dad was detained for five months. *(quietly)* My dad had an affair with your mom.

Lerato: *(sensing what she's about to be told)* No!

Cindy: *(sighs deeply, then)* You were born two years before me.

Lerato: *(initially silent, then)* You mean...*(Lerato moves off, dazed)*.

Cindy: *(gently following her)* Your dad...

Lerato: ...is *not* my dad. That's what you're telling me?

Cindy: *(gets up and moves towards Lerato)* He must've been a good guy. He didn't make a fuss. He insisted that you simply be part of the family. *(Cindy goes up to Lerato and puts her arm around her. Lerato doesn't resist)*. Your real dad...Moses Mashishi...gave you your name. Your other dad gave you your surname.

Lerato: And this...is the truth?

Cindy: I know...stranger than fiction.

Lerato: *(turns towards Cindy, they look straight into each other's eyes)*
We're...sisters....

They stand and look at each other, registering the significance of this, and as Cindy makes a move towards embracing her, Lerato moves off, gently, not in an alienating way.

Lerato: I'm not...ready for this. I need to sit down. *(she sits on the sofa, leaving Cindy standing)*

Cindy: I brought the documentary I'm making....

Lerato: Of...our father?

Cindy: (*Beat*) After my mom told me everything, I really felt for you. We'd both lost our dad.

Lerato: (*Beat, looking straight ahead*) I've lost...two....

Lights fade. Screen comes to life with a final scene from the documentary. There is a panoramic shot of Robben Island to begin with.

Cindy: (*voice over*) Moses Mashishi was jailed from 1984-1987 for furthering the aims of banned organisations. When he was released, it was during the State of Emergency imposed by PW Botha. (*images of mid-eighties resistance, UDF flags and rallies*). His time in prison had not dulled his lust for politics and soon he was at the forefront of the United Democratic Front's leadership in the Western Cape.

After the unbanning of the ANC and the launch of negotiations, he was appointed to play a role in aligning the returning exiles with the grassroots political formations.

(*images of speeding cars, crosses at the side of the road*) On 10 May, 1991, he was killed in a car accident. And the country was robbed of a fine leader.

Screen fades. Interview 1 from the documentary is looped. Lights come up on Lerato and Thandi. The images of the interview continue with the sound down.

Lerato: You got an interview with the Minister?

Cindy: He was very happy to do it. I was surprised by his generosity.

Lerato: (*Beat*) It's not generosity. It's his conscience.

Cindy: Conscience?

Lerato: (*Beat*) He was in the car with them....

Cindy: What?

Lerato: *He was driving. Not my...dad.*

Cindy: (*after initial shock*) I was always told that there were only two of them in the car.

Lerato: It was a cover up.

(Cindy gets up and walks away, but Lerato follows her, and tells the story, relentlessly)

Lerato: They were coming from a function to welcome home a new batch of exiles. Ndlela was driving. He crashed into a tree. Uncle Moss wasn't wearing a seatbelt and was flung out of the car. My dad suffered spinal damage. Ndlela only had minor injuries. He was over the limit. *(Beat)* He was very involved in the negotiations.

Cindy: So it was better for him not to be seen to be involved....

Lerato: My dad agreed to take the rap. All for the bigger cause and all that. He spent the next five months in hospital. When he came out, the story had been spun that he was the driver.

Cindy: Why didn't he expose it?

Lerato: You don't know my dad. It was a very sensitive time. It would have hurt the party. He always hoped that once things settled down, it would be made right. But it never was. He became disillusioned. He watched how his former comrades became rich. Powerful. He wrote a lot of poetry. Some of it is in my show. He won't have a street named after him. My poetry is my monument to his memory.

Lerato and Cindy sit in silence, looking straight ahead. On the screen loops a quote from Ndlela.

Interview 1: I have no doubt that if he were alive today, Moses Mashishi would be making a huge contribution.

Caption appears on screen. Mr Winston Ndlela, Minister of Public Works.

After a minute or so of silence.

Cindy: Now you know why I hate politics....

Lerato: *(Beat)* Why didn't our parents tell us...?

Cindy: That's exactly what I asked my mother.

Lerato: What did she say?

Cindy: Something about allowing us to discover our history for ourselves so that we may know how to navigate our future...

Lerato: *(sighs)* What kak!

They take each other's hands and let out a little, half-hearted laugh. Then they Sit in silence again. Lights begin to fade.

Cindy: So...now that you know your past, do you know where you're going?

Lerato: No.

Cindy: *(Beat)* Me neither.

Lerato: Knowing my history...just makes me more confused.

Cindy: Me too.

Lerato: *(Beat)* Do you think...

Cindy: What?

Lerato: Do you think we have other siblings?

Cindy: Oh please! Don't go there...sister! *(they laugh)*

Fade to black. Music. The lights come up sharply on Cindy and Lerato in performance together.