

THE ARTS/BOOKS

THERE is a memorable portrait of Philip Kgosana in Joseph Lelyveld's *Move Your Shadow*. The youth in a pair of shorts who led a crowd of 30 000 in a march to Cape Town's parliament during the Sharpeville crisis, who for a brief moment appeared "to have held the fate of his country in his hand", Lelyveld finds as a Unicef administrator in Sri Lanka, a middle-aged international civil servant, disillusioned with exile politics and resigned to watching and waiting for a liberation which might not arrive in his lifetime.

It is a portrait of an attractive and talented personality, a personal testament which poignantly captures the tragedy and sadness of the broader history of South African politics.

It would have been better if Philip Kgosana had settled for Lelyveld's literary tribute. Since the publication of *Move Your Shadow*, Kgosana resumed a role in exile politics, re-joining the organisation which expelled him 26 years ago. Perhaps to mark this form of homecoming he has decided to tell his own story directly. It is a pity, for Kgosana's narrative, while often interesting, adds little to the existing accounts of the "March Days" in Cape Town, 1960 and is on several occasions demonstrably untruthful. It can do little to enhance his reputation.

Kgosana was moved to begin work on his autobiography by his children who, according to the introduction of *Lest We Forget*, began asking him questions about Robert Sobukwe after hearing about Sobukwe's death on the radio. So, says Kgosana, he began, in February 1978, "the first attempt at recording my life story".

In fact, Philip Kgosana had by then written at least two partial autobiographies, one for *Drum* in 1960 (published as "The story of my exiting life" in February and March 1961), and one in Kampala in 1974 under the title of the present volume (a copy of which was lodged in the University of London's Institute of Commonwealth Studies in 1976). The Skotaville publication appears to be an updated version of the 1974 manuscript. It differs substantially from the 1961 version.

The book contains 12 chapters. Seven of these describe his experiences as a young man, with the emphasis on his contribution to the Pan Africanist Congress' anti-pass campaign. Kgosana grew up in Makapanstad near Hammanskraal, the child of a strictly religious carpenter. Overcoming family poverty and consequent disruptions to his schooling, he managed to matriculate from Lady Selborne High School and win a South African Institute of Race Relations scholarship to the University of Cape Town. He was a bright, ambitious, and fairly rebellious young man.

His political experience on the eve of his departure to Cape Town was limited to an evening of listening to a mesmerising speech by Robert Sobukwe in an unlit township hall. In Cape Town poverty compelled him to share a room in a Langa migrant workers hostel and it was here, in April 1959; that he first encountered members of the PAC.

The section which describes his growing political involvement is richly detailed and from it can be reconstructed the development of the PAC as a political force within the migrant worker community. Kgosana was to learn Xhosa rapidly and become an effective public speaker.

The problems in his account begin with his description of the Anti-Pass campaign. The campaign began in Cape Town with Sobukwe's visit in early February. During his visit Sobukwe addressed a "mammoth rally" on "the role played by so-called good whites". Thereafter, Kgosana tells

Kgosana: A man of honour, but a poor memory

LEST WE FORGET: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
by Philip Ata Kgosana
(Skotaville, R12,95)

us, the Cape "was gripped with the fever of open rebellion against the good whites" (Liberals and members of the Congress of Democrats). Curiously, though, Kgosana did not in his *Drum* account mention this aspect of Sobukwe's speech.

But in the book he is laying the groundwork for his attack on the role of Liberal Party during the March crisis. This comes in the third chapter in which Kgosana supplies a day-by-day reconstruction of the events between March 21 and his imprisonment nine days later after leading the 30 000 marchers out of the city back to the townships.

During this period there was considerable interaction between a group of Liberal Party members centred around the radical newspaper *Contact*, and its editor, Patrick Duncan, and the local Pan Africanist leadership. The details of this relationship are available from at least two diaries kept at the time as well as the personal memories of most of the principal figures involved. Kgosana's first account of these of these events, the

Drum autobiography, also supplies useful corroboration of most of the important points.

In his book, though, Kgosana suggests that the relationship between himself and the Liberals was essentially antagonistic. In particular he states that Duncan imposed himself as a negotiator between the police and the PAC during a massive demonstration outside Caledon Square police station on March 25.

There are at least two sources which suggest that Duncan's presence on this occasion followed a phone call to him by Kgosana. This is not mentioned in the book. The book says Kgosana reprimanded Duncan for taking part in the negotiations which led to the crowd's dispersal. This does not tally with Kgosana's version of the events in *Drum* and conflicts with the versions supplied by other participants.

In a subsequent passage Kgosana suggests he himself led and commanded the great march out of Langa on the 30th. The March resulted from "a snap decision" by the leadership "to organise another massive invasion of the city". This conflicts with Kgosana's *Drum* article in which he recalls being in bed when he first heard that the men were marching and had to be given a lift to the head of the procession so that he could take control of events.

In *Lest We Forget*, Kgosana tells his followers that the march was headed for parliament and "the final showdown with the white rulers of South Africa". This contrasts rather oddly with Kgosana's subsequent actions as narrated in the book, first in offering to march into town in only a small group leaving the main body of



Kgosana 'holding the fate of the country in his hands'

marchers behind so as to avoid provoking the police into violence, and then, finally, in accepting a future ministerial interview as the price for the dispersal of his followers.

The second half of the book details

Kgosana's escape from jail, his subsequent quarrels with other PAC exiles, his entry into an Ethiopian military academy, and his ill-fated attempt to put his military expertise at the service of Holden Roberto's Na-

tional Front for the Liberation of Angola. The story concludes with his enrolment as a public administration student at Makerere University, Uganda.

In all these adventures Kgosana emerges rather creditably. In particular there is one episode in which he recrosses South Africa by car from Lesotho to Botswana after South African agents prevent him from catching a plane in Maseru.

Kgosana is clearly a man with substantial reserves of personal courage. He has also, to judge from his comments on exile PAC wranglings as well his observations on Imperial Ethiopia, Angolan exiles, and the Uganda military dictatorship, considerable political perception and moral integrity. It is all the more puzzling, then, that his recall of the events in Cape Town in 1960 should be so ungenerous and misleading.

Tom Lodge

Dr Tom Lodge is a senior lecturer in the Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand

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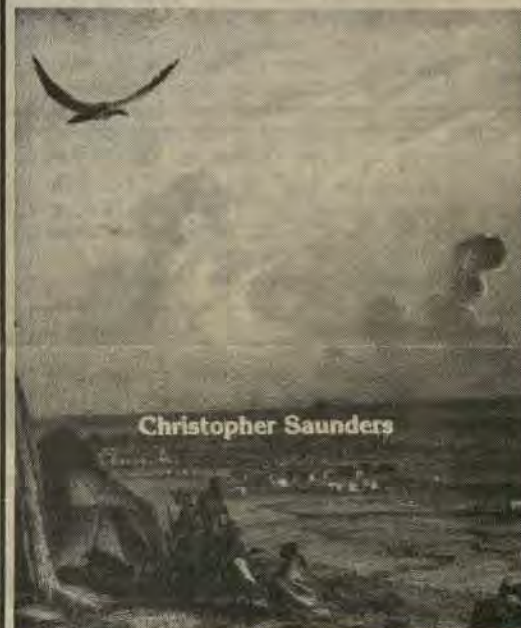
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