



Last year when the famous Kenyan writer and activist Ngugi WaThiongo visited Natal, he was amazed by the cultural activities of COSATU affiliated workers in the Tsithebe- Mandini area. Most notable was a play by them about the extraction of money, favours and services from ordinary people in KwaZulu by chiefs and headmen. The play - sometimes humorous and often harsh - was conceived and directed by Marrasta November Tshabalala, a worker from Wenred Freuheuff in Mandini.

Tshabalala acts, writes, paints, sings and also provides a backbone for NUMSA, COSATU and, increasingly, the ANC in the area.

His talents are many: his factory choir has already released a cassette of mbube songs titled, "Striking Back". His drawings have been exhibited at the African Culture Centre's "Workers and Art" focus last year. His writings have appeared in cheap editions put out by the Culture and Working Life Project. A story he co-authored with other

COSATU writer, artist and worker leader shot and injured

*Report by
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COSATU writers entitled "A man who could fly" received a commendation in the Nadine Gordimer short story competition last year.

In that story, a peculiar event is retold from many perspectives: a rural peasant,

a white madam, a lover, a vigilante and a telephone department employee tell of how one day groups of armed vigilantes are chasing a man fleeing for his life. They describe how - all of a sudden - the man lifted off and flew away from his assailants. Unfortunately his wings get caught on some telephone wires. The police arrive, to cut the poles down and, angry at the inconvenience, give the man a thrashing.

The problem in reality though is that COSATU leadership in those areas of Northern Natal cannot run away from violence. On 24 February, at around 2am the household in which Marrasta Tshabalala lives in Mandini was attacked by eight armed men who sprayed it with bullets for about an hour. Marrasta was seriously injured from a bullet that went through his head next to his ear. He was hospitalised with another four workers with lighter wounds. A dismissed KIC NUMSA worker was killed in the attack.

This was the fifth attack on the household, which has been earmarked as a COSATU/ANC stronghold. The household consists of a



Graphic by Marrasta Buthelezi

Graphic: Courtesy of Culture and Working Life Project

main four-room house with little shacks all around it, housing approximately 18 people. Most are industrial workers in the Isithebe-Mandini area.

The first attack, according to NUMSA workers from Henred and Lennings, occurred last year. Returning Inkatha supporters from a rally in Port Shepstone were led off the buses to deal with the ANC "thorn".

The second attack occurred later over the Shaka day celebrations. The local Inkatha leadership went to the house to get all people there to attend the rally. The people responded that they were not Inkatha supporters and that they should be left alone. They were attacked, and skirmishes went on the whole

day. In the evening KwaZulu police came and arrested all the people from Tshabalala's and an adjacent household. They were to be charged for public violence or for the possession of dagga. It never became clear. They were released the following week, with some of them close to losing their jobs.

The third attack happened in broad daylight when most of the men were away. The house was ransacked.

The fourth happened to Marrasta Tshabalala and another NUMSA member. They were walking towards the bus station, according to his co-workers, when KwaZulu police accosted them, shot the one dead and beat up and arrested Marrasta. He was later

released without any consequence.

Finally, the last attack has unnerved the entire area.

According to local shop steward leaders they have tried everything - from the use of traditional medicines to negotiations. Perpetrators of violence still hunt them down. If they resist they get arrested for public violence. If they take defence seriously then they are accused of declaring war.

"There is no real animosity with Inkatha members in Mandini. It is always violence brought into the area by a small group of determined COSATU-bashers and anti-ANC people. We hope that the funeral goes on without incident."

We hope it does. ☆