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**M**y name is Alfred Temba Qabula. When I started to write this book I had been working for 13 years as a forklift driver at the Dunlop factory in Durban. There, we made tyres of all kinds, of all sizes, for cars we never drive, for "kwela-kwelas" that chase us in the townships and belts for bulldozers that demolish our shacks.

I was a member of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (Mawu), now the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Before that it was an affiliate of the Federation of Trade Unions (Fosatu). When the union started in the factory I became a shop-steward, a cultural activist and an oral poet (imbongi) in the Workers' Cultural Local in Durban. I now work full-time as a cultural organiser, based in the Culture and Working Life Project at the University of Natal.

Together we are fighting, we are singing and we are uniting people to create a democratic South Africa without exploitation, oppression and fear.

My origins are simple: I was born on the 12th of December, 1942, at Flagstaff, in an area called Bhalasi in Pondoland. It is a harsh and beautiful land - a land of unending green hills and valleys but also a land of poverty, of broken homesteads, of disease and malnutrition.

My ancestors ploughed this land and trailed these hills with cowdung. They did so from way back, as far back as memory reaches in the clan of Miya; in the lines of Muja, of Sibewu, of Manqandanda, of Eluhluwini, of Sijekula, of Siyalankulandela, of Mancoba and of Henqwa. For two centuries their praise-names and their cattle echoed around these valleys.

But then came capitalists demanding labour for the mines, and tax collectors wanting cash. My father's father refused to work on the mines and became a transport rider to raise cash to pay his taxes: with his ox-wagon he footed the countryside from farm to farm, from the Transkei to Natal, from the Orange Free State and the Cape and back, carrying grain and other products. But he was destroyed by the arrival of the railways. He became a herbalist, and consistently refused to go out and work for a wage. He sent my father and his brothers out to work on the mines or in the sugarfields. From then on migrancy invaded our homes.