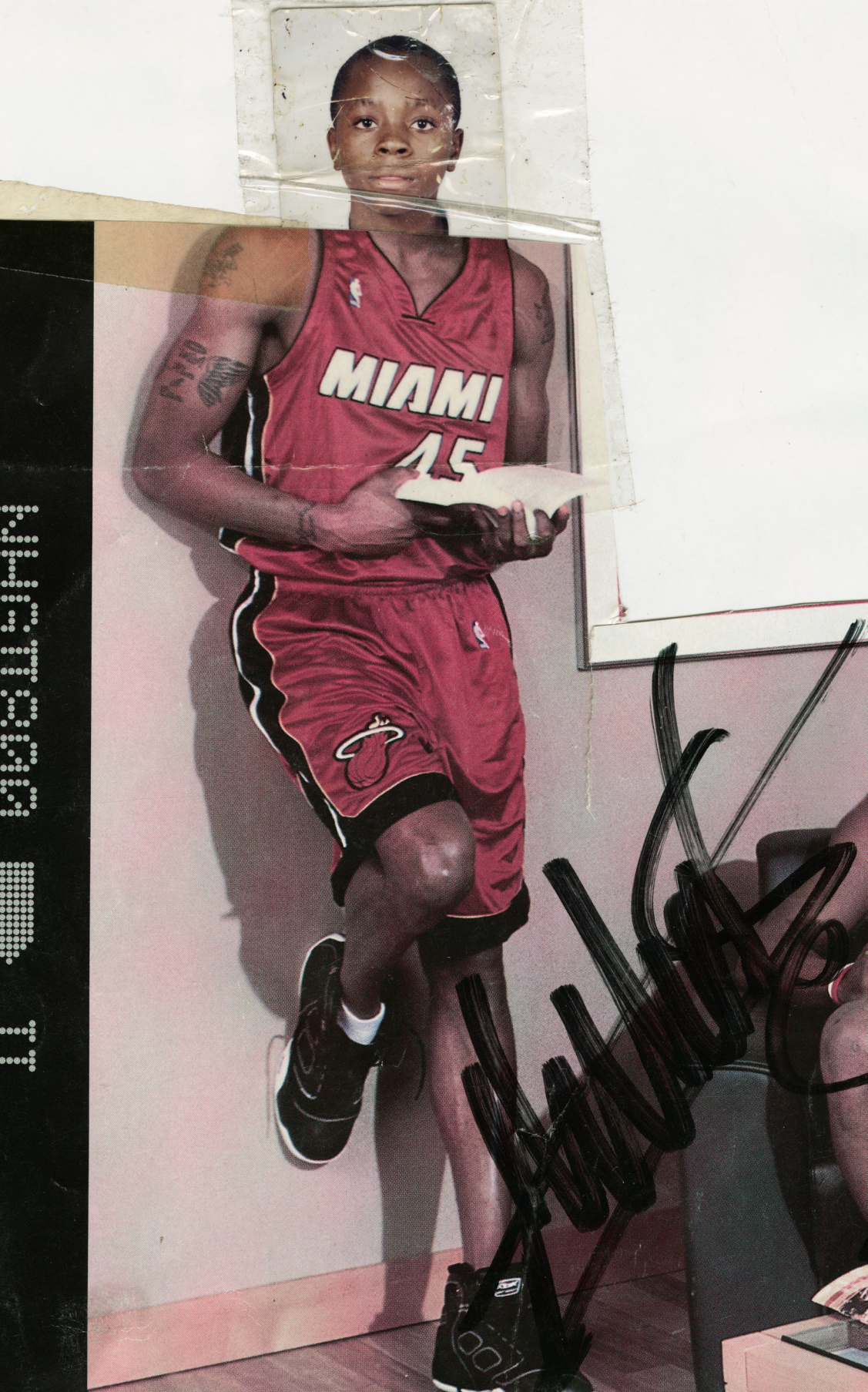


					
Pires Verde	HE Pres Ange-Félix Patassé	HE Pres Idriss Deby	HE Pres Assoumane Azali	HE Pres Denis Sassou Nguesso	HE Pres Faure Gnassingbé
Central African Republic	Central African Republic	Republic of Chad	Union of the Comoros	Republic of Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo
					
					
Jammeh	HE Pres John Kufuor	HE Pres Lansana Conté	HE Pres Kumba Yala	HE Pres Daniel arap Moi	HH King Mswati III
Republic of Ghana	Republic of Ghana	Republic of Guinea	Republic of Guinea-Bissau	Republic of Kenya	Kingdom of Eswatini
					
					
Nujoma	HE Pres Mamadou Tandja	HE Pres Olusegun Obasanjo	HE Pres Paul Kagame	HE Pres Fradique De Menezes	HE Pres Ntchombi
Niger	Niger	Republic of Nigeria	Republic of Rwanda	Democratic Republic of São Tomé & Príncipe	Republic of São Tomé & Príncipe
					
					
Essingbé	HE Pres Zine El Abidine Ben Ali	HE Pres Yoweri Museveni	HE Pres Mohammed Abdelaziz	HE Pres Levy Mwanawasa	HE Pres Robert Mugabe





XI

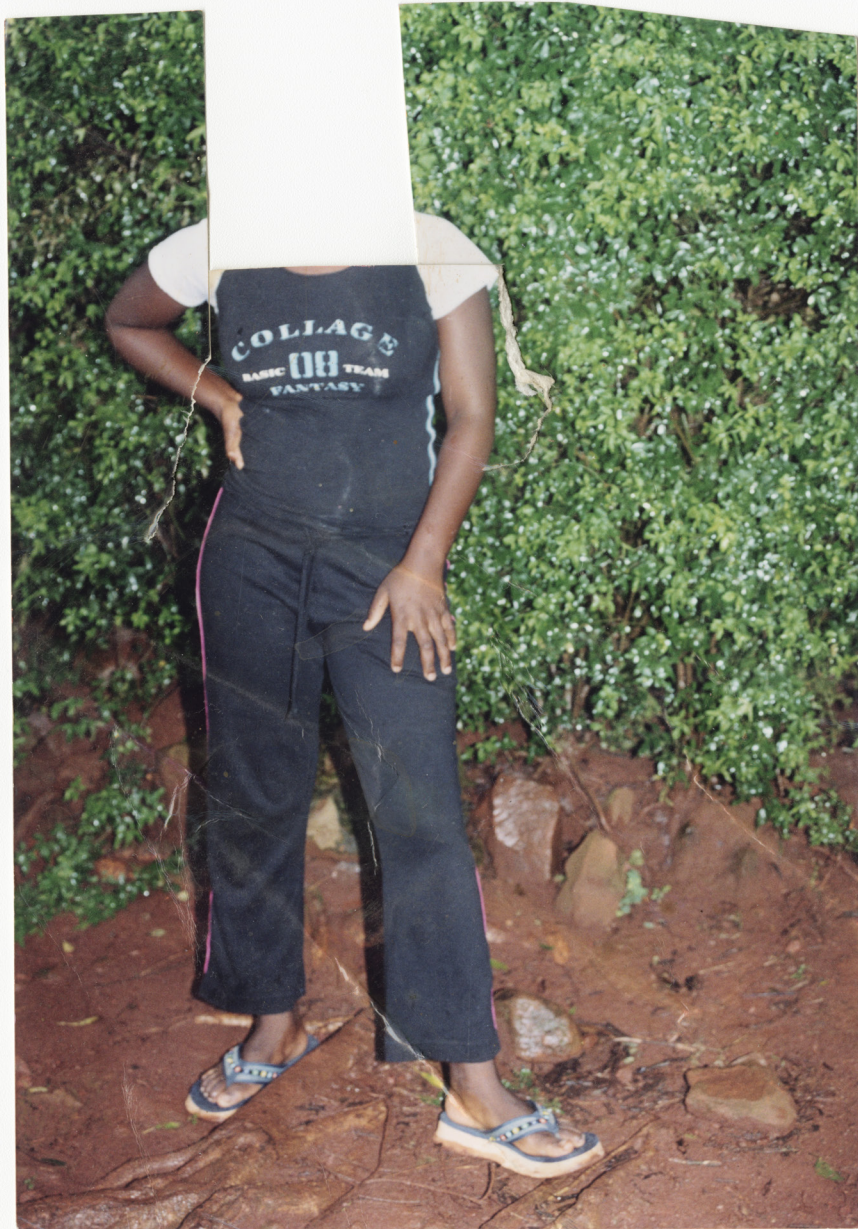
KGEBETLI MOELE

## ZULU-BOY / ROOM 207

STEIDL

THE WALTHER COLLECTION





If there is anyone you know, always telling you that they have lived the ins and outs, days and nights of Hillbrow, they are lying. Most of them don't like it there; they hate the place. Everybody is on their way out of Hillbrow.

But there was one man, a Hillbrowean in true nature, who not only lived the good life of the place but felt its very painful existence as well. He breathed it and so it breathed him, it embraced him and he embraced it, felt its pain and made it feel his pain.

Zulu is the unofficial language of the street, it rules the streets, has power and command in it. All Zulu men are like the greatest king of the Zulu nation, Nkosi Shaka, who killed his own child, tore apart his very own genes.

What is my point?

All Zulu men are violent, always talking hard and commanding. No one was ever robbed by a Venda-speaking man. Every robbery is done by the Zulu or, let me say, done in Zulu.

He had been mugged a dozen times and he had mugged others a dozen times. Not that he went out with the intention of robbing someone. No. That someone just presented himself to be robbed.

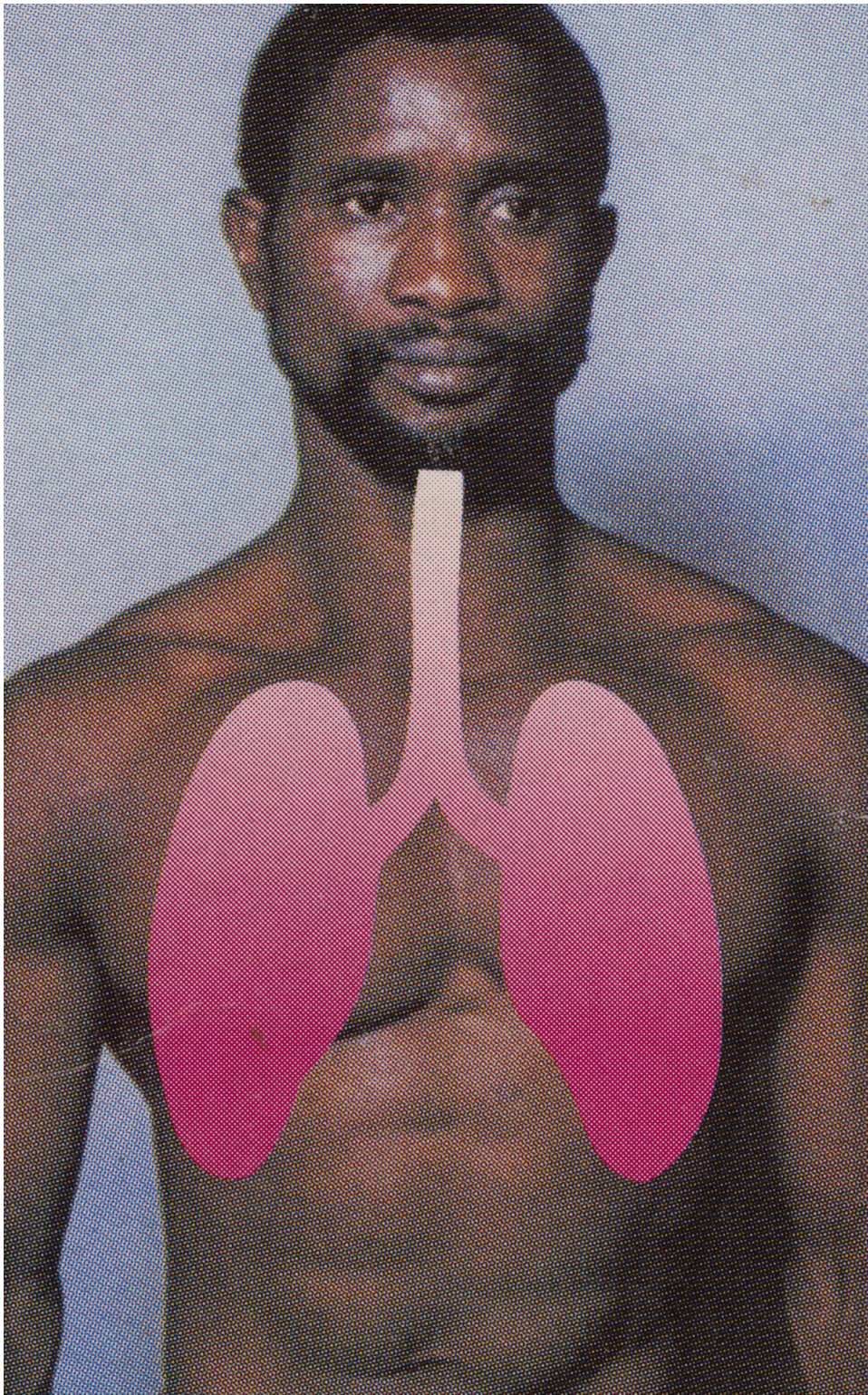
There are things that you don't do when you are in dream city. He twice took phones from men. One was being driven in an expensive German car. He was talking on the phone with the window open. The Zulu-boy greeted him, took it and continued moving like nothing had happened.

The other one was taken on a hot day from a man who was sitting in the back of a taxi with the window open.

This was the Zulu-boy. He was not exactly an average Zulu because Zulu men are well-built men and he was average height and thin, he looked more Zim than Zulu and because of that the police always stopped him (that was why he always moved around with his ID book).

He had a very small head, with a scary scar on his jaw, inches away from his right ear, that looked like a show dolphin. His right ear had three piercings, where three diamonds were hung to neutralise the scar. He had another scar just above his chin and that made him, well, not pleasant to look at. He didn't like to smile much, and if he did, it would mean that he was comfortable with all the people around him, which was unusual. He got even harder if there





was one of the female species with him that he was poking, or having the need to poke.

His voice was always strong, well projected and powerful; there was never a need for him to repeat what he had just said because you would have heard him the first time.

He was not expensive, he was a style man, and all his 'expensive' material was always bought through the back door. He would stop at a street vendor's stall and look at something with interest. He would want to pay forty per cent and there would be no negotiating. If the vendor happened to be a lekwerekwere, he would want to pay under thirty-five per cent and the poor vendor would not even get a thank you.

Then he would take his time looking in the mirror, making whatever it was sit on him like he had a PhD in fashion. You would have liked him and thought that he was very expensive, and that was what everybody thought about him until they were walking in the street and saw the exact same garment.

When he first came to the city he stayed in Ponte, the building with the biggest electric billboard on the top. It was a very clean place then, but it has turned into another sad story on its own. He was a student at the technikon, studying sound engineering, but then he became a victim of that thing we call peer pressure, which is one thing that all students have in their student life.

Sometimes I think that the Zulu-boy just liked things, liked attention and liked to show off. He was arrested a couple of times for silly crimes. Crime was his way of putting up with the Ices of the institution – he came from a celebrated family and expected himself to be a trendsetter, but he failed at that. He failed at trying to keep up with his peers and so he became another peer pressure dropout.

After he left Ponte, he lived on the outskirts of Braamfontein, on Hospital Street in Dudley Heights. He never spoke about what he was doing at this time, he was just like Matome sometimes, but the rumour was that he was living with a woman twice his age, a woman who had everything. He got her pregnant and they had a baby. You can think of the end yourself.

He stayed on Captain Street in Brenton Manor for a short time. Then he stayed in Marriston Hotel on Claim Street, pushing drugs. He got arrested and was in prison for nine months waiting for trial;



then, somehow, the case was dismissed due to a lack of evidence. On his release he vowed not to do crime any more.

It was when he was staying at the Ambassador that he met Matome. The day after they met, he came to the studio to prove to Matome that he could engineer sound. Matome rejuvenated his dream, freed it from its dream-heaven, and he made it into Cäres and that's when the real dreaming started.

He loved the city and understood every soul in it. The only thing that he would have changed about it would have been to make everybody in it Zulu. If he had had the chance, he would have made everyone in Johannesburg a Zulu.

Though he didn't like makwerekwere, he hated the Pedis even more. He associated every individual with their tribe or the land that they were from. For him, the Zulus were the supreme race and after that everybody was subhuman, 'lamaPedi.'

Don't blame him, he inherited that from somewhere in our past. No matter what you were, if you were black, he liked to know what tribe you were from. To him, every man had the mentality of his tribe.

The Zulu-boy was different, he had seen that day we were all waiting for – the day when we would have the biggest party Hillbrow had ever seen. Until that day came he was just going to enjoy Hillbrow to the full.

The first time I came here, like so many of us I had heard stories about Hillbrow being the capital of sin.

'Stay away from the ways of the city, my child; you are there to get an education and not to get the ways of the city. Don't let the ways of the city into you,' my grandmother told me when I was leaving home for the city.

But I came to understand the city ways, love them even, and Hillbrow isn't a capital of sin, it's just a residential area, where people are living and trying to make a living. After slaving, after school, after the formal part of our lives, we mingle and mend, use and abuse what we can use and abuse while hoping to never get used and abused ourselves. Those are the ways of the city.

The Zulu-boy found love somewhere in the middle of what the holy ones of this God's green earth call sin.

Courtesy of Matome and his no-strangers lifestyle, he got acquainted with the city's angels of the night. They too are people,

the same as you and me, with hopeful dreams. I once hated them more than you do, but I came to see that they are human beings too, and so did the Zulu-boy. And then he fell deeply in love with one of them.

Note: This extract is from *Room 207* (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2006), pp. 62–6. This hardbitten novel tells the story of six young men, mainly university dropouts, who share a one-room flat in Hillbrow. They spend their time drinking, chasing women, making music and hustling for next month's rent. In an early chapter, the narrator introduces the friends who share Room 207, one of whom is Zulu-boy.

lekwarekware, makwarekware – derogatory term for a foreigner or foreigners.

'the Ices of the institution' – Ice is a fellow student who squanders an inherited fortune.

Cäres – a dance band in which some of the friends perform.

'the day when we would have the biggest party Hillbrow had ever seen' – the character Matome always talks about the huge party they will have when they finally get out of Hillbrow.











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I LOVE BEING ME