

The Nineteen Eighties

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I recall that I touched in kindness
his shoulder: and he winced

. . . and then he lifted up his shirt
to show *sjambok* cuts repeated

across his back, in red-blue welts
that patterned his brown skin

—university was never like this,
but then, I was classified as white.

My student was softly telling me
why his work was late:

they all ran, he said, and security
found him in the dark, and laid in.

“It happens,” he shrugged, and flinched,
“but it’s been difficult to write.”

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Education as Change

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Volume 24 | 2020 | #8798 | 1 page

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/8798>

ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)

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