

A POEM OF
VENGEANCE

Kumalo
of the ANC

This poem and the accompanying lino-cut—a tribute by an American artist—are reprinted from *Spotlight on South Africa*, published by the ANC of S.A., in Dar Es Salaam.



Naylor 1964

*Mini,
Big strong smiling Mini
and Khayinga and Mkaba who loved life
no less, have been robbed
of their most precious possession,
life.*

*Our comrades fell
in Verwoerd's Pretoria
bitten in the neck
by the hangman's knot.*

*Have you seen life slipping away?
I once saw my mother die
on the sharp sand at Sharpeville.*

*I hear Babla my brother cry
and his body hitting the concrete
one hundred feet down
from the interrogator's window.*

*Have you seen the face
of a man being beaten up?
In prison
when you hear the noise
your heart-beats race.*

*But worst of all
is the sigh
 or shriek
 or cough or
 —or nothing*

*just escaping air
as life slips away.
How did Mini and my brothers die*

*in that secret hanging place?
You may ask—please let me tell you—
I know.*

*Singing? Yes—but how they sing!
Big firm Mini
not smiling on this day
a smile at the lips perhaps
but the eyes grim
always grim
when facing the enemy.*

*Heads high they walk
strong united together
singing Mini's own song
'Naants' indod' emnyama Verwoerd'
—Watch out Verwoerd the black man
will get you—
'Watch out Verwoerd' . . .
the people have taken up this song
'Watch out Verwoerd'
the world sings with Mini.*

*And meeting Death
in their front-line trench
the three heroes shout
into the grey teeth of the enemy
'We shall be avenged'
and the people take up the shout
'Our heroes shall be avenged.'*

*It is vengeance we want
as the last precious gasps
escape into the Pretoria air.*

SOUTH AFRICAN FREEDOM SONGS:

A Tribute to the Patriot Vuyisile Mini

AS DISTINGUISHED from staid and conservative choral compositions the term freedom song applies specially to a new phenomenon in South African life. This is the revolutionary song whose content and form not only express forcefully the mood and feelings of the South African freedom fighters but this is the song which unites black and white in the expression of their common aspiration for a free South Africa.

The freedom song is perhaps the most suitable vehicle for bridging the gap between the cultural and national characteristics of the different racial groups in South Africa. These songs are sung by the freedom fighters as they are composed without any translation into the different languages spoken. Thus in the process of struggle the fighters more often than not commune in the same language and know what it is all about.

Another feature of the freedom song is that it portrays the various stages reached by the people as they overcome obstacles on the march to freedom. The songs which were born in the 1950's when the era of

positive, militant and revolutionary action came into the forefront as the only correct method of resistance, these freedom songs expressed this fighting attitude of mind. When the Congress volunteers went to jail in 1952 in defiance against unjust laws they sang:

‘Imithetho ka Malani isiphethe nzima, Mayibuy’ i Afrika’

(Malan’s laws are a burden to us, come back Africa).

Later when Chief Lutuli became President of the A.N.C. the people sang:

‘Malan o tshohile
le ’muso oa hae
Lutuli phakisa onke’ muso’

(Malan has taken fright, make haste Lutuli and form a new government).

In 1956 the Federation of South African Women mobilized the biggest ever multi-racial protest demonstration of women in front of the Union Buildings. They were protesting against the threatened extension of pass laws to women, and they sang defiantly if not prophetically for the Premier Strydom soon died:

Hey Strydom,
Wathint’ a bafazi, way ithint’ imbokodo
uza kufa’

(Hey Strydom, now that you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, and you will be crushed).

To hear the rich baritone of the late Vuyisile Mini when he led mass Congress meetings in song was always an inspiring event in itself. He was well known for his singing in every province of South Africa. Mini himself composed numerous freedom songs. Perhaps, this is one point of criticism that could be made against the movement, that these songs were not properly written and recorded but merely spontaneously sung when the words became known. They are not long songs. On the contrary they are short and repetitive, thus making it easy for all to learn the words. The mass solidarity of any Congress gathering builds up around these songs. The South African police sensed this unity and have never dared to arrest a leader whilst the singing was going on.

As a young man Mini sang in several choral groups such as the Port Elizabeth Male Voice Choir, Ikhwezi and a choir presently led by Enoch Gwashu of Port Elizabeth. What is generally unknown is that Mini loved classical music and sang in various choirs including those of whites unconnected with the struggle for freedom. This by itself in

apartheid-minded South Africa was recognition of this great son of Africa's musical talents. Mini always joked about this afterwards saying he had carried the 'gospel of Congress' further by way of song. This allusion to the gospel refers to a song Mini composed during the Defiance Campaign:

'Mayihambe le vangeli
Mayiqib' ilizwe lonke'

(Let this gospel spread and be known throughout the world).

Mini also composed these four songs on which we will briefly comment because they deal with the present stage of struggle:

a) 'Thath' umthwalo Buti sigoduke
balindile oomama noo bab' ekhaya'

(Collect your things and let's go home, brother, our mothers and fathers are waiting for us at home). This song expressed how tired Mini and other treason trialists were of the four-year-old treason trial that failed in the end. This song now inspires South African refugees everywhere. They shall go home one day.

b) 'Izakunyathel' i Afrika
Verwoerd shoo
Uza kwenzakala'

(Africa will trample you underfoot Verwoerd. Beware you shall die).

c) 'Naants' indod' emnyama
Verwoerd Pasopa naants' indod' emnyama
Verwoerd'

(Behold the advancing Blacks Verwoerd, Beware the advancing Blacks Verwoerd). In this song Mini made use of a common Afrikaans phrase 'Pas op' meaning 'Beware' or 'Look out'.

d) 'Siza kubadubula ngembai-mbai,
Bazakubaleka,
Dubula ngembai-mbai!!'

(We shall shoot the oppressors with cannon, they are going to flee before us—shoot, shoot with cannon!) This is more than merely voicing what will be done in future, but it is a command—'shoot, shoot with cannon!'

We have only referred to Mini's freedom songs, but he has also composed choral pieces that are sung in the Eastern Cape. Mini was the leader of the Treason Trial Choir together with Oliver Tambo. As

we have pointed out, there are songs in all languages that are sung by the freedom fighters in South Africa, one being a calypso in English:

'Take the country the Castro/Zanzibar way.'

In a nutshell the freedom songs in whose development Mini played a significant role will be sung for ages. Those who throttled his baritone into silence shall be cast into the limbo of despised and forgotten things. These songs that identify our struggle with those of the people of Cuba and Zanzibar bring us into the march forward by humanity to peace, freedom and happiness for all on earth.

Freedom songs are the songs of a New Africa, they cannot be crushed.

(* 'A Poem of Vengeance', the picture above it—a tribute by an American artist—and 'South African Freedom Songs', are all reprinted from 'Spotlight on South Africa', published by the ANC of SA in Dar Es Salaam.)

FROM THE DEATH CELL

I AM PRESENTLY awaiting execution at Pretoria Central Gaol, having been sentenced to death at the beginning of the year.

On October 2nd, 1964, Captain Geldenhuys and two other policemen came to see me. They asked me if I had been informed that my appeal had been dismissed. I said, 'Yes'. They said, did I know that our advocates admitted in Court that we were guilty of all the other cases except the murder. I told them I was not interested to know from *them* what my advocates said.

They then said that there is still a chance for me to be saved as they knew I was the big boss of the movement in the Eastern Cape. I must tell them where the detonators and revolvers were, and they would help me.

I told them that if they studied the evidence against me they would understand that I was only implicated about the detonators indirectly, but I wasn't there. I told them that if they wanted to know about the revolvers, they could go to Kholisile Mdwai—he would help them best and would be happy to do so—as he had done at the trial.

They then asked me about Wilton Mkwayi—they said I saw Mkwayi in January 1963—I said, 'yes'—they asked me if I was prepared to give evidence against Mkwayi, whom they had now arrested. I said, 'No, I was not.' They said there is a good chance for them to save me from the gallows if I was prepared to assist then. I refused to assist.

They then said, would I make the 'Amandla' salute when I walked the last few paces to the gallows. I said, 'Yes'. After a few more jokes of that nature they left.

VUYISILE MINI