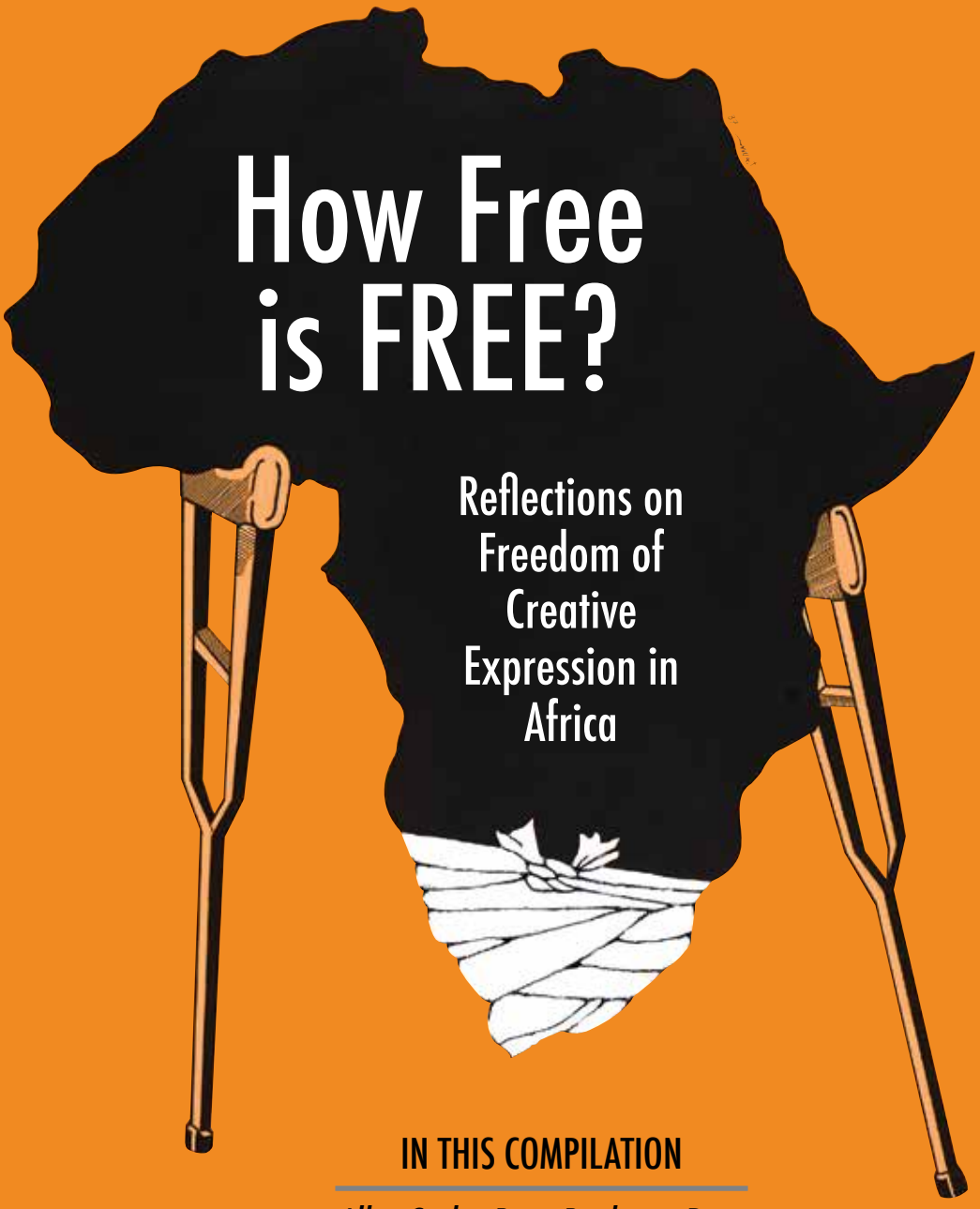
How Free is FREE?

Reflections on Freedom of Creative Expression in Africa



IN THIS COMPILATION

Albie Sachs, Boris Boubacar Diop, Chenjerai Hove, Lauren Beukes, Michelle Rakotoson, Saad Elkersh, Sami Tchak, Yewande Omotoso and more.

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How Free Is FREE?

Reflections on Freedom of Creative Expression in Africa

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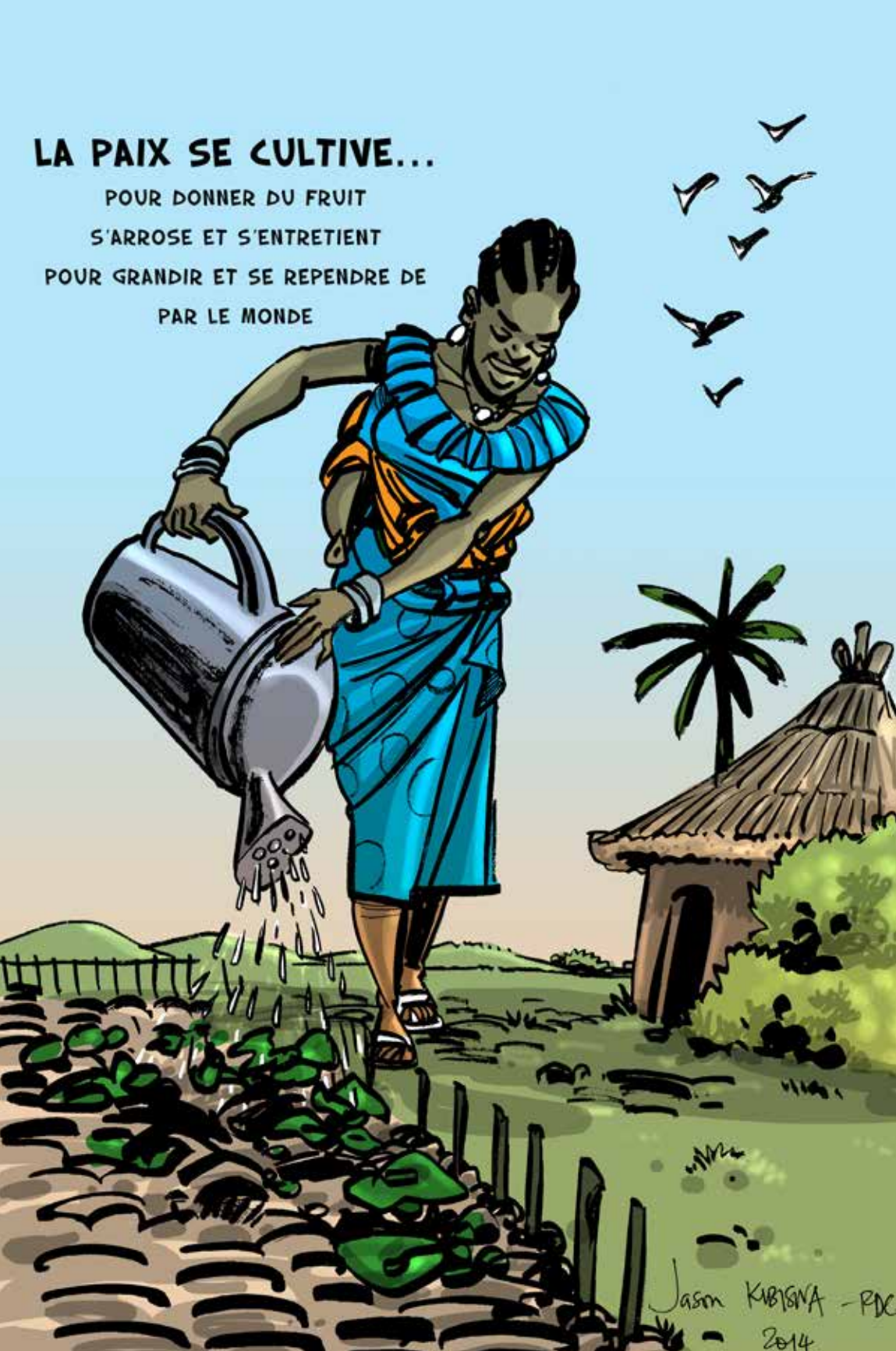
LA PAIX SE CULTIVE...
POUR DONNER DU FRUIT
S'ARROSE ET S'ENTRETIENT
POUR GRANDIR ET SE REPENDRE DE
PAR LE MONDE
Jason KABISIVA - RDC
2014

Photo Credit: Antoine Tempe

Aisha Dème (Senegal)

Freedom of Expression – How Hip Hop changed the Course of History in my Country

Aisha Dème is a Senegalese cultural activist. She has a degree in Computer Science from the Ecole Polytechnique de Dakar. Passionate about culture, in 2009, she decided to create a web platform dedicated exclusively to the promotion of art and culture in Senegal: www.agendakar.com

Today she is a consultant and is involved in several local cultural projects. Aisha is also the Vice President of Music In Africa.

Freedom of Expression – How Hip Hop changed the Course of History in my Country

Aisha Dème

IT'S GREAT WHEN artists write History. It's great when these artists are young, when they carry with them not only their dreams, but also the voice of a nation. These young people are the products of urban culture, where it teems, palpitates, vibrates, suffers, rumbles and lives – the place where you speak with your guts.

In Senegal, one can therefore confidently say that urban culture won ITS struggle for freedom of expression.

From the arrival of hip hop to political change…

I grew up with hip hop, like most of the young people of my generation. We are the children of the true hip hop that arrived in Senegal in the mid-eighties. Hip hop having swept across the United States and France, it was now our turn. I'm a child of that hip hop that found me – a young, gullible teenager comfortably ensconced in my bubble, far removed from the realities of my country. They arrived with their wide baggies and their sneakers, and possessed of that incredible verve only granted to rappers. And they plucked me from my bubble by the power of their words and the strength of their conviction. I suddenly discovered the ills afflicting my country and our youth, urban and rural alike … disillusioned. To me, and to thousands of other young people from different backgrounds, they revealed a Senegal we hardly recognised. That was 25 years ago, and our journey of discovery is not yet over. So far, the journey has been beautiful, insightful and tumultuous. But above all, it has left an indelible mark on our country's history.

Rap had arrived in Senegal, the land of "Maslaa", where most

things are better left unsaid. It was towards the end of the 80s that hip hop dance had been making waves for several years. This was the social context in which rap music became the mouthpiece of a disenchanted youth who had at last discovered in this art form a means of expression that suited them. It became a message-bearer. It observed, analysed, and commented the political and socio-cultural problems of the country. Inevitably, it became militant and accusatory, gradually influencing the growing collective awareness.

It's the year 2000. The Socialist Party has been in power since the country became independent in 1960. After 40 years of this regime, the country is running out of steam. The gulf between the people and their government keeps growing wider, and hopes of a better life for the Senegalese are gradually crumbling. We were about 20 years old then, and had never known any other president than President Abdou Diouf, who had taken over from Senghor. In fact, he also seemed to be locked up in his tower, unaware of the problems faced by the country's youth – the same youth he had referred to as "unsavoury", demonstrating a monumental lack of judgement. A lack of jobs, persistent school stay-aways, an economy kept afloat through World Bank reforms and the misappropriation of public funds had finally landed the country in a deep social crisis. The Senegalese were hungry for change. We, the youth, were angry.

The rappers, who'd been lauded and worshipped from the very beginning, became more and more virulent. The indignant cry of Xuman and the PEE FROISS, "In whose name?" ("*Luy Ndeyu Lii?*") still resounds in our ears, like that of their predecessors, the Positive Black Soul, precursors of Senegalese rap: "This is not right!" ("*Du Deug Du Yoon*"). Yatfu warned: "The country is burning!" ("*Deuk bi tak na!*"). The FROISS confirmed:" There will be hell to pay!" ("*Ca va péter!*").

As to the compilation Dkill Rap, it exploded like a bomb over the heads of the politicians in 1999, crystallising all the disillusions and resentment of the Senegalese youth. BMG 44, Rapadio, Sen Kumpe were not to be outdone. We were passionate and more committed than ever to the cause of the rappers. Concerts proliferated. Even basketball tournaments had turned into not-to-be-missed hip hop gatherings, with "Rapattak" concerts being organised after the matches. Rap was associated with everything that had to do with the youth. The rappers had realised how powerful they were and continued raising awareness

through militant lyrics that became hugely popular among Senegal's youth.

They vehemently denounced the abuses and failings of the State and exhorted the youth to register *en masse* and to vote. The press entered the fray and increased the pressure. The media became a channel for the messages of these youngsters representing the mindset of the people. And so we joined forces, relaying the message of our young idols. It had come full circle. The majority of Senegal's youth, influenced by these leaders of the streets, voted massively and felt that they had taken their destiny into their own hands, at this historical moment which led to the first political changeover in the young history of the country.

It was a first great victory for the hip hop movement, in spite of all the obstacles, all the dangers and all the risks that had been placed along its way, as some of them can testify.

Didier Awadi, founding member of the Positive Black Soul, forerunner of Senegalese rap:

"We encountered problems of tax adjustment, threats, intimidation. They sometimes descended on our homes to carry out searches, alleging that we hadn't paid taxes for years. Sometimes they sent people to make trouble at the PBS concerts.

The RTS (editor's note: national Senegalese television, the only existing television channel at the time) demonstrated its zeal by refusing to broadcast some of our songs. But President Diouf himself, I have to admit, allowed us to express ourselves. He wasn't into censorship. He even asked to meet Positive Black Soul in 1997 and told us, "You have things to say, speak your mind. **(Didier Awadi, October 2014)**

Xuman (the Gunman), one of the big names in Senegalese rap, and founding member of the band, Froiss:

"*I didn't realise how dangerous it was. I received a few threatening phone calls that I didn't take seriously. Then one day, somebody phoned me and said, 'Be careful, you're very outspoken, tread carefully'. That really scared me. I hadn't realised that when you become committed, you don't commit only yourself, but also your family. It didn't keep me from carrying on, but from then on I was aware of the fact that I might be in danger and that I*

was not being careful enough." **(Gunman Xuman, October 2014)**

Thiat, member of the band Keur-Gui de Kaolack, one of the initiators of the Y'en a marre movement:

"Our group was formed in 1994. We were arrested for the first time in 1997. We were 17 years old and were still minors. We were arrested for denouncing corruption, the lack of infrastructure and other problems in the town of Kaolack. We were charged with libel by Ablaye Diack, then mayor of Kaolack. That's why we like to say our first rapper salary was jail time. In 1998 we were severely beaten up. It cost us a month in hospital. In 1999 we wanted to bring out an album with six tracks. Four of the songs on that album were censored." **(Thiat, October 2014)**

Y' en a marre, or The beginning of the Wade nightmare…

On 19 March 2000, His Excellency Mr Abdoulaye Wade, after 26 years in the opposition, won the presidential elections together with his allies of the Front pour l'Alternance (Movement for a new dispensation), the FAL. A new page full of hope was being written in the history of Senegal. We were euphoric and wild with excitement. This was "our victory". We had elected him! However, for us, a well-used proverb about being optimistic was going to be turned inside out: it would seem that every silver lining has a cloud.

The euphoria was very quickly replaced by disillusionment. Yes, after the great joy of the new dispensation, came the time of disenchantment. Broken promises, rising unemployment, corruption, untimely water and power cuts, etc. The ills eating away at the country piled up, interminable and painful, all the while President Wade and his entourage seemed to be enjoying a lifestyle of breathtaking opulence. Tension in our country had built up again. So our young modern troubadours had taken up their crusade again, 11 years later, against a system that has failed them and against the arrogance of a regime that indulged in excesses to the point of being accused of monarchistic tendencies.

"Stop them!!! They are stealing the Republic!" raged the revolutionary, Awadi. Gunman Xuman, known for his legendary outspokenness, sent a message to President Wade in *Yaa Tey* ("You make and break as you wish"). Metador emerged from his forgotten suburbs to jolt the youth

into action: "Wake up! You're asleep!" (*"Xippil Xool / Yaagui nelaw!"*), while the band Keur-Gui de Kaolack, from the centre of Senegal, spouted their bitterness in *Coup de gueule*. (A piece of my mind).

In January 2011, with the social crisis at its peak, the now famous movement, Y' en a marre, initiated by the journalists Cheikh Fadel Barro and Aliou Sané and, aptly, the anti-establishment band Keur-Gui de Kaolack, consisting of Thiat and Kilifeu, made its appearance. The young artists and their friends, having tea together one evening, were once more lamenting all the problems facing ordinary Senegalese. Thiat recalls the moment, passionately:

"Fadel, who, at the time, was a journalist with the Gazette and wrote scathing articles against the Wade regime, made fun of us, saying we criticised a lot, but it was time to get organised and do something. We agreed. We had an all-night brainstorming session. We couldn't do anything political, nor start a rapper or journalist movement. We wanted to act as citizens and incite the Senegalese to become involved with us in a peaceful movement." – (Thiat of the band Keur-Gui, October 2014)

Thiat and Kilifeu were joined by their fellow hip-hoppers Simon, Fou Malade, Djily Baghdad and others, and received the support of first-generation rappers like Keyti, Xuman, Matador, Awadi, etc. Within a few months of its appearance, the movement counted among its allies almost all the idols of Senegalese youth. Once again, they enjoyed the youth's massive support. There we were, together again, for a new chapter in History. The Y' en a marre collective, propelled by the artists, had succeeded in convincing, uniting, mobilising the youth into supporting different campaigns that contributed to changing the destiny of the country.

Xuman:

"The decision to join Y' en a marre was an ideological one. We had to be there! We couldn't miss it! Moreover, our presence could give credibility to the movement and mobilise more people, especially those that had been following us from the start. Actually, Thiat told me one day, 'We are doing this thanks to you, who started it … '

"There is a difference between militancy and activism. Militancy doesn't go beyond words. Activism puts words into deeds. We, the rappers, have been militant for years. At some stage one has to take the risk of going to prison, of getting beaten up. With the events of 2011

and Y' en a marre, it became inevitable. 'Courage is contagious', as the American journalist Glenn Greenwald said." – (Xuman, October 2014)

Yes, courage is contagious, and in this context, it spread, grew and gained ground. Our combatants were ready for anything. In 2011, they launched a huge campaign to incite young people to register to vote in order to participate in the Senegalese presidential election 2012. The slogan "*Ma carte, mon arme*" (My card, my weapon) became a general leitmotiv. Once again the mobilisation was impressive. It was the kind that only artists are capable of. The movement was increasingly popular.

It was at the centre of that historical day of 23 June 2011, when it protested violently with thousands of people against a revision of the Constitution aimed at introducing a presidential ticket initiated by Wade. It would have allowed the President of the Republic and his Vice-President to be elected with only 25% of the votes. What a moving memory it is, that image of Thiat of Y' en a marre interrupting the tedious speeches of the politicians with a courageous and galvanising: "Enough spoken! Let's go fight!". Just as moving was the instantaneous response of all those young people who followed him into the streets to "go fight", some of them paying with their lives. Men, women, young and old stood up as one at that moment. Our Constitution was not modified. We had won. Another important page in the history of Senegal …

Thiat, a member of the band Keur-Gui de Kaolack and one of the instigators of the movement Y' en a marre:

"The band Keur-Gui had a concert in Mauritania on 16 June 2011. They suggested that we stay longer to play at the Fête de la Musique, with a nice fee to boot. During the night of 18 June, Fadel phones and informs us that Wade wants to introduce his law on 23 June. We immediately returned to Senegal. It was a choice between the money and the struggle for our country. On 22 June, civil society came together to find a solution to prevent the revision of the Constitution. There were a lot of speeches, but we knew that talking wouldn't resolve the problem. We had to invade the streets. The politicians stayed inside; the youth left. The police were waiting for us outside. They attacked us with teargas.

"We couldn't get to the Palace, but we had to do something symbolic and powerful. We staged a sit-in on the Place de l'Indépendance (Independence Square). They asked us to leave, but we refused. They arrested us. They gave me electric shocks to get hold of me. Fou Malade,

Crazy Cool, as well as many other young people and myself, spent the night at the police station.

On 23 June, they tricked Simon (another popular Senegalese rapper) into coming to visit us. They beat him up and then let him go. Kilifeu was also beaten up. But outside, the struggle continued, and we won.

When the law was withdrawn, the people wanted to descend on the Palace. Y' en a marre refused. We had been fighting against the law. Wade had been elected by the vote; he had to be removed by the vote. On the same day, we had fought against him and we had defended him, in defence of republican principles. That was what we fought for." – (Thiat, October 2014)

The hip hop miracle…

In March 2012, President Abdoulaye Wade was ousted after 12 years in power and turbulent presidential elections. The Y' en a marre movement would probably not have been as popular – no use denying it – if it had not been instigated by the rappers. Rap, more than anything else, had in fact held the movement aloft.

In Senegal, rap has always been very popular among young people. This art form which listens to their heart and echoes its beat. This art form that recognises their troubles, their hardships, their suffering, and that knows how to shout it from the rooftops. This art form that puts its finger where it hurts. Young people identify with it and associate with it. In this instance the rappers were a driving force of a movement which in the end is an extension of what they have always professed to stand for. It's not surprising to see them, after having denounced the abuses for years, taking real action, with their thousands of fans following them, when the last straw breaks the camel's back. This phenomenon, whatever its scale, is not surprising, coming from the Senegalese rap artists.

Thiat, passionate as always, confides:

"Y' en a marre was a good mixture, it was a great combination. It's true that hip hop made the difference. Next to the intellectuals in their suits, with their speeches way over the heads of the people, from our side we succeeded in uniting the youth. We got 520 000 young people onto the voter's lists (official statistics) and we won our struggle.

"A rapper is a mirror of society, the echo of the population. Rap is

intelligence in action, it's permanent journalism (…). Senegalese hip hop is the only hip hop in the world to have toppled two regimes.

"Today, Y' en a marre inspires many other young people in Africa, notably in Burkina-Faso, where we established the collective , Le Balai Citoyen (The Citizen Broom)." – (Thiat, October 2014)

When Thiat told us this, little did he know that the collective Le Balai Citoyen would, a few days later, contribute to toppling from power President Compaoré. This collective had been initiated by the rapper Smokey and the singer Sam'sK LeJah.

In Senegal, hip hop succeeded, in spite of all the obstacles, in creating this miracle, in this Africa of wavering democracies, where art and culture are so often muzzled. And today we can say hip hop is still keeping watch.

Yes, hip hop is still keeping watch, and doing it well. After Y' en a marre, it once more surprises us by its creativity and confirms its consistency by its discourse. We can repeat it: it keeps watch not only through its militant activities and its actions on the ground, but also through what it does best: its music. For instance, since April 2013, Xuman and Keyti, two big names in Senegalese rap, present a rapped news bulletin on television every Friday: a summary of the week's news … in rap, as its name suggests. A phenomenon never seen before, which has assumed unexpected proportions. They inform, but – as always – view things with a critical eye and denounce abuses. The two artists interpret the news in their own way, making use of subtlety and humour. It is even more positive when one takes into account that the Journal Rappé (Rapped News) first appeared on Youtube, far from the editorial constraints of traditional media and with an original approach much more likely to engage with the youth rapidly and on a broader scale. The bet paid off! The number of views has increased exponentially and they are so popular that the Journal Rappé is now also broadcast on one of Senegal's most popular television channels.

According to Xuman, creator of this successful project, it is a new way of continuing the struggle "in order not to remain trapped in silence».

However …

Although the struggle for freedom of expression has been won among our rappers, Senegal as a whole remains a country full of paradoxes,

where culture and traditions can weigh heavily on this so-called freedom. A beautiful exhibition named *Chronique d'une révolte* (*The chronicle of an uprising*), showing images of the post-election protests, was organised, and the Raw Material Company, a major cultural centre in Dakar, published a book on the subject. The exhibition showed poignant photographs bearing witness to a period of protestation, in the midst of which we find our young artists who fought, as citizens, for the future of their country. The exhibition was a resounding success.

But the Raw Material Company, where the exhibition had taken place, was ransacked during the Biennale de Dakar in May 2014 for hosting an exhibition on homosexuality. Koyo Kouoho, the person in charge, had no choice but to withdraw the exhibition.

In spite of everything, Raw Material Company has maintained its programme on the rights of individuals, notably on freedom of expression, sexuality and homophobia in Africa. A residency was organised there in October 2014. The cycle consists of a number of different events including exhibitions, seminars, film projections, residencies, and will conclude with the publication of a book planned for the end of 2015.

Do you consider that the struggle for freedom of expression has been won?

Thiat:

"Yes!!! Press freedom arrived in 1992, but it was hip hop that really liberated the Senegalese nation. It cut the umbilical cord that was gagging them. It started in the rich neighbourhoods, but quickly spread everywhere and everybody adopted it as their own. Hip hop is the only weapon capable of changing the whole world.

"(But) socio-cultural reality in Senegal also means that we don't acknowledge homosexuality in the way the West sees it. We cannot be forced to see things from the point of view of the West. We have refused to accept their laws on the subject. We abolished the death sentence here long ago. in the United States people are still being executed, and no one is forcing them to change that." **(Thiat, October 2014)**

Xuman:

"I don't know if we have won the fight for freedom of expression, but I think there are achievements that cost years of struggle. We didn't want

to lose them. We always fought for that. We didn't want Wade to mess up everything. That's why we mobilised like we did on the 23rd of June.

"Today, no one can prevent a Senegalese saying what he thinks, and that is thanks to the maturity of the people.

"Freedom of expression is also a weapon that can hold dangers for us. One cannot say everything, everywhere, anywhere and anytime. Culturally it won't do. There are subjects that have to be approached carefully. Homosexuality, for example. In Europe, they fought for centuries and only now have they obtained same-sex marriages. If we want to cut corners here, it will be complicated … change cannot follow at the same pace." **(Xuman October 2014)**

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Senegal – October 2014
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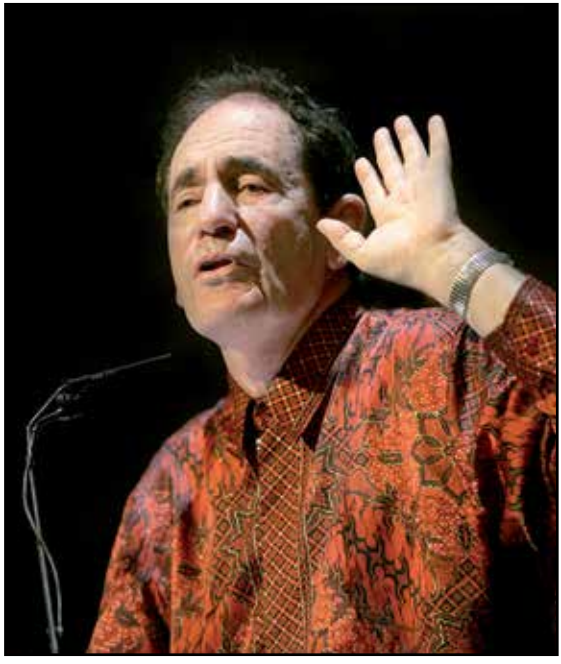


Albie Sachs (South Africa)

Free spirits and Ravage Souls

Albie Sachs' career in human rights activism started at age seventeen, when as a second year law student, he took part in the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign. He started practicing as an advocate at age 21, was subjected to banning orders and placed in solitary confinement without trial for two prolonged spells of detention. In 1966 he went into exile. In 1988 he lost an arm and sight in one eye when a bomb placed in his car in Maputo by South African security agents, exploded. In 1990 he returned home and as a member of the Constitutional Committee and the National Executive of the ANC took an active part in the negotiations which led to South Africa becoming a constitutional democracy. After the first democratic election in 1994 he was appointed by President Nelson Mandela to serve on the newly established Constitutional Court.

Free Spirits and Ravaged Souls

Albie Sachs

EVERYTHING IS SUDDENLY dark, totally dark. I know something terrible is happening to me, I don't know what. And in that total obscurity, I hear a voice speaking in Portuguese, saying: "Albie, this is Ivo Garrido speaking to you. You are in the Maputo Central Hospital. Your arm is in a lamentable condition. You must face the future with courage."

And, in the darkness, I say: "But what happened?"

And I hear another voice, a woman's voice, saying: "It was a car bomb."

I faint into euphoria.

The moment has arrived that every freedom fighter is waiting for – "Will they come for me today? Will it be tonight? Will it be tomorrow? Will I get through the day? Will I get through the night? Will I be brave?"

They have come for me, and I have survived!

Time passes, I'm suddenly conscious and I'm feeling very light. Joyous, happy. My eyes are covered, I can't see anything and I tell myself a joke. It's an old joke about Himie Cohen who, like me, is a Jew. He falls off a bus, he gets up and moves his hands over his body as if to make the sign of the Cross. And someone says: "Himie, I didn't know you were Catholic."

"What do you mean Catholic? Spectacles … testicles … wallet … and watch."

I'm lying on the hospital bed (I was to learn later after a seven-hour operation), and I start with testicles.

When the word went round the ANC camps, I who've tried without success all my life to be macho suddenly became a huge macho hero… "And the first thing comrade Albie did was reach for his balls." All in order? In order …

Wallet? If my heart is damaged, big trouble. Wallet seems to be okay. Spectacles? The bandages are there, but there is no big crater. If my brain is damaged it can be very serious. Then my arm slides down and

there's a gap. I say to myself: "It's only an arm, it is only an arm, I only lost an arm." And I sink back into euphoria knowing that I've survived. And with a total, utter conviction that, as I get better, my country, South Africa, will get better.

This was in April 1988. And when I later came to tell the story of what it is like to wake up without an arm, to go through this experience, I ended the description with the words: "I joke, therefore I am."

Some months later, I'm out of hospital, in London and very weak. There's a ring at the door of the house where I'm staying. I open the door with some excitement. Two people sent by Oliver Tambo, leader of the ANC, are there to greet me on his behalf, the organisation's behalf and to find out how I'm getting on. One is trade union leader John Nkadimeng, who had known my dad, seen me grow up. The other is Jacob Zuma. We walk inside. Zuma has that big "Zuma smile". Nkadimeng has a long face, and I'm determined to make Nkadimeng smile. He has lost a son to a bomb blast, but I feel so joyous and euphoric that I'm sure I can get him to smile.

We sit down and I tell the story, not in a hurry, African style … enjoying all the nuances, the little flavours, the quirks of human nature along the way, not rushing to get to the climax. Nkadimeng with the long face, Zuma chuckling. A chuckle becomes a gurgle, a gurgle becomes vigorous laughter and when I tell him about "spectacles, testicles" he almost falls off the chair.

I say to myself – this is how we are going to get a new South Africa, my Jewish joke meeting up with humorous storytelling in the African way. We don't flatten our world to create a bland non-racial society. We bring in what we've got; we share what we've got and enjoy being members of a single, unified, but diverse nation.

Years later, Albie is now sitting in green robes as a Constitutional Court judge, during the Laugh It Off case. Laugh It Off was a small firm. A graduate of journalism decided to challenge the dominion, and power of branding and logos by large commercial enterprises. He took several logos from big firms and he parodied them on colourful T-shirts. Most of the targets laughed and some actually bought the T-shirts and gave them to their employees to show that they can take a joke. But not Carling Black Label. Their logo was accompanied by the words, 'Carling Black Labour, White Guilt'. They went to court; they got an order restraining distribution. The case went to the Supreme Court of Appeal, which didn't

think it was funny. You can criticise their policies as much as you like, but can't use the property, their logo, in order to do so, the judges felt. The cost of the litigation was no joke.

The matter comes to the Constitutional Court and we unanimously decide that the free-speech values, which are clearly strong here, completely outweigh any possible commercial detriment. It's about the role of humour in democracy. Without humour, without the capacity to laugh at ourselves, to convert what are often very stressful and serious issues into the form of a joke, we bottle up our tensions, and democracy gets frustrated. So I wrote a concurring judgement which the magazine *Noseweek* absolutely loved and printed almost in full. The story went around the world and the property lawyers got into a state of extreme tension. Obviously they were quite right – the whole recession that followed afterwards could be blamed on my judgement!

The free-speech community think this is terrific and I'm basking in their good feeling – I sense that I'm "Mister Nice Guy", and intellectuals like you think it is wonderful to have a judge like that; until, that is, I come across some words in a poem by Mongane Wally Serote.

It's a long poem, really a novel in the form of a poem. The words that strike me are as follows: "The dogs bark and bite, even in cartoons. They inflict wounds in the silent soul. They bark as they tear the soul apart."

What's Wally getting at? What is the source of that extreme disquiet and hurt that he is displaying?

Somebody asked me once at a book-signing event about the *Laugh It Off* case and how I came to write it and the background of humour and so on. "Justice Sachs, what do you think about the cartoon by Zapiro depicting President Zuma about to rape the female form of justice?"

I said, "I'm sorry, but I'm a judge and President Zuma is suing Zapiro, and I can't respond to that, the matter could come before the Court."

To me it's the dilemma created by the poem of Wally Serote. How do you reconcile expression of a free spirit, on the one hand, with sensitivity to the ravaged soul of people subjected to historical hurt, on the other? It reminded me of the distress felt on the occasion when the then Speaker of the National Assembly, Baleka Mbete, went to an exhibition at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, and she saw pictures by a feminist artist which showed the vaginas of black women being used

as ashtrays, and stormed out. She was indignant, and the artist couldn't quite understand why. The artist said, "My whole point was to show how the bodies of black women are disrespected, how their sexuality is disregarded." Yet Baleka, who is a noted African feminist and a very cultivated person, couldn't bear it. She was shocked and felt violated in a visceral way.

I see certain parallels between what Wally Serote was saying and what Baleka felt. Something is going on here, something we need to be aware of. Not to ban speech, not to send people to jail, not to prohibit the production of challenging artwork, but to engage in meaningful dialogue with a view to achieving mutual understanding. I'm not dealing with the legal questions at all; it would be quite inappropriate for me to do so. I'm dealing with what seems to be a witty, sharp political observation by a satirist of great calibre and great personal courage. Can we laugh at or bring a smile or a sense of satisfaction to people looking at a cartoon that might be deeply wounding to millions and millions of other people out there, decent ordinary people who feel we might criticise president Zuma, poke fun at lots of things that he does, but still recognise that he is our president? In their view, you don't depict the president of the country about to open his fly, with ministers at his side urging him on, with a woman lying prone and helpless in front of him. For millions of people not familiar with metaphorical art that kind of scene is reminiscent of the stereotype of the black male rapist. It ravages the soul, the issue is deep, and it is hard and sharp.

Possibly something could emerge from that. It's painful for me personally. I mentioned Jacob Zuma coming to see me after I came out of hospital. I remember him on another occasion telling me how poignant it was when he came out of prison on Robben Island and went to see his mother, a working-class woman, in a township in Durban. She had a tiny house and she got it tidy and neat for him. She was proud of it and so proud to receive him. He had to lie down there and he couldn't say: "Mommy … Mama, conditions on Robben Island were better than your house that you want me to stay in." She wanted him to promise that he would not get involved in the Struggle anymore; because it would be too painful for her if he went to jail again. He had been torn between placating his mother and following the conscience that had brought him into jail in the first place.

I also remember scenes in London, at the time when he was married

to Nkosazana [Dlamini] Zuma and I went to the apartment where he was living. He was very apologetic for taking the family laundry to the launderette when we had a meeting to discuss something; but I suspect he was also apologetic in the way that men are when they are seen to be doing what some might consider an unmanly thing.

I know Zapiro well, and hold him as a friend. His mother was a Holocaust survivor. When I came back from exile, at every ANC meeting Gaby Shapiro was there with little flags. There's always somebody with the buttons, the flags, the booklets, and she was there, as loyal committed and anti-racist as you can get. Zapiro is a warm and brave person who was detained by the security police in the Struggle. He has taken positions of principle in relation to the rights of Palestinians that have made him unpopular among many members of the Jewish community. He is a good, decent person, with a brilliant pen and a sharp mind. Yet the imaginations, the feelings, the sensibilities of these two people whom I respect in different ways, came into a kind of collision. What's the place of the artist in a situation like that?

On the fence?

It's a funny thing, but in the English language to be "sitting on the fence" is always said as something negative, as though you're comfortable sitting on the fence, not taking sides. Sitting on the fence, if taken literally, is actually a very uncomfortable posture. And I think an uncomfortable posture is good for writers. It's also precarious – and isn't writing about trying to get a balance where things are swaying, to find a centre, to find a connection? So while sitting on the fence is meant to be cowardly and negative, in fact to do so successfully requires positivity and courage. The main reason for urging writers to sit on the fence is to encourage them to be aware of both dimensions: the free spirit on the one hand, the right to be able to say everything, not to be afraid; on the other, the need to plumb the deep emotions, the sense of history, the personality, the being and significance of people. Not just of other writers and critics, but of people.

I'm dealing here with the conscience of the writer, not the duty of the judge. In some respects, the conscience of the writer might be more expansive than the limits of the law and even defy the law. In other respects, it's narrower than the law. In a democratic society that protects free speech and freedom of artistic creativity, you have a general responsibility to stay within the limits of the law. If your writer's conscience compels you

to break the law, you will bear the consequences. But your responsibility does not begin and end with what is constitutionally permissible. In a society based on the principles of human dignity, equality and freedom, writers are called upon to honour their fellow human beings and show respect for their craft, for humanity, for *ubuntu*; it should animate much of what you're doing. Hopefully, it should come out instinctively, intuitively, not because of a feeling of being bound by the strictures of staying politically correct, but because it's right, because that's the kind of person, and artist, that one is.

Author's note: Some time after this speech was given, President Jacob Zuma withdrew his defamation proceedings against the cartoonist, Zapiro.

'Free Spirits and Ravaged Souls'
Keynote address at the Time of the Writer Festival, Durban, South Africa, 4 May 2011.
Published in *Africa Inside Out – Stories, Tales and Testimonies: A Time of the Writer anthology,* **edited by Michael Chapman, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012.**
Republished in Sachs, Albie. *We, the People: Insights of an Activist Judge***, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016.**


Jason KIBISWA - RDC 2014

Ayoko Mensah (Togo/France)

Is Art a Weapon of War?

Ayoko Mensah is a French-Togolese author and journalist. Passionately interested in culture, she is particularly keen on dance and has published two books about African contemporary dance. She is well known as an expert in the field of the flow of artists and art works within the countries of the 'South'. She is also a trainer in cultural journalism. She was the editor in chief of the magazine 'Africultures' before becoming responsible of the editorial staff of 'Afriscope', a magazine launched in 2007 that aims to make heard the African diaspora issues and to take part of the intercultural dialogue.

Is Art a Weapon of War?

Ayoko Mensah

MIDNIGHT. A MAQUIS in a busy precinct of an African capital. Old neighbourhoods and small streets display the typical hustle and bustle – a proper ndombolo. A few figures around some tables blend into the darkness. In the distance someone is waiting under a neon sign. Dreadlocks, hat, cigarette in hand, texting on his mobile..

A few minutes later a younger man joins him. Same stature and attitude: locks, jeans, t-shirt and impeccable takkies. He is wearing sunglasses and approaches slowly. "Salaam old man (Viépère)". He grabs a chair and sits down.

"Now, don't start with me. Please, not now... Do not get at me with your why ? why ? why? I couldn't care a damn about your why's? I know you know. But I am here to tell you once again.. Art is not a weapon of war. Art can achieve nothing in this shitty world. Art is there to give us illusions, to swallow us whole, until our souls are totally sucked out and empty. Just look around. Look carefully, old man. What do you see ? Nothing but the power of each one over the other and too bad for your face… everywhere. Everywhere… Everywhere. But you, the only thing that interests you is playing your music, giving your concerts, selling your discs, be seen on TV.

Don't start with me.. You know I have as much talent as you. Maybe even more. Me too, I've wanted to leave for Mikili, shine in the spotlights and laugh all the way to the bank. Me too.. But never had a chance to come across the right white girl. The ones that come here for the full package: sun, music, husband and baby all in one, at a price that beats all the competition !

Never had that much luck, old man. And then, no visa for Mikili. No way. You try, try and try again. And then try once more. Bring along all their bloody papers… smile when you want to shoot them to pieces. No way. You there.. don't move. To do what instead ? Play you nigger music here. If you croak of hunger, it's because you were too stupid. Just

sing and sing at the top of your voice baffle them with your music and the banknotes will shower down on you. And if you give them too much of yourself, then you're stupid too. Here, freedom of expression, democracy, human rights and all that stupid stuff, is like heaven must be… if you even get there… it's feet first ! Anyway.. no more risks, not anymore, I have new dreams now and all the time in the world before me."

The old man gets up. Without saying a word he slides towards the counter, a few meters away and looks deeply into the eyes of a young woman. Toxically stunning. One of those beauties you sometimes accidentally spot on the corner of the street and who totally bedazzle you.

"2 Despès."

The young woman slowly turns around, digs into the fridge and takes out two ice-cold bottles which she puts on the counter. She wipes off the drops pearling down the cold glass. Then she wipes her skin. Her skin. Her skin. When she pulls off the caps, the white foam bubbles up and fizzes. The old man shakes for a moment while he grabs the bottles. He lowers his gaze. He would have rather kept them focused on their target though.

He crosses back the way he came and places the twin shapes on the table. Icecold mouthfulls.

"You listen to me now. It is easy to discard everything, throw it all away… That is the easy way out. It all rots away. I know the tune. It's what's doing the rounds here nowadays and everyone has their own version of it. But let me tell you this. Sonny (fiston). The world will not stop turning after the bomb has exploded. You will catch on with one or two people… you will melt their hearts… touch their souls and then.. what ? Do you really hope to change anything at all ? It is not a bomb, or a hundred, or a thousand of them you need, but a million… but for the time being you do not have those million. All you will achieve is add a balls-up on top of another balls-up. As if we haven't got enough of those already. What do you thins ? That I am naïve or have become senile ? That I cannot see the enormity of the catastrophy. Are you joking or what…"

Throats icy cold. Behind his sunglasses the son stares at the neon sign, which starts to flash. Almost with the rhythm of the ndombolo. One, two, three, one, two, three, one, two, three. It makes him smile. The old man cannot see it. He clears his throat and selects his last arrows.

"It is the old story of the half empty or half full glass" he says waving

his bottle around. “But, you see, sonny, these two points of view no longer play a role. The glass exists. One point. One line. And not so long ago, in this filthy glass, there was slavery and colonization. Who told you that art is not a weapon of war ? It is in fact our only weapon to continue our quest for freedom.”

Sonny burst out laughing… a forced, almost fake laughter.

“Frankly, I cannot see what you are talking about. 90% of artists on this f..g continent are still dying of hunger. Often, in fact far too often, their only hope to get out of their misery is to please the Whites. Too bad if they have to sell their soul, their dreams and mostly their arses. No choice. Anyway, here there are only super charged churches left and remote mosques. Mark my words, soon enough the artists will end up muzzled and gagged. And you talk to me about freedom ?”

Sonny tries to laugh again but it sounds all wrong.. Like an engine that splutters dies. Like a sudden breakdown. He stands up and gulps down the rest of his bottle. His tank is full again.

“Old man, I don’t care a hoot about your blessing. I’ve come to say goodbye, that is all.”

Sonny makes as if he is leaving. Then stops, a prisoner of invisible strings. The old man does not even look up. He knows he is still there.

“My boy, think carefully. Tonight still you must think hard. I promise you. The fight is only starting. For how long now have we, the beaten, the colonized, the indigenous ones been calling the Whites “you” ? Barely 50 years now. And still, the curtains have hardly started to lift. And already, look. We are standing upright and proud. The youth makes the powerful ones shake in their boots. The ”Y’en A Marre” in Senegal, the “Balai Citoyen” in Faso, the “Filimbi” in the DRC, and today “Lyina” in Ndjamena, everywhere sentinels are being invented… Open your eyes. Your generation takes its destiny in its own hands. And what courage and determination ! I understand your rage and I share your dream. But nothing good can come of your failed bomb. Believe me, in this war of humanity against itself, the only thing that can save us now is art. Because it is a weapon of mass construction>”

Without turning around, sonny takes a ballpoint pen out of the back pocket of his jeans. He opens his hand and scribbles in his palm “No victory without Artmy” and disappears in the dark of night.

Azad Essa (South Africa)

Art, Freedom of Expression and then the Power Goes Off

Azad Essa is a South African journalist working at the Al Jazeera Network, covering Sub-Saharan Africa. He came to prominence writing the Accidental Academic, a provocative and award winning Thought Leader blog that challenged the established assumptions of contemporary South African culture, politics and common sense. His first book 'Zuma's bastard: Encounters with a desktop terrorist' (Two Dogs Books) was published in late 2010. An adaption, 'The Moslems are coming' (Harper Collins, India) was published in April 2012. Essa calls Durban home but is currently based in Doha.

Art, freedom of expression and then the power goes off

Azad Essa

"Art is one of the greatest catalysts for debate, and debate is the greatest catalyst of change."

Kwame Kwai-Armah, actor & playwright

WHEN THE COLONIES disbanded, art became an irritable pursuit.

At the time, leaders of the vast cauldron of African states tasting the chalice of «freedom» felt compelled to take control. Freedom fighters turned into insecure dictators, dissenters were asked to collaborate or face censorship; freedom of expression became a foe. But it wasn't all the same. Multiple narratives emerged. Consider the relative openness of Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal and the initial visionary ensemble of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania to the propagandist antics of Sekou Toure of Guinea, or firm control over narrative in Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe once land invasions began.

Then consider the banned voices of freedom that fought apartheid South Africa at a time when political opposition and trade unions were outlawed. Mama Afrika, aka Miriam Makeba, was cast away from home for the freedoms espoused by her voice. South Africa may now be free, but the times, they are a changin'.

Here in Africa, freedom has a proprietor. Little wonder then, that art, freedom of expression in Africa, in all its diversity, reflects the vast web of complex anxieties experienced and the weird freedoms enjoyed on the continent.

This is a continent bursting at the seams at every juncture. Multiple narratives thrive, weave, and suffocate. Tribal anxieties must navigate rigid, sometimes imposed democratic systems. Religious sentiment, persuasion must stand its ground against foreign persuasions in societies without strict demarcations between State, sentiment and historical

precedent. Whereas the State or the Church is purportedly no longer the arbitrator of artistic design in Europe, on the African continent, art is both the abused, and the abuser. Freedom of expression represents freedom from the past and yet is but one more method of control. That art is by design, an act of love, it must be said that revolution or consumerism, pits artistic freedom into a false universe. There is nothing categorical about art, or freedom of expression on this continent of plenty (or be it anywhere else).

Case Study I: Senegal

On 3 April 2010, Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade unveiled a statue on Mamelles Hill in the capital, Dakar. The bronze statue, at 160 feet high – almost double that of the Statue of Liberty – is of a muscular, ribbed Herculean of man vested on a hilltop, bidding his wife and nestling his child, purportedly staring into Africa's future. It represented the studded glory of the then president's prestige projects for Senegal. This was meant to be his masterpiece … a statue of renaissance. Nineteen African heads of state, North Korean government officials and around 100 African-Americans attended the event.

At the time, Wade said the statue brought to life Africa's common destiny. «Africa has arrived in the 21st century standing tall and more ready than ever to take its destiny into its own hands». But in the months leading to the unveiling of the statue, thousands protested against the momentous costs, said to be nearly $27 million.

With Senegal falling headfirst into a recession, with almost 30% of the youth unemployed, the statue seemed length and breath out of sync with the material and spiritual aspiration of the people.

In 2008, there were food riots in the country, although this Muslim president had envisioned a future where «man shall not live on bread alone». In 2009, he had to apologise to the small Christian community for referring to the statue as Jesus. But as per freedom of expression goes, the local imams of this majority Muslim country, criticised the statue as against the teaching of the faith. Islam is fervently opposed to symbols of idolatry. Then there were the comparisons with the Soviet-influenced realism, and «Stalinist» art, in both design and execution. This naturally begged questions: what was African about the statue? Who did it talk to or for? And what did it represent? Can a renaissance – as imagined by former South African President Thabo Mbeki and Wade, among other

modern-day African visionaries – be imposed upon the people? For the naysayers it wasn't difficult to dismiss the structure. Magnificent, spellbinding and ridiculous to the naked eye … it came across as the president's exercise in megalomania.

Unable to pay for the statue, outsourced to a North Korean company based in Pyongyang, Wade gave up $27million worth of State property to North Korea. The statue itself overlooks Ouakam, a poor neighborhood where thousands still live in squalor.

And if that is not enough – there is a fragrant disconnect between the city and the countryside. From the fragrant old quarters of Medina where Senegal's most famous citizen, Youssou N'dour was born, to the Colobane market, where open gutters liberally spill the city's muck on to the narrow, winding streets.

There is no Renaissance.

Here, in a democratic Senegal – far beyond the monarchies of old – Wade abandoned his peoples' needs and decided what would be best for them.

Here, an art piece came to represent a bid to paste a lasting legacy on his country, culminating in an attempt to push his son Karim as the next president.

Here, it was only the strong tradition of democratic practice in Senegal, ironically inherited from its colonial period that kept this country from capitulating. Still, before elections in 2012, the people spoke, took the streets and rose up, in what some were speculating to be the «African Spring».

It didn't go that far. Wade realised he wanted history to judge him with grace. In the end, his vanity won over ego and he stepped down after losing elections that went to a second round. His artwork will be remembered. But few can dispute that an artwork meant to denote a legacy, had become a rallying point against him.

"The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well,
you do not stand in one place."

Chinua Achebe.

There is no agreed upon universal standard for freedom of expression.

Books on Hinduism or Islam that might fan communal flames are banned in India. Spoken words that test the Holocaust narrative are punishable by law in Western Europe. In the United States, radical

ideas and activism can be easily shafted into the dollops of national security euphemisms. Take the Danish cartoons on Islam's Prophet Mohamed that sparked protests across the globe. On their own: they were innocuous, unimportant, even poorly drawn art. In context, the freedoms purportedly espoused by the cartoons only became a window into larger European prejudice towards Muslims. With religion and State clearly demarcated, enlightenment becomes a euphemism for European entitlement to decide what is important for others, what may be adaptable to modern democratic values.

For all of Africa's collective failures, poor ranking in human development indices, endless cross-continent conflicts and penchant for authoritarianism in parts, Europe, or the United States are no worse, no better in their mostly hypocritical, realist stance on political, economic and social freedoms.

Consider pink washing in Israel, whereby this nation presents itself as «superior, civilized» because of its progressive laws on homosexuals in comparison to its markedly regressive Arab neighbours. Israel sells this as a marker of democracy while it nonchalantly expands illegal settlements or continues with its apartheid-like dehumanisation of Palestinians. Gays and lesbians are used here, as they are in the United States as a means to an end – equality is not the ambition.

Where freedoms constitute a threat to the status quo, there are means to undermine those threats. The same values are hidden under new masks, resting on new triggers.

We pretend art is not racist – it often is. We pretend art is not myopic or parochial, that it almost certainly holds up a mirror to society, to the powerful, the elite. But art is only as creative and as provocative its creator. Some art is locked in itself prejudicial, propagandistic by design.

Satire is often used to decode and to understand a nation's health. The tragic events at satirical magazine 'Charlie Hebdo' in Paris in December 2014 and how it was sold as purely a matter of freedom of expression, certainly told us a little about France. The sacred is no longer God, law, race or religion. The sacred is now firmly the status quo.

Case Study 2: South Africa

In the second half of May 2012, South Africa erupted with split indignation. An artwork, 'The Spear' – created and painted by a South African male Brett Murray – depicted President Jacob Zuma as a Leninist

acrylic on canvas – with a generously sized penis hanging out his pants. Though the artwork had been on display for days at the Goodman Gallery, the story only reached the national consciousness once the 'City Press' newspaper published a review along with a photograph of the painting on May 13, 2012. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) condemned the artwork and a flurry of outrage followed with religious leaders also joining the fray in calling for the artist to be punished, the artwork disassembled, and 'City Press' boycotted.

For reasons related to security, 'City Press' pulled the image down from their website, and onMay 22, two men entered the Gallery and defaced the painting.

What followed was a lengthy process in which South Africa's Film and Publication Board classified the painting as unsuitable for children under 16. The Board then withdrew this decision and also ruled that the painting did not undermine African culture.

The Goodman Gallery took the opportunity to tout the victory as a triumph against attempted censorship of the arts, which, under the ANC-led government seems to be turning into a serious concern.

Those against the painting described it as «insulting to the president». Most telling was Minister for Higher Education, Blade Nzimande's comment: «We take this very seriously. We feel it is an insult to the black majority in this country. We feel our act of reconciliation is being taken for granted by the white population."

Another reality sat between the claims of attempted censorship and offence.

Was there a long history of the appropriation and abuse of the black body in South Africa? Was it reasonable for Africans, specifically black South Africans to be offended by a caricature of a black president using some of those very symbols that were used to justify colonial control of 'the savage'? Democratic values are meant to usher in a diversity of opinion, expression and thought. When they are suppressed, it stands to reason that democracy is undermined.

President Zuma, as charming as he may be for the electorate – for whom the ANC still represents their best chance at complete liberation – is certainly not respected for a string of corruption, infidelity and misgovernance allegations pitted against him.

Zuma is seen as an adulterous, power-hungry populist. He is no champion of democracy.

But then, within the context of art and freedom of expression under a democratic environment, did Murray's artwork help provide the electorate with an accurate portrayal of Zuma? Or did it, as claimed, merely speak down to a black majority who read it in ways that reminded them of those jaundiced medieval and colonial artworks of the past?

Power is also decentralised, diffused, and Murry's work was laced in discourse.

But here lies a third conundrum and probably the most important: private vesus the public; law versus the truth.

Zuma appropriated public sentiment, manipulated historical sentiment to distract from the scrutiny leveled against him. He allowed the outrage to brew. Here the fourth best-paid president on the planet played victim.

Which then begs the question: who was artwork speaking to and for? Whose freedoms did it represent? Did the artist choose a set of codes and conventions that suited his own sensibility alone? Surely his sentiment is shared?

Even if the gallery's legal application to exhibit the painting was upheld, were the charges held against the painting «incorrect» or «false»?

The law has certainly protected the status quo before.

III

"If I have a message, then I will sing"

Youssou N'Dour.

Freedom is a commodity under democracy. Democracy also presents a freedom to commoditise.

Art in the free world is enjoined to the illusion of choice, and the freedom to express dissent is meant to be a timely boon. And then there are platforms like those traps on social media have facilitated the production and exchange of information more than ever before. This over the past two years than all of human history. This is freedom's best chance at raising its voice. The African continent is part and parcel of this growth, with smartphones grabbing a younger generation by the tusks; bidding us to be part of a global community that sees, buys, lives and procreates online.

We increasingly look the same. Our ideas may indeed by funneling through the same platforms, but our worlds are more apart than it may have ever been. Criticise the Swazi monarchy on Facebook and you may

be arrested. Mock Robert Mugabe on Twitter and you can be bludgeoned by bullies. Take a swipe at Ethiopia's wrestling of the eastern Ogaden region and you can be imprisoned.

Likewise, there is little freedom of speech in Somalia, where journalists are clobbered like clay pigeons at a shooting range.

As it stands, freedoms are shrinking in South Africa, Zambia and Kenya. The former two nations as democratic ownership slips slowly out of reach of the ruling party. The latter, under the aegis of "national security".

The costs of data may be reducing, but with information on the open market, surveillance is on the rise. As it turns out, the cost of data is inversely proportional to surveillance.

And yet, we are also still in the age of single-party democracies on the continent. Freedoms have barely consolidated, expanded since the independence movements of the 1960s and '70s.

Opposition parties – be it in the DR Congo, Zimbabwe or Uganda – battle to hold public meetings and rallies, without bullying by the current leadership.

The First World complains of surveillance on social media networks, but the rule of law is so inaccessible on some parts of the continent, elections are so flawed that freedoms are as flighty as the average First World Facebook status update.

All across the continent, youth climb onto social media through their awkward devices, discuss religion, debate politics, argue about rights for 'gays', 'minorities', 'foreigners', and about crime and corruption.

They connect in ways landlines never did. They are able to see like their parents never imagined. How do we recreate, re-imagine our societies? How can we leapfrog this underdeveloped state and become 'like them'? How can we get out of 'this place'? How can we 'fix this'?

And then the power drops, and the lights go off.

Case Study 3: Central African Republic

Alongside the banks of the Congo River, the DRC government, together with the UNHCR government, had set up a trail of transit centres for refugees from neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR). Once they had had been documented, they were able to move into the community, or into one of the designated refugee camps. There are two camps, one outside the town Libenge and the other on the outskirts of Zongo, directly

opposite the CAR's capital of Bangui.

These refugees have fled machete-wielding madmen, cannibalism, indiscriminate raping and pillaging, in a war dripping with religious undertones.

Here in the Zongo camp, young children roam the makeshift schools, teenage boys and girls amble around aimlessly, while parents and older folk dig the earth and plant gardens for extra food or earnings. It's been three years since the latest round of trouble started in CAR and most of the refugees here, find it hard to go back home. Back in March 2013, a Muslim-led group of rebels from northern half of the country, marched into the capital Bangui and disposed of the ruling president, François Bozizé. The president, himself a benefactor of a coup in CAR in 2002, was shafted by Seleka rebels and he was forced to flee. As was clear at the time, French troops allowed Seleka rebels to take the city, with only South African troops putting up a fight for the incumbent, losing 13 soldiers in the process.

South Africans are still waiting for answers mind you, for the reason their soldiers were asked to put up a fight for Bozizé and why their pleas for help from the French went unanswered. No amount of tweeting, facebooking has cast any light on this incident.

Seleka rebels, drunk on their conquest, looted the city, razed villages and abused the Christian population. When the French clasp over the new leader seemed unsustainable, the French started withdrawing their tacit support for the new leadership and watched as another group, made up of Christian farmers, known as anti-Balaka, emerged to defend themselves against the Muslim rebels. Then the carnage stepped up a notch.

Killings became indiscriminate from October 2013, peaking in December, and into the new year.

A year after the coup, hundreds were still leaving Bangui, towns and villages. If they were Muslim, they tried to flee on busses to seemingly Muslim-friendly Chad and Cameroon. Others closer to Bangui, especially Christians, jumped on pirogues and made the perilous journey across into Libenge or Zongo. Here in Zongo, the refugees had very specific problems.

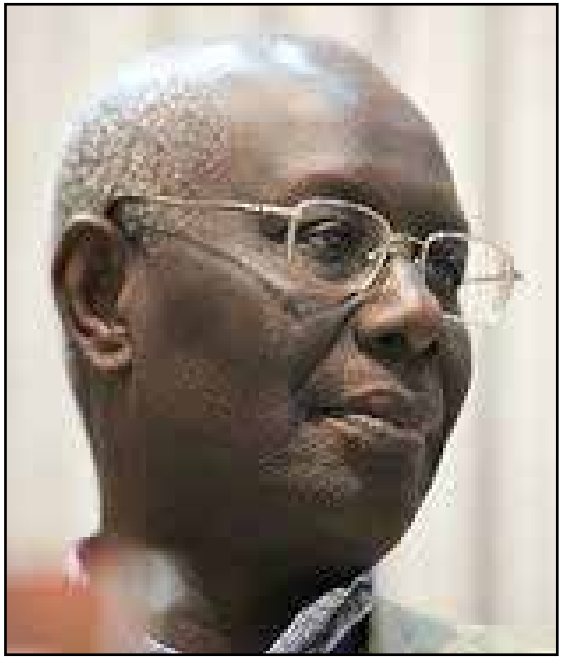
Many of the refugees here were students, scholars who were used Bangui's city life, and here there were, forced into a refugee camp without the amenities of water, electricity, or mobile phones and internet. This was generation X, Y, Z, in a desolate camp without signal, forced to

cohabit with farmers in the middle of nowhere. Their primary concern: how can we be connected? How can we rekindle our connection with the outside world? How can we check email? Others said their university certificates were the only property they owned when houses were set alight and the carnage began.

In the transit centre, on the river banks close to the town of Libenge, a dance troupe congregates with their hi-fi and dance shoes. Their 25-member team have dispersed. Some had fled to Chad, Cameroon. Others had come across to the DR Congo. They were force to flee because of the most mundane of symbols: their hairstyles. The Seleka rebels were known for elaborate, spiked hairstyles, and so the musicians mohawks made them a target for the self-defense Christian militias who considered the youth aligned to the Seleka. The musicians had fled to the DRC when one of the team's relatives was killed for his rebellious haircut.

IV

Art has always been "seen" differently on the continent. Today, those artworks without a story is best suited to "meaning". Even then, those meanings are disparate, contested. The continent will shape its own interpretation of "freedom" when it manages to break free from the shackles of a present that isn't hell-bent on learning from what's passed.



Boubacar Boris Diop (Senegal)

A Day in Paris

Boubacar Boris Diop is a Senegalese novelist, journalist and screenwriter. His best known work, Murambi, le livre des ossements (Murambi: The Book of Bones), is the fictional account of a notorious massacre during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. He is also the founder of Sol an independent newspaper in Senegal, and the author of many books, political works, plays and screenplays. Doomi Golo (2006) is one of the only novels ever written in Wolof, it deals with the life of a Senegalese Wolof family.

A Day in Paris

Boubacar Boris Diop

IT WAS AROUND two in the afternoon. Dembo Diatta had planned to use part of the morning to take over a hundred books to the bookshop he visited regularly on his short but frequent visits to Paris. He ought now to go back to his little hotel on rue Mélusine, in the eleventh district, but he hesitated between taking the 84 bus or getting a cab? He still had a bit of money but having arranged to meet up in the early evening with a couple of friends, Chris and Muriel Castelnaud, and now he was starting to feel a bit tired. Truth was that he'd bumped into a college friend in a local café, who he'd not seen for ten years. At a very young age, Mambaye Cissé had gained the reputation of being a maths genius and been in line for an extraordinary scientific career, and may be a theorem in his name or something along those lines. But depression must have slowly got to him, bit by bit, since he was clearly no longer in a good mental state. Badly shaven, with scars on his face and neck, he had one remaining tooth, his hands shook incessantly and his breath reeked of booze.

He'd started showing Dembo shoals of fish on his ipad, explaining with enthusiasm:

"Look, what you've got here is the famous love dance of the marbled grouper fish"… Dembo raised his eyebrows and Mambaye began to explain the images, one by one, to him: "See, Dembo, this is one of the great biological mysteries of all time. Each year, on exactly the same date, hundreds of thousands of these groupers gather round the Tuamotu islands on Fakarava atoll, wait for night and the full moon to arrive and then all mate together. And they only mate on that one night of the year!" Mambaye ended his explanation with a triumphant tone: "Instinct! How strong is that?"

Now, after a further two hours of hard drinking to the tune of Mambaye's rambling tales, Dembo Diatta just wanted to get his head clear. No way, he would not go to drag his boxes of books round on

public transport – bus and tube – and deal with a load of snide looks from pissed off Parisians.

Out in the street he called a cab firm. With a bit of luck he'd get a 'good' cab driver. In Dembo's head that meant one of those witty, smart drivers, quick to have each passenger believe that they are old mates with no secrets between them. Oh yes, he relished this kind of on the spot repartee, something between a pop-up companion and himself. He remembered one occasion when he'd forcibly extracted himself from his seat reluctant to be parted from a cab driver who had literally turned his skull inside out. Gripping the wheel, the young driver had spat his philosophical venom at anything and everything but in such a raw and passionate way that Dembo Diatta, well known playwright – though not terribly talented (and that's saying it himself) – nursed the idea of a comedy sketch with the title 'You're right there, Cabbie'. Its small scale theatrical genius would consist of an epic crossing of the city, with a crazy mix of upbeat and desperate banter, punctuated with lethal verbal attacks on the political mob, player Ten of the national football team (expert at missing penalties in the final seconds) and of course the totally crazed judges of the International criminal court.

Dembo had often mused on the fact that you couldn't stop a cabdriver who had decided to strike up a conversation. These guys were such forcible characters, there was no chance of stopping them. He knew a bit about this having tried , unsuccessfully, to ignore them. Following a routine scenario he would start by making vague, sparse replies to all the driver's questions but soon give in and then end up sometimes far more wound up than calm and reasonable.

A great traveller in the face of God and keen observer of the contradictions of the modern metropolitan world, Dembo Diatta had also realised that it's also not possible to do anything when a cabbie, plagued by some deep internal rage, chooses to ignore you, expressing through his silence that, installed in his taxi, you are merely a package, to be got from A to B to pay the bills.

Dembo Diatta had tried to break the ice on several occasions, less out of interest, in fact, and more to prove his own theory about the behavior of cab drivers in overcrowded cities. It never worked. The guy remained immutable, seeming to grumble into his beard : 'You reckon that with the fucking life I've got, I'm going to start putting on a show for any tossers who get in my cab?'

But today, January 7th, 2015, Dembo Diatta had even less luck.

Two or three hours earlier, two young men, the brothers Cherif and Saïd Kouachi had stormed into the offices of Charlie Hebdo with their Kalashnikovs and killed a dozen journalists, one after the other. Dembo Diatta was probably one of the few people in Paris – maybe even in the world – who had not yet heard the news.

A day like no other. A truly weird day.

He remembered each tiny detail.

He'd only just got into the cab – a curvy, grey Volvo, when he heard the voices on the radio talking, probably for the umpteenth time, about the attack at 10, rue Nicolas-Appert. With a crack in their voices, the journalists piled on the questions thick and fast: who could be behind this attack? Al-Quaida? ISIS? Was it true that Wolinski and Cabu were among the victims? Despite his stupefaction, Dembo realised that the slaughter of two celebrity satirists would be a monstrous trauma for everyone in the country. The journalist kept on asking if the cartoonists were in fact dead. A sort of grief breaking in to the incredulity.

Deep down, Dembo Diatta both understands and shares the shock. Actually, having never lived in France, he'd not held a copy of Charlie Hebdo in his hands. But he'd come across Cabu and Wolinski's cartoons in other publications and he'd found them vicious but not without affection for the subjects they decimated. Dembo Diatta did not want to know they had been coldly killed. It would be as though each rueful grin they'd extracted from him over the years had been matched with a bullet.

These were his thoughts when a reporter came on air to give an update. Everything seemed to be speeding up; Dembo Diatta felt there was an indefinable buzz, a heightened sense of excitement as each journalist came on air. Even thinking this made him feel a bit ashamed. Who was he to sit in judgement on anyone? "Even so," he said to himself: ' At times like these, the people lucky enough to survive exaggerate how bad they feel."

For him too, today was not an ordinary day. So though he rarely started chatting with someone he didn't know, he felt an uncontrollable need to say something to the cab driver. Ignoring his grouchy air, he rocked forward on his seat and started up " Good god! What's going on? These people are completely nuts!" The driver glanced quickly in the mirror to look at him but then made out he'd not heard a word. The cabbie was, as they said back home, a young man straight out of the generation

brought up on 'diversity culture'. This really convoluted attitude – where people are not sure which terms to use – had always amused Dembo. He smiled to himself: what a weird, mixed up society! I can't mock it too much, but I reckon that with people from everywhere putting their roots down here – some of them really wild – it's never going to be easy living with this mix. And anyway hadn't he always felt secretly that they – he and the cab driver, with their more or less intertwined history – should understand one another completely, especially on a day like this?

That actually, having first deplored the carnage *"Come on mate, you're right, it's terrible to be spilling innocent blood. Back home human life is sacred even if they do treat us like savages most of the time"*, they would then drift slowly together towards a different view: *"Peace for their souls but you know they had it coming, these guys provoked them, truth can not lie!"* And *"It's not over, bro, it's not finished"*. Finally they would both go all out: "*What do you expect, my man, if you colonise and kill for centuries, you've got to expect the boomerang effect. It's common sense*".

But it didn't go that way. Dembo and his travel companion came closer to exchanging blow than to chatting about colonialism. In Rue Melusine, the cab driver didn't even bother to help with getting the boxes of books out of the taxi. In turn, for revenge, Dembo gave him no tip and left the door of the car open. From inside the hotel door he could hear the driver slamming shut the door all the time muttering "fucking bastard". All a bit childish but it wouldn't be the first time Dembo Diatta behaved in this rather stupid way in Paris. This city could turn his mood black with a simple yes or no.

The lobby of the Lacroix hotel was quiet. It wasn't one of those hotels where the staff, poised and vigilant, sometimes more stylish than the guests, came and went, swift to seize your bags and to direct you to a colleague tucked behind reception. At the Lacroix, on the contrary, guests were ignored and deemed capable of fending for themselves, like an adult, and at some level were even treated badly for not affording a classier hotel.

Once flopped on his bed, he flicked through his favourite TV channels. The image of the policemen Ahmet Merabet shot in the open street kept being shown. The commentary kept on about the same fact – the killer hadn't even stopped. A father with a family killed with a bullet in his head, just like that, in passing. Each time he saw the scene again, Dambo Diatta, disturbed by the futile gesture of the victim begging

for mercy from his executioner, asked himself what on earth went on in a human being's mind at the exact moment he knows that for him everything is going to brutally end. It was all too harsh and too stupid.

And then there were these know-it-alls, on the special news editions, with their self congratulatory airs rushing forward to analyse, castigate, witness, honour, threaten and so on. All these people were paid to talk and they did it both endlessly and obnoxiously. Enough to make you vomit. In short, the vox pop of the media. The media babble. But what about everyone else? Ordinary people. Well, they listen and what they hear, slowly but surely, by a strange process, gets lodged in their minds, as die-hard truth. Though as soon as that thought had crossed his mind, Dembo Diatta, always punctilious in outlook, corrected himself: no, of course not everyone. But most people, for sure. The shut-down face of the young taxi driver came back to him and he sighed in frustration. In the course of his travels round the world, from a conference in Amsterdam on African theatre to a workshop on mime techniques in Kenya, he tried not to get himself bogged down by petty squabbles, specially with people he didn't know who didn't like the colour of his skin. The encounter with the cab driver was a new battle lost and he'd have liked to find the man and given him a lesson in life skills. But could he actually rebuke the guy for a stubborn refusal to open his mouth and talk? There was a great big hole of silence right in the heart of the city, and he had shared its crossing with the sad young man.

Freedom of expression is a good thing but what's the point of it if someone has nothing to say. Dembo Diatta knew quite well that in complicated situations people end up, for peace of mind, listening to a new breed of griots, guardians of the word and the only available source of wisdom. And these griots were saying calmly and reasonably but masking a dull anger, that something huge was going to happen and, unfortunately, everyone needs to get ready for it. They were talking about 'Survival of nations'. the Legacies of the ancestors. Our sacred values. Us, the last refuge of the Spirit. Let's say it, let's be clear, don't let's be hypocrites. These sort of notions, of course he'd heard them before but this latest version had deeply unnerved him. What if these small-scale outbursts of rage and craziness, like today's, led straight, with heart-pounding certainty, to a massive butchery of all human existence?

"Somewhere out there," thought Dembo, "there are the powers-that-be for whom we human beings are just moving black lines endlessly

circling and crisscrossing a glowing globe. The time is coming when the dark masters of the world will eliminate all us irrelevant humans, and they will do it without a second's thought, like a teacher wiping the blackboard clean of yesterday's lesson. And thanks to science, these masters have virtually limitless powers".

Dembo's view was, unlike that of most people, that new information technologies and in particular the social channels, further the aims of large states and extremist groups lurking in the shadow much more than the desire for freedom of every last one of us. Nothing to hammer that home like an avalanche of information crashing down at a hellish rate!

Is there a problem knowing what to do? Does it matter? Whatever. We 'll take care of it. Which little agency had, for example, concocted the slogan "I am Charlie"? It was everywhere, from top to bottom of the Paris buildings and along all the illuminated signs on the highway. Dembo thought there was something strange in shouting out like this, beating your chest like a child: "I'm a good person, I'd like a world where no one gets thrown in prison for writing an article in the media or gets murdered in an iron cage in a Guantanamo orange suit".

By free associating, Dembo Diatta remembered having read the phrase of a German poet in the Holocaust Museum in Washington: "Those who begin by burning books sooner or later end up burning people". Not perhaps the exact words of Heinrich Heine but certainly the sense he intended. And Dembo recognised quite well that the killers on this day, 7 January, with their faraway source of inspiration detested most of all the theatre, his reason for living, and himself, Dembo Diatta. Besides, he continued to feel an intellectual familiarity with at least two of their victims. The harrowing death, that same morning, of Cabu and Wolinski, was like a personal matter, resonating horribly with the memories of his student days, almost like a death in the family.

But he wasn't going to hide himself in the herd and start this ridiculous and sensationalist bleating of "I am Charlie'. Out of the question: things were never that simple. He found it hard to relate to this sudden appetite of millions of people for a single thought at the same time as they imagined all acting together, from the heart, in the name of freedom of conscience. Two words surfaced in Dembo's mind. Naivity. Cynicism. He didn't like either of them. And Dembo Diatta knew quite well which event in his modest literary career had ended by rendering him totally cynical and, as some people sniggered behind his back,

virtually paranoid.

This event deserves to be recounted.

Having got it into his head one day to write a 'serious play', he had decided to do whatever was needed in order to understand, in action and from the inside, so to speak, wars, suicide bombings and the kind of popular uprising so common that no one paid any attention to them. He wanted most of all to silence everyone who saw in him, without ever daring to say it openly, a minor writer, only good enough to attract the applause of a public made ignorant by crude appeals to the lowest common denominator.

The experience had driven him nearly crazy. It should be added that Dembo Diatta had never done things by half. The same person, who up till now had only cared about the sports pages, set himself the task of researching all the key sources and online documents about Iraq, Somalia, the Sudan, Afghanistan and Mali. Drawing on his natural tenacity and scrupulousness he made notes on everything and willingly checked every last detail. He believed he now understood – and it became the basic principle behind his efforts – that it was only the instigators of war, the arms dealers and the world leaders who held a coherent vision of global events. Therefore he pushed himself to adopt their mindset, and not hop from one humanitarian disaster to another or from one armed conflict to another. There was clearly a link between all these catastrophes. Even between the Ivory Coast and Ukraine? "Why not?" he retorted to his detractors, "I'm not ruling anything out in advance." But let's be clear. Sometimes, yes, Dembo, who declared himself equally fascinated by the 'Great silence of China'. pushed the little boat of suspicion a bit too far out. His friends also found his sudden and late passion for international politics a bit suspect and suspected him of getting sucked into conspiracy theories. He responded to them with a little shrug that even if not everything can be proved as a conspiracy, there had certainly been a fair few conspiracies and machinations in recent history. And added "You'd better believe me, it's going on right now or I, Dembo Diatta, am not the son of my mother and father!"

Naturally Dembo Diatta never wrote his masterpiece. The only surviving things from his gruelling quest for the truth were a document with a pretentious and cryptic title [Time of the Seven Afflictions] and some sketches of dialogue and stage directions, hidden deep in his files in an old MacBook Pro. But his journey to the heart of darkness had

not been entirely in vain. It had, literally, turned Dembo into another person. It had taught him to be highly attuned to fake evidence cleverly slipped into the ears of the public by the media. Not a single declaration by a leader of a wealthy nation seemed free of agenda. Dembo Diatta was never going to fall for any simplistic myth of a world divided between the friends and enemies of individual liberty. The NATO bombings of Libya had both angered and amused him. He'd not believed for a single moment that if hysterical, young Libyans were let loose on Muammer Gaddafi – cruelly tortured and killed in the streets of Sirte – it was to prevent him from 'massacring his own people'. Through more and more lies, these thugs with silver tongues ended up eventually getting caught out publicly, just as in Iraq but that didn't change anything. They had bet on the forgetfulness of the public and won.

Dembo got dressed and went out to see Muriel and Christian. The Castelnauds, actors with some sort of Alsace background and not highly active, were the nicest and most reliable couple that Dembo Diatta had ever known. Warm and chilled, Christian, the opposite of Muriel who was tougher and more analytical, always elicited a wave of empathy, even from those who hardly knew him. After a couple of times meeting him on the street, it was fine to call him just Chris.

Muriel and he did some improv of short farces in pub theatres, playing on a single, repeat theme of the sort: "Have you noticed, Madame, that they're all talking about global warming, the Pope, The Queen of England".. and after two or three bits of tomfoolery shouted out loud ".. and it's darn colder everywhere, Sir".

Nothing about this was particularly special; Muriel and Chris knew this and didn't give a damn. They were smart enough anyway to take the piss out of themselves rather than others. Dembo was happy to have a bite with them two days before leaving to get his flight at Roissy. But unfortunately everything had changed since the attacks of the morning. "Can I be straight with these two?" he asked himself for the tenth time as he went leisurely down the wooden stairs of the Lacroix hotel. In short, Dembo Diatta was neither being Charlie or not being Charlie. It was this that he wanted to share with the Castelnauds or even shout it across the roofs if someone gave him a microphone. But right now, at this unusual time, mics were not given to everyone and especially not to an unknown comic writer visiting the city.

Half way up rue Mélusine, Dembo ducked into Emile Chautemps

park and less than ten minutes later he crossed the threshold of Cosa Nostra. How long had he been coming to this Italian restaurant with its titillating name? It was a bit vague in his memory but it was certainly a fair while. Eight or nine years. But he'd never exchanged any words or even a vaguely polite smile with Maria Laura, the owner. That would have been difficult anyway, since, like him, she was a woman of few words and seemed, as well, a victim of a chronic depression since the day her partner, a Valerio Guerini, had run out with the cashbox and one of the curvy waitresses. Classic! Dembo didn't know the details, he'd only listened one day to a completely pissed customer asking Maria-Laura if she didn't miss Valerio just a tiny bit. Not a good thing to do, because after venting all her anger on him, Maria-Laura came back out of the kitchen, eyes blood red, with a pan of boiling oil. The poor fool fled through the window to howls of hilarity from the customers and was never seen again locally.

The Castelnauds were a bit late, because, they explained, of the police roadblocks. It was really good to see them again. Their enthusiastic greetings brought some much needed life to the restaurant.

Almost immediately they began to talk to Dembo about a concept of street theatre they were working on. Since he'd known them the Castelnauds were always busy from dawn to dusk on a 'new' or more accurately 'radical theatrical experience'. This time it was about, little by little, letting real people in the street take over the performance and transforming it into a spontaneous and massive happening – didn't matter what – dancing, lions roaring, viral attacks by young rappers against the government and so on. Chris didn't rule out that the chaos might result in actual riots. Dembo watched him weigh up the chances – and risks – for theatre to rouse people enough to set fire to all the wealthy areas of the city.

Dembo Diatta suggested the possibility of a performance in which the audience never saw the faces of the actors. Everything would be about disappointing the audience, over and over again, he clarified. Right to the end, the idiots would keep waiting in vain for…

"Whatever, mate," cut in Chris.

Laughing in delight, they drank to their infamous creative powers. But despite their good mood all three were a bit on edge, less relaxed than usual. Then when Chris slammed a performance he'd seen a couple of days earlier, Dembo Diatta noticed Muriel looking at him questioningly.

The moment of truth was getting closer and closer. Somehow the killers from Rue Nicolas-Appert were inside everyone's heads largely because they had neither names or faces.

When they first touched on the subject, Dembo ducked the issue and made the mistake of several rather embarrassed attempts before announcing:

"I'm not completely sure that I agree with what I'm hearing… but then I'm not in a good position to talk."

"Come on Dembo, don't hold back", said Muriel, "Tell us what you think of what's happened".

Dembo felt a slight irritation in her voice but also a genuine curiosity, clearly shared with her husband who now waited to see what he was going to say.

He launched himself forward: "Well, you know, before coming to see you I went online to see these cartoons. I wanted to see them with my own eyes."

Their eyes fixed him with the same unspoken question: "And?"

"These cartoons are horrendous," he said calmly, saying each word very clearly. "You and me, we know what cartoons are but frankly, these appalled me. I thought they were crass and racist. For a long time I've liked the cartoonists of this Charlie mag but these… well, I couldn't get them."

It was more than enough to say.

"You didn't get them?" repeated Chris and leaned towards him.

There was an unusual bitterness in his voice. Dembo Diatta acted as though he'd not noticed anything.

"Making people smile and hurting them is not the same thing," he said. "Why pour oil on the fire?"

"I see why lots of people are throwing this stuff around since this morning," replied Chris animatedly: "Oh, you know, say the wise guys, they were good people at Charlie Hebdo and then it went wrong. You mean they got obsessed with Islam, right? They were Islamophobes, Cabu and Wolinski, right? Racists too? Well Dembo, they paid for it. The bastards came and you know what, the little fuckers took the time to call each person by their name before shooting them stone cold."

It was not going well.

And he knew that with Chris, a kind bloke with an open mind but a touch psycho, it could go from bad to worse in a matter of minutes. Soon

they would be history at Cosa Nostra. Dembo Diatta chose to stay calm, although he was so determined to make himself understood that he stayed on the defence, concerned as much to justify himself than simply to give his opinions.

The three of them didn't part that evening angry with each other, but Dembo found it sadder that they were all ill at ease. Shaking Muriel and her husband's hand by the metro station and avoiding their eyes gave him the impression that nothing would ever quite be the same again.

"It's crazy how jittery people are", he said out loud, not caring about people nearby. "Soon it's going to be that your friends won't talk to you because you can't stand a film they like". He gathered his breath and fumed: "I sucked it all up, Muriel, when you accused me earlier of supporting people wearing the veil."

That had been when in the restaurant when Dembo had hotly retorted: "What 's going on with this country? You don't want to see the Muslim veil but you do want Muslim supporters to put up with equally obscene images of their religion. I just don't get it." Frustration and anger had made his tone harder without him meaning it.

He was pissed off with them now for even raising the subject. Or was it he who should have held his tongue. Like when a family is in mourning you don't chuck your bile all over the dead person in the name of freedom of speech. Too late now to go back. He pointed out to them that at no time, anywhere, France included, had anyone ever really claimed that absolutely anything could be said.

"Do you know how this comic Charlie Hebdo started out?" he asked. They had a vague memory.

"Well, me I only found out today. Totally amazed me". He went on. "A mate, a fantastic online researcher, sent me the link to a paper that he put online today. The facts speak for themselves: in November 1970, Charles de Gaulle was quietly sitting at home and a magazine called Hara-Kiri published with a cover headline

"Tragic party at Colombey: 1 dead". So the police jumped all over the kiosks, seized all the issues, destroyed and banned the paper. Why? Undermining respect for the dead. But wham! It's not over: to go on taking the piss out of the General, the same magazine reinvented itself as Charlie Hebdo".

Though even there too, something was eluding Dembo Diatta: why should a whole country or all of humanity suddenly trot behind a

small group of libertarian Parisians who had always spat on the face of everyone? Finding it harder and harder to get a grip on himself, Dembo called them childish, anarchist has-beens.

And the whole time the three of them were arguing, the big taboo words circled silently around them. You. Us. Oppressors. Wretched of the earth. Slave trade. Madagascar. Sétif. Thiaroye. The words of Aimé Césaire: Europe is accountable to the human community for the highest pile of skeletons in history". Thankfully he kept all that to himself. It wasn't the kind of thing he could chuck at Muriel and Chris. And anyway he trusted these words even less than the bile and smoldering anger they carried with them. On the other hand, Dembo hadn't been able to stop himself referring to the morning edition on the radio of France 2 in which two journalists had started on "The Rwandan genocide in which the Hutu community will be totally wiped out by the Tutsi".

"I don't see the connection", said Muriel with a tense expression and Chris added: "Come on, don't start talking to us about two complete idiots. Let them go hang themselves for all I care. "

But Dembo couldn't not stop himself: "And what exactly is your problem? It's you who push others to make comparisons that don't mean anything. There would be a right old ruckus if someone said here that the Jews butchered the Nazis. Why is it so hard for you to put yourselves in other people's place?"

An amused smile crept over Muriels's face. Dembo, still quite wound up, wanted to react violently but she reached out her hand to stop him.

"Don't get mad, Dembo. I'm not making fun of you. It's just that I realized that you don't know how to talk to us. We're old mates, we've been friends for ages. But you're talking to us now as two White Westerners."

Shaken, Dembo made do with staring at her in silence. Muriel, cooler and more considered than her husband, had once more hit the mark.

But Dembo still couldn't agree with her: "OK, I see what you're saying but even for you two I can't be just Dembo Diatta. It can't go on like this. We're all in the fire here and everyone has to move their ass to get out of the heat".

After a pause, he added: "And you two perhaps more than others.."

"Us?" exclaimed Muriel sounding genuinely shocked.

"Come on, Muriel, let's not mince words," replied Dembo simply.

He remembered then casting his eyes round the room. The Cosa

Nostra had slowly emptied. A sole brunette, of indeterminate age, perched on a nearby stool seemed more interested in Chris than in their confrontation.

"OK.. look", said Dembo suddenly, "I'm confused… I'm all over the place. The fact is– hardly anyone knows what's happening any more. In the end I think they'll get us all."

There was a minute or two of embarrassed silence, probably the first in over twenty years of friendship.

Crossing a deserted Emile Chautemps park again, Dembo thought about Muriel and Chris. They had a long tube journey ahead of them to get home at Place du Caquet at Saint-Denis and he imagined them on the train asking themselves why he, Dembo, was getting so wound up and intolerant. He reproached himself once again for not being able to hold his tongue, for not knowing how to hold back from the argumentative words – *yet, maybe at least, nevertheless, in contrast.*

But the time for nuances was well past and he knew a fear of the future would make people keep their mouths shut. Why did he have to go playing the provocateur?

He had just one day left in Paris, the following day, before leaving for home. He spent it stretched out in his room reading old comics which he always brought with him while travelling. Just for a while they kept all the information coming from the TV and radio at a distance. He was fed up with the whole affair; it was really messing with his head.

But he would call Chris and Muriel Castelnaud at some point. He needed to feel sure that they could still talk to each other.

Translated by Hannah Charlton

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Chenjerai Hove (Zimbabwe)

Beautiful Words Are Subversive

Chenjerai Hove is a Zimbabwean poet/novelist/essayist. He has won several national and international awards, including the Zimbabwe Literary Award, Noma Award for Publishing in Africa for his novel 'Bones' and the German African Prize for his book of essays, "Palaver Finish". He is widely translated into German, Japanese, Norwegian, Danish, French, Dutch and Swedish. Hove passed away in July 2015.

Beautiful Words Are Subversive

Chenjerai Hove

MANY YEARS AGO, while still in my home country, Zimbabwe, I had a brief confrontation with the minister for information whose name I will not mention since he succumbed to illness. People, including writers, should not insult the dead. The subject of discussion was freedom of expression. He warned me that I could write whatever I wanted, but I should know that after writing what I wanted, I have to face the consequences. That is when it dawned on me that that freedom of expression is important and crucial, but freedom after expression is better.

One African writer, years ago, made a little speech which I still find inspirational today. We were talking about the situation of a writer in Africa and what were the dangers of our existence as writers, especially if we have alternative views to the ones which the wielders of political power have.

The writer, from Benin, said his main problems were anchored in ministers of his government … the minister for information who thinks that a writer is an unpaid information officer of the government, the minister for culture who wants to dictate his definition of culture to the writer, the minister for justice who makes laws which make writers seem a criminal and the minister of police who owns the handcuffs of the nation.

As a writer, this observation set me thinking. And in most African countries, books are not even under the ministry for culture. They are under the ministry in charge of the police. The national archives are under the ministry for home affairs, not the ministry for culture or even information. I can never stop worrying about the culture of the minister for culture. When will the minister for culture ever quote a writer of his country in any one of his many speeches in which he lectures artists on what culture is all about?

So, we are talking of books and national records under arrest, the

master keys of the national archives are with the police ministry. But then we still have to insist on finding out the logic of this misplacement of knowledge in the ministry for police affairs. In Zimbabwe and most African countries that I have visited, stored knowledge is under the ministry for the interior; as if all knowledge must be arrested in order to ensure that it does not escape to the people.

When Zimbabwe tried to ban Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, I was chairperson of the Zimbabwe Writers Union, fresh and rather naïve about power and control over national knowledge and records. The Zimbabwean Muslims were fighting to have the novel banned. The writers sent me to meet the chairman of the censorship board and the minister for state security about the matter.

It so happened that the minister for state security had only a few photocopied pages of the novel delivered to him by the Muslim community of Zimbabwe. I had the whole novel. My task was to explain to the minister that it was futile to ban a book since citizens who want to read it will smuggle it into the country anyway. And the book, being a hard cover and massively expensive, there was no way this single novel could be a state security issue. But the minister picked up the phone and called the chairman of the censorship board, an ex-policeman in the colonial government of Mr Ian Smith.

As I entered the chief censor's office, he recognised me and we sat down to do literary business. I questioned his knowledge of literary aesthetics as a police officer sitting in judgement over literary matters. It did not make any sense that a police officer should preside over matters literary. And his argument was that it was like that also in South Africa, that the banning of books was under the police. And in Australia too, and Canada and many other former British colonies, including Jamaica. I was amazed at his whole colonial map of the control of writers and literature, the sheer brutality of thinking that if literary brutality was shared among many countries, it must be right and justifiable.

Politicians and writers never seem to come to an agreement about basic national issues. Writers, especially poets and novelists like me, accept that we cannot promise anyone to build a bridge where there is not even a river. During election time, politicians can promise you anything. But writers have no election time. Writers have no business lying to anyone about building schools or hospitals where there is not even anyone who is ill.

But then why the quarrel? Politician and writer, power and powerlessness, the strong and the weak? Guns and prisons versus words. Did someone drunkenly say the word is mightier than the sword? That sounds like a good philosophical and Biblical teaching, but we know that guns kill and writers get killed for using words against swords.

To write is to rebel, to revolt, to challenge the established system of values even if those values are in politics, culture, history and even geography. Writing has to do with the affirmation of memory in order to create some sense of permanence of time and space. The writer, and I am one of them, wants to restore the respectability of human memory in order to establish some semblance of permanence in human affairs.

The task of the writer is to see, record and warn. When society is decaying, the writer records the decay. But if that society decides to over-celebrate the political slogans of the day, the writer's task is to warn society that no nation should celebrate false and empty slogans. In the writing of the history of periods and spaces, one gets more from the dynamics of literary works of the period than one would get from political speeches or even historians' versions of events, especially if that history is simply a record of the deeds and misdeeds of the powerful, the heroes. In literature, the heroes are the small ants, not the big elephants. Remember how a small mosquito can cause you sleepless nights by simply mewling into your ear like a neglected cat!

It is futile to think that the powerless did not have power of some kind. The creative eye and ear and nose always searches for the hidden truths which the politicians work hard to obliterate. The erasure of memory is the stock in trade of the politician. The revival of memory is the stock in trade of the writer, the story-teller, the poet who tells history in sequences of images, metaphors and symbols.

For, to write is to remember. To write is to think. To write is to re-invent a world which could be easily erased from human memory for the convenience of those in power. To write is to expand the constituency of the imagination, the constituency of possibilities, the space of human beings' capacity for unlimited human doubt.

Literature says: what is a human being if that human being is deprived of the capacity to doubt? And that is why the scientists who made a huge impact on society were usually readers of literary works which assisted in expanding their literary imagination first before enriching their scientific capacity to doubt and to search for answers. The

space ventures and travels to the moon and to Mars where first invented in the literary imagination.

But then writers, intellectuals and other artists are fighting in Africa all the time. What is the nature of this fight, and how will it end? One can only speculate that it will never end, and the nature of it is a matter of borders and constituencies. The politician or businessman believes in the constituency of the physical borders and numbers. The more the voters, the happier the politician. The more people the politician can address in a rally, the more powerful he feels. It is the physical and numerical space that the politician cherishes.

But artists, writers included, live in a different world which is not justified by quantitative things, the numbers of voters and the physical boundaries which the writer's has crossed. When a million copies of a writer's work are bought in one year, I have never heard a writer talking as if he were a millionaire. A book is a constituency, a living one which enkindles the imagination of the individual who sits down and allows himself or herself to be subverted by words, images, metaphors and symbols. For a writer, life is made of images and symbols, just as it was in the beginning, and the word became flesh.

Did I talk about subversion? All engaged art is subversive, but not in the way politicians use the word *subversion*. Subversive art is that art which makes the viewer, the reader, feel newly persuaded to question the way they have always thought the world is organised, the world of values. To write is to create new values, to move from old spaces into the realm of new spaces of the imagination. A book, and any effective piece of art, searches for new spaces in order to enrich them while at the same time enriching the old spaces by removing the rust of the imaginative spaces of the old.

A book, oh, what a universe … It informs, forms and transforms human conscience, the paraphrased words of the late novelist/philosopher, Jean Marie Adiafi echo in my mind. A good book is not like a banana whose skin you throw away after eating the flesh. A good book is one that refuses to be forgotten since it enriches the reader's present and nourishes the reader's past and gives flowers to the future of the meaning of human existence.

A book ensures that the world you thought was round might actually be flat, depending on where you are standing. A book subverts thought and emotion, human experience and the search for new forms

of possibilities of experience in different and similar spaces. When a bird sings and the writer records its music, both are transformed – the bird and the writer. The world changes. The bird becomes the voice of my mother who died many years ago, and I become a bird which flies and meets my mother's voice somewhere at the centre of the human soul; and there are many centres of the human soul which art attempts to give us a safe voyage to, a journey with a complicated map so that human experience becomes one permanent piece of continuous motion and transformation. Art hates stagnation! The vibrancy of the word is witness to the dynamic nature of human experience in all its complexity.

Anybody who creates is in trouble. People were thrown into the den of lions for venturing to tell the emperor that the world was round. The emperors were not about to accept the flatness of their imagination. Every ruler hates innovation in which they are not a major participant. But an artist stands up and says to the ruler, we should know that change can happen without us being in the centre. We can also be on the periphery, and what is wrong with being on the margins, especially if being on the margins can be so loud. In an orchestra? The musician with the smallest flute might get the most attention because the orchestra is not complete without that particular instrument, the small voice. Writing searches for the small and hidden spaces of human existence.

I am talking about the small voice in a democracy, in a world which is running the risk of thinking in quantitative and not qualitative ways. The validity of a democracy is measured, in my own personal view, according to how small voices are protected. The strong have to have their strength measured against how much they can protect the weak, those who have no access to the numbers which are used to bolster the power and influence of the powerful.

The majority, the ones with the big numbers, are already protected by their "majority" status. It is the weak and minority who should be the centre of protection mechanisms in any democracy. That is where the writer, the artist, as an individual voice, enters the arena as a minority, to say a singular voice is also part of the orchestra, part of the multifaceted dialogue which makes society and societies tick. The foolishness of the monolithic democracy is no longer viable since there can never be a majority without a minority to respect the weight of the majority. An elephant is not big if there is no ant to announce and acknowledge the elephant's bigness.

Writers and all other artists depict people in small spaces, with their small visions which have sustained them for so long, which is their history, and the artists of the world have a place in the world in order that the world's spaces are not only for those who have money and political power, but those who know how to distribute the power of the imagination so that the small spaces of our lives can also have meaning. The creation of new meanings is the task which the arts have taken upon themselves. That is why art is magic because magic without new creative spaces is nothing.

And writing is magic because it makes people believe what they had never imagined could be possible. When we talk about freedom of expression, we are talking about how we can expand the imaginative spaces so that our scientists can read a novel and expand their imagination in order to dig deeper into the recesses of human existence in their own way. There is no society which has cancelled the arts and bloomed in the fields of architecture, science and philosophy. The city of Rome is a big piece of art inspired by the writers of the time.

As a writer, I did not realise that I was banned from entering all government schools of my country until a high school teacher was dismissed for having invited me to his school. High school students nationwide were studying my novel, *Bones*. My novel was allowed into schools, but the author (me) was banned. The reason: "You will poison the minds of the students," an official told me when I protested.

But then, if a writer poisons the minds of the students, what would the novel do since it is allowed into schools? Of course, the authorities feared that my interpretation of the novel would be "poisonous" to the malleable imagination the youth. But if I were a frightened bureaucrat or minister for culture or education, I would fear more the book without any authorial interpretation, a free book in the hands of the students, than a book with some interpretation from the author.

Experience has taught me that the root of the conflict between writers and politicians is a space called constituency. Those who said the pen is mightier than the sword might have been materially mistaken, but in the end there are certain fundamental truths in this saying. Maybe the truth is that the pen, words, shoot at the heart, soul and imagination of the reader while the sword, an object of physical harm, only destroys the flesh. A writer's words soothe the reader to change; a gun shoots the reader to death.

Since time immemorial new ideas about perceptions of the world have always been a danger to those whose comfort is viewed as permanent. Books, and all arts, contain "new" ideas, and new ideas and visions are a danger to those whose constituencies are always measured in quantitative ways. Books change lives through ideas. Politics changes physical and human spaces quantitatively.

Artists never promise their audiences anything except the meaning of a full life. Politicians and others of the power trade promise heaven on earth. The former dwells in the constituency of mind and meaning, while the latter dwells in the constituency of figures and numbers. But when the politician seeks the constituency of mind, he/she finds that the artist has already settled permanently in that constituency.

The two constituencies have their different kinds of power. I cherish to have my words, my language, help shape the dreams and aspirations of those who read my work. My dream is to change the way they perceive the world, the way they feel towards objects and people, the way they feel towards the land they walk on, the way they experience 'the other' who comes from 'other' lands. I want my words to share the beauty and ugliness the hopes which I still see in human beings.

If my endeavours offend anyone, it is because he/she hates sincerity and the human capacity to doubt, which is also the human capacity to transform. The moment we lose our capacity to doubt everything about our existence, we, as human beings, soon become extinct.

Artists seek the freedom to create, to see and record the joys, sorrows and smiles of their societies in order to celebrate and warn humanity about its flowers and human decay. I hate silence, society hates silence laws because human beings are not silent imbeciles.

Tribute to the author


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Edgar Sekloka (Cameroon/France)

Go and See, Go and Listen

Edgar Sekloka, is a singer, songwriter and composer. In 2008, he published Coffee, his first novel (Sarbacane Publishers - Actes Sud). The novel was shortlisted for the 2008 RFO Prize, the 2008 Glennois Prize and the 2008 Juke Box Ado. His second novel, Adulte à présent, was published in November 2011 at the same publishing house and was well received by booksellers.

Go and See, Go and Listen

Edgar Sekloka

GO AND SEE, go and listen to this guy who plays the guitar with only one string, get on the Internet if the flying is too expensive, go with the eyes and ears of a tourist, go on a trip, get to know him, you who have all the visas, you who have all the permits, all sorts of possibilities; you who don't want to be burdened with guilty feelings. You who don't have time even for your own tears, but who keep urging your offspring not to cry, to finish their food because there are countries where the children are starving; you who are eating yourselves to death, all the while hanging on for dear life, most of you earning the minimum wage, the conscripts of insecurity, the empty-pockets crew, suffering from modern-day debt, from the endless accumulation of touch gadgets. You, whose imagination has been dulled by images, you who dare not dream anymore, you of the worn-out audacity, you who vote for a look, a suit, a skin colour, *so what ?* You who read the news only when it is *dispatch*, more than two sentences and it's Balzac, it's too long, it puts you to sleep, you and your sleeping pills for the nights, your cigarettes-and-coffee for the days, several times too much, you whom caffeine stresses as much as weight gain. You who dance with the Wi-Fi in front of a screen to get 10 minutes of exercise, you who desire the youthful shape of a vulgar and salacious *photopshop* idol, you who dismiss everything, *it's not a big deal !* that's what you say to switch from what used to seem important, you who et caetera *to be continued* (translator's note: in Latin and English in the original text). I'd like to continue heaping scorn on you but I sense that you don't like it and anyway I'm just like you.

I'm like you I said, someone who doesn't like it when they harp on about his cowardly acts, who prefers hiding them away, containing them, keeping them for himself in the abyss of his soul, in the depths of the secret burrow, above all don't expiate them because then you'd have to talk about them, open up… Not that, rather internalise them to the point of mixing them up with your blood and passing them on to

your descendants. Try and understand, I'm talking about the bacteria of the unanimous half-hearted, these poor things affected by the virus of pathological inhibition, the famous I1M1, which ever so often takes hold of me, which ever so often makes me laugh in my sleeve, softly, so as not to disturb anyone or be noticed, which ever so often turns me into something which the hyper-super-absolutely in verbosity of the Parisian bobo-hipster mistakenly refers to as… autistic.

I don't know if it's me or a pirated copy of me, but as a result, I make a point of crossing at the zebra crossing, of avoiding scandal, of being a model citizen. The excellent position, the three-piece suit, the office that goes with it, the Japanese sedan, the wife and later the mother hen, the garden, the vegetable patch, the cat after the divorce, the romantic deprivation. Sometimes, in order to be even more ordinary, to act like anybody, sometimes I complain and I stir up some nicely appropriate mini-revolutions between a soccer match and a documentary on the environment.

I don't aspire towards it and I have learnt not to feel an inclination for it, so I leave it to those ladies and gentlemen the Artists to express a true conviction, to tell an absurd story, to translate the world into poetry, it always comes over better in the silence of a Chaplin film, in the melody of a Makeba song, in a mural by Bansky.

Whether famous or less so, Artists, those who inspire hope, who enhance emotions, who arouse utopian ideals, those and those only, are free from time to time, liberated from the consensus for fleeting moments during which they bring forth their creations : in a workshop, on stage or in the streets.

Free because they don't withdraw into themselves, free when they express themselves.

Go and see, go and listen to this guy who plays the guitar with only one string, he chants: when a hen approaches the wheat, the wheat doesn't grow. Go and peck at his melodies and if need be, change a few words, realise that when a block approaches Man, Man doesn't grow either. Go, go on, there's nothing to be afraid of, go towards that which we must hang onto, go and peck at the lesson, freedom is expression.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uDvZacJyj4

Elana Bregrin (South Africa)

An Inconvenient Cow

Elana is a Durban-based South African writer who draws her inspiration from the people, landscapes and conundrums of the country that is part of her. Her published work reflects a range of narrative styles and includes adult and young adult novels, biographical narrative, short stories and a radio play. "Survival Training for Lonely Hearts" (Pan Macmillan) is her most recent novel. Elana spent many years as a publishing editor and now works as an independent writer and editor. "An Inconvenient Cow" reflects her private battles with the politics of being human and maintaining voice and integrity in a country where unilateral discourse of one kind or another predominates, and difference and divergence are too often stamped as 'other'.

An Inconvenient Cow

Elana Bregin

LONG WEEKENDS ARE the curse of the lonely. It's when the whole world conspires to remind you that everyone except you has a good time ahead and good people to share it with.

The boarder has gone down the coast with friends, the colleagues are heading for the mountains, and the neighbours have family coming to stay.

In my married days, a weekend of solitude wouldn't have troubled me. I would have relished the breathing space, the chance to reclaim some of myself, watch the news without the negative commentary. But I've since learnt that headspace is an overrated luxury.

The shopping centres are crowded, SUVs jamming the parking lots, everyone stocking up for their four days of fun to come. Outside the guarded perimeters, the street dwellers shop at the bins as usual. But in here it's all festive commerce. People stroll the aisles with a lilt to their lips, instead of the downturned smileys you usually see. Trolleys are stuffed with braai packs, potato crisps, classy wines, fancy dips and other indulgences. And even the humbler baskets of the less well-off have a luxury item or two.

There's one thing to be said for us South Africans, we're good at packing up our troubles when the holidays hit. There's plenty in this life of headline drama to be down about. But wallowing in perpetual sorrow isn't going to change it, so you might as well get carefree when you can. Being single makes optimism even more obligatory. There's no one to whine to. No captive audience waiting at home for you to unload your bad day. Necessity forces you to cultivate a certain resilience of spirit.

In the parking lot, the car-guard greets me with his usual disarming smile. Even if it wasn't for his distinctive accent, I would know him for a foreigner by his darker-than-local complexion. I tip him more than the going rate, partly in honour of his pock-scarred beauty, partly because I know he's saving up for the first affordable flight out. He told me once

that he's a refugee from Burundi. He showed me a photo of his wife, a beautiful molasses-skinned woman wearing the bright-patterned garments of her country. That was all the exchange his minimal English and my non-existent French could manage. But the subtext was clear. I know that what brought him here was atrocity; that what sends him back is atrocity; that there is pain in his prolonged separation from his beloved wife, whom he may or may not see again.

Such are the exchanges of our stratified South African society. It's in these glancing encounters, in the transfer of small change from one hand to another, that our parallel lives find moments of intersection.

Let me say it straight: I love living in the South of Africa. I love this crazy, unique, confused, beautiful, chaotic continent. I don't love the crime, the cruelties, the stubborn bigotry, the maggoty corruption. But the rest I value. For me, Third World is not a swear word but part of the attraction.

Like all dysfunctional families, ours isn't easy to cope with. It requires a kind of dogged endurance, a crazy staying-power through thick and thin. It's the same brand of insane loyalty that keeps the spouses of drug addicts hanging in there, in the hope that each fresh relapse will be the forerunner of the long-awaited genuine new leaf. In some ways, we don't have a choice. Shared trauma creates powerful bonds. The more abusive the family life, the harder it is to break away. That's why so many of those who leave here end up coming back. There's nothing wrong with Australia. But when you're a child of hurly-burly, used to the intensity of life on the edge, too much normality can be alienating.

So there I am. Cruising home with modest stock in boot on this fine autumnal evening. The sky is an African cliché, artistically stained with the pinks and oranges of impending sunset. There's just enough tang in the air to make me glad I'm returning to a warm home. I'm not paying too much attention to my fellow travellers. I'm lost in my reverie of failed relationships, and the difficulties of living solo in suburbia as the female half of a childless ex-couple. The prospect of four days of my own company, relieved only by solitary outings to coffee shops, is a daunting one. It's at times like these that it hits home how socially awkward an unpartnered woman can be in the suburb of coupledom. It's not that people mean to be unkind. It's just that it's hard to know where the spare part fits.

The glorious sunset isn't helping my mood. Like everything else,

beauty is meant to be shared. I switch on the radio. A golden oldie voice is crooning "Ferry across the Mersey". Should I have done the equivalent and followed the ex across to Oz? Would it have been better to be mourning a country right now, instead of a marriage? But Oz was a symptom, not the cause; just one disagreement among many. Interesting how two people so different could have been so strongly attracted.

I'm jolted back to the present, realising I haven't taken my foot off the brake for a while. Our lane is at a standstill, cars backed up from the traffic lights, sitting unmoving through the signal changes. There's some palaver up ahead. The usual likely options flash through my mind: multi-car pile-up? Toyi-toyiing taxi drivers? Smash-and-grab in progress? No, whatever it is doesn't have that edge of drama.

The problem seems to centre on the black SUV tank at the head of the queue. It's signalling a right turn across the intersection, but the vehicle isn't moving.

I lean my head out the window to see the reason. On the concrete triangle that forms the centre island, a cow is curled up in repose. She's posing there like a big-boned model, perfectly relaxed in the traffic, not spooked at all by the vehicles revving past her ears. Her legs are tucked gracefully under her, as if she's on a comfy sofa, contentedly chewing her popcorn cud while watching the roadshow.

My heart lifts at the sight of her. This is no ordinary cow – she's Nguni, the prize breed of Africa. For centuries these hardy beauties were the wealth and cultural capital of traditional African society. Under colonial rule they were decreed inferior, like everything else about black life, and the herds were decimated. In recent years they have been bred up again and their popularity reclaimed.

I get out for a closer look. It's hard to understand how anyone could label these cows "pariah". Their hides are patterned with colours, blotches and spots in striking combinations. Each configuration has its own vernacular name, suggestive of the imagery the patterns evoke: "Stones of the Forest" for the ones with the big black blotches; "Eggs of the Lark" for the brown-speckled ones; "Clouds of Heaven"; "Flies in Sour Milk". I was given a brief lesson once by the old-timers on my visit to a rural homestead for a wedding. They were glad to have an interested stranger to share their knowledge.

Our road-island cow is of the white variety. Her hide is vanilla snow, with a spattering of dark chocolate on her sides and legs. She's probably

strolled down from the settlement across the railway line, abandoning the over-grazed common land in search of tastier fare.

It wasn't the first time cows had ended up in traffic here. I always felt slightly honoured by these exotic visitors on my home ground. What's the point of living 40ks from the urban centre if you're not going to enjoy the quirky charm of it?

My sentiments weren't shared by the ex, however. For him, the sight of cows trespassing on the main road was just more evidence of third-world slide. He saw nothing good about this continent – except the possibility of leaving it. He was right to go. Unless you can love Africa, don't live here.

It's clear that Mr SUV isn't part of the Nguni fan club either. The problem is that Nguni-girl's bulk is spilling over her concrete sofa and her generous hindquarters are intruding into his lane. The only way his massive Hummer can get past her is to pull out into the other lane. This he's clearly not willing to do. He didn't go to all the expense of buying himself a brand-new-out-the-box-screw-the-planet-I-am-king Hummer tank with customised "Iron Man" number-plate just to have some cow challenge his right of way. So there he sits, while the traffic builds up behind him. He's fuming enough to cut his petrol bills in half. I can hear him swearing from where I am; there's a lot of rage in those f-words. It reminds me of someone. Someone now living in Oz.

Hummer Man does what any road supremacist will do in such a situation. He leans on his hooter. Nguni-girl freezes in mid-chew. She turns her horned head to examine the source of the sound assault then resumes her chewing in the manner of one who hopes that ignoring the problem will send it away.

The Blondie sitting beside Hummer Man puts in her two cents' worth. Her voice drifts back to me, with its distinctly flat Durban vowels: "Why don't you phone Flying Squad, lovey?"

Lovey's answer is to let rip with another blast of hooter. Nguni-girl ignores this, too, clearly believing she's in the right here. She's peacefully minding her own business, chewing away at her slimmer's salad supper. And as far as she's concerned, this ill-bred objector can take a hike.

I wander up the road to see if I can be of any help.

"You'll get past easily if you just swing into the other lane," I call to Hummer Man.

He ignores me. Obviously I'm missing the point here. He's not

interested in swinging anywhere. This third-world cow is in his first-world way. She's inconveniencing his expensive Hummer like she has the right to. Like the road is hers to occupy. And that, in a nutshell, is what's wrong with this whole effing country.

Blondie leans her streaked mane out the window and says, "Shoo, shoo. Go on, you smelly thing, get out the way." She picks up a Coke Zero can from inside the car and pitches it daintily. This does the trick. Nguni-girl gets to her feet. She humps her hindquarters off the island and stands there reproachfully, eyeing the bad-mannered bull in her face. She's square in the middle of both lanes now. The road is well and truly blocked.

There's quite a queue of cars backed up by this time. Engines are switched off as more people get out to see what's happening. Taxis have pulled over to discharge packet-laden passengers and pedestrians are pausing to watch the show. A young man in luminous car-guard vest brings his bicycle to a halt beside me. He's probably en route to his job for the night, guarding cars for small change at one of the restaurant parking lots.

Hummer's voluble annoyance at the cow seems to amuse him greatly.

"*Hau,*" he says, shaking his head, "*Umlungu!*"

The rich way he clucks his tongue conveys a collective folly.

Our eyes connect and I smile back at him.

"I don't think he likes cows on his road, this man," I say, in my home-taught isiZulu.

He answers me in English: "But a cow is a cow. If it is in your way, you must move to the side and go past it," he says sensibly.

It strikes me that my neighbour, being from the requisite culture, might be able to fill in the blanks in my limited Nguni knowledge.

"What do you call this kind of cow?" I ask.

"We call it *inkomo* – cow."

"Yes, but doesn't it have another name? A special name that is given only to white cows with these brown spots?"

He is uncomprehending for a moment; then his face clears.

"Oh," he says, "you mean the deep words. The old ones know that, not us." He shakes his head. "In my place there are no cows. Us, we only know cars," he smiles.

We're speaking in low voices – I don't know why – murmuring like

conspirators. We're two passing ships sharing a moment of connection. But the disparities between us makes it feel illicit. During apartheid, such harmless encounters between black and white were not just frowned on but forbidden. In the ex's view, they still are.

My habit of getting into friendly conversation with dark-skinned strangers was one of the things about me he always loathed. He would parade it in front of visitors as evidence. Of what exactly I was never sure.

"Paula imagines she's living in Disney's Africa. She thinks there's nothing wrong with picking up raw strangers on the street," he'd say, inviting them to share in my shaming.

Funny isn't it, how the irreconcilables are never that obvious in the courting days.

Maybe the fault lines only appear later, the same way that cracks in shoddy housing are never apparent until the new owners move in. But once they burst open, there's no shelter to be found.

Even the simplest things – like having guests over for a friendly braai – turns into an armed encounter. I'm not discounting my part in it. I don't imagine I was easy to live with either; I had my quirks, too. I was never much good at the socialising, for one thing; never learnt how to do the tribal bonding over crime stories or produce the required snigger at the racial put-downs disguised as jokes. You'd have thought that after five years of marriage I'd have learnt to keep my mouth shut.

But there's only so much you can swallow and not have it come up again.

The ex's friend, Andre, trots out the latest hate-joke doing the social rounds. It's the usual brand: black-bashing. I've never liked Andre, and with the amount of wine that I've imbibed, I don't have to. I wait it out through the cue-card laughter.

"I've got one," I say. "What smells worse, a toilet full of diarrhea or a racist joke from the mouth of an arsehole?"

Hostility from the hostess is an instant conversation killer. Especially when it's vulgar.

"Don't mind Paula," the ex says into the silence. "She'll defend anything if it's black."

"Somebody's got to speak up for absent friends," I say.

I keep my voice light. It's all in the spirit of jest, right? But nobody's smiling, everyone wearing those tense expressions people get when they're about to be drawn into a spousal sparring match. From then on

it's all downhill. The guests depart in unison. The hosts are free to let rip without reservation.

The ensuing row doesn't so much rock the marital bed as demolish it. By that stage our marriage was pretty much over anyway. We both knew there was nothing left but a corpse on life support. To finally pull the plug was mercy-killing.

A yell from Hummer Man brings me back to the present. Nguni-girl has decided to investigate the enemy in close-up.

Blondie gives a theatrical shriek as the cow's horned head looms up at her open window. Hummer Man is frantic: is the beast about to dent his precious bodywork?

No, she's just being curious. Her long rough tongue unfurls to rasp thoughtfully at the gleaming bonnet, trying to decide what manner of beast it is. She licks the cold windscreen, leaving a trail of cow saliva smeared across it.

This is the last straw for Hummer Man. He flings the door open and clambers out, menacing in the way that South African beefcake can be when pumped up on entitlement. He hitches up his trousers purposefully; lots of steak and beer in that *boepens* of his. I see the whites of his eyes as he plants himself in front of Nguni-girl.

"Bugger off," he says, flapping his hands at her. "Go on, you cheeky carcass. Just bugger off back wherever you came from." Actually, what he said was a lot less polite than that.

Nguni-girl is losing patience, too. She's reading the aggro in him, swishing her long, tufted tail in indecision. She lowers her beauty-queen head and gives a cryptic moaning moo. Hummer Man answers it with a grunting bellow.

He rips his Sharks supporter cap off his head and scuttles towards her, whipping the cap through the air like a rapier. They dance, man and cow, a bizarre dance of flapping arms and weaving horns and mutual belly wobble.

The queue of stationary vehicles has become an extended python, traffic jams in both directions now. Passing trucks, motorcyclists, more minibus taxis packed to the hilt with home-bound commuters, have all halted to watch the drama.

Among the crowd is probably a number of past and present cattle-herders, experienced in the tricks and trade of cow management. But no one makes a move to intervene. There's something deeply elemental being

enacted here. Age-old adversaries squaring off in timeless challenge: might versus right. Daisy and Goliath.

Hummer Man is aware of the watchers. He jams his rugby cap back on his head, stiffens his shoulders and resolve. There's honour at stake here. Civilisation is counting on him. He means to show this beast a thing or two about respect for your betters.

"Hand me my knobkierrie," he orders his woman.

I hear her gasp: "Be careful, lovey!"

I share her alarm.

"I don't think getting violent is such a good idea," I call.

Hummer Man ignores us both. He rips the weapon from Blondie's uncertain hand and rushes at his adversary with a sumo-wrestler yell.

Nguni-girl lowers her head and charges at him. Her pointed horns lock with his stick and she wrenches it from him like matchwood.

"Jesus!" says Hummer Man, "Whooaa!"

He scuttles into reverse, trips over his Nike shoe laces and comes a spectacular cropper on the tarmac.

"Oh my God!" his woman screams. "It's going to gore him! Somebody do something!"

Her cry draws the same response that people show to a mugging in progress: everyone stands frozen. Nguni-girl is doing a good imitation of a killer bull, snorting through her nostrils, horned head lowered towards her adversary. Are we about to see intestines fly? No. She's not goring him. She's only interested in the Sharks cap dislodged from his head. She spears it on a horn tip and lifts her head with the cap dangling comically, like asparagus on a fork. Her antics draw laughter from the crowd. Hummer Man thinks it's directed at him. He hefts himself up painfully onto hands and knees, looking around for the ferocious horned beast.

But Nguni-girl, her point made, has lost interest in him.

She stands with her back to us, admiring the African sunset; a particularly fine one, it has to be said, fitting backdrop to the drama. The sunset flush has deepened into the moody violets and crimsons of autumn evening. A few bright-eyed stars have come out to watch the show.

Hummer Man is back on his feet, dazed and grazed, but standing. Blondie ejects herself from the tank and flings herself at him. "Oh my God, Petey! Are you all right?"

Petey shakes her off, grim faced. His cellphone is in his hand, his

fingers stabbing at the keypad. He bellows into the device, his rage mounting audibly as he speaks. He's shouting for Metro Police to come out and bring shotguns. They seem to be telling him no officers are available. There's been a tanker accident on the highway and all hands have been diverted there.

Nguni-girl, meanwhile, has decided to take the weight off her feet. She lies down again, considerately avoiding the disputed central island. Her broad back is nestling against the Hummer's wheels, her tongue fondly rasping at the tyres. She seems to have developed a soft spot for the iron-plated bull.

Hummer Man is through playing softball. He's a desperate man with nothing left to lose.

"Get the gun," he instructs his shaking wife. "I'll shoot this bladdy thing myself!"

The roadside crowd is hushed, no one laughing now. There's an awful fatalism to the scene: the halted traffic, the gathering dusk, the man and his nemesis, the dumb chorus looking on. "Don't do it!" I want to shout. "Your ego isn't worth it."

Blondie seems to be of the same opinion. She's protesting, pleading, sobbing incoherent words about arrest, jail and fates worse than death.

But Hummer Man is in no mood to listen. Shoving her aside he storms round to the passenger side and wrenches the cubby-hole open. His fist closes around something metal and mean. Blondie weeps helplessly, mascara tears staining her pink turtleneck. I feel so sorry for her. How many times have I been in her situation? To get between a man and his rage is folly.

I feel sorry for Hummer Man, too. Can't he understand that he'll never win anything this way? Force only draws counter-force. To triumph against the unbudgeable you have to learn to yield.

There's a sound behind me, like a gravel landslide. A rusted door rumbles open, and from one of the minibus taxis an old man emerges. His face has the texture of dried biltong. His suit and hat date back to the 1930s. He's thin as a pennywhistle, but his bearing is unbowed.

The crowd parts respectfully to allow him through. All eyes watch as he stalks to the battlefront; past the stranded bulk of the Hummer; past the weeping woman, the wild-eyed, gun-toting man.

He halts alongside Nguni-girl, now busy nibbling at a tyre-tread dessert, and gives a melodious whistle. Nguni-girl's fringed ears prick up.

The old man speaks to her, a clicking torrent of sound. His voice croons words while his tongue knocks a rich accompaniment.

There's praise and reverence and coquetry and chiding all mixed together in his praise-song. I understand no word of it; but I can feel its power.

"What's he saying?" I whisper to my awed and speechless neighbour. He shakes his head to signal the impossibility of translating then gives me a simplified version. It goes something like this:

"Come, Imasenezimpukane.
Come, favourite speckled cow of my youth,
Fly away like the Bird That Never Rests,
Hurry back to the green hills
Where your brethren, Stones of the Forest
And Eggs of the Lark await you.
For you have tamed the Iron Beast of the Road
And now it is time to rest."

It's the old language he's speaking, the deep and complex isiZulu not often heard any more. It's a language deeply observant, expressive and playful, that named things in recognition of their poetry of being and not just ownership; that understood and honoured the intricate connections between people, the nature that supported them and the daily rhythms and rituals of cultural life.

It was language I had never properly known or spoken, yet I felt the sadness of its vanishing. Its loss signals the passing from existence of a much more human way of being and seeing; of an entire reference field of knowledge no longer wanted in the world – this increasingly automated, utilitarian and over-surveyed world that has neither place nor value for anything that can't be contained or owned.

Nguni-girl seems at peace with her praise-poem. She gets to her feet obligingly, stands eyeing the old praise-singer as if awaiting further instruction.

Swaying her large spotty hips, she ambles across to the roadside with her gallant cow-tamer following.

I watch them move towards the railway line, into the dimming afterglow, taking their magic with them.

The crowd stirs as if released from a spell. We climb back into our arrested vehicles and resume our interrupted ways back to our diverse

lives.

Hummer Man roars off in a screech of wheels, taking his zone of rage with him.

I look back across the railway line. Straining my eyes through the deceptive twilight, I can just make out a large, pale, horned shape bobbing along placidly ahead of a dark, upright pennywhistle. Then both of them vanish into the star-strewn sky.


JUNIOR BILAKA

Ellen Banda-Aaku (Zambia)

If You Pay It Will Show

Ellen Banda-Aaku is a writer from Zambia. She writes mainly for young adults and has won several literary awards including the Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa, the Commonwealth short story competition and the Penguin Prize for African writing for her novel Patchwork which was also short-listed for the Commonwealth Book Prize. In 2012 Banda-Aaku was awarded the Zambia Arts Council Chairpersons Ngoma Award for her outstanding achievements in literature. Three books by Ellen Banda-Aaku are due out in 2014: a factual book about cancer in Zambia titled, Nthano Zathu – Our Stories of Hope; a teen fiction book by Farafina publishers of Nigeria titled Sula & Ja; and a book for children titled Tama's Journal by Teach Twice publishers in the US.

"If You Pay It Will Show" The Role and Relevance of the Arts in Zambia

Ellen Banda-Aaku

IN A CATCHY nationwide TV advertisement some years ago, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation used the slogan "*If you pay it will show*", to encourage viewers to pay their TV licenses.[1] The slogan was popularised further when renowned Zambian singer and songwriter Danny Siulapwa (aka Danny Kaya) released a song, *Beta TV*. In the song he tells the story how he approached an attractive, seemingly innocent young woman but had his advances rebuffed with a curt response: "*I don't need a lover, but if you pay it will show*". The slogan can fittingly be used in a campaign to promote and galvanise investment in the arts in Zambia. If investment is made, social, cultural and economical relevance of the arts will show.

Arts and the economy

The arts are an income-generating industry if fully exploited. In 2011, the arts and culture industry in the UK contributed £12.4 billion to the economy, according to a report by the Arts Council of England on the value of arts and culture to people and society. Considering that the arts have the potential to generate significant revenue for an economy, it is surprising that the industry tends to sit at the peripheries in many developing nations. In Zambia for instance, the Zambian National Arts Council, an organisation tasked with advising the government on arts policy and developing artists in the country, is funded largely by donor agencies. While donor funding is invaluable – one could argue that

1 Arts Council England, The Value of the Arts and Culture to the People and Society (2014), available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/The-value-of-arts-and-culture-to-people-and-society-An-evidence-review-Mar-2014.pdf retrieved 3 October 2014

without it arts in Zambia would be in an even more precarious state – this situation invariably places the funder in the driving seat of the arts agenda and the government in the passenger seat. The fact that the body responsible for the development of the arts is left to the benevolence of funders is perhaps an indication that the arts do not get the attention they deserve and are not generally perceived as an industry with enough potential to contribute to a nation's development.

To give credit to the Zambia National Arts Council (comprising of various art bodies representing literary arts, performance arts, media and fine arts), despite being underfunded and criticised for having no strategic plan[2], the council continues to operate with some degree of success. One could argue that even the best strategic plan cannot be implemented without adequate resources. In order for the arts in Zambia to grow and develop to a point where the industry can make a significant contribution to the economy and all the benefits to society be realised, significant investment is needed. Recently, and for the first time in Zambia, a ministerial department with responsibility for overseeing the arts was created. While the creation of the Ministry for Tourism and Arts is commendable, it is yet to be seen how this will translate into tangible investment in the industry and a change in society's perception of the arts. Chilufya Chilangwa, the former director of Amaka Arts, an organisation aiming to develop Zambian arts into sustainable industries which will contribute to national development says: "The biggest challenge I faced organising the Amaka Arts Festival in Zambia in 2012 was trying to educate potential partners on the importance of investing in arts as a whole, and the long-term positive economic benefits of the arts to a country."[3]

The social value of the arts

Apart from having the potential to boost the economy, there are social benefits too.

The arts have the ability to change perceptions, educate and inform the public. Artists in Zambia are playing a significant role as educators,

2 A. Mulenga, 'Andrew Mulenga's Hole in the Wall. Arts & Culture interviews, reviews and critiques. *Zambia National Arts Council system is rotten – Lange* (2012), available at http://andrewmulenga.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/zambia-national-arts-council-system-is.html

3 Interview (Skype), Chilufya Chilangwa, 29th September 2014.

social advisors and agents for change. In 2013, the TV drama *Love Games* was televised in Zambia as part of a Safe Love campaign in the fight against HIV/Aids. The film's aims were to sensitise and educate about HIV/Aids. If social media is anything to go by, the series was extremely popular to Zambians abroad and in the diaspora. From the viewers' comments, it was apparent that they could relate to the issues and the characters, which generated comments and dialogue around behavioural patterns, cultural-social values and HIV/Aids.

Unfortunately, despite its popularity, *Love Games* only ran for 26 episodes. All the same, the art of film and performance had encouraged dialogue, entertained, sensitised and educated the public about HIV/Aids.

The power of the arts in Zambia can also be seen in the role they play in public health education. Community dramas are staged at health centres in townships and in rural areas to sensitise audiences about public and social health issues such as breast and cervical cancer screening, HIV/Aids. Mulowa, a young woman who lives with her husband and young children in Matero Township, Lusaka, had this to say about her experience of cervical cancer: "I watched a community drama about cervical cancer and realised I had the symptoms the character described. The next day I went back to the clinic for a cervical cancer test."[4] Mulowa was found to have pre-cancerous cells and referred to hospital for treatment.

Love Games and Mulowa's story are clear examples of how the arts in Zambia can positively contribute to nation building.

A national treasure

The arts and culture of a country are its essence and identity. To preserve this culture and identify, a country should maintain and sustain its art and cultural heritage. When the arts are neglected, a country risks identity. The sad reality is that due to the competing priorities in developing countries such as housing, healthcare, the maintenance of national libraries, museums and other institutions that serve as custodians of arts and culture are often neglected. Clear example is the Lusaka Playhouse, a theatre built in 1953 standing in the heart of the capital. Over the years the cultural landmark has staged numerous musical and theatrical productions, but for years now has been in obvious need of renovation. A

4 Interview, Mulowa, Lusaka, 20th June 2013.

year ago, a group of about 60 artists called on the National Arts Council and the Ministry for Agriculture (the playhouse is a cooperative society registered under the Ministry for Agriculture?), "to set up an interim committee for a specific mandate to develop a strategy and business model to restore the Playhouse to its core business, including clear strategies to fundraise and rehabilitate the Playhouse."[5] The artists go on to describe the cultural and historical landmark as, "a safety hazard,"[6] to performers due the dilapidated state. In the midst of this attempted coup of the management, the Playhouse's orchestra pit – which had been abandoned for years – was uncovered and revamped by Opera Z, a company that "promotes contemporary opera, dance and theatre by providing performance capability at no cost."[7] Opera Z went on to stage an opera production called *Damyna Damyna* featuring classical trained Zambian musicians. This is encouraging news. However, if the call from the artists goes unheeded and the current attitude towards the country's arts and cultural landmarks remains unchanged, it is in all likelihood that in another 50 years, the orchestra pit will once again be buried under dust. The irony of the opera production at the playhouse is that the situation typifies the state of the arts in Zambia, despite the strife; the artists preserve and continue to produce great art. If the arts industry is to develop, institutions of art and cultural relevance such as museums, theatres, libraries, art galleries etc., should be regarded as national treasures and maintained accordingly.

A mirror or a hammer?

German Marxist poet, playwright and theatre director Bertolt Brecht once said: "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it."[8] Can it be argued that the relevance of art lies in the fact that it serves both as a mirror and a hammer?

Because through art, a society sees itself and the reality of the

5 UK Zambians Print and on line Magazine, Jump to Content – Suspend Lusaka Play House Operating License – Artistes. (2012), available at http://ukzambians.co.uk/home/2013/04/17/jump-to-content-suspend-lusaka-playhouse-operating-licence-artistes/ retrieved 1 October 2014.

6 Ibid.

7 P. Langmead, Contemporary Opera, Dance and theatre Producer, (2013), available at http://www.operaz.org/ retrieved 2 October 2014.

8 Notable Quotes, available at http://www.notable-quotes.com/b/brecht_bertolt.html retrieved 4 October 2014.

reflection can heighten the conscience of society to a point where it questions, evaluates and changes. In a radio interview, American movie producer Spike Lee was asked why he doesn't provide solutions to the questions he raises in his movies. This was his reply: "One of the great criticisms of *Do the Right Thing* was that I did not produce the answers to racism and prejudice at the end of the movie. But I don't think that is my role as an artist, in my opinion, my role depending on the film is to say here is a mirror, this is what is happening to us. What are we going to do about....my role as a producer is not to give solutions but to start a discussion and debate in order to arrive at a solution?"[9]

The roles and relevance of an artist may vary depending on the artist and the environment. Maureen Lilanda is a renowned Zambian musician who has been in business for over 30 years. She sees her role as an artist in Zambia as that of entertaining, educating and influencing society by singing songs that address social issues in a subtle way and using her celebrity status to campaign for social issues such as HIV/Aids and prevention of child marriages. "Through my work as a campaigner for these causes, I have experienced the power I have as an artist to influence others."

The story of the Zambian artist

"Things are worse today for the Zambian artist than they were 20 years ago, because arts and entertainment are considered a luxury, hence the industry has been hit hard by the bad economy,"[10] says Maureen, adding that money is in live performances but the demand for them has dwindled. In terms of the development of the quality of music production, Maureen says the situation for artists is bleak as there are no *real* record label companies available to provide the specialist support services that go in to producing music. "What we have now are recording studios where an artist books space and equipment and makes a record using his or her own funds and then has to go out and market it," says Maureen.

The situation of a lack of professional support services for the musicians is the similar to that of Zambian writers. More and more

9 The Breakfast Club Power 101.5, Spike Lee Interview. Radio (2013). Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRIj0ER-HqA retrieved on 2nd October 2014.

10 Interview, (Phone) Maureen Lupo Lilanda, 28th September 2014.

writers of fiction are self-publishing today, than was in the case in the 1960s and 1970s when publishing was the domain of government. The Kenneth Kaunda Foundation KKF, a national publishing, marketing and distributing company monopolised and subsidised the publishing industry. However, in the mid to late-70s an economic crisis triggered by the drop in price of copper (Zambia's main export), hit the country and KKF collapsed. Dr Cheela Chilala, an academic and literary practitioner, describes the effect the economic downturn had on Zambian literature. "In my view, this time of economic crisis marked the start of the problems of Zambian publishing, especially because KKF had monopolised the industry. The number of writers had increased, but publishing capacity had dwindled."[11]

Today, very few publishers in Zambia publish fiction because it is not economically viable. Because of this, writers are self-publishing and by doing so, find themselves having to finance and promote their own books while the publisher's role is reduced to providing printing services. Kudos to Zambian writers such as Dr Sekelani Banda who have gone down the self-publishing route, as without their efforts even fewer books of Zambian fiction would be in existence. But self-publishing is not for all writers. Many do not have the funds or the marketing skills to be successful at it. As Dr Banda acknowledges, "I am determined to distance the notion of bad quality from self-published books. None the less, I must acknowledge that creating a 'professionally' produced book is hard."[12]

The crucial point here is that the lack of a thriving publishing industry and support services stifles the ability of artists to create.

Zenzele Chuulu, a visual artist and vice chairperson of the Zambia Visual Arts Council of Zambia, also decries this lack of support systems for artists in Zambia. "There are so many visual artists in Zambia but they are not visible because of a lack of supportive structures to sustain artists,"[13] says Chuulu. He believes what is needed to promote the visual arts industry's growth is the introduction of policies designed to

11 C. Chilala, 'Anatomy of the Challenges Facing Zambian Writers and Publishers of Literary Works, Journal of Southern African Studies, 40, 3 (2014) pp 593 – 606.

12 S. S. Banda, 'A Zambian Author's Contestation of Common Perspectives on Self-Publishing, *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40, 3 (2014), pp 615 – 621.

13 Interview (Phone), Zenzele Chuulu, 27th September 2014.

protect the Zambian artist, such as a national requirement that public spaces exhibit only the works of Zambia artists in order to increase the opportunities to exhibit. According to Chuulu, most countries adopt such strategies in order to protect and develop their artists, but Zambia does not have a full comprehensive policy. The situation seems to be changing for the better as the government has issued a memorandum that all officials buy Zambian art as gifts for dignitaries at home and abroad, and Chuulu acknowledges this but insists more needs to be done.

The general feeling by those working to promote the arts in Zambia is that there is a need for more Zambians with Fine Arts qualifications. Recently, a private university, the Open University Zambia, has introduced BA degree Programmes in Fine Arts and Theatrical Arts. This is seen by many as a solution to the problem of apathy towards the arts in Zambia. "Hopefully, when we have graduates of Fine Arts in Zambia, it will help develop an appreciation of the arts,"[14] says Chuulu. He also makes the point that a large proportion of the population in Zambia politicians included, do not have a full appreciation of the value of the arts. To support this point, Chuulu gives the example of the construction boom that is taking place in Zambia. "A boom in construction should see a growth in visual arts as new infrastructure creates new art spaces, but because of the lack of formal knowledge about the arts, the construction boom is not having a positive growth impact on the arts industry."[15]

The argument for more arts qualifications in the country is that the increased specialist knowledge of the arts will result in an appreciation of the industry and a situation where opportunities to develop the industry are recognised and exploited.

Freedom of expression?

An artist can be only as relevant as he or she has freedom of expression. Impediments to creative expression can take various forms. Factors such as a lack of resources, political affiliations, cultural and religious beliefs and fear of censure can hinder an artist's creative expression. For centuries and the world over, artists have been incarcerated for their work, particularly when the art form expresses social or political injustices. Peter Chikwampu, the current director of Amaka Arts Festival, sees the situation in Zambia as paradoxical. "I feel artists have and do not have

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.

freedom of expression, because there is no organisation that performs the role of monitoring and censoring artists' work. But on the other hand, we have the situation where certain music is not given airplay on government-owned radio stations because the authorities feel the content is in bad taste."[16] While this indicates an element of suppression of the artist's creativity for political reasons, themes that highlight social cultural issues tend to feature more prominently than politics in Zambian art. This is probably because Zambia has been fairly stable politically since the introduction of multi-party politics in 1991. Over the past 23 years, elections have taken place and political parties have changed seats with minimal disruption to the country. To this extent, social challenges such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/Aids, gender-based violence seem to make for more compelling sources of inspiration for the Zambian artist.

However even expression of social cultural themes does not go unchallenged. Chuulu chuckles when asked if he is free to express himself as an artist. "I was arrested in 2004,"[17] he says and goes on to explain the reason for his arrest. The Visual Arts Centre of Zambia co-hosted a performance and art work exhibition with a South African artist. The exhibition and performance involved body art where nude bodies were painted in bright colours and then impressed on white canvass to create designs. "Someone went and reported, and security personnel invaded our offices of the Visual Art Council and forcibly accused us of being in possession of obscene materials," [18] says Chuulu who was detained for 12 days then released with a suspended sentence. Chuulu goes on to say that it is not unusual for artists in Zambia to be challenged by a Christian organisation for exhibiting "immoral material" as art or for a women's advocacy group to accuse an artist of objectifying women. He gives the example of a Zambian artist whose exhibits were confiscated because they were of women with their breasts exposed. "The irony of the situation was that the artist's work was inspired by the images he saw at the Ncwala[19] traditional ceremony where the custom is for women to parade topless; but the guy expresses the images in art form and suddenly

16 Interview. P. Chikwampu. 6 October 2014

17 Interview. Zenzele Chuulu. 28th September 2014.

18 Ibid.

19 Tradition ceremony held annually by the Ngoni Tribe of Eastern Zambia to celebrate the first harvest of the year.

it's not acceptable."[20]

So the freedom of the expression of the artist in Zambia is being curtailed, somewhat, by social, cultural and religious values. The fact that attempts are made to suppress the expression of artists demonstrates the power of the artist to influence society.

What is the way forward for the arts in Zambia?

To develop the arts in Zambia to a level where they create jobs, generate income, sustain and preserve the arts and culture of Zambia, investment is required at all levels. A campaign to highlight the importance of the arts in order to inform the public and also generate an interest in the arts should be implemented countrywide. There is also a need for a strategic plan with defined measurable goals, backed by sufficient resources in order to catapult the arts industry to a place where it can realise its full potential. Patience is also required as it takes time to see the results of investment made in the arts. Another issue, perhaps more complex, is finding a way to measure the value of the arts and the contribution it is making to society. The challenge being aesthetic value can't easily be translated into numbers. All the same, a system that will record and monitor the income potential of the arts industry is crucial if investors are to be convinced to put their money in the arts. Hopefully with a better understanding of the importance of the arts, more investors will come forward and commit to supporting the Industry. The government should however take the lead in encouraging private funds to be invested in the arts by introducing policies and laws which protect and preserve the artists and the art and culture of the country. Granted, it is not an easy task but it has to be done because the social, economic and cultural benefits of the arts are too valuable to be ignored. A country needs an income, an identity, and cultural value. But for all of it to fall into place and to reap all the benefits of a thriving Art culture massive investment is needed; to paraphrase; pay and it will show.

20 Interview. (telephone) Zenzele Chuulu. 28th September 2014.

Gaël Faye (Rwanda/France)

Don't Blame it on Voltaire!

Gaël Faye, is a singer, songwriter and composer. As an assiduous student, Gaël Faye was drawn by creative writing, rap, and slam poetry. Together with Edgar Sekloka, they created the 6D Label Production and self-produced their first eponymous album which became a major success in 2011at the Printemps de Bourges. In 2013, the Pili Pili album on Croissant au Beurre, was released and it revealed the singer's identity, together with Ben l'Oncle Soul and Bonga of Angolan descent.

Don't Blame it on Voltaire!

Gael Faye

IN A PRIMARY school classroom, a teacher is returning written assignments to the pupils. The subject is examining exactly what is freedom of expression?

All the pupils get their assignment back, graded by the teacher. All of them, except one. He has to leave the class under the gaze of his fellow pupils. He departs, accompanied by two men, for an unknown destination

Firstly, we don't all agree on what freedom of expression means. Some say it's the freedom of opening your trap whenever you feel like it. Almost like the crocodile, when he's sunbathing, mouth wide open, with that suicidal bird, an Egyptian plover. You know what I'm talking about? The one that takes care of his dental hygiene, sitting comfortably inside the crocodile's mouth, as if it's the most natural thing on earth.

Others say freedom of expression is the right to kick up a stink, to make yourself heard, to speak up, to speak out, to be the voice of the voiceless, and all the twaddle of those activists fighting for the rights of men, women and their children.

But here, we all know that only men have the right to shout, and that women must shut up. And so must children. Well, you may yell as long as you're a small kid. You may scream in the middle of the night and wake the whole household. But as soon as you are old enough to string together sentences, grasp concepts of subject-verb-object, then on you have to keep your head down, look at your shoes and not speak until given permission to do so.

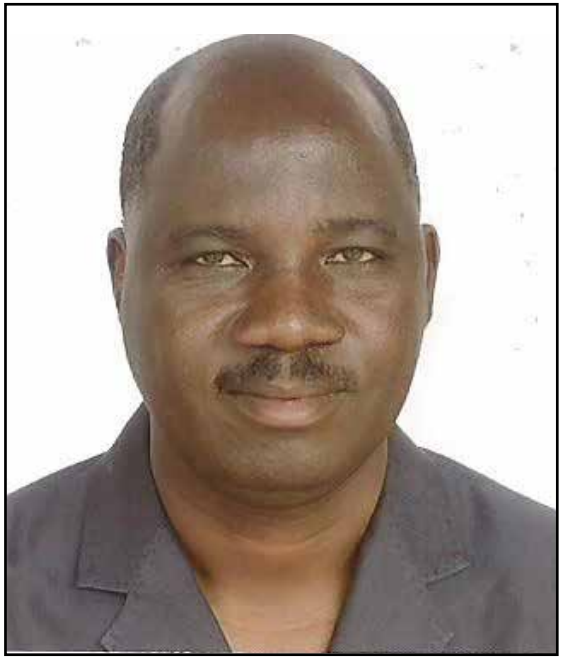
There's another group of people who think that freedom of expression has nothing to do with your mouth. That it's about thoughts, about what's going on in your brain, up top, and that you are free in your head when your ideas can walk around completely naked, bottoms showing, singing lalalalala, with no thought for what others may think.

These guys say that it's the freedom of our souls, that it's out of reach, that the police can't get hold of it, can't seize anything at all as evidence.

Nothing to report, officer! But the priest at church, now he, on the other hand, tells you that God knows what's going on in your thoughts. God reads you like an open book. He knows about all the smut and all the disgusting dirty things you're hiding. If your thoughts are not exactly in line with the the Holy Scripture, you'd best confess, otherwise, you'll have to deal with the big boss up there!

There's a last group of people who say that freedom of expression is a right. That means it is allowed and one can use it, and moreover, if one uses it one shouldn't be afraid of reprisals from the country's president or his soldiers. With freedom of expression, one shouldn't get into trouble if one tells the President things he doesn't want to hear. Our President is often heard on the radio. He really likes talking and he quotes the Bible and sometimes even writers, philosophers that most people don't know and whose work they can't even read, because most people can't read. And those who can read a little, like me, don't have enough money to buy books. Once, the President quoted a philosopher hamed Voltaire. He was French or Swiss or something, but anyway, he's dead but he left the world a few sentences to enlighten people with his wisdom on freedom of expression. For instance, he said, " I don't agree with what you are saying, but I will fight for your right to say it." Really a nice sentence that, even beautiful! But when the President quoted it, it became, " I don't agree with you and I will beat you up if you dare say it." In conclusion, I will not answer the question of this assignment. To each his own opinion. But I note that there is freedom of expression in our country. For the President only.


RESPECT MY BELIEF RIGHTS
FREEDOM OF ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION
LIBERTÉ DE RELIGION



Hamadou Mande (Burkina Faso)

Artistic Freedom and Cultural creation in Burkina Faso

Hamadou MANDE is research professor of dramatic arts and cultural policies, and Director of Professionnal Training at the University Ouaga 1 Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo of Burkina Faso. He has a PhD on Theater studies.

Director and director of theater troup, he also assumes various artistic and associative functions including those of Educational Director of Training Centre and Research in Performing Arts (CFRAV), President and Artistic Director of the International Festival of Theatre and Puppets of Ouagadougou (FITMO) and Vice President of the International Theatre Institute (ITI). He is a member of the Technical Committee and Focal Point for Burkina Faso of the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA).

Artistic Freedom and Cultural creation in Burkina Faso

Hamadou Mande

Introduction

A lack of freedom is completely detrimental to the development of artists and their creativity. It is in this context that a number of initiatives have been taken at national and international level to insure conformity with this right to freedom, fundamental for artistic and cultural creation.

Alongside these initiatives, there is urgent need for monitoring and surveillance, essential if these freedoms are to become a permanent reality. Within this context, Arterial Network has invited us to explore the issue of artistic freedom and cultural creation in Africa.

In 2004, the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA) stated in its strategy document, *Cultural indicators for development: towards an African perspective*, that cultural freedoms are a priority for countries to include in their cultural policies.

In Burkina Faso, the right to artistic freedom and cultural expression is guaranteed by a variety of international and national legal instruments. These all recognise that the arts are the "lungs of the city", in that they entertain, inform, train, educate, raise awareness and nourish both the body and mind of the individual. Through art and culture, individuals within the community can express their humanity and outlook on the world. The arts give meaning to life. Their relevance is recognised and there is a commitment to protecting and promoting them.

This recognition does not mean, however, that there are not sometimes serious violations and restrictions against artistic and cultural freedom – or even denial. These abuses, however intermittent, reflect the need for vigilance and a willingness at all times to halt any possibility of challenging the right to freedom of expression and artistic and cultural creativity.

For this reason we want, with this case study, to analyse the situation for artistic freedom in Burkina Faso by looking closely at the legal framework and current regulations and to examine the relevant statutes and laws that have been adopted as well as instances in which artistic and cultural freedoms have been infringed.

1 – Legal and regulatory framework

The right to freedom of expression and creativity, as well as the right to participate in cultural life, is guaranteed by the current constitution of Burkina Faso, adopted on 2 June 1991.

In its introduction, this charter specifies that it subscribes "to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Political, Social and Cultural Rights". This reinforces Articles 7 and 8 of Section 1 (Fundamental Rights and duties) that relate to freedom of belief, non-belief, conscience, religion, philosophy, worship, practice, assembly, opinion, media, information, as well as Article 18 of Section 4 which aims to guarantee and promote "artistic and scientific creation", all of which constitute the social and cultural rights recognised by the constitution. In addition, Sections 21 and 28 guarantee freedom of association and intellectual property. Article 28 states that "the creation and the resulting artistic, scientific and technical works are protected by law. Expression of cultural, intellectual, artistic and scientific activity is free and can be exercised according to current laws."

The international treaties and conventions to which Burkina Faso has subscribed to and on which the country's basic law is based include:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) ratified by Burkina Faso on 10 September 1998
- Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, ratified by Burkina Faso on 18 September 1969
- Cultural Charter for Africa, ratified by Burkina Faso on 17 October 1986
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, ratified by Burkina Faso on 2 April 1987
- Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, ratified by Burkina Faso on 21 July 2006

- Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions, ratified by Burkina Faso on 15 September 2006
- Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, signed but not yet ratified.

The number of treaties and conventions to which Burkina Faso has subscribed is very important. To date, approximately 18 international conventions, directly relating to culture and the arts, have been either signed or ratified by the country.

At a national level, the cultural sector is developing a detailed framework of compliance with the adoption of seven laws for the protection of literary and artistic property, legal deposit, advertising, film and audio-visual, freedom of association and decentralisation. In addition, the National Cultural Policy of Burkina Faso[21] (a document developed through consultation) was adopted in November 2009, which has as its purpose to "base the nation's future on internal values and changing realities".[22] It is also worth noting that in 2013, the status of artist was authorised which, despite its belatedness (coming into force 53 years after independence), completes the framework for the cultural sector.

Freedom of expression, regulated by consensus-based standards, is a right for all individuals. It includes freedom of opinion, communication and creation as stipulated in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950. This states in part, "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers ..."

Burkina Faso is also a signatory to several international conventions on copyright, freedom of expression and related rights. At a national level, there is a body of rules governing the enjoyment of the freedom of creation that it is guaranteed by the country's constitution. This means that this freedom is exercised within the framework of the law and cannot be absolute. Beyond the legal and regulatory framework, it should be noted that the vast majority of Burkina Faso's artists have always enjoyed freedom of action and creation due to the lack of official

21 National Cultural Policy of Burkina Faso, adopted in 2009

22 Idem

censorship structures. Jean-Pierre Guingané[23] was therefore able to claim that creative freedom is the secret for cultural and artistic vitality in a country that conducts itself with integrity. He went further to say, «This country has a rare asset within the context of Africa: we have virtually complete freedom for designers and artists. It is exactly this tradition of freedom that raised fears of dirigiste tendencies during the revolutionary period".[24]

This hard-won freedom has always faced challenges, especially under periods of emergency measures when freedom of expression was not always guaranteed. Even during the revolutionary period – which everyone recognizes as being extremely fruitful in terms of artistic creativity, fully supported by a dynamic cultural policy [25] – there were still attempted restrictions of creative freedom, as illustrated by the guidelines of the revolution: «Culture in the People's Democratic society should be of a threefold character: national, revolutionary and popular. Anything that is anti-national, anti-revolutionary and anti-people should be banned. Instead we should extol our culture for celebrating dignity, courage, nationalism and all the great human virtues ... Let our writers put their pens to the service of the Revolution ... « [26]

The desire to control the contents of artistic work and the classification of artists as either revolutionary patriots or activists opposed to the State, pose a risk to the freedom of creative practice.

The majority of national legal instruments currently in force were adopted after the revolutionary period, with the return to constitutional rule under the Fourth Republic. We would therefore have expected that the status of the artist and respect for creative freedom would seriously improve. Unfortunately, this seems not to be the case if we take stock of

23 Prof. Jean-Pierre Guingané (1947-2011): playwright, academic and former Secretary of State for Culture, was an important figure in the cultural landscape of Burkina Faso, Africa and internationally, particularly in the field of theatre.

24 Jean-Pierre Guingané, Cultural policies: and accountability sketch (1960-1993), Burkina between revolution and democracy (1983-1993), Political order and social change in Sub-Saharan Africa, pp. 77-90.

25 The establishment of large-scale public events such as the International Crafts Fair of Ouagadougou (SIAO) and National Culture Week (SNC) as well the national orchestras of young people and women from this period.

26 Jean-Pierre Guingané, Cultural policies: and accountability sketch (1960-1993), Burkina between revolution and democracy (1983-1993), Political order and social change in Sub-Saharan Africa, pp. 77-90.

what has happened over the last two decades.

There can be a wide discrepancy between the existence of a powerful legal framework and a guaranteed respect for individual freedom of expression and creativity: in the case of Burkina Faso a discrepancy is clear where, despite the stated intention of promoting artistic and cultural development, few legal mechanisms are enforced. The arts and culture remain the poor relation of national development policies and artists continue to be regarded as marginal. In addition, the kind of repeated violations artists observe on a daily basis force them to become increasingly resilient if they are not to become completely alienated.

The following examples go some way to indicating the type of infringements and restrictions of freedom of expression and creativity encountered in Burkina Faso.

2 – Restrictions of freedom of opinion and creativity in Burkina Faso.

Among the practices, attitudes and actions that undermine full enjoyment of artistic freedom, prejudices exist about certain artistic professions considered demeaning, especially for women. This is the case for actresses, as illustrated by Odile Sankara's experience: «In Burkina Faso, actresses are often seen as prostitutes because of their working lifestyle. In our job we have to work in the evening: this does not mean we live an immoral life.»[27] Laure Guiré, actress and president of the Women's Association 'Wéléni' agrees: «It's very difficult to work in an environment where women in the theatre are considered promiscuous. People think that girls go to the theatre to be like men. 'The day is made for work and evenings are for staying home', they say but working in the theatre involves evening hours, often until late. People are really suspicious about this: they also don't understand the fact that we have to go on tour to promote the shows: 'How can a woman travel regularly with men without anything happening?' is the main question from everyone where we live."[28]

The fact that women are even working in theatre is a major achievement and the pioneers paid a high price for getting onto the stage. Women are constantly denied the right to practice the acting profession and they struggle every day against gossip, insults and being

27 www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJA255lp114-115.xm10/

28 Interview with Laure Guiré

bad-mouthed by some men – and also some women – just to be able to practice their chosen profession. In general, it must be emphasised that the rights and freedoms, described in a variety of texts by artists, and the relative guarantee of freedom for creativity, have been hard-won achievements, never generous handouts.

Even more than prejudice, artists have suffered direct threats of harm, both physical and to their reputation. These practices increased during the past decade under Blaise Compaoré's regime. In April 2007, radio host and musician Sam's K le Jah (Karim Sama) was subjected to death threats. One of these demanded that he «stop his nonsense at radio Ouaga FM». These threats are designed to intimidate artists who make use of their freedom of opinion and expression to denounce corruption at government level. These threats not only violate the right to freedom of expression but they also are in danger of jeopardising the advances that have made for these rights. In all, Sam's K le Jah received three death threats between May and June 2007 before his vehicle was set on fire on 28 September 2007, while he was on the air hosting his reggae show. The pressures would continue until his dismissal from Ouaga FM radio 30 May 2011. Other musicians have also been pressured and received veiled threats from the authorities for being outspoken. This was the case of rapper Serge Bambara aka Smokey for his hit, *Who benefits?* (which evoked the assassination of former president, Thomas Sankara) or another hit track, *With real bullets* made with Sam's K le Jah.

In the field of cinema, there is the case of the documentary, *Borry Bana* or *The Fatal destiny of Norbert Zongo*, directed by Luc Damiba and Abdoulaye Ménès Diallo. This film about the assassination of Norbert Zongo was in fact censored by the public media and it was only after the fall of Blaise Compaoré that it could be broadcast on national television. In response to this degree of censorship, the artist Smokey distributed the film on the Internet and the promoters of the documentary *Borry Bana*, launched the Ciné Droit free festival in 2005, which has become a key festival alongside FESPACO.

In terms of literature, writer Vincent Ouattara [29] who published a book critical of Blaise Compaoré's government, was subjected to threats and intimidation by individuals in high political circles.

For similar criticism, journalists like Bitou Germain Nama, Newton

29 Vincent Ouattara, The Compaoré years: crime, politics and power, Klenba editions, Paris 2006

Ahmed Barry and many others have many times been brought before the police or State security officials to justify themselves. Newton Ahmed Barry was also the subject of death threats. Journalist Norbert Zongo was the subject of repeated death threats before his assassins took final action and killed him on 13 December 1998.

There have also been cases of journalists and editors who have been tried for writings deemed defamatory by the public authorities: San Finna, the Observateur Paalga, Bendré and L'Evènement, all of which are private media outlets. If that were not enough, 2014 saw further violations of press freedom increase, with break-ins at offices of private newspapers such as the Opinion, L'Evènement and Complément d'enquête with no sign from the police of tracking down the suspects. The type of objects stolen (computers) showed a clear attempt to try and gag journalists. These violations of civil liberties have been condemned by civil liberties organisations such as the Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights (MBDP) and the Society of Private Press Editors (SEP) through public statements.

An example of restriction against and violation of the right to artistic freedom observed in Burkina Faso is discrimination against artists considered less than sympathetic or «opposed» to the regime in power. They are systematically excluded from the programming of major national events (FESPACO, SITHO, SIAO, CNS)[30] or gala evenings that offer opportunities for artists to earn some money. This discrimination – akin to a form of 'economic censorship' – puts pressure on some artists to be less critical and to self-censor. A precarious financial state is a reality for many artists and simply can't afford to object to these practices, all of which has an impact on creativity. The lack of subsidies and policies to support artistic creation, high taxation on imported professional materials and the lack of alternative funding sources all contribute to a highly tense and detrimental environment for artists and creative practitioners in Burkina Faso.

Restriction of freedom of movement for artists due to stringent visa policies for foreign artists [not always a direct result of national intervention] can be seen to constitute a violation of artistic freedom, and that cannot be ignored. Since the relevant authorities refuse to acknowledge these visa denials, creative practitioners cannot even

30 FESPACO (Panafrican Festival of Cinema and Television of Ouagadougou), SITHO (International Exhibition of Tourism and Hotel Ouagadougou) SIAO (International Crafts Fair of Ouagadougou), SNC (National Culture Week)

identify the exact charge made against them. This is most likely done in violation of international agreements and the UNESCO recommendations concerning the status of the creative, which stipulate that «States should promote free movement of artists internationally and not hinder the ability of artists to practice their art in the country of their choice" as well as national laws guaranteeing the free movement of creatives and their works.

Finally there is the very serious issue of piracy – often encouraged by individuals who are working the system at the very highest level for their own gain – which makes the situation far worse for creatives wanting to practice their art freely and with due respect.

These few cases show that Burkina Faso does not guarantee artistic freedom of expression and that there needs to be permanent pressure on the government, because without freedom of expression and opinion, there can be no artistic freedom. "Art is fundamental to humans" reminds Ms. Farida Shaheed:[31] «Art is an important means for each person, individually or collectively, and for groups of people to develop and express their humanity, their worldview and the meaning they attribute to their existence and their achievements».[32] In these circumstances, there is a real need for resistance and Burkinabe artists have organised grassroots movements such as Balai Citoyen (The Citizen's Broom) to denounce abuses and capricious questioning of the existence of terms such as artistic freedom. These movements resulted in a widespread popular awareness that culminated in the mass uprising on 30 and 31 October 2014, leading to the departure of Blaise Compaoré from power after twenty-seven years of absolute rule. This movement was, it must be said, developed over time, though imaginative ways, integrating work from all creative disciplines and it is this, which helped to change attitudes and develop social awareness.

Conclusion

Given the density of the legal framework for the protection and promotion of artistic freedom and expression and taking into account that a formal censorship has never existed in the country, it is possible to conclude that artistic freedom and freedom of expression is guaranteed

31 Farida Shaheed, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights: the right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity

32 Idem, p3

in Burkina Faso.

However, the significant discrepancy between the value of the framework and what happens in reality leads us to believe that a real analysis of whether artistic freedom exists requires us to monitor what happens in actuality. And this analysis shows that serious activism and interventions regarding the right to artistic freedom and freedom of expression have had a degree of success. Significant success, in fact.

However legal infringements – sometimes open, sometimes veiled – come mostly from the political authorities, which control the economy, the judiciary and national security. These infringements constitute a serious risk for society because: «The effects of censorship or unjustified restrictions on freedom of artistic expression and creation are devastating. They generate significant losses on the cultural, social and economic front, deprive artists of their means of expression and living, create an insecure environment for everyone with a creative practice and stifle the debate on human, social and political issues. Finally they hinder the functioning of democracy and often also prevent the debate on the legitimacy of censorship itself.» [33]

Faced with violations of freedoms and denial of their rights, the only alternative left to the artist and social activist concerned with the protection and preservation of the freedoms of expression and artistic creation is to organize networks able to apply checks and balances and reverse the course of history through citizen action. This is the price to pay in order that the freedoms of opinion, expression, artistic and cultural creation will in reality be guaranteed and promoted.

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33 Farida Shaheed, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights: the right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity

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A Sense of History

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A Sense of History: Media, Academic and Artistic Freedom Two Decades into Democracy

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Introduction: the democratic content of South Africa's transition

It seems trite to say that, thanks to an excellent Constitution that guarantees civil and political rights, two decades into democracy, South Africa enjoys many rights and freedoms stifled under apartheid, including freedom of expression. Or does it? This question is likely to be answered differently by different social actors. Put to artists, academics and journalists and they would probably say that they enjoy unprecedented freedom, although there are signs of this freedom under pressure. The recent revelations that free-to-air broadcaster e.tv faces pressure to promote the government's infrastructure programmes, coupled with the growth of media more friendly to the ruling party, shows how free spaces can be compromised. The right to freedom of expression gives special emphasis to artistic, academic and media freedom, strongly suggesting that the document's drafters considered them to be at the core of the right to freedom of expression. So if freedoms that form the core of the right are largely respected, then it can be safely assumed that the right is in good shape.

But how would Abahlali base Mjondolo (AbM), the shackdwellers' movement, or the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

(Numsa) respond to this question? In September 2014, the chairperson of the KwaNdengezi branch of the AbM, Thuli Ndlovu, was shot and killed in her home, in what bears the hallmarks of a political assassination (Abahlali base Mjondolo 2014). In 2013, two Abahlali supporters, both from the troubled Cato Crest area, were killed under suspicious circumstances. Activist and outspoken critic of housing allocations Thembinkosi Qumbela was killed in March. Then in June, AbM activist Nkululeko Gwala was killed after speaking out against alleged corruption in housing allocations in the area. This hours after a senior ANC politician told a public meeting that Gwala was a troublemaker and should be removed. The politician has denied that he meant for Gwala to be assassinated (Moore 2013). After these incidents, Abahlali alleged the existence of a hit list holding the names of activists who spoke out and mobilised against unfair housing allocations (OppiTV 2013). In August 2014, three Numsa shops tewards, the secretary of Isithebe Numsa local, Njabulo Ndebele, his deputy Sibonelo 'John-John' Ntuli and Ntobeko Maphumulo, were killed in the family home of one of the slain shop stewards in KwaZulu-Natal (Numsa 2014). Numsa is spearheading a movement for socialism that may in time become a workers' party to challenge the ruling African National Congress (ANC) for political power. The Union is convinced that the killings are linked to an attempt by ANC-sympathetic unionists to form a rival union to reduce Numsa's influence.

The Daily Maverick has estimated there have been 59 political killings between 2008 and 2013 (Moore 2013). Initially, Mpumalanga was seen as the country's murder capital, following several anti-corruption whistleblowers being murdered. This led to the *Sunday Times* newspaper warning against a culture of political assassination setting into the country (*Sunday Times* 2011). Then the blight moved to the Eastern Cape and the North West. Now, as was the case under apartheid, KwaZulu-Natal is the epicentre of political killings.

When the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) disrupted Parliament in August 2014, demanding answers from President Jacob Zuma about when he was going to pay back the money for upgrades to his Nkandla residence, the security cluster, led by the Ministry for Defence, moved with lightning speed to enforce Parliamentary points of order. But in spite of the fact that the body count of whistleblowers, some are ANC members or members of alliance partners, as well as ANC political

critics has been growing, the security cluster responds at glacial pace. That is if they deign to respond. Some of these killings may be a result of non-political, criminal actions, but the circumstances surrounding many of these deaths suggest otherwise. Given the patchy performance of the security cluster in stemming the growing number of political killings, informal repression may well become a weapon of choice of less-principled members of the political and economic elites in their war against the poor. The chaos that besets the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), especially when their work does not involve prosecuting a famous Olympic athlete, strengthens this possibility.

The arts, academia and the media are central to knowledge production and dissemination in society. They can help the country see itself, diagnose emerging problems in the social formation, and propose solutions. Yet these sectors are still fairly privileged spaces. They remain fairly insulated from broader shifts in the political landscape, and their transformation still remains unfinished business. This means that assessing their freedom as an indicator of the state of country's democracy health would yield only a partial picture. No artists or academics are being killed for their work, and journalists remain largely free to practice their profession. However, alleged police murder of photographer Michael Tsele during a service delivery protest in Mothutlung in January 2014 (Sanef 2014), is the first and only known instance of a journalist dying at the hands of the State in a post-apartheid South Africa.

An assessment of the extent of democratic space made from a ground-up perspective – from the experience of working-class activists seeking to diversify the political landscape from below – would yield a different set of conclusions.

After two decades of ANC hegemony, political diversity is increasing. But as new political formations come into being, democracy is being tested, and in some cases, found wanting. What do these observations tell us about the democratic content of South Africa's transition, two decades down the line, and the role of the arts, academia and the media in this transition? Have these sectors played the necessary roles to deepening democracy? This paper attempts to answer these questions.

'This painful process of separate streams': artistic freedom and the struggle against apartheid[1]

It is necessary to delve into history in order to understand the deeper

roots of current pressures on democratic spaces in South Africa. I intend to return to a very troubled period in the country's history. In the 1980s, those in the liberation movement who were sympathetic to the Freedom Charter, or the "Charterists", become ascendant once again in South African liberation politics. The result was the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) concretise this political tradition inside the country while the ANC remained in exile. Many politically conscious artists lent their support to the UDF in solidarity against apartheid, and to build a democratic vision of a free South Africa. I became very familiar with these cultural politics, as I wrote my Honours dissertation on the selective cultural boycott, which led to me shuttling between the UDF cultural desk, Azapo and many artist and cultural organisations. I also worked in the community arts sector, in two community art centres which hosted artists across the various ideological tendencies in the liberation movement. During this time, I learned important lessons about the value of political diversity.

Working across these ideological schisms was not easy, as fighting had broken out between UDF and the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (Azapo) supporters a few years earlier, leaving profound mistrust in its wake. As the UDF became the dominant force in liberation politics inside the country, it clashed with activists who argued for the need to maintain independent organisations, out of respect for their members' political diversity.

Some UDF-aligned activists enforced their leadership of the liberation movement in authoritarian, at times violent ways, especially in the trade union movement. Disagreements between the UDF and Azapo eventually spiraled into bloody conflict between what became known as the "Charterists" and the "Zim-Zims" during the mid-1980s. While these conflicts were manipulated by the State, in its report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission laid the blame for "necklace killings" of Azapo members and political dissidents throughout the Eastern Cape firmly at the door of the UDF (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998: 111).

Writing in 1987, the New Unity Movement cautioned against liberation organisations using Stalinist techniques to resolve political differences. They went on to argue that Stalin had no sense of history: he had only a sense of himself. As a result, it took three short years after his death for his legacy to be disgraced forever. The Movement drew this

lesson from Stalin's history:

> "That which today seems all-powerful will not necessarily remain so forever. Only those actions, which intrinsically advance the cause of our struggle, and therefore, that of humankind, will be kindly judged by the future generation. Thuggery and violence and intimidation in the liberatory camp can at best bring short-term gains. Some may be browbeaten into silence. But others will rise to question and challenge and they will right the wrong by restoring these freedoms and relegating the violators to their rightful place in history, namely, the dung heap. Let the clique be warned, let them learn from history!" (New Unity Movement 1987: 19).

Some artists felt that they best served the Struggle by remaining independent from all liberation organisations. Once they sacrificed critical distance, they risked becoming hagiographers, and exposing those who refused to do so faced accusations of being counterrevolutionary. But many artists who were sympathetic to the UDF shaped a form of art that subordinated aesthetics to party politics and facilitated attempts to organise artists under its umbrella.

The UDF organised artists to encourage the isolation campaign against the regime, from within South Africa. This campaign included a cultural boycott. By that stage there was broad agreement in the liberation movement that the boycott should be administered selectively: that is, artists who opposed apartheid should be allowed to travel freely, while the regime and its supporters should be isolated. Initially, the UDF argued that the democratic movement as a whole should make decisions about who should be allowed in and out of the country, but soon it and its affiliates began making the decisions alone, making no effort to encourage an inclusive approach. This created the risk of the boycott being used to practice a form of ideological purging, where artists who supported the UDF were allowed to travel unhindered, while those who did not would be stymied, even if they supported the liberation struggle.[2] The global Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) also played a king-making role, anointing the ANC as the sole and authentic representative of the oppressed, and refusing to recognise the ideological diversity in the liberation movement (the exception to this rule being the City Group) (Cobbett 1987: 10).

On the whole, UDF-sympathetic artists remained silent about these censorious practices, and some opportunistic artists even used the shift to a selective cultural boycott to establish much-coveted international careers.

This reduction of the liberation movement to the UDF became clear at the Culture for another South Africa (Casa) conference, held in 1987, Amsterdam, and organised by the ANC and the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement. Its purpose was to discuss the state of arts and culture inside South Africa, and the effectiveness of the isolation campaign. This conference was significant in that brainstormed the cultural infrastructure that was needed for a non-racial, democratic South Africa, as well as developing a roadmap for the sector's transformation. (Campschreur and Divendal 1989: 9).

Many artists sympathetic to the Congress Movement participated, but others who were not or who preferred to remain independent, were excluded from discussions that were to shape South Africa's future arts and culture sector.

In attempting to justify these exclusions, one of the Dutch organisers admitted at the time that the conference "excluded groups … like Inkatha and the Black Consciousness movement', equating the former (then an apartheid surrogate) with the latter, a legitimate part of the liberation movement.

One of the writers who excluded from Casa was Es'kia Mphahlele, himself a controversial figure for having returned from exile in the 1970s. Speaking about the organisers' sectarian approach, he told me the following in an interview:

> "…it displeased me thoroughly, and I was angry because this is not the kind of thing that we want to do if we want to create a certain front, a broad united front, even if it is not an institutionalised organisation, but a broad front where people feel that no matter what the political affiliation they have, they can say what they want. I was thoroughly displeased with it. It was divisive and it made people feel that they are irrelevant… [I would] be prepared to say, let us go through this painful process of separate streams, with the foresightedness to know that ahead of us there is bound to be a national culture, and even though we cannot predict what it will be like, it will be there" (Duncan 1989: 39).

A national culture? Artistic freedom in a democratic South Africa

So, to what extent has a democratic national culture enriched by the country's various ideological streams as envisioned by Mphahlele, come into being in South Africa's democracy? In 1990, as it became apparent that the apartheid regime was unsustainable, and the ANC and the then National Party (NP) initiated pre-negotiation talks. The ANC's Albie Sachs argued that the organisation's members should be banned from saying that culture is a weapon of the struggle, as this attitude had impoverished art. Instead, Sachs argued, the revolutionary duty of an artist is to "write better poems and make better films and compose better music, and let us get the voluntary adherence of the people to our banner" (Sachs 1990: 28-29). According to Sachs, art should aim for a "copy free world" and unleash the creative potential of South Africans through the broadest range of creative practices possible. The purpose of arts and culture policy was to bring such enabling conditions about, and if it did not, then the "new South Africa" risked merely legitimating inequality, in Sachs's prescient words (Alexander 2002: 143).

As democracy dawned, many prominent South African artists practicing in the "high art" tradition rushed overseas to join into the "global" art world once again, as South Africa gained increasing acceptance in the eyes of the international community.

Mega-events such as the Johannesburg Biennale were also used to integrate South Africa into global art networks, as these mega-events shifted from being platforms for national cultures to being conduits of a new global consciousness. Some artists and curators embraced globalisation uncritically and others appropriated post-colonial theory selectively to promote post-national art discourses and practices, but both reveled in the fact that the "post-national" moment had apparently arrived (Duncan 2007).

But could South Africa really confront the international art world as a nation at that stage? Were artists not opportunistically seizing on post-national discourses to jump over the national moment and "go global" prematurely? As Neville Alexander argued, the nation has to be built on all levels of the social formation (Alexander 1985: 23-40). If it is not, then a country can declare that national unity has been achieved, when the material basis for people to experience a common national identity does not really exist: such declarations risk being reversed, as

they are not deeply rooted.

The ANC's cardinal error – informed by errors in its theory of national unity – was to assume that they could legislate a "Rainbow Nation" into being. To an extent, the ANC was forced into adopting a superficial approach to transformation because the objective conditions globally did not favour anything more substantial. The country's transition to democracy took place after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and at a period in history when prospects for revolutionary change had waned. The international balance of forces had swung against liberation movements generally, and armed struggles specifically. The character of the transition meant that South Africa has not experienced a social revolution in a true sense. While the formal trappings of apartheid have been dismantled, the social relations forged under apartheid remain largely intact, and this has placed significant transformational constraints on many social levels. But there were also the subjective conditions within the ANC that predisposed it to half-hearted solutions to the country's national question.

The ANC has always been, at its core, a multiclass, reformist organisation that could bring South Africa to the point of dismantling apartheid – and it did so admirably under appalling conditions – but could not offer a meaningful programme to eliminate poverty and inequality beyond that.

Two decades into democracy, artists enjoy strong constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression. South Africa's democratic centre remains very much intact. But, nevertheless, there are also signs that Sachs's plea for artistic independence has fallen on deaf ears. The Film and Publications Board's attempts to censor Brett Murray's "The Spear" and Jahmil Qubeka's film "Of Good Report", suggests a creeping cultural conservatism hostile to artistic freedom. In relation to "The Spear", the Board used a section in the Film and Publication Act to classify disturbing or harmful or age-inappropriate material for children, to ban "The Spear" painting for children under 16 years, including online versions of the painting

According to the Board's judgement on applications for classification of the painting, "Younger people and sensitive people may find the themes [in the exhibition] complex and troubling".

In announcing the decision to classify the painting, the Board's Chief Executive Officer, Yoliswa Makhasi argued that the painting was

not being classified simply because of the exposure of genitals, but because the artwork "…has forced society to revisit its painful past" (Duncan 2012). The Board's reasons for classifying the painting are extremely suggestive of a "nanny State" mentality and underlying moral conservatism, rather than a legitimate concern to protect children from harm.

The shifting role of the Film and Publications Board is a fascinating lens to view the tectonic shifts in South Africa's cultural landscape. Originally set up to replace the apartheid-era censorship board, the Publications Control Board, the Board was meant to act purely as a classification body, with censorship being confined to all but the most extremely offensive content, such as child pornography. However, in the late 1990s the government expanded the Board's powers, while reducing its independence. Gradually, and inappropriately, the Board took on itself a larger role of being a moral regulator, whose task it is to uplift society, and in the process, its hostility to art forms it considered to be immoral had hincreased.

In a democracy, morality should not be grounds for publications control, as it invites subjective, socially conservative readings of which art is considered acceptable. Thankfully, though, the Board has an excellent Appeals Tribunal, which has checked the more censorious impulses of the Board, including in relation to Murray's painting and Qubeka's film.

Brett Murray has made much of his involvement with the UDF in the 1980s, especially when "The Spear" controversy escalated. [3] The painting formed part of an exhibition, "Hail to the Thief II", and it showed little sympathy for the ANC. The Board's attempts to censor "The Spear" had no place in a democracy, but at the same time the exhibition was dominated by deeply problematic stereotypical assumptions about the ANC. Some of its iconography bordered on racism. Whatever one thinks of the ANC and its recent history, it cannot be reduced to the caricatures that Murray put on display: a male gorilla humping a female one, ostensibly representing the party's relationship to the people, or a party that has used its proud history of struggle to demand Chivas Regal, BMWs and bribes. The ANC remains so much more than that, even Jacob Zuma's ANC. The artist's work also pointed to a profound sense of betrayal on his part, as though the ANC had betrayed his own expectations. But perhaps he had built the organisation up into something that it was not. To that extent, he too lacked a sense of history.

Multiclass organisations the world over run the risk of being taken over by predatory, authoritarian elements once they assume power, as they are driven by their own internal contradictions smother dissent from within and without. The ANC is no exception to this rule, and in fact, still remains on the democratic end of the scale.

Murray's exhibition points to an uncomfortable truth about South Africa's cultural transition; that whites still wield inordinately high levels of symbolic capital, relative to their numbers. While the freedom to create is available to all South Africans, the opportunities to have one's creative work heard or seen still remain unevenly distributed, and this suggests that the national culture that Mphahlele so yearned for has yet to manifest. This lack of transformation damages the cause of artistic freedom. The problem gives official censors more moral weight, as they can argue that the artists they are trying to censor are reactionary throwbacks from South Africa's past and their works are "not in our culture".

While the ANC led the struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa, its alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) has also ensured that Stalinism is also part of its political tradition too. However, so many artists aligned to the "Charterists" and promoted the "art as a weapon of the struggle", preferred not to acknowledge these realities. They promoted one organisation as the sole and authentic representative of the oppressed, and failed to defend the principle of political diversity. Also, they uncritically embraced a highly utilitarian view of art and its relationship to politics. In the process, they laid the basis for what exists today: a party whose leader said in 2008 that the ANC would rule "…until Jesus comes back" (SAPA-AFP 2014), and ahead of the 2014 national elections that "…We will continue to run this government forever and ever. Whether they [detractors] like it or not" (SAPA-AFP 2014).

To that extent, artists such as Murray need to answer for their silence when their voices were needed most, as they have helped create the very problem that now has come back to bite them.

Academic freedom and the unfinished business of transformation

Academia was a very privileged space under apartheid. While other democratic spaces were being closed down, academics still retained

some level of autonomy. Nevertheless, they did not take this freedom for granted. Some universities fought for academic freedom, defined in terms of a formula developed by the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, T.B Davie, who argued that academic freedom should be defined as the university's right to determine who shall be taught, who shall teach, what shall be taught and how it should be taught, without regard to any criterion except academic merit (University of Cape Town 2014). Today, academic freedom is guaranteed in South Africa's Constitution, and the T.B Davie formula still remains the dominant understanding of what constitutes academic freedom.

Universities are meant to play a key role in a country's intellectual (re)production. They produce the next generation of scholars, while providing spaces for free enquiry and exploration. Without the freedom to teach, write, publish and think, they would find it impossible to play this role. The consequence would be producing mindless automatons and become cheerleaders for powerful public or private interests. However, academic freedom should not just be about the freedom to teach and research. It should also guarantee the ability of academics to speak out publicly on issues of importance, including those that affect their own institutions. I would also argue that conceptualising academic freedom as a negative freedom – in other words, a freedom from restraint, usually at the hands of government – is inadequate to the task of addressing the transformational challenges in South Africa today. In this regard, the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility is a useful alternative departure point. The Declaration redefines the social role of intellectuals, as part of the broader movement for freedom and social justice. It holds the view that social relevance is the most effective bulwark against interference in academic freedom (Kampala Declaration 1990).

Threats to academic freedom are often understood in a conventional sense; namely as threats that are external to the university, and that generally emanate from governments. The case of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) from 2005 onwards is a sad tale of how academic freedom can be threatened, not from without, but from within. The most bruising incident involved academics Nithaya Chetty and John van der Bergh, who were accused of bringing the university into disrepute for criticising its most senior managers in the media, especially the then Vice-Chancellor Malekgapuru William Makgoba. The University's

management vigorously denied clamping down on academic freedom, arguing that this freedom was being used opportunistically by some staff members and their supporters to prevent transformation.

It is an undeniable fact that, 22 years into democracy, many of South Africa's universities are still grappling with addressing the legacy of apartheid; while student bodies are increasingly reflective of the country's population demographics, staff demographics still remain tilted towards white people and men. A report into transformation led by the University of Cape Town's Crain Soudien, documented a litany of grievances from black staff and students who feel alienated, especially at historically white universities (Soudien et al 2008). The racial and gender compositions of the professoriate are skewed towards white males to a shocking extent. Furthermore, many universities' departments remain very inwardly focussed, failing to utilise the freedoms they do enjoy to contribute towards transforming the societies in which they operate. If they are to become relevant once again, then academics need to start becoming the change they want to see in the world, if in fact they want to see change.

Central to the dominant understanding of academic freedom is the principle of academic self-rule. Self-regulation can prevent academic work from becoming corrupted by political or economic interests that may not necessarily have the pursuit of knowledge for the betterment of society as their primary objective. Yet at the same time, in an untransformed academic body, academic self-rule can maintain existing institutional arrangements, cultures and practices preserve pockets of privilege and reproduce unequal social relations. This reality can be misused by proponents of a statist vision of transformation to argue for more intrusive State intervention in the sector: an argument that was captured very succinctly by Lesiba Seshoka in the *Mail and Guardian* recently:

> "It is as clear as daylight that universities have rejected the transformation mandate of their majority shareholder, the State, in favour of the mandate of anti-transformation minority agents posing as funders, in the guise of maintaining university autonomy and so-called standards. This is unheard of in the private sector, where the views of the majority shareholder are respected." (Seshoka 2014: 38).

Clearly, these tensions have been very much at play at UKZN. However, is "transformation from the top" imposed by Government as the majority shareholder, really the answer? During Makgoba's tenure, this approach led to the university's management pursuing a narrow racial approach to transformation, and combining this transformation project with a corporatist agenda that sought to turn the university into a world-class institution, geared towards serving a high-skill/high-wage, globally competitive economy. This is what Tembile Kulati and Teboho Moja have aptly called "Transformative Managerialism" (Kulati and Moja 2006). An academy that is tied to the apron strings of the economy, as warped and unequal as it is, is going to be even more distanced from society than it is already.

There is an unbreakable thread between academic freedom and transformation. Academics will be unable to contribute to socially useful knowledge without academic freedom, and in fact, could not be considered transformed. However, without transformation, academic freedom risks becoming a freedom enjoyed by the few, reinforcing academic work as an elite undertaking. Unless the interrelated nature of these two concepts is stressed by academics, like artists, they may find it very difficult to maintain the freedom that exists. However, like the "high art" community, many in the academic community has also rushed to internationalise, without sufficiently attending to the national tasks that need to be undertaken to root knowledge production in broader society. The notion of universities that pursue global excellence will ultimately benefit South African society as whole, is the academic version of neoliberal trickle-down economics: a chimera.

Unless a more rooted approach to academic work is pursued, in time to come, the most meaningful intellectual work may well take place outside university walls. Already in sections of society, being an academic has become an object of derision: a synonym for someone who is cut off from society, incomprehensible to everyone except themselves, who makes no attempt to bridge the gap between the institutionalised intellectual work of the academy and the organic intellectual work that abounds in broader society. The failure to articulate a substantive definition of transformation, which embraces academic freedom as an integral component of this project, leaves the way clear for the imposition of statist definitions of transformation.

Granted, at the moment, there are important initiatives from

within the academy to orientate the academy more towards society and its problems, especially from within the Humanities. But until such initiatives become more widespread, then the academy risks shrinking into irrelevance, with the real battles for a more just and equal South Africa taking place outside its walls. Civil society needs academics to organise around erosions to freedoms, not only in their own backyards, but in broader society. The campaign against the Protection of State Information Bill (otherwise known as the Secrecy Bill) is one campaign where academics have been largely missing in action, but it is not the only one. This apathy on such important issues is short-sighted. There may come a time when academia needs civil society's voice on issues that affect them, and civil society may well turn around and ask "but where were you when we needed you?"

The blinkered watchdog: media freedom then and now

Like academic freedom, media freedom has been largely respected by the government, although there are signs of its erosion. The public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is largely in the ANC government's pocket, and has now turned its sights on the agenda-setting press. There are signs of more media organisations falling under the ANC's sway. This would be less of a problem if the media were both pluralistic and diverse. But in reality the media system is characterised by moderate pluralism, but scant diversity. The press has rebuilt investigative journalism capacity over the past decade, and as a result has often performed admirably as watchdogs of elite power in the classical liberal-pluralist mode. However, their focus has been on public power in the main, rather than private power. Yet at the same time, the press faces its own transformation challenges, which have been used by the ANC to delegitimise them. The party has argued that the print media display an anti-ANC bias and an ideological orientation towards neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism, leading to them being out of touch with majority opinion. The ANC has also criticised the Press Council of South Africa for being inherently biased towards the industry that set it up, and therefore of being self-serving. While there can be little doubt that these attacks were opportunistic, in that they were being used by the ANC to pursue a press control agenda, they were effective hooks for this agenda because they were areas of weakness in the press the ANC

could exploit.

It is ironic that the ANC is so hostile to the press. Under apartheid, sections of the English language press played a king-making role in relation to the UDF, and to this extent, also effaced political diversity in the liberation movement. Commenting on the tendency for the press to wipe out AZAPO's role in promoting the cultural boycott, Gomolemo Mokae called these papers "sychophants of the Charterists" (Mokae 1988). In a democracy, there is no doubt that the press still constitutes an elite public sphere, and because of that, it remains out of step demographically, and I would argue ideologically, with broader society. The mistake the ANC has made is concluding that the party, and only the party, is affected by this problem. In fact, all social formations that are constituted by poor and working-class people are similarly affected. Even investigative journalism tends to practice a form of elite surveillance of power, focussing on the (mis)doings of political, and to a lesser extent, business leaders. In this regard, the media's reporting of excessive spending on upgrades to Zuma's home is an example of best practice. However, very few investigative journalism resources are being devoted to exploring how power imbalances in social formation play themselves out at the base of society. In this regard, the editorial failure that characterised the early media coverage of the Marikana Massacre – this a result of journalists failing to take workers' accounts of events seriously – is a case in point.

Because of their focus on elite surveillance, the media have largely failed to document the erosions of democratic space in broader society since the early 2000s, when the imposition of neoliberalism fuelled localised, and at times, national resistance. While many of these struggles could not be described as consciously anti-neoliberal, they had the potential to coalesce into just such a national movement. In response to signs of emergent political diversity, the State became increasingly authoritarian, criminalising the right to protest by unlawfully banning protests with alarming frequency, arresting activists on the flimsiest of grounds, and misusing the surveillance capacities of the State to spy on them. Social movements such as Abahlali base Mjondolo, the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and the Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM) were subjected to these tactics, but small town and rural activists were particularly susceptible to official harassment as these actions generally fell under the media radar. Many have harrowing stories to tell. When

two LPM activists were alleged tortured at the hands of police during their arrest in 2004, many journalists scoffed at the allegations and were reluctant to report them. As is the case with many torture allegations, the criminal case against the police was dismissed for lack of evidence.

Since the intelligence services became entangled in the succession battle between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, a media spotlight has been thrown on the abuse of intelligence services to advantage sections of the ruling elite. But activists have been complaining about intelligence harassment for years. Evidence of inappropriate intelligence surveillance of political critics emerged as far back as the World Conference Against Racism in 2002, and then again during LPM preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2003, as well as in the wake of service delivery protests in Harrismith. Long before the Marikana Massacre, the police have been known to act effectively as private security guards for mining companies, repressing dissent against abusive mining practices. Jubilee South Africa activists in Limpopo and Mpumalanga have complained for years about police harassment, arbitrary arrests and police violence against protests, as well as death threats.

With important exceptions, elite and media responses to these events all too often involved a "Yes, but…". The fact that several movements have participated in illegal activities like road blockades and illegal electricity reconnections has been used as a reason to brand them as criminal, and to justify State crackdowns. But this branding has prevented a proper examination of the policing and intelligence practices used to contain their activism, which has been targeted at legitimate expressions and actions too and has, beyond question, been repressive.

Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that many activists have complained of experiencing persecution twice over: firstly at the hands of the police, and then again at the hands of the media, whose failure to recognise the reality of State repression left them vulnerable to further harassment.

Why have these problems surfaced? Undoubtedly, there is a class dimension to the problem, as journalists still tend to be drawn from a social base that does not experience the realities of working-class life, which includes a creeping de-democratisation of society that has starkly manifested itself in poor communities. The routine processes of news in commercial media organisations also place constraints on journalists. Commercial media organisations tend to legitimise the worldviews of

those who are most attractive to advertisers as "common sense", leading to reporting and commentary being sucked to the political centre, and in turn a process of marginalising more politically radical viewpoints. Furthermore, given the commercial pressures on media organisations, the sources most widely legitimised by other media tend to be the most used, leading to a form of pack journalism. These sources usually have access to power and money already, which includes the organisational capacity to maintain a constant flow of information to the media. Organisations representing working-class viewpoints, and these groups are generally less resourced, can easily be overlooked.

These trends are uneven, but to the extent that they do exist, they create an environment where the police can literally get away with murder. South Africans can remain suspended in a state of disbelief, continuing to deny the increasingly obvious fact: society saddled with massive inequalities can no longer be held in equilibrium through consent and increasingly, coercion is the State's preferred response.

Activists' experiences strongly suggest that media transformation remains unfinished business, yet attempts to transform have assumed a narrow character.

The focus is racial and, to a lesser extent, gender substitution. The focus should be on transformation that encourages the media to reflect the society in which it operates, on the levels of ownership, staffing, product and audience. This narrow definition of transformation risks leading to elite transformation, where the commanding heights of the media are passed from a white elite to a black elite, with little effort being made to diversify the media and increase access to the means of media production.

Both the press and the ANC have focused on racial transformation in the form of Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), measured in terms of the B-BBEE scorecard. As these scorecards are generic in nature, applying to many industries at once, they have nothing to say about transformation or the lack thereof in the most important areas of the media operations, namely content and audiences.

It is telling that the attacks on media freedom, and especially on the press, have somewhat subsided. While the press themselves have much to do with this – in that they initiated their own enquiries into press transformation and the adequacy of the press self-regulatory system and made some reforms of the basis of their findings – there are also

other shifts that may have given rise to the ANC's silence on the issue. The press was damned if it did not transform and damned if it did. If it did not transform, then it risked being de-legitimised as resisting transformation; but if it did open itself up to transformation, narrowly defined, then sections of capital aligned to the ANC could take over a chunk of the press and neutralise it from within. Certainly, there are signs of the ANC having shifted in this direction.

Another strategy the ANC government appears to have adopted is to grow State media sector and stealthily re-establish a Ministry of Information, using the lack of transformation as a pretext. This regardless of the fact Government took a decision in the 1990s to resist the temptation to transform the media by muscling into the media itself. At the same time, it is also underfunding, or otherwise hobbling, the effectiveness of institutions set up to bring a more democratic media system into being. In fact, it would appear that these institutions have been set up to tinker on the margins of the media system, or even fail. These developments imply a particular political project, namely a government that wants subjects rather than citizens.

Conclusion: the past in the present

A sense of history allows us to see the past in the present. It allows us to assess paths taken, paths not taken, and how these choices have shaped where we are now. Today will be tomorrow's history at some stage, which means that unless the necessary lessons of history are learnt, successes may not be replicated and mistakes are bound to be repeated. South Africa pursued a statist transformation path that was very timid; that changed laws and policies without really changing social relations. Community organisations were demobilised, creating space for the gouging of many transformation gains in the mid-1990s when South Africa was neoliberalised. Many within the liberation movement warned that this partial, fragile transition would be the inevitable outcome of the dominant liberation trajectory in South Africa, but all too often these voices were ignored, branded counter-revolutionary and even censored. The seeds of the lack of respect for diversity of opinion is now coming back to bite the country. It could have been anticipated that, as social polarisation sharpened, genuine democrats in the ANC would lose ground to a new generation of securocrats. It is these very securocrats

that now have full access to the coercive mechanisms of the Sstate: the police, the military and the intelligence services.

However, it cannot be denied that the ability to enjoy the fruits of 20 years of democracy, including freedom of expression, is unevenly spread across society.

Artists, academics and journalists enjoy it far more than other change agents such as activists. Yet these more privileged sections of society are not doing enough to ensure that these rights are generalised across society. At times, they have been apathetic about their own freedoms, never mind the welfare of broader society. These deficiencies in defending freedom of expression have much to do with how the right has been understood as a received idea in these sectors. This idea has been steeped in the liberal-pluralist ideological tradition, an assumption that personal freedom is automatically enjoyed by all, whereas in unequal societies such as South Africa, the ability to individuate and enjoy these freedoms is available to a select few.[4] Political activists have not hesitated to defend artists, academics and journalists when their rights are under threat, but this defence has generally not been reciprocated.

Down the decades, artists, academics and journalists have failed to consistently defend the principle of political diversity. They have also failed to recognise that the erosion of democratic spaces is inevitably going to creep into their relatively insulated spaces. Little effort has been put into defending freedom as an integral part of a broader transformational project that extends the benefits of the arts, academia and the media across society, rather than a conservative project that defend the rights of those who own the printing presses and broadcast houses, the means of formalised knowledge production, the galleries, the cinemas and the publishing houses. Self-serving approaches to transformation create space for the state to step in on the pretext that it has a duty to lead the transformation of society. This narrow defence of the right leaves the terrain wide open for more authoritarian transformation projects lack democratic content. And this should not be the case, as the democratic project should be central to any meaningful transformation process.

Those who are genuinely committed to emancipatory artistic, academic and journalistic work need to develop a language and set of practices that allow these sectors to become more reflective of the society in which they operate. It needs to contribute to the betterment of these societies as an ethical foundation of these sectors, without falling

into the trap of visionaries imposing a single line of march on these institutions to achieve these objectives. While many in these sectors may sleep easy in the knowledge that their rights are protected by the Constitution, it must be remembered that Constitutions come and go. Their defenders can be neutered. But others still enjoy considerable autonomy to practice agency: the Public Protector's office under Thuli Madonsela is an inspirational case in point. Ultimately, history teaches us that the most effective, sustainable bulwark against creeping erosions of democratic space is social relevance. If people see themselves in the sectors that are under attack, then they are more likely to come to their defence. As mass organisations are rebuilt from below, leading to the most significant reconfiguration of the political landscape in the past two decades, the project of developing a "democratising transformation" as an alternative to "transformative managerialism", becomes a project that artists, academics and journalists neglect at their peril.

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- These next two sections build on an article I wrote in preparation for this lecture, published on the Conmag site and entitled 'Artistic freedom then and now'. See Duncan 2014.
- Playwrights Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka, long associated with the black consciousness and Pan Africanist movements respectively, but fiercely protective of their independence from AZAPO and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), told me at the time that consultation effectively amounted to 'asking for permission' to go overseas, which they refused to do. They never experienced problems with taking plays overseas, though, but the Afrika Cultural

Centre, under the leadership of Benjy Francis, did. Although the Centre was often associated with Pan-Africanism, it was vocal about its political independence. The British AAM was particularly insistent about cultural groups consulting with the ANC before they toured in the country. When Francis and the Azanian National Theatre toured the production 'Burning Embers' – a strongly anti-apartheid play – in 1986, they were told repeatedly that they could not hand out promotional pamphlets or secure venues without having 'ANC approval'. As Francis told me the time, the AAM's reaction to them was 'petty and ill-informed' and 'an affront to the fact of our struggle. He concluded '…They [the AAM] cannot live our cultural history for us' (Duncan 1988: 58).

- For instance, in an interview with Master's student Ross Passmore, Brett Murray noted that in the 1980s, producing posters, t-shirts and other art constituted much of his 'day job' (Passmore: 97).
- As far back as 1845, Karl Marx argued in *The German Ideology* that this tradition's concept of a 'natural individual' vested with pre-political rights is a historical product of capitalist property relations and forms of production, and personal freedom has in reality been the freedom enjoyed only by those who developed within the relationships of the ruling class (Marx 1978, 146-202). In outlining the conditions for freedom of the working class, Marx recognised a difference between negative freedom and positive freedom. For Marx, negative freedom was a bourgeois concept, as it is the freedom primarily of those who own the means of production. Positive freedom is built up as a result of the struggle of the working class, and gives the working class an opportunity to develop as human beings. But, he argued, both negative and positive freedoms need to be advanced (Marx and Engels 1845).


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Freedom of Artistic and Creative Expression in Zimbabwe: A Survey of the Legal and Policy Frameworks

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Freedom of Artistic and Creative Expression in Zimbabwe: A Survey of the Legal and Policy Frameworks

Jesmael Mataga[34]

"Censorship is based on fear…" Johnny Clegg[35]

Introduction

This paper presents a brief survey of the legislative framework governing freedom of artistic expression in Zimbabwe. It contextualises the censorship regulations in Zimbabwe by situating them within the broad historical and contemporary environment of Zimbabwean laws on freedom of expression. Thus, the paper briefly looks at the historical developments in the legal framework governing freedom of expression and highlights how selected Acts and policies have affected freedom of artistic expression in Zimbabwe. Though the censorship laws affect a broad creative spectrum, this short study will draw on examples from the performing and visual arts. The study highlights key challenges currently affecting freedom of artistic expression in Zimbabwe and makes a few recommendations as solution.

Freedom of Artist Expression: Beyond Legislation

Contemporary art can be a catalyst for change. It can arouse emotions and it challenges the daily realities of society. This inevitably places the

34 Dr. Jesmael Mataga is a Zimbabwean Academic and Researcher who is currently a Senior Lecturer at the School of Museum and Heritage Studies, Sol Plaatje University, South Africa.

35 Johnny Clegg, interview by Ole Reitov, 1998. Freemuse, http://freemuse.org/freemuseArchives/freerip/freemuse.org/sw5920.html, (Accessed 28 February 2015).

artist in a position to engage positively with the art's result, or it can lead to confrontation with the State. In this ambivalent relationship, the State always seeks to regulate or control artists' power to provoke the status quo. One could say that the regulation of artists – usually stimulated by political, religious or cultural concerns – is an inevitable reality, but often an unpleasant one for the arts sector. Without belittling the importance of regulation, it is essential to acknowledge that artists have responsibilities in upholding societal and moral values, as well as a role in respecting the rights of others. The fact is that in its interaction with artists, the State always leans in dominance, equipping itself with statutory instruments in ways that often relentlessly undermine and reduce artists' freedoms, thus creativity executed. While in many countries there are laws that strive to create conducive conditions for the status of artists, experience also shows that as restrictive censorship goes on the rise, political and economic turmoil should be noted in context. In such contexts, artists should exercise their right to talk of or criticise society's conditions. In response, the State increases legislation to silence the former.

We now live in a world where freedom of expression, as well that of creative expression are recognised as key aspects of human development, the observance of democracy and as integral facets of the protection of fundamental human rights.

For this purpose, countries have various equality clauses, bills of rights and sections guaranteeing fundamental freedoms. Nations assert the right to freedom of expression in their constitutions, as well as in the ratification of international conventions, agreements, charters and other international instruments that guarantee basic freedom.

Globally, cultural and artistic rights are embedded within instruments which seek to protect these rights. These include international conventions, agreements and protocols as well as regional and national legal and policy frameworks that all seek to guarantee a free environment for artists and other players. Seminal instruments include Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), UNESCO's Recommendations concerning the Status of the Artist (1980), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and many more. Regionally, countries in Africa have adopted several agreements on human rights, noteworthy being African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1981. In the field of culture, the African Union's 2008 Plan of Action

on the Cultural and Creative Industries in Africa expressly proposes to "guarantee freedom of expression for creative and performing artists."

Many more charters, agreements and policy guidelines exist, setting standards for the creation of free conditions for artistic creativity. Many African countries guarantee rights and freedom of expression either in their constitutions, bills of rights, Acts of parliament and other policies. However, notwithstanding the existence of these legal mechanisms artistic expression frequently come under attack – religious, economic, cultural and political motivations all the seek to regulate, control and limit the ability of the arts to "talk to power".[36]

In a supposedly tolerant 21st century, legal and extra legal restrictions on freedom of artistic expression continue to exist. In a recent special report, the United Nations Human Rights Council's Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, reminded us of the multi-faceted ways in which the right to for the freedom of indispensable for artistic expression and creativity continue to be curtailed the world over. The report highlights a growing worldwide concern that artistic voices have been or are being silenced in different ways.[37] Freemuse, an independent international organisation which advocates freedom of expression for musicians and composers worldwide, is just by one of the many organisations monitoring and documenting violations on artistic freedom of expression.[38] Freemuse's reports collated from all over the world show that artists are increasingly facing censorship, persecution, incarceration or death, because of their work.

Given these developments and the well documented rise in violations of basic principles of freedom in the world, a pertinent question should be asked: is legislation enough?

What is clear is that regardless of the existence of well-developed international, regional and national legal frameworks, an inconsistency exists. Where on one hand freedom of association is guaranteed, while on the other hand the same freedom is made to shrink and become limited. Worldwide, artists continue to be threatened, persecuted, attacked,

36 Arterial Network, *Artwatch Africa 2013. Monitoring Freedom of Creative Expression*, 2013, Cape Town: Arterial Network.

37 United Nations, A/HRC/23/34, *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights,* Farida Shaheed, United Nations, March 2013. Available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A-HRC-20-26_en.pdf, (Accessed 11 February 2015).

38 See their website, http://freemuse.org/.

abducted, killed, detained, prosecuted, imprisoned and censored. This case study foregrounds this disconnect between the legal mechanisms created to ensure freedom and the devices used to limit freedom.

Developments in Zimbabwe point to the necessity of fair and flexible legal systems, but also to other important issues such as advocacy and raising awareness about political will, religious and cultural tolerance, as well as enforcement and monitoring. This suggests the need by the arts sector to do more in understanding their rights. Become familiar with existing laws and policies, advocate for revision of the laws, and engage and build consensus with the State. For even when the perfect laws exist, the pressure on artists to conform to the demands of the political elite, dwindling markets and other moral, cultural and religious considerations always force artists to self-censor. It is these issues, above of legal and policy reforms that are more difficult to solve.

Censorship in Zimbabwe: Background and Context

Johnny Clegg's expression quoted above, "Censorship is based on fear, " talks of an important connection between the inherent power of art to "speak truth to power", and the desire by political establishments to limit and curtail this. This desire emerges particularly strong in unstable economic and political environments. In moments of instability, censorship becomes a tool governments deploy in order to regulate, control and sometimes silence the platforms that artists use to criticise and parody, and highlight societal excesses. Such has been the nature of the relationship between artists and State censorship in post-2000 Zimbabwe, a period often termed "Zimbabwean Crises." One main characteristic has been the diminishing of the democratic space and a disregard for human rights and the freedom of expression and association.

The history of censorship in Zimbabwe has a long trajectory, stretching across the colonial and post-colonial periods. During the colonial era in Zimbabwe, the earliest forms of control of the arts sector included the 1911 Obscene Publications Ordinance and the 1912 Cinematograph Ordinance, which regulated visual media. Subsequent legislation included the Entertainments Control and Censorship Act, 1932 which expanded the scope of control to cover theatrical performances and other public entertainments. In 1967, these diverse strands of legislation were combined to make the Censorship and

Entertainments Control Act, 1967 which controlled the diversity of artistic production raging from book publishing, visual arts, and film and public performances.

Thus, the legal provisions currently regulating the arts in Zimbabwe were further entrenched during the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) regime (1965-1979) as it sought to limit the freedom of association and expression for Black nationalists. In a period when the regime faced pressure from protest activities by Black nationalists and international alienation and sanctions, Ian Smith's government used censorship to control publications, music, literary and visual arts. In this period, anything that was seen as "unpatriotic" was subjected to a stricter set of censorship laws. Besides the censorship laws, UDI also passed legislation such as the 1965 Law and Order Maintenance Act which severely limited the freedom of association for black citizens. In this period, statutory institutions, the Rhodesian Literature Bureau and the Rhodesian Censorship Board increasingly restricted publications by African authors and banned all material that was considered to be subversive or critical of the UDI regime.[39] The bulk of these censorship laws were not repealed after independence in 1980 and have remained largely unchanged since they were passed.

Contemporary developments regarding freedom of artistic expression in Zimbabwe can be better understood by looking at the broader political and economic environment, particularly at the turn of the century. In this period after 2000, a constricting environment on freedom of association, increasing intolerance of political dissent, violation of human rights and freedom of the press has ensued. Since 2000, new laws and regulations limiting the freedom of speech and association were passed as the government sought to exert stricter control over the dissemination of information and the activities of opposition political parties, as well as civil society organisations that were publicly exposing government's political intolerance and human rights abuse. Laws put in place to limit the freedom of expression and association included the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (2002), the Public Order and Security Act (2002), and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2004). Following these, a stricter monitoring of the press has led to several arrests of journalists, as

39 Antoon De Baets, 2002. *Censorship of Historical Thought, A world Guide, 1945-2000*, London Greenwood Press, pp621-625.

well as publications closed.

The restrictive legal environment and legislation surrounding freedom of association and expression, has had a negative impact on the arts and culture sector, affecting and stifling creativity, especially in the performing arts, visual arts, and of course, the media. This situation was exacerbated by the country's unstable economic environment. A 2012 baseline study on arts and culture in Zimbabwe, determined that in the worsening economic climate, conditions for artists deteriorated and the State's financial and technical support dwindled. The study was commissioned by the Culture Fund, a civil society organisation.

The hyper-inflationary macroeconomic conditions that existed in Zimbabwe shrunk the market for artistic products, resulting in a massive brain drain as some prominent artists migrated to seek greener pastures elsewhere in the world.

For the local arts scene, the weakening economic and political environment, coupled with a shrinking space for artists and a weakening market, led to the emergence of vibrant and unique forms of art that focused on highlighting the deteriorating economic and political environment. Artistic genres such as "Protest Art," 'Hit-and-Run Theatre," "Protest Music" and "Protest Theatre," all offered a critical commentary on politics, corruption, human rights abuses, dictatorship and dispossession gained momentum.[40] The increasing popularity of these "arts of protest" invited a response from the State.[41] Political satire and other art forms that highlighted the government's excesses or criticised State policies, beckoned State gagging. The suppression has been characterised by performances and exhibitions banned, as well as the censoring of music, audio-visual production and publishing.

The several legal Instruments used in the regulation of the sector are outlined in the next section.

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40 Thamsanqa Moyo, Theresia Mdlongwa, James Hlongwana, 2014. Desilencing the Silences on Zimbabwe: Raisedon Baya's (2009) Tomorrow's People and Other Plays and the Paradox of the Postcolony *Elite Research Journal of Education and Review* 2(4) pp. 95 – 105; Bannington Eyre, 2001. *Playing With Fire: Fear And Self-Censorship In Zimbabwean Music,* Freemuse: Denmark.

41 Praise Zenenga, 2008. Censorship, Surveillance, and Protest Theater in Zimbabwe, *Theater*, 38, (3), pp 67-83.

Formal Regulation: The Policy Framework

National Constitution

Zimbabwe's new Constitution (2013) has comprehensive clauses that guarantee fundamental human rights and freedoms. The Constitution's Article 61 directly addresses freedom of expression and freedom of the media, stating that:

Every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes:

1. Freedom to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information;
2. Freedom of artistic expression and scientific research and creativity; and
3. Academic freedom.[42]

The Article also guarantees freedom of the media, freeing of broadcasting and other electronic media.

While the Zimbabwe's Constitution guarantees basic rights and freedoms as well as freedom of artistic expression, several other pieces of legislation and the censorship regulatory framework in Zimbabwe severely limit the rights guaranteed by the same constitution. For the current constitution, a key challenge is the relationship between the constitutional guarantees of freedom of artistic expression vis a vis the other legislation that infringes on these rights. New laws enacted in this period such as the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act; the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) cited in this section interfere with the same rights that the constitution gives on freedom of the press, of association and expression. It is being argued for example, that Section 96 (Criminal defamation) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act is in violation of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media as enshrined under Section 61 (1) and (2) of the Constitution.

The Cultural Policy

Zimbabwe's cultural policy (2007) has broad objectives but does not directly make reference to freedom of artistic expression. This is however implied in its preamble where it expresses that "our people should have

42 Government of Zimbabwe, *The Constitution of Zimbabwe*, 2013. Harare: Government Printer. http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/attachments/article/56/constitution.pdf, (Accessed 15 February 2015).

the right to develop, access and enjoy culture and all its manifestations."[43] Besides this statement, there is no other clause or section that directly addresses freedom of artistic expression or the status of artists.

The policy has a very nationalist outlook and most of its sections envisage a sector that draws from the country's culture, traditions and liberation struggle. These are elements seen as crucial in building a sector that contributes to the preservation of the country's history and heritage and supports the maintenance and preservation of political, religious and cultural harmony.

Thus, with no direct reference to freedom of artistic expression, the cultural policy envisages a sector that supports the project of national unity and cohesion. While this nationalist dispensation is a noble ideal, the policy's silence on freedom of artistic expression and its overwhelmingly nationalist outlook seeking to create social, political and cultural cohesion may lead to intolerance of dissent or alternative ideas, particularly those perceived as critical of the national project. Such a scenario will yield a negative outcome for artistic expression.

Censorship and Entertainments Control Act, Chapter 10:04, 1967.

This Act is the main law that affects artistic production and has had a huge impact on the arts. A product of the Rhodesian government, the Censorship Act "regulates and controls the public exhibition of films, the importation, production, dissemination and possession of undesirable or prohibited video and film material, publications, pictures, statues and records and the giving of public entertainment; to regulate theatres and like places of public entertainment in the interests of safety…»[44]

This Act is one that is prevalently used to control the activities of artists, regulating all sectors such as performing arts, film and video production, music, advertising, visual arts and publishing.

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43 Government of Zimbabwe , *Cultural Policy of Zimbabwe*, http://artsinafrica.com/uploads/2011/06/CULTURAL_POLICY_OF_ZIMBABWE_2007.pdf; (Accessed 04 March 2015); Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust, *Baseline study on the culture sector in Zimbabwe*, Harare , 2009. http://arterialnetwork.org/uploads/2011/08/The_Culture_Fund__Baseline_Report__FINAL_250609-3.pdf (Accessed 05 March 2015).

44 Government of Zimbabwe, *Censorship and Entertainments Control Act*, Chapter 10:04, 1967, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4c46e6ec2.html (accessed 16 March 2015).

A key aspect of the Act is that it establishes a Board of Censors, and all members are appointed by the Minister for Home Affairs. The Act grants the Board of Censors police powers to regulate, temporarily ban, confiscate or arrest artists who do not comply with the provisions of the Act. According to the Act, the Board has powers to "examine publications, pictures, statues and records and to declare them undesirable or to declare publication or record prohibited".

According to the Act, any material will be deemed "undesirable" can be banned if it or any part thereof —

(a) is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals; or

(b) is likely to be contrary to the interests of defence, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State or public health; or

(c) discloses with reference to any judicial proceedings (i) any matter which is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals or any indecent or obscene medical, surgical or physiological details the disclosure of which is likely to be offensive or harmful to public morals.[45]

The Board also controls and regulates public entertainment through a permit system. According to the Act, no persons or organisations are allowed to perform in public without approval by the Board. Thus, any public performance, for instance live musical shows and theatre, are to be reviewed and approved by the Board before being publicly performed. The Board of Censors also controls what it calls "exhibitions and entertainments" where the public exhibition of any "publication, picture, statue or record or the public playing or intended playing of any record" has to be approved by the Board. This controls the exhibition of arts works, advertisements etc., all which must first be Board approved.

In terms of enforcement, the Act gives powers to the police acting on the Board's behalf to seize materials or to stop performances for examination. Local police are allowed to stop performances or exhibitions, as well as arrest and detain those suspected of having contravened the Act.

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45 Government of Zimbabwe, *Censorship and Entertainments Control Act*, Chapter 10:04, 1967, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4c46e6ec2.html (accessed 16 March 2015).

The Official Secrets Act, Chapter 11:09, 1970.

Though the Official Secrets Act does not directly deal with artistic products, it has indirect implications for artists. The Act legislates against the writing, exhibition, or publication official State secrets, and if artists produce anything seen as threatening the country's security, they could be prosecuted. According to the Act, no one can publish or communicate documents, articles, or information that is prejudicial to the safety or interests of the nation.[46]

This Act prohibits artists from producing "books, pamphlets, records, lists, placards or posters; or, drawings, sketches, pictures, plans or photographic or other representation of a place or thing; or any sound recordings" that can compromise the security of Zimbabwe or the maintenance of law and order by the police or any other security body established by the State.

Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Chapter 10:27, 2003.

One of the most recent laws, the 2003 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act controls the right to information, regulates access to information, legislates against abuse of freedom of expression by providing for "protection of information whose disclosure will be harmful to law enforcement process and national security."[47]

Yet again, though this Act does not explicitly refer to artists' activities, in practice artists face arrest and prosecution if they publish or exhibit any material that compromised law enforcement of national security.

Public Order and Security Act, Chapter 11:17, 2002.

Passed in 2002, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), replaced the 1965 Rhodesian Law and Order (Maintenance) Act. POSA controls the holding of public gatherings and gives sweeping powers to the police to ban, disperse or prohibition of public gatherings. The Act places

46 Government of Zimbabwe, *Official Secrets Act*, Chapter 11:09, 1970, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4c4712e82.html (accessed 16 March 2015).

47 Government of Zimbabwe, *The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (AIPPA) (Chapter 10:27), 2003.http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/attachments/article/96/CENSORSHIP_AND_ENTERTAINMENTS_CONTROL_ACT_10_04.pdf (Accessed 16 February 2015).

responsibility on organisers to notify the regulating authority and police of the intention to hold a public gathering at least seven days ahead.[48] As provided in the Act, local police can effect temporary prohibition of the holding of public gatherings within particular police districts. This has been used to stop musical and theatrical performances and exhibitions.

This Act has been used on many occasions by the police to prohibit shows and performances by artists, citing possibilities of the disturbance of public order. Performances that are perceived as too critical of the political system and that are deemed to have a potential disrupt law and order usually find it difficult to get permission from the police. Under this Act, producers and performers can be arrested, detained and charged either for performing without permits and police clearance or for productions that are seen as leading to public disorder.

The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, Chapter 9:23, 2004.

The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act legislates on "crimes against the State." These include treason, subverting constitutional government, causing disaffection among police or defence forces, publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the State or undermining the authority of or insulting the President, the inciting or promotion of public disorder or public violence or endangering public safety.

Any artistic productions seen as undermining or destabilising the sitting government or any activities that disrespect, undermine or insult the security forces or the state president are liable to prosecution under this Act.

Sections that have been used to bring criminal charges against artists include Section 33 – "Undermining authority of or insulting President" which criminalises that any actions which "publicly, unlawfully and intentional makes any statement about or concerning the President or an acting President or engender feelings of hostility towards; or cause hatred, contempt or ridicule of; the President or an acting President or makes any abusive, indecent or obscene statement about or concerning

48 Government of Zimbabwe, *The Public Order and Security Act (POSA)*, Harare: Government Printer, 2002. Available at http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=42&Itemid=36, (Accessed 16 February 2015).

the President or an acting President".[49]

This Act's Article (42) also forbids the "making statements or publishing anything that insults, grossly provoke or causes offence to persons of a particular race, tribe, and place of origin, colour, creed or religion". Though the article exempts "any film, picture, publication, statue or record that is of a bona fide literary or artistic character", it has been used in criminal charges against artists.

Covert Regulation and Self-Censorship

Besides direct censorship that is meted through legislation, indirect and covert censorship is widely applied in other subtle ways.

A key feature of this is an "unofficial" censorship system affected by various organisations in the sector, particularly those that are key in the production and distribution components of the value chain. For instance, there is a feeling within the sector that unofficial gagging also takes place within the State-controlled platforms such as Television and radio stations simply by not granting space to artists seen as critics of the government. This has particularly affected the music industry. In a report titled "Playing with Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music," [50] Banning Eyre, highlights how during the past couple of years several media sources have reported cases of censorship of popular music in Zimbabwe. The report shows that in music there have been very few cases of direct censorship, yet the system of unofficial censorship exists which involves the recording industry, DJs and radio stations.

Accordingly, the government's monopoly of the airwaves is used to restrict airplay of artists who are seen as critical of their policies, effectively silencing them. In ignoring calls to liberalise the airwaves so as to open the doors for independent players, government has managed to censor and control content on the airwaves.[51] State broadcasters avoid artists who are critical of government, while record companies operate an effective monopoly for the music, marginalising musicians whose

49 Government of Zimbabwe, *The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act*. Harare: Government Printer, 2004. http://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/zwe/2006/criminal_law_codification_and_reform_act_html/criminal_law_codification_and_reform_act.pdf (Accessed 18 February 2015).

50 Banning Eyre, 2001. *Playing with Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music*, Freemuse: Denmark.

51 Banning Eyre, 2001. *Playing with Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music*, Freemuse: Denmark.

music is seen as anti-establishment

In some cases, censorship comes from local authorities who use their discretionary powers selectively to deny permits and prohibit artists from holding activities. Many artists complain that they have been denied concert clearance by the National Arts Council and the police, this under unclear circumstances. A result of all these forms of subtle control is self-censorship, where based on fear of upsetting the political establishment and the fear of losing the already declining market, artists deliberately avoid subjects or activities that could be interpreted as politically or culturally inappropriate – and in doing this they participate in limiting their own freedom.

Gagged! Recent Restrictions and Violations

Protest Theatre

It is in the visual and performing arts where the Zimbabwean censorship laws have a bigger influence. A form of theatre, now commonly referred as "protest theatre", that satirises contemporary political and economic conditions in Zimbabwe, has gained momentum since 2000. In this period, these productions invited increasing control and a sizeable number of the theatrical productions were deemed to be in violation of the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act or to be in contravention of sections of POSA, AIPPA and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act.

Though not comprehensive, a selection of plays affected by this legislation in recent years are summarised here: [52]

1. Rooftop Promotions is an arts production and management organisation based in Harare. Since its formation in 1986, Rooftop has been running many theatre productions at Theatre in the Park

52 Cases drawn from numerous press reports, Crisis Coalition Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights Reports. See also, United States Department of State, 2013 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Zimbabwe*, 2014, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/532849c25.html (Accessed 16 March 2015); Praise Zenenga, 2008. Censorship, Surveillance, and Protest Theater in Zimbabwe, *Theater*, 38, (3), pp 67-83; Thamsanqa Moyo, Theresia Mdlongwa, James Hlongwana, 2014. Desilencing the Silences on Zimbabwe: Raisedon Baya's (2009) Tomorrow's People and Other Plays and the Paradox of the Postcolony, *Elite Research Journal of Education and Review*, 2(4) pp. 95 – 105.

– one of the most popular venues based in central Harare. Their productions focus on national and social issues that affect people in Zimbabwe and the plays are also taken to the rest of the country through their National Theatre Touring Programme. They also run a video and film production and distribution project.[53]

Because of the focus of their productions, their plays have constantly attracted the censorship board and the police, leading to arrests, detention of artists and producers as well as banning of some of their plays. In 2011, Bulawayo police banned Rooftop Promotions' Rituals, which focused on political violence. Rituals,directed and produced by Daves Guzha, was written by acclaimed writer Stephen Chifunyise. Though they were later acquitted, Rooftop artists were arrested, detained and charged for criminal nuisance and for contravening Section 46 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act.

In 2004, Rooftop Promotions' play Super Patriots and Morons was banned in Zimbabwe by the Board. Super Patriots and Morons condemned misrule and the abuse of human rights by an unnamed political leader. Produced by Daves Guzha, and written by Raisedon Baya, the play went on to be nominated for the Amnesty International 2007 Freedom of Expression Award.

Over the years, critical plays by Rooftop Promotions which have failed to get space on national television include, A Play of the Giants, Rags and Garbage, Ivhu versus the State and Dare/ Enkundleni – a joint production between Rooftop Promotions and Amakhosi Theatre Productions.

2. Amakhosi Theatre Productions (also known as Amakhosi Academy of Performing Arts) is a Zimbabwean theatre company based in Makokoba Township, Bulawayo. The company was established in 1981 by Cont Mhlanga – a well-known arts manager, playwright and director. Amakhosi has endured constant brushes with the police and the Board and their productions have been targeted due to their political undertone. Over the years, their plays such as Workshop Negative, Cry Sililo, Dabulap, Stitsha and Crisis of Zimbabwe – which focused on the changing political and social environment – either did not receive "the Government's blessing,"[54] and were criticised for

53 See http://www.rooftoppromotions.org/

54 Kaarsholm, P. 1990. Mental Colonisation of Catharsis? Theatre, Democracy and Cultural Struggle from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. *Journal of*

violating the Public Order and Security Act and the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act. Most of their productions have found it difficult to travel to other parts of the country and seldom get space on national radio and TV. Negative criticism, and threats of arrest and detention is what Amakhosi artists have learnt to live with.

3. Raisedon Baya is an award-winning playwright and producer whose productions have travelled around the world with different arts companies. However, Raisedon Baya's various plays focus on a critique of the social and political environment, and have been subjected to censorship laws. In 2007, Raisedon Baya's Everyday Solider and The Good President and Rooftop Promotions' Pregnant with Emotion, were all reportedly banned on the grounds that they were in violation of the Public Order and Security Act and the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act. In 2008, The Crocodile of Zambezi, Raisedon Baya and Christopher Mlalazi's fictional satire was also banned by the local police. The production managers and actors were held by police.
4. Several other artists have also been affected by the strict censorship laws. For example, in 2008, Silavos Mudzvova and Antony Tongano were prosecuted for unlawfully performing a satire Final Push – a depiction of the country's deteriorating political and economic crises. They were charged for performing without Board clearance. In 2012, local police in Masvingo Province banned the public performance of No Voice No Choice, a production by community theatre groups, Edzai Isu Theatre Arts Project and Zvido Zvevanhu Arts Ensemble. However, the Zimbabwean Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), an NGO advocating and assisting in litigation against human rights abuses instituted an urgent court application, successfully challenging the ban. In the same year, a play called The Coup, a play written by New Zealand-based Zimbabwean writer Stanley Makuwe that had a successful run at the Theatre in the Park in Harare, was banned by the police and its national tour was cancelled.

Visual Art: Unsettling Official Histories

Owen Maseko and Gukurahundi Art

The case of Owen Maseko in Zimbabwe encapsulates a problem highlighted earlier in this paper. On one hand a constitution guarantees

certain freedoms, while on another hand, other laws limit the said rights. In early 2010, visual artist Owen Maseko put up an exhibition titled Sibathontisele at the National Art Gallery, Bulawayo. The installation depicted the military violence (commonly referred to as Gukurahundi) in Matebeleland and Midlands Provinces as the government attempted to suppress alleged dissident activities following the ZANU PF victory in the 1980 elections.

Maseko's exhibition on Gukurahundi touched on a sensitive aspect of Zimbabwean history – an aspect that many commentators feel has not been given enough space in the public sphere and in the official historical cannon. Maseko's installation, in a State-funded institution challenged official history by attempting to revise the clean official historical narrative of Gukurahundi. His work attracted the arm of the law.

Image 1, Owen Maseko's Exhibition at the National Gallery, Bulawayo. Source, Solidarity Peace Trust, http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/owen-Maseko800.jpg `

A day after its official opening, police shut down Maseko's exhibition. The government-order banning came from Home Affairs ministry under the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act, with official comment that the "effigies, words and paintings on the walls portray the Gukurahundi

era as a tribal, biased event". Eventually, the artist was detained and charged under Section 31(a) (i) and Section 33(a)(ii) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. These sections criminalises the inciting or promotion of public disorder or public violence or endangering public safety, and make it a criminal offence to "cause hatred, contempt, or ridicule of the President or Acting President, whether in person or in respect of the President's Office."[55]

The exhibition's banning as well as Maseko's arrest and prosecution resulted in him launching a Constitutional challenge of the Codification and Reform Act. Maseko's lawyers (Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, ZLHR) argued the artist's fundamental rights, provided for in the Constitution of Zimbabwe and other International Human Rights Instruments to which Zimbabwe is a party, were being violated. The Constitutional Court had to determine whether or not works of artistic creativity can be subjected to prosecution under Section 31 – Publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the State and 33 – Undermining authority of or insulting President, of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (Chapter 9:23), without infringing on the provisions of Sections 18 (1) – Provisions to secure protection of law, 19 (1) – Protection of freedom of conscience and 20 (1) – Protection of freedom of expression of the (old) Constitution. In a landmark ruling, the constitutional court found the sections of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act to be inconsistent with the national constitution.

Besides highlighting the limitations of the legislation regime governing the arts in Zimbabwe, the case of Owen Maseko points to problems that artists face in the absence of diverse production and distribution channels and where artists have to largely rely on State – supported institutions. Though Zimbabwe boasts reasonably well-developed visual arts with a sizeable number of private galleries, the sector is still dominated by the National Art Gallery – a parastatal with a mandate to promote the visual arts. Diversity in production and distribution channels gives artists the freedom to choose which of platforms to use, where they will be freer to exercise their creativity.

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55 Government of Zimbabwe, *The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act*. Harare: Government Printer, 2004. Available at http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=42&Itemid=36, (Accessed 16 February 2015).

Main Challenges

a. **Vagueness of the existing legislation.**

The Acts cited in this report are seen by players in the arts sector as unclear and subject to various interpretations by the State. For instance, in terms of the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act, a publication is deemed undesirable if it:

(1) Is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals.

(2) Is likely to be contrary to the interests of defence, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State or public health.

Yet, for many artists, terms such as "offensive," "public morals" or "harmful" are subjective and ambiguous, meaning the government can put restrictions to any material that it deems fit to qualify within the description.

b. **Lack of awareness among the artists.**

It is clear that many artists have no knowledge on the requirements of the various pieces of legislation which affect their work. According to many artists, in these laws, the legal language is crafted in ways that do not clearly articulate what exactly is expected of artists or clearly articulate how specific sections or articles impact artists.

c. **Multiplicity of legislation.**

There are numerous pieces of legislation governing the sector, but the relationship between each piece is not very clear and many artists do not understand the provisions and stipulation listed therein. For instance, though they do not expressly refer to artistic activities, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, have all been used to ban or prosecute artists.

d. **Inconsistencies in the application of legislation.**

The existence of multiple laws coupled with a lack of clarity on the laws, has led to a situation where laws are not uniformly applied. For instance, there have been cases where a play is allowed to run in one province, but gets banned by the police in another province.

e. **Politicisation of the arts sector**

For the past decade political tension has been festering in Zimbabwe and artists, through their work, are seen as positioning themselves in opposition to the political establishment. In a situation like this,

artists highlight their right to self-expression as entrenched in the Constitution while the State suspects them of having political agendas and fling accusations of anti-establishment sentiments. The situation has led to a degree of polarisation. One hand, there are artists who are considered as pro-establishment, and on the other, artists that are seen as anti-establishment and whom the the Board must gag.

For instance, protest art in Zimbabwe has been perceived and dealt with by the State as part of forces seeking political change. Productions are either banned or they receive negative reviews, while plays, music and films receive little airplay from State-controlled media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

a. **Review of existing legislation**

There is an urgent need to review and streamline existing legal frameworks. Most of the Acts regulating the sector are outdated. Rather than creating conducive conditions for the artists, the laws are largely restrictive.

For instance, there is need to establish a clear review and licensing framework, deal with issues of vagueness of some of the sections of the Censorship and Entertainment Act as well as create an inclusive and independent regulatory Board. There is need to create a balanced representation of all arts in the Board of Censors and the Appeal Board, of which all membership are direct current appointees of the Minister for Home Affairs.

The current legislation has very weak appeal measures and provides no structure for monitoring the implementation of the law and the infringements of artists' rights.

There is also need for clarity on the relationship between the Censorship Act and other legislation such as AIPPA and POSA. The national cultural policy is a key instrument in the regulation and promotion of arts and culture and should have sections that directly address freedom of expression and the status of artists.

b. **Legal support**

There is need to increase platforms for legal support for the sector by provision of legal counselling and advisory services for artists. Zimbabwe's visual and performing artists have in the past years

received pro bono legal representation from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, (ZLHR). This needs to be expanded, probably by working with more law firms.

c. **Awareness raising**
A key challenge currently existing is the lack of awareness among artists on the legal framework that affects them. This situation creates a situation where artists fail to comply with the requirements of the law, leading to bans, arbitrary arrests and prosecution artists and the failure by artists to challenge the bans and arrests. This scenario points to a need for advocacy and awareness raining activities as it is important for all stakeholders in the sector to understand the existing legislation that governs them.

d. **Advocacy and building consensus.**
Currently, a major characteristic of the relationship between the arts sector and the law enforcement agencies is that of suspicion. To break this impasse, there is need for creating platforms for communication and consensus-building between regulators and the artists. Sector associations and other civil society organisations can play a positive role in this by facilitating research, information sharing and dialogue on the artists' rights.

e. **Value chain diversification.**
Characterised by the dominance of State-supported institutions and monopolies by a few organisations, there is lack of diversity in service provision for artists across the value chain in the Zimbabwean arts sector. While there is diversity in the print media, the broadcasting media remains a monopoly, regulated by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Authority. There is a need to break these monopolies by expanding platforms in the value chain, particularly for production and distribution of the arts. The situation where the media is monopolised by the State leads to conditions where not only institutionalised censorship increases, but also where self-censorship among artists thrives, for want of access to production and distribution facilities as well as markets.

f. **Monitoring and information exchange.**
Currently, no formal body exists to monitor freedom of artistic expression or for campaigning for the rights of artists, and for monitoring violations or for challenging current laws. Efforts by civil society organisations such as Zimbabwe Theatre Association (ZITA),

Bulawayo Arts Forum (BAF), Visual Art Association Bulawayo (VAAB), Savanna Arts Trust, Global Arts Trust, the Nhimbe Trust and Homegrown Arts, all of whom have joined to create a new alliance called the Coalition Against Censorship Zimbabwe (CACZ), should be applauded and expanded.

Koleka Putuma (South Africa)

Mountain

Koleka Putuma, is currently pursuing a degree in Theatre and Performance at the University of Cape Town. She has headlined at SliPnets' Inzync Poetry Sessions, JamThatSession and at Off The Wall. She is also a resident poet of Lingua Franca. In 2012 she took second place in the Cape Town leg of the Drama for Life Lover + Another National Performance Poetry Slam Competition and represented the city at the national finals. In March 2013 she was commissioned by Badilisha Poetry X-change and Scotland's International Poetry Festival to produce a poem to be exhibited in a digital installation during the Stanza Festival in Scotland. She recently won the Slam For Your Life national slam championships at the National Arts Festival.

Mountain

Koleka Putuma

The sun
Drips the foundation on my face down my collar bone
This walk is no longer fun or graceful
We have been circling parts of Namaqualand for over twenty minutes
Trying to locate the start of the mountain
Or the entry point of it
Every entrance (we see) is fenced
The dogs bark at the sight of our footsteps
The dogs want to jump the fence
The dogs look on defence
I feel on defence
I feel ready for a fight
Guarded against a fight I do not yet see
But quickly foresee trouble
When the old white lady, in her pyjamas, turns my back with her Afrikaans
And says **you are on private property**
I question why I understand what she has said
And the mountain she calls private
"You can't go up the mountain, without going past my property"

She says
I ask if she owns the mountain
She says she owns this land
Namaqualand
I think she is implying she built the mountain
Erected it stone by stone
Imagined its existence before her birth

I think she is telling me that
They own the mountains too
And I swear
I am not making it about race it's not personal
It's just her mountain in Namaqualand
It's just private poverty
In the way your thoughts are private poverty
In the way your freedom is private property
In the way your obsessive partner thinks you are his/her private poverty
In the way your body is private property
In the way private property was lynched and sold back in the day
It's not personal, this private property thing
It just doesn't not belong to you
It was not built (by your ancestors) for you
You are not allowed in it
You are not allowed on it
Unless you are the maid or nanny or garden boy or adopted
Or a cockroach bumping into things when the lights have been switched off

My friends (upon hearing the old white lady's tale) joke
That heaven will be private property too
So I'm guessing you won't be able to go to heaven
Unless you are a servant of God
And of course, we are people who cannot go anywhere
Or inherit anything unless we embody roles of servitude
And yet our forefathers built kingdoms
We do not own or live on
According to the inherit aspect of your settling, and our consequential migration
This current native land act

Tells us to
Move if we can't afford it
Move if the neighbourhood is hostile
Move, because our guests are too loud

Move, because the neighbours have been complaining
Move, because the three dogs on a leash need more space on the pavement
Move, because I will bump you out of the way because I do not see colour
Move, the last two syllables of your name off your ID, so I can swallow who you are
Move your child to another school, ours is full (we have reached the quota for never mind)
Move, if you did not make a reservation, there aren't any more tables, no those ones are reserved
Move, if you don't get along with the Landlord

The self-appointed Lords of this land
Are asking of you to move
To shift
To bend
To Jump
To beg
To become scraps
To become palatable
To shrink
To keep explaining
To be the explanation
To be the scapegoat
To be the actual goat
To be the slaughter house, and the sacrifice,
But just not talk about the blood spill,
To be the apology
To be the excuse
To be the puppet, and the strings and the applause, and the stage sweeper

In this native land act
We are the spectacle
The monkeys
The pun intended
The poetic visuals for the township tour

Our bodies now the houses being demolished
Our throats bulldozed
Our words the rubble
Our belongings no longer recognizable
As we are yanked from our skin
Dodging assassination attempts that look like
Picnics and selfies with the law
And yoga poses during public holiday marches
Telling us our movements do not matter
Unless we are moving out of the way
Or moving to make way
Or moving out
Or moving in together to squat like sardines in tin metal squares mistook for houses
Unless your movement is about Mandela
It does not matter
So move it elsewhere
Just not up the mountain,
Because the mountain is for their banners
And anyway, you, you can't go up the mountain
Apparently, It does not belong to you

Lauren Beukes (South Africa)

Riding with the Dream Patrol

Lauren Beukes is the author of *The Shining Girls, Broken Monsters, Zoo City* and *Moxyland*. Her books have won major international literary, horror, science fiction and mystery prizes, have been translated into 26 languages and optioned for film adaptations. She also writes comics, screenplays, essays and journalism. She lives in Cape Town, South Africa.

Riding with the Dream Patrol

Lauren Beukes

[CAPE TOWN] THE VIEW from the Mongooses' offices at an undisclosed location on the Foreshore overlooks white-sailed yachts on a choppy grey sea and the distant industry of shipping containers shuffled around by cranes and trucks in the harbour. On the other side, the bustle of the City Bowl is reduced to the blank facades of buildings, the faint hum of traffic. It's an enviable view for a government department. It's a pity no-one's taking it in.

That's because the Mongoose team, some 48 of them (on this floor at least), are glued to their screens. A mix of programmers and "intelligence collectors", the elite surveillance unit is watching the greatest show on earth. You.

"It's actually very tedious," says Lerato Makhetha, while looking over my shoulder at the information scrolling across the screen. The Mongooses' director of operations is sharply pretty, 36 and barely five foot two; a petite Big Brother in heels and a Maya Prass dress. It would be easy to underestimate her.

The info stream is harvested from cellular phone calls, social media, CCTV, cookies, browser histories and even embedded fashion cams, hot off the catwalk and feeding information straight into the Mongooses' servers.

"We've got algorithms in place to do the heavy lifting; detecting blatant abuse, unauthorised disclosures on flagged materials, problem phrases, and links to and from blacklisted sites, criminal activities, scams, illegal pornography. But at the end of the day, you still need a human being to sort through it all. Is this a real terrorist threat to national security or just someone blowing off steam on a blog?"

The work may all about the subtleties, but Makhetha is not. Formed from the remains of the Hawks after they were disbanded, the Mongooses follow a simple mandate.

"To bite the heads off snakes in the grass and chew up the dirty

little beetles trying to turn up shit and undermine our democracy."

"Relax," she says, brushing off my obvious discomfort with a laugh, "It's all constitutional. It's not like we're the Gestapo here."

The truth is that they're more effective. In the age of social networking, sharing is caring and secret policing was never this easy. Whereas apartheid's Special Branch would have had to embed undercover agents to spy on union meetings, for the Mongooses, total transparency, at least for private citizens, is only one click away. A glance at Facebook events, your Flickr set, your Twitter feed, or your MXit friends list provides information on your known associates, recent whereabouts, and political, social and sexual proclivities.

But the combination of RICA – rendering every SIM card traceable down to its GPS coordinates – the Protection of Information Act and the Corporate Responsibility Act, where corporations are legally obligated to co-operate with government demands like shutting down cellphone coverage in a riot zone, for example, makes their job a whole lot easier.

The Mongooses can not only monitor open networks but private ones too, including phonecalls, emails and your Internet history. They can even track your current location using your cellphone's GPS – and shut down anything they don't like.

There are rumours the unit also has a game design arm that creates the kind of silly apps for social networking, of the kind that rates your sex appeal on MeToo or your Twitter influence or creates photoclouds out of your most popular Tumblr posts. But when I ask her about it, Makhetha says mildly, "That's classified."

Also classified is *exactly* what happens when a human operator confirms the algorithms. Makhetha won't comment on the rumours of secret detainments. "That's not strictly my department, but if something like that was happening it would be classified. But I can tell you what the first steps in the procedure would be from our side."

"If it's just someone venting or making a stupid joke about blowing up the taxi rank because the drivers are on strike, we'll send them a friendly warning to cut it out. But if it's a genuine offence, say an info terrorist disseminating top secret documents about tenders' deals, we're within rights to immediately act, to disconnect them from the Internet and shut down their cellphone account until the matter is resolved in a court of law."

"We've got all this in place with the network providers as per the Corporate Responsibilities Act of 2013. Of course, the perpetrators still get a free and fair trial. But we have to shut down their communications immediately. It's about stopping the poison before it infects the whole system. I guess you could say we're Freedom's tourniquet."

The problem, according to critics is that the tourniquet is not just cutting off the poison, but the circulation of a healthy democracy. One of the most outspoken detractors is Montle Hunter, head of Clear, a radicalised pro-transparency spin-off of Afrileaks – shut down by the Mongooses three years ago.

Clear calls the Mongooses, facetiously, "the dream patrol", as in the only place they're (probably) not watching your every move are dreams.

Well, it's rather appropriate the only place Hunter agrees to meet me is *in* a dream world of sorts – in the popular Pilipino virtual game world, ShinyShiny.

Hunter appears as a bog-standard cyborg-orc, indiscernible from any of the other orcs wandering through the enchanted techno-forests of ShinyShiny.

"This is me," he jokes, "Warts and all."

The truth is that no-one know what he looks like or if Montle Hunter is his real name or if he's a he at all or only one person or the public face of an interchangeable like-minded collective of people. Hunter operates between the unregulated alternanets and darknets to avoid detection by the Mongooses or the global info-terrorism unit, Int.pol.

In public, he says, he has visual frequency distorters on hand to disrupt CCTV cameras and reveals that Clear agents have fallen back on using old-school espionage techniques.

"We're passing hand-written notes," he admits, a little sheepishly.

"The problem here is not that the South African government is spying on its people. Governments have always done that. It's that they're actively suppressing information using the Protection of Information Act of 2011. And I'm not just talking about critical State secrets or leaked diplomatic missives, the kind of real 'national security issues' it was designed to protect. We're talking about withholding basic information that affects lives on a day-to-day level."

He cites the Vaalwater cholera outbreak in November as a "classic

example".

"Here we've got a municipal district manager who sees an outbreak of a fatal disease in his area, but he can't get the information on the water supply to find out if it is contaminated because it's linked to a hydro power station, which is classified as it falls under national security. And as a result, 981 people died. We're talking about the basic effectiveness of government to do their job here. It's self-sabotage."

"There are some things that should be absolutely classified and top secret. Example would be the blueprints of Pollsmoor Prison. But something like the housing waiting lists should be public information. There are still people waiting for housing and have the impression their position on the list changes from month to month. And they might be right. There might be serious dodgy dealings going down but we simply don't know. We don't have access to those lists because they're classified. And why? Because people tend to get angry about housing screw-ups, which might lead to a riot, which might lead to them blockading the highway and overturning buses and burning tyres, which then becomes a 'national security issue.'"

"The problem is that you can justify almost anything as national security and the guy who gets to decide what should be declassified is the same person who decided it was classified in the first place. So he's got the Yes Stamp in one hand and the No Stamp in the other. It's mental. And all this is being sold to us as 'Mama Government and her Mongooses know best. Now run along, dear and write some more concerned letters to the newspapers.'"

When I try to raise some of these issues with Makthetha, she's very sympathetic.

"I can understand that some people have concerns, but I'm afraid I can't discuss that, it's – "

"Classified?" I finish.

"Your file says you have a short temper," she asserts. "What I can tell you is that we know all about Clear. We've got keyword monitors set up on most of the major Chinese game servers and we're already working on ways to embed nanoparticles in paper that will be able to relay the imprints of hand-written notes to our systems. What you have to understand is that this is a global issue. As fast as info terrorists can come up with new tactics, governments are working hand-in-hand to develop countermeasures."

As she shows me out, Makthetha offers a mild reminder.

"And of course, you won't forget to submit the story for pre-approval as per the Media Patriot Act."

Of course not.

Michèle Rakotoson (Madagascar)

Culture or Identity, the Fundamentals of the question

Michèle Rakotoson, is a novelist and the chairperson of the Association of Friends of the National Library in Madagascar. Formerly the Chief of Service for Relations with listeners at Radio France Internationale, she is currently part of the group which set up the «Ambohi-pihaonan'ny mpanakanto multidisciplinary salon" which brings together novelists, editors, infographers, and photographers. Her main publications are Tovonay, Tana la belle, and Juillet au pays.

Culture or Identity, the Fundamentals of the question

Michèle Rakotoson

IN A LENGTHY interview published in the newspaper Libération of 4/5 October, 2014, Olivier Roy, Research Director at the CNRS (National Scientific Research Council) in France, is quoted as follows :

« Cultures have not disappeared; they have been sacrificed on the altar of identities… An examination of symbols and codes reveals the state of crisis cultures are in. »

The issue is presented in a way that can seem aggressive and against everything that underpins the dignity of peoples. But on reflection, it is a fundamental issue in this world where globalisation tends to standardise thought systems and lifestyles. Via the different kinds of media (radio, television, internet etc.), global archetypes are taking shape. A youth from Antohomadinika, a popular neighbourhood of Antananarivo, who will never have the opportunity to take a plane to the West, adopts the dress codes of the « – » of the Bronx, in order to resemble a dominant role model which he can identify with. And this phenomenon is visible all over the world, where young people in search of direction and identity associate themselves with the images they see on television, in movies pirated here and there, in publicity magazines and so forth… This search for identity, which can sometimes become violent, can reveal the extent to which a country is in crisis, culturally and intellectually. Because it shows the extent to which the country is powerless to react to the globalising influences of the very powerful mass media. And the extent to which a country is powerless to defend a « national culture ».

But in making this statement one also declares its opposite. Indeed, the concept of a « national identity » risks creating a rigid vision of a country, a region or a person at a specific moment in time, denying it any measure of development. To take an almost caricatured example : is an inhabitant of an isolated region in the south of Madgascar, this man who must walk for miles to get to a dispensary where none of the drugs will

be in stock, the same Madagascan, from the same region, who regularly gets onto a plane to go and negotiate his deals in Paris or New York ? Yes and no.

- Yes, because they share the same family, regional, maybe even national contemporary history, propagated by the schools, the media, politicians… Yes, because they share one and the same territory, the same language, apart from a few variations, and travelling between regions – roads – allow for increased circulation of people, things and lifestyles and thought, which eventually creates an impression of belonging to the same nation.
- No, because they don't experience the same realities, they don't experience the same History, especially contemporary History, their economic realities are huge distances apart, their everyday lives are not the same, their future prospects are not the same and their possibilities for expressing themselves, for describing their experiences, are not the same.

And that is where grand talk about identity and national culture is dangerous. Because it makes for a rigid perception of a nation, of a population; it may even conceal the most glaring disparities, and, if care isn't taken, perpetuate them. All the more so because the grand talk emanates from the dominant social group.

The necessary conditions for real freedom of speech

And this is where it becomes necessary, even compulsory, to identify all the conditions that need to be in place in order to protect the freedom of speech of all of us, because if it is not done, the political discourse, the civic discourse, the citizen's discourse will in any case always remain a dominant discourse and a discourse of oppression. No matter how noble the intentions.

Currently, there is a lot of talk about sovereignty, and the concept is being applied to many things, among them culture. Why not, one could say. After all, culture is the breeding ground of a country's self – expression, of its intellectual and spiritual development... True, on condition that one accepts that culture is in its essence fluid, that it is dependent on time, place, the social group that represents it, on lifestyle, the diverse influences it undergoes… And putting forward the rigid

concept of « national culture » is taking the risk of excluding whole sections of society, sections of population who don't have the means of self-expression or of making themselves heard.

The other fundamental question is this: how can the « culture of the most fragile countries, those that are the least economically powerful», withstand the onslaught of mass culture, of the so-called « global » culture (a term that also begs analysis), when the means of dissemination are not the same. Current global mass culture imposes upon us a certain vision of the world and of being a citizen, as well as norms that codify the consumption of said citizen, and serves as a vehicle for a whole style of living, of thought, of consumption, backed by a market of global dimensions. In this system, the exclusions are violent and the responses to exclusion even more violent. This perception of exclusion can, at least partially, account for the diverse terrorist actions we have seen. And no country is immune against this phenomenon.

We are facing a phenomenon here that can be quite perplexing. One response to the « invasion » could be, surely, to accept the different transformations of a specific society, to refuse the rigid discourse on identity but to integrate all of it in a global vision of society which also includes « Culture » and provides its creative members (artists, artisans, engineers etc.) with solid structures for creation and diffusion (better access to television channels for local artistic productions, the introduction into schools of local and contemporary artistic and literary creations representative of local and contemporary thought, like films, books, lyrics…). This programme would also have to establish a solid legal and commercial environment that protects the artistic or technical creations…and will also protect the heritage as a whole. All this without turning inwards and isolating itself, but rather opening itself up to the world, especially to those who share the same philosophy and the same experience, in all lucidity.

The sovereignty of culture, a condition for freedom of expression

And this raises the question of the sovereignty of the country.

Currently, there is a lot of talk about sovereignty, and the concept is being applied to many things, among them culture. A priori, in relation to culture, this concept does not make sense, because culture is essentially fluid, it depends on time, place, the social group that represents it, on

lifestyle, the diverse influences it undergoes… But the mere existence of this concept is indicative of a terrible fear. We often wonder, these days, if the « culture of the poorest countries » can withstand the onslaught of mass culture, of the so-called « global » culture (a term that also begs analysis). Looking at it closely, the latter can indeed pose a threat. Because through its mass influence, it imposes a certain vision of the world and of what it means to be a citizen, and also certain norms that codify the consumption of said citizen, and in so doing, it serves as a vehicle for a whole style of life which requires certain products necessary to said style of living, of thought, of consumption, because this mass culture is backed by a market of global dimensions, which in its path blurs the diverse civilisations of the different human groupings that make up the society of a specific country.

It can also in the long term be the cause of economic or financial problems, because in order to function, it has to use vast means of diffusion and marketing of its products, and to this end it needs to control the media: radio, television, films, Internet etc., to assure the marketing of its products and of the lifestyle it wants to impose.

So there is a real danger of standardisation and homogenisation and therefore control of all lifestyles, modes of consumption and thought patterns, in the midst of which one can legitimately wonder whether the smaller countries will benefit.

And in this respect, what can a small country do?

There is a strong temptation to close the country to any outside influence and to overemphasise the value of « the national culture », as if it is linked to the « natural genius » of the nation. But here again the concept is dangerous.

What is a national culture? What are the values it is based on, the values that legitimise it, that perpetuate it? What is it that unites a nation, what is it that differentiates the members it is made up of, which one of these members can legitimately call itself or be called the « national culture »?

We are only a small step away here from the idea of authenticity, and of a pure culture, of a pure race. Now this is a dangerous concept, because it takes culture out of its social, historical context and immobilises it, preventing any analysis or development, and so in the long term it excludes huge sections of society, because it imposes a single model

of citizenship, a single model of thought, at the risk of perpetrating injustice, inequality, etc…

Let me offer an example : during the celebration of Alhamady Be (the Madagascan New Year) this year at Ambohimanga, the royal city in the outskirts of Antananarivo, a whole section of the poorer population rebelled. As part of this commemoration, there was a procession with 'filanjanas' (sedan chairs) and 'Maromitas' (porters). The blunder was a clumsy gesture, the result of a sincerely good intention to recreate an historical scene which used to take place in the royal city every year. What was not taken into account was that a 'Maromita' is a menial servant who carries his Lord and Master on his shoulders. Now, some of the young people playing the role of 'Maromitas' were descendants of such servants and, due to the economic crisis, are themselves currently in a situation of exclusion. The outrage was as powerful as the wound was deep. But this revolt was a silent one, the 'rebels' having reacted with a profound silence which put a strain on any later possibility of change in social relations. If freedom of speech had been effective in this case, if everyone had had the possibility of expressing himself, of expressing his uneasiness, the blunder would not have taken place, the situation would not have become inextricable, the problem would have been verbalised, which might in the end avoid an explosion of pain and a dangerous social explosion.

Guidelines for Development

Here, we are on shifting sands, because the lines of thought cut across history, world vision, the environment, etc. … And this is where one has to accept that the culture of a country, a society, a given social group, is determined by history, by collective memory, by the environment, the economy, etc. … And the given situations change. Culture, then, is the manner in which this society lives, expresses itself, sings of itself, paints itself, talks about itself, etc. … And the artists and other creative elements are the vectors of this mode of expression and self-expression, vectors that push this mode of expression, of singing of oneself, to excellence, when they are able to. And it is within this framework that it is fundamentally important to give them freedom of expression, but together with its corollary: ethics and respect for the other. And it is just as important to give this freedom of expression to all sections of the society, to allow it to express itself and thus to develop without clashes.

Yet, currently, the means used to spread mass or « global » culture, are ever more powerful and do not take into account the characteristics of the different social groups it affects. Acculturation takes place at an ever faster pace, and it is less and less possible to create symbiotic cultures that would allow for a more serene evolution of society. And that is where the danger lies, that of said society following a lifestyle which does not match its reality.

This is where the work of artists, journalists, people in literature and in art, activist and so forth, is fundamentally important. Because often, those who 'rebel' are the people who are more tuned in to the different divergent or convergent currents within society. They experience it more intensely precisely because they find themselves, often, on a fault line: social faults, psychological faults… fault lines that are present in any transforming society.

Their position as the primary receptors of all the fragilities and also the splendours of their society often places them at odds with it, because they disrupt the « stability » of the social entity… hence the strong temptation to declare them renegades, or borderline. Yet in fact, their position, often or sometimes on the margins of society, allows them to express in a powerful way that which is said or experienced collectively.

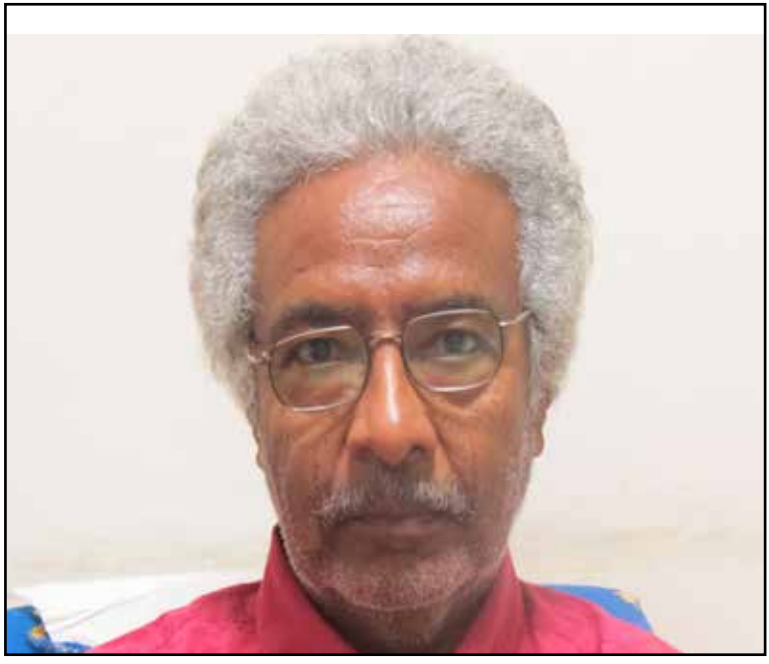
Because all societies change, and like any living entity, are permanently in a state of transformation. And one has to be sensitive to that. To give another example: currently, technological progress is advancing extremely fast, as are the changes they bring about. But, and this is fascinating, societies adapt these technological changes to their own needs. Let's take an example: the neo-rural vegetable sellers at the wholesale market in Antananarivo use cell phones as their tool to 'speculate' on the price market. This transforms the whole mode of consumption and therefore of social relationships, and the advertisers know this and have started to introduce the image of the farmer in their ads. But can we really say that it constitutes a violation of the sovereignty of Malagasy culture?

In fact, the only response to the « invasion » might be, and probably is, to accept these transformations, but also to integrate them into a global vision of society which also includes freedom of expression and provides the creators (artists, artisans, engineers…) with solid structures for creation and diffusion (better access to television channels for artistic productions like films, or access to the national print works for young

writers, for example). This programme must also establish a solid legal and commercial environment that would protect artistic or technological creation(s)…and also the entire heritage.

This could maybe limit the damage. Because it would reassure the creative elements of society by allowing them to have an improved image of themselves and therefore to produce an improved, more modern image of their society. They would be less tempted to 'seek greener pastures' elsewhere and therefore to use all the inferior products offered to them, notably those that are produced by the big mass media, who often tend to provide a negative image of the so-called Third World. It is a vast subject, because we are face to face here with « Big Brother ». But maybe the smaller countries like Madagascar are lucky to still be in a position to create niches of expression for themselves.

27/10/2014



Mohamed Abusabib (Sudan)

Art and Artists in Sudan, A History of Harassment

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Art and Artists in Sudan
A History of Harassment

Dr. Mohamed Abusabib

Background

ONE TYPICAL CHARACTERSISTIC of the profession of art is that the produced artwork, however it looks, wholly abstract or extremely symbolical, must carry a certain attitude of the artist. That is because a work of art is an embodiment of thought, and thought is based on a specific stand-point which represents an ideological position. Thus art is thought and thought is never partial. This is how art and artists, as an institution, operate in any given culture and contribute to the aesthetic and intellectual life of the community. One outstanding contribution by art is its role as a critical tool. Here a work of art, based on its aesthetic value, has the capacity to transcend all types of barriers, be them ethnic, linguistic, religious or political, and communicate with human mind and feeling to convey the message it carries. This is why art is the most sensitive, contentious and formidable component of culture, thus resistant to manipulation and containment. And, this is why art has always been suspected and feared by dictators, undemocratic regimes and fanatics of all kind. The Sudanese case is a clear example.

Sudan is the land of one of the oldest civilizations which dates back thousands of years and witnessed the birth of its first centralized government around the tenth century BC, on the banks of the Nile Valley in the far northern part of the country. The country is home to 57 ethnic groups (before the secession of its southern part) subdivided into 570 tribes. It contains within its borders representatives of all the major defined groupings of languages in Africa, with the sole exception of the Khoisan languages of Southern Africa. The latest edition of *Ethnologue*

Lists the number of languages for Sudan at 142, of which 134 are living languages and 8 are extinct. The country gained independence

in 1956, however the Sudanese enjoyed democratic rule for 11 years divided into three periods: 1956 – 1958, 1964 – 1969, and 1985 – 1989, interupted by years of military dictatorship: 1958 – 1964, 1969 – 1985, and 1989 – present.

Like elsewhere in African countries which suffer from dictatorial rule, the impact of such rule on Sudanese economic, social and cultural lives has been enormously damaging. This article highlights this impact on the field of art and looks into the relation between the "art institution" (here defined as the fields of artistic production taken collectively, along with established traditions and conventions associated with the major modern and traditional art forms, academic institutions concerned with the arts, and art organizations) and the "political institution" (here defined as the body of policies adopted by the junta and implemented by the state). Certain important branches of the art institution will be highlighted and various aspects of the state's policy in this regard will be outlined in order to clarify the relations between the two institutions. The article also focuses on the second military dictatorship and the present Islamist military regime.

Nimeiri military regime (1969 – 1985)

The art and political institutions have long been at cross-purposes in respect to the latter's policies concerning culture and the arts. The main feature of this inharmonious relationship is that while the political institution embraces certain policies that serve its own political agenda, the art institution is stubbornly defiant in the face of attempts to impose such policies on it. One clear example of such relationship is the National Council for Arts and Letters and its act.

The National Council for Arts and Letters

In 1976 the People's Assembly (the Nimeiri regime's parliament) passed the National Council for Arts and Letters Act. The opening passage in this act, which discloses the main objective of the regime is stated as follows: "The Council shall work for the promotion, encouragement, and publication of Arts and Letters within the policies prescribed by the political organization."[56] That political organization was The Sudanese Socialist Union, a party erected by Nimeiri and disappeared after his fall. It is obvious that the Council was intended to be subordinate to the

56 The National Council for Arts and Letters Act 1976: section 4.

political institution in order to serve the political aims of the existing political organization. Although Nimeiri's primary motive for establishing the Council was to create inroads into the artistic institution, the program assigned to it has never been realized for two main reasons. The political institution has in general never been able to build adequate support within the modern artistic movement because of its social and ideological background. Moreover, the authorities have never regarded the Council as an ideal option and politicians have always been sceptical about its ability "to deliver." As a result, the basic necessities for such a large and complex undertaking, including a proper budget and suitable facilities, have never been available. In short, such strategic and national obligations would cost the authorities a large amount of money, but would not provide quick political gains.

The Institute of Music and Theater

This institute has suffered from an uneasy relationship with the political institution from its very beginning. Since music, singing, and theater are popular art forms that readily have an immediate influence on the audience, the Institute has always been vulnerable to harassment by the political institution, particularly under the Nimeiri dictatorship and the present Islamist regime. Examples of this harassment will be discussed later.

Art Organizations

In the field of art, particularly in music and literature, the formation of bands and the establishment of clubs and associations in towns and urban centers are old traditions dating back to the early decades of the last century. Some of these organizations, especially in the area of music, still follow the traditional forms of their respective ethnic groups, albeit with some degree of adaptation to the urban environment. In 1951 the Artists League was established as the first art organization by singers and musicians associated with Sudan Radio, which has continued to exist under a series of names, today operating as the Artists Union for Singing and Music. This type of organization is intended to unite artists in their efforts to deal with problems facing the profession, including complex issues such as copy rights, the role of organizations at the national level, and relations with the authorities. An early example of these efforts among artists was the strike over wages in 1951 led by singers and

musicians working for Sudan Radio. Important musical groups began emerging in the provinces in 1961, a development that has also greatly contributed to modern Sudanese music.

But in the Sudanese context, where social and political crises are the rule, artistic organizations are ultimately forms of solidarity in "defence" of their members' interests that lead the "struggle" for the promotion of their profession. They have typically been banned immediately following every military coup, with the new regime later approaching certain of their members in the hope that the organization can be re-constituted in a form that supports the government. In addition, all of the military regimes label the groups they have banned as Communist-led organizations having artistic and cultural programs that do not support the "correct" political strategies.

For example, General Nimeiri banned all art organizations that he regarded as disloyal after surviving the 1971 coup attempt. Towards the end of the 1970s he formed a loyal art organization named Sudanese Literary Union, which held its founding meeting at the headquarters of Nimieri's Sudanese Socialist Union. Soon afterwards its Chairman was appointed Secretary of the National Council for Arts and Letters. This union then vanished after the uprising of 1985 that toppled Nimeiri, and those writers and poets whose activities Nimeiri had banned founded the Sudanese Writers Union. But the leaders of the Islamist military coup of 1989 immediately banned the union. However, the union re-emerged after the Nifasha peace agreement between the regime and Sudan People Liberation Army in 2005, but was again recently banned.

At the individual level, the case of the very popular Sudanese singer the late Mohamed Wardi, provides the most glaring example of the political institution's suppression of the art institution. Because of his political views and opposition to military rule, Wardi has been systematically persecuted since the days of the first military regime, and the Nimeiri regime repeatedly jailed him and threatened his life. He and many of his colleagues fled the country after the Islamist coup. Wardi is commonly regarded as the epitome of artistic resistance to non-democratic regimes. In addition to his romantic songs, his production of patriotic songs that champion national causes along with socialist and emancipatory ideals is unparalleled. Not only has he campaigned against the current civil war, he has visited refugee camps accommodating Southern Sudanese in neighboring African countries and performed

there many times.

Art organizations are a part of civil society and regard themselves as independent entities arising from the democratic movement in general, and are advocates of social equality and cultural and economic development.

The Islamist regime (1989 –present)

"Islamisation" of the arts

The National Islamic Front's (NIF) undertaking to "Islamise" the arts after its seizure of power in 1989 was, in essence, an attempt to eliminate long-standing aesthetic traditions and artistic practices and replace them with what it took to be an ideal religious form of art. The Front viewed this undertaking as a necessary and even "natural" move if the artistic activities and aesthetic conceptions of Sudanese communities were to reflect the "new Islamic identity" of the country.[57]

The beginnings of this undertaking can be traced back to the early 1980s, when Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, the Islamist ideologue and leader of the NIF, gave a lecture in Khartoum University mosque in which he laid the theoretical foundations and suggested practical guidelines for what he construed to be the true Islamic involvement in artistic activities.[58] The legislative and administrative measures taken by the government immediately after the Islamist military coup put those guidelines into practice almost to the letter. The Islamist jurisprudential interpretation of art and the main guidelines of implementation can be summarized as follows:

- The baseline in Islamist discourse on art as stated by al-Turabi is the doctrine of monotheism, *tawhid*, which defines the aesthetic outlook and perspective of the Islamists in dealing with the phenomenon of art. In accordance with this doctrine Muslims

57 The NIF issued "The Sudan Charter: National Unity and Diversity" in 1987. It stated in this document that the "Muslims of Sudan have a legitimate right, by virtue of their religious choice, their demographic weight and natural justice, to practise the values and rules of their religion to their full range – in personal, familial, social and political affairs." For this reason "Islamic jurisprudence shall be the general source of law" because it is an expression of the will of the democratic majority. Quoted in Khalid 1990: 309 – 310.

58 Al-Turabi 1983. "Hiwar al-Din wa al-Fan." *Majalat al-Fikr al-Islami*, No.1 (September), 41 – 64. Khartoum: Jamaat al-Fikr wa al-Thaqafa al-Islamiyya bil-Khartoum.

are required to unify all aspects of their life and direct them to the worship of God. Consequently, monotheism prompts the artist to express his faith through beautiful images of life. Such statements are based on an interpretation of Koranic verses and sayings of the Prophet.

- Beauty is regarded as seductive and distractive from God, and that we have the choice either to indulge it, or transcend it to God. However, art as the creation of beauty is even more seductive and distractive from religion than beauty itself.
- Art is a sensuous reaction incompatible with rationality itself and with the conscious devotion to God that is an attribute of religion. Art, like power, economy, and sex, is lustful, free, emotional, unruly, and expresses the subjective tendencies of the artist.
- Art occupies a broad area in the life of modern societies. This means that the door is opened wide to seduction and distraction from God.

The following guidelines suggested by al-Turabi summarize the role of art in the Islamist movement and how they can be put into practice.

- Both art and religion are symbolic practices that aim to transcend worldly realities towards a higher ideal: art aspires to an ideal beauty, while religion aspires to eternity. As a result, religion guides the artist towards true faith, and faith inspires the artist to create.
- Art should be deployed as an effective vehicle for ideology, and all artistic resources must be deployed for the sake of *jihad*.
- The Islamic legal tradition concerning art must be supplemented by a new interpretation.
- There is no objection to the visual and audible arts unless they violate Islamic moral codes.
- Existing artistic practices, both traditional and modern, must be re-evaluated because they carry both *jahili* (pre-Islamic) values rooted in opinion, race, pride, and ethics, as well as the ills of Western civilization.
- It is necessary to create religious artists who are capable of producing true religious art.
- Since Islamic monotheistic life is comprehensive and integrated,

> a revival of Islamic art is not possible unless there is a revival of all aspects of Muslim life as well.

Legislative and Political Measures

When the NIF struck a political deal in 1983 with the military dictator Nimeiri, two areas were of paramount importance, namely, the economy and education.[59] In respect to education, the government gave the Islamists a free hand to further its activities in the higher secondary schools and universities, whereby it established a solid foundation in the student movement. The Islamists viewed this as key to securing future support among professional associations and trade unions, all of which had been firmly opposed to its policies.

The regime inaugurated its policies in respect to education with what Abbas terms "mopping up operations." Shortly afterwards tens of teachers and administrators in the university system were pensioned off primarily on the basis of past political affiliations.

An important legislative measure is stated in the 1998 constitution. In Part One, Article 12, under "Sciences, Art and Culture," affirms that the "State...shall as well strive to encourage all forms of art and strenuously seek to elevate society towards values of religiousness, piety and good deeds."[60] But Article 18 is elaborate, comprehensive, and compelling in respect to what is taken to be "religiousness":

> Those in the service of the State and public life shall envisage the dedication thereof for the worship of God, wherein Muslims stick to the scripture and tradition, and shall maintain religious motivation and give due regard to such spirit in plans, laws, policies and official business in the political, economic social and cultural fields in order to prompt public life towards its objectives, and adjust them towards justice and up-rightness to be directed towards the grace of God in the Hereafter.[61]

The authorities put such measures into action in the artistic field through the appointment of loyalists in leading positions in all art institutions.

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59 Abbas, Ali Abdalla 1991. "The National Islamic Front and the Politics of Education." *Middle East Report* (September-October), 23 – 25..

60 *Draft Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, the Authenticated English Translation of the Arabic Version* 1998: 2.

61 Ibid.: 3.

Other measures included the banning of all literary and artistic associations, such as the Sudanese Writers Union and the Sudanese Visual Artists Association. The NIF regime also prohibited male and female members of the National Dance Band to perform Sudanese traditional dances together, and it enforced certain dress codes, presumed to be Islamic, for even those female dancers from non-Islamic ethnic groups.

A report in the clandestine newspaper *al-Midan* concerning the situation at the Institute of Music and Theatre in Khartoum gives a good description of how the official Islamist policies were typically enforced in artistic institutions:

> Every day the security staff at the Institute report to the Dean about the teachers' and students' activities and behaviour. Security staff are free to enter the lecture room at any time and for any reason. They see to it that Islamist dress is observed by female students and that they do not sit together with the men. The Dean even censors drama texts in order to avoid, for instance, physical contact between male and female actors on the stage during training, or to make sure that all "un-Islamic" words and expressions are removed from the text.[62]

One outcome of all such measures is a drastic fall in the number of performances that these institutions have held, along with an overall decline in the quantity and quality of artistic production, and mediocre artists of all types dominate the artistic scene today, particularly music and singing where the commercial potential is high.

The Ideological Dimension

It is the first time that such detailed religious opinions about art and the Islamist legal standpoint have been unequivocally incorporated into a comprehensive political agenda. The principle of monotheism has also been made to serve a practical political tactic. The linkage of artistic creation to the Islamic principle of monotheism neatly fits this tactic. On the one hand, it legitimizes the measures taken by the government to restrain the artistic institution as a free enterprise and curb its potential to be an effective critical tool. On the other, if art is to be based on the principle of monotheism, then any opposition to measures or programs associated with this conception must eventually lead to its antithesis, which is heresy.

62 *Al-Midan* 1996 (September-October issue): 8.

In practical terms, the Islamist ideological impact on art is shown by the destruction of artworks that Islamist individuals, including Islamist artists, and the authorities have perpetrated. But far more serious is the attempt on the part of the Islamist authorities to purge the entire record of Sudanese music that is stored in the archives of Sudan TV and Radio and censor all new production. The director of the cultural section of Sudan TV has stated that, "The banning of some songs is in accordance with the general policy of the state to establish genuine creative works of art and culture and purge them of all blemish."[63] The director of the television has stated this point in greater detail:

> There are fixed criteria for banning songs. In this respect we sought the advice of Dr. al-Hibir Y. Nur al-Dayim [a prominent Islamist], a lecturer on literature at Khartoum University, who pronounced a *fatwa* (Islamic legal statement) concerning certain romantic songs. We also listened to certain other scholars to whom I gave responsibility in this matter. When we began to sort through the cultural and social material that is broadcast, we set up principles and criteria that serve the welfare of the singer, the audience, and the new generation. For example, it is not proper for us to introduce a singer who swears by something other than God, for there are songs that contain swearing by the eyes, the smile, the voice, or the hair. Islam urges us to observe values of virtue and monotheism. There are also singers who have demanded that some of their earlier songs be banned, and they now produce songs that all people accept.[64]

Failure of the Islamist Project

Political expediency has in fact dictated the whole of the Islamist project from the very outset. The Islamist regime quickly resorted to

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63 Taken from an interview with Awad Mohamed Ahmed, Director of the Cultural Section. *Al-Fajr* newspaper (published in London), 1997, No. 1 (May14th).

64 Ibid. Taken from an interview with al-Tayyib Mustafa, the Director General of Sudan Television. *Al-Fajr* claims over ninety songs have been banned, including songs from the 1930s and such famous traditional Sudanese songs as *al-Gamar Boaba*, sung by the very popular Mohamed Wardi. Other sources give a much larger number.

experimentation in the absence of historical experience, any successful Islamic model that they could follow, and any elaborated "Islamic" cultural theory that might serve as a guide.

The Islamist discourse on art also reflects an epistemological arrogance. It simply ignores the vast knowledge concerning art accumulated by such human and social sciences as aesthetics and art history, including Islamic art history. The Islamist conception simply abstracts culture into religion and then accommodates art to this view after purging it of all "un-Islamic" material, however defined. Indeed the idea of completely binding the activity of art to the activity of worship is so vague and it is so difficult to imagine any "mechanism" by which such a bond could be constructed. Even from the perspective of the history of Islamic art, such a bond has never been established. Moreover, the adjective "Islamic" in the term "Islamic art" does not necessarily refer to religious content. As Grabar, a prominent art historian has indicated,

"'Islamic' does not refer to the art of a particular religion, for a vast proportion of the monuments have little if anything to do with the faith of Islam. Works of art demonstrably made by and for non-Muslims can appropriately be studied as works of Islamic art…. An alternate and far more common-sense interpretation of the adjective 'Islamic' is that it refers to a culture or civilization in which the majority of the population or at least the ruling element profess the faith of Islam."[65]

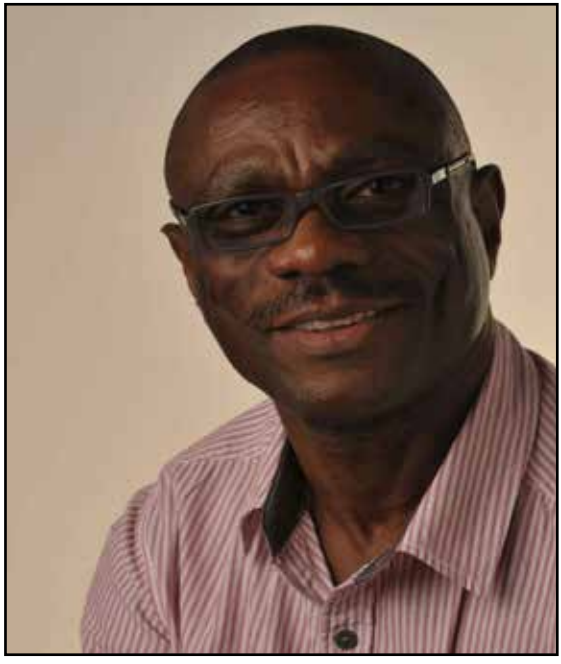
The re-emergence of active artistic associations opposed to the regime's measures has revealed the deep resistance of the vast majority of artists and intellectuals to the Islamist program. Also, in academic institutions, Islamist administrations have not succeeded in defining any alternative "Islamic curriculum."

From the aesthetic point of view, there are no Islamic principles of art or systematic Islamic aesthetics capable of influencing the direction of development of art either in Sudan, or in any other Islamic society with a similar background. It is simply not possible to subjugate any cultural phenomenon, isolate it, and control its development apart from the basic internal and external factors that govern its growth and apart from the historical context that defines its roots.

In respect to Sudan, the range and depth of aesthetic practices among the indigenous communities are far too complex for traditional

65 Grabar, Oleg 1987. The Formation of Islamic Art. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1 – 2.

Islamic-Arabic concepts of art and beauty to encompass. Nor can the Islamist regime refashion them into types of religious activity. Moreover, these aesthetic practices are but an expression of the cultural roots of these communities, and they attest to the socio-cultural and historical realities of which art is a product.



Patrick J. Ebewo

Freedom of Creative and Artistic Expression in the Performing Arts: A Critical Reflection

Patrick Ebewo holds a PhD in Theatre Studies and is a Professor and Head of the Department of Drama and Film, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. He taught at universities in Nigeria, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. Prof. Ebewo is very active in research and has published extensively in the areas of African theatre and development communication; applied theatre, culture and film studies. He is an NRF Rated-Researcher.

Ebewo has published five books and edited four volumes. He has numerous journal articles and chapters in books. Prof. Ebewo won the Tshwane University of Technology's "Researcher of the Year Award" several years and has published extensively in the areas of African theatre and development communication; applied theatre, culture and film studies. He is a member of several academic organizations including the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) and African Theatre Association (AfTA).

Freedom of Creative and Artistic Expression in the Performing Arts: A Critical Reflection

Prof. Patrick J Ebewo

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Introduction

All through the ages, the arts (both performing and visual) and artists have left indelible imprints on the sand of times through their creative oeuvre. Beyond entertainment and the gift of pleasure for those who consume works of art, artists expose the crudities and suffering of the society and they are often courageously outspoken. Committed artists are often obsessed with what the Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka tags "the recurrent cycle of human stupidity." Committed artists are fundamentalists when it comes to the issue of freedom for all humankind and they are often social critics who write about injustice, political repression, subjugation and oppression in society. In Africa in particular, artists' concerns arise out of the specific conditions of contemporary African society and they reflect the profound social, economic and political tensions which have marked African societies since the collapse of colonial rule. Many artists have become not only critics of prevailing conditions in the society, but have attempted to change it, by contributing, as directly and eloquently as art can ever allow, to the struggle for human rights and a meaningful existence. They all embrace the tradition of railing out against miscarriages of justice or repressive regimes. Unfortunately, positions usually taken by committed artists often expose them to danger with unpalatable sanctions and consequences. Some have been known to be

ostracised, killed, maimed or silenced.

Signs of the contemptuous attitude towards the arts have been apparent since the time of Plato. This ancient Greek philosopher disapproved, not only of the arts, but of the literary artist as well. Literature as an art form that deals with imitation reflects society in the way that a mirror throws back a reflection of the viewer. This imitation that defines literature in relation to life was seen by Plato as a fraudulent and deceitful reproduction of human experience in words. He argued that the literary artist is not only useless in himself, but harmful to society; and he went so far as to brand the literary artist as a social misfit who should not be allowed to participate in the affairs of a well-ordered society (quoted in Smith and Parks 1951: 10). Plato, specifically attacked the stage (drama) in both *Republic* and *Law*. During the medieval period, drama played a prominent role in the Church by being used as an instrument to propagate faith but as soon as it criticised the bad elements in the Church, it was shown the way out. The government of then Czechoslovakia banned Vaclav Havel's plays in 1969 as they were deemed slanderous against the State. In 1601, Queen Elizabeth frowned at Shakespeare's *Richard III*, seen as opposition against her throne. It is on record that Ibsen's *Ghosts*, a play about marital infidelity, hypocrisy, incest and syphilis met with bitter rebuff in Norway. In South Africa, *Spear* painting by Brett Murray which ridiculed President Jacob Zuma in the pose of Lenin with dangling phallus, was condemned by the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) and the painting was destroyed.

To what extent do artists deserve not to be allowed the freedom to express themselves creatively? This essay is an attempt to defend the artists as cultivators of good conscience and thus, people who deserve to enjoy the dignity of their profession and human rights. This article advocates for the artists' freedom to create and express themselves within tolerable limits and frowns at institutions that tend to inhibit artistic freedom. Though freedom is man's inalienable right, the essay also calls for checks and balances on the part of the artists in their quest for freedom of creativity and expression. The major objective of the article is to conscientise artists to handle the issue of "rights" with the delicacy they deserve bearing in mind that artistic expression should be navigated responsibly. Though artists have rights, the premise of this paper is that sometimes their rights conflict with the rights of others in

the society thereby creating tension that may culminate in censorship. Though many art disciplines have been referred to, the concentration in this paper is on the freedom of creative and artistic expressions in the realm of the performing arts in Africa.

The functions of the arts generally, and performing arts in particular, are not contested in contemporary society when it comes to their contributions to the growth and development of humankind. In contemporary African society, performances (drama and theatre) permeate our lives and this is why this growing realisation has culminated in the belief that the world is "living in a dramatised society" (Mangan, 2013: 3). The arts, and indeed drama is a mirror of the African society. Since art-for-art's-sake is no longer en vogue, dramatists the world over communicate salient messages for society's upliftment. Many committed theatre professionals in Africa act as the social consciousness of the world around them. They serve as watchdogs in their communities and this self-imposed duty sometimes earns them the bitter taste of liberty. In the 1920s, Oba Ladigbolu I, the Alafin of Oyo (Nigeria), banned the Apidan Theatre for satirising the chieftaincy institution. Abidogun, the actor-manager of the theatre troupe was fined about twenty pounds (Adedeji, 1971: 62). Three of Ogunde's plays: *Yoruba Ronu* (1965), *Strike and Hunger* (1945) and *Bread and Bullets* (1951) were banned because of their criticism of the government in power in the then western Nigeria. Under the dictatorship of Kenya's Arap Moi, Kimani Gecau, Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Mirii's involvement in the Kamiriithu Theatre Project led to their exile. The Zimbabwean Amakhosi Theatre presented a play entitled, *The Good President* (2007) written and directed by Cont Mhlanga. The play was well received when it was staged at the Harare Park. "But when the play premiered in Bulawayo in the South-West of Zimbabwe, the police stormed the performance and asked the audience and actors to leave, because it was a political gathering" (Glortad, 2011: 251). The world premiere of Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* (adaptation of Gay's *Beggars' Opera*) was performed during the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) Convocation on 16 December 1977. The play's attack on official corruption of the military that was in power was so damaging that the play was confined to Ife, never to be shown in big cities like Lagos (Gibbs, 1986: 135). During the apartheid era in South Africa, art was repeatedly suffocated – Nadine Gordimer's, *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and Fugards *Statements* were banned.

Many arts patrons and advocates for the freedom of creative and artistic expression frown at individuals and government's resistance to creative outpouring, particularly those aimed at sanctioning against intolerable behaviour in the society. Artists, like other people in society have the right to express themselves freely without recourse to infringements. Frantz Fanon (1952) once impressed upon the world to shun the butchery of what is most human in human beings – Freedom. It must be noted that though many sectors had long deliberated on issues impacting on their rights and freedom to exist, the arts sector has only recently awaken from its slumber with momentum gained since the first world conference on the rights to freedom of artistic expression and creativity. The Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights (under its legal framework) states:

The most explicit provisions protecting the freedom of artistic expression and creativity are to be found in article 15 (3) of ICESCR – "To respect the freedom indispensable for . . . creative activity" and in article 19 (2) of ICCPR "states that "the right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds."

As hinted earlier, though artists have the expressive freedom to practice their art, this should be done with caution. We live and share in the human community and as such, whatever we do as individuals must be done with due consideration for others. Caution should not be thrown to the winds in the name of freedom. Arts practice should be conducted within reasonable and tolerable boundaries.

Limitations

Despite the concept of globalisation, the issue of the freedom of the creative and artistic expression in a world that is geographically, socio-politically and economically diverse is a complex one. Cherished as the idea of the freedom of artistic expression is, there are some limitations. Article 4 of ICESCR authorises "Limitations as are determined by law only in so far as this may be compatible with the nature of these rights and solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare in a democratic society" (p.7). Under Article 19 of ICCPR, "the right to freedom of expression, including in the form of art, may be subject to certain restrictions that are provided by law and are necessary (a) for the respect of the rights or reputations of others; or (b) for the protection

of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals." Artistic expressions that propagate war, racial and religious hatred constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Freedom of artistic expression should at all times be wary of hate speech. As a matter of fact, some expressions may constitute "criminal offence" and some that "is not criminally punishable but may justify a civil suit or administrative sanctions" and that may "not give rise to criminal, civil or administrative sanctions but still raises a concern in terms of tolerance, civility and respect for the rights of others" (see CCPR/C/GC/34 pars. 24 and 32). Further, artistic freedom is often challenged by specific circumstances: information dissemination regulation, "necessity to protect children and adolescents against specific contents, such as extreme violence or pornography," indigenous people's rights, privacy and moral rights. Since "in most cases, restrictions on artistic freedoms reflect a desire to promote a world vision or narrative" (p. 9), artist should not trample on other people's rights in the name of celebrating their freedom of expression. Some contemporary theatrical contents and experimentations in Africa may be used to illustrate how not to indulge freedom of artistic and creative expressions.

Sex and pornography

In a bid to copy the violence and pornography that have supposedly attracted African audiences to the movie industry, some theatre practitioners have dabbled into extreme obscenity and violence in play production. In South Africa, Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom holds audiences tongue-tied with extreme violence and nudity on stage. In the fashion of British in-yer-face theatre, Grootboom's presentation of sex and violence are indeed apparent in *Foreplay* (2009) and *Cards* (2009) which smashed local taboos through nudity and strong language and against the background of black actors simulating sex on stage.

In the last couple of years, the Department of Drama at Tshwane University of Technology has repeatedly mounted plays that deal with violence and sex. In *Felsten*, an actress's breasts were exposed in full view of the audience. The *Blue Room*, a play in ten intimate acts by David Hare (a 2011 MA project) handled with reckless abandon the "sexual daisy chain" of 10 individuals in search of love and fulfilment of lustful desires. In May 2011, a Master's student in the Department produced *Cleansed*, a play by Sarah Kane. Much more than the mere bone of the play was the

fact that one female character removed her dress (from head to toes, no underwear) in full view of the audience; a male actor followed suit. One lay on top of the other on a bed uttering "Fuck me" moans all the way. On a bare floor (beach) was seen a gay couple, bare buttocks to bare buttocks simulating graphic sex in full view of the audience. On another tableau on top of the set was a topless girl sitting on the naked laps of a young actor crying, "Fuck me" several times. This production aggrieved my sense of decorum and two staff members in the Department volunteered to mellow down the nudity aspect of the production before being staged at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape. Even after the play had been mellowed down by substantially eliminating the sexual scenes, one festival critic wrote:

"Not much needed to be said about the style and approach which tortured the audience with hints of theatre of cruelty, it is blatantly aggressive and hard to ignore. The extremism of the language and images shocks the audience, leaving us very unsettled." (Linderboom, 2011, Grahamstown).

Some believe that giving the audience early warning or imposing age restriction would have served the needs of sensitive spectators. To me, this is not the solution because in traditional Africa, a public performance (excluding some rituals) is not restrictive. Everybody attends.

Also, in 2011, a play director in one of the drama departments in South Africa directed a play titled, *Battlefield*. A battle field was indeed created with waves of dust and cacophony of noise that caused discomfort in the audience – another experiment in the theatre of cruelty repertoire. On the last day of the show's run, the department head received a petition from some cast members stating:

"We, the *Battlefield* cast, are very concerned about our health. The sand we use in the show is giving us allergic reactions. "A" and "M" have already suffered severe asthma attacks after the show, even though they have never been diagnosed asthmatic in their lives. Some of the other cast members are also complaining that it is starting to affect their health and breathing as well . . . We request that the department arrange for medical precautions – perhaps humidifiers and masks could be provided during performances." (Extract of Petition Letter from the Cast).

On their own merit (as experimental theatre), I have nothing against productions of this nature. But one of the explanations often

received from playwrights and directors of these plays is: "We want to shock the audience!" What crime has the audience committed to deserve the shock? In a western theatre tradition where dedicated audiences need something novel to spice their commitment, this may be tolerable but in many parts of Africa where theatre may be regarded as a "crawling baby", we must be cautious. In many parts of Africa, where sex in the public is regarded as taboo, we need to be very sensitive when love scenes are created on stage. Fred De Vries (2008) states that Grootboom's work "pulls crowd with numerous people walking out because they could not take the realistic sex and violence." This earned him the accolade, "Township Tarantino", coined after an American film director known for his aesthetisation of violence. Peters (2006:216) states that the definitional opposition between what is obscenity and what is art that had developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had created a classification norm preserving the realm of art from the obscene. In other words, obscenity is obscenity; and art is art.

Creativity and the province of arts

What is art? Is the dramatist or more generically, are artists journalists? Drama is art and one of the functions of art focuses upon man; and all performing arts have to do with human life in its most intense state (Smiley, 1971:7). Smiley enunciates some of the identifiable general functions of art to be generation of new knowledge, production of specific pleasures in human beings and functioning as a special kind of order in the chaos of life. He goes on to add:

"It offers controlled and permanent beauty. An artist creates by giving diverse materials a controlled form in a skilled manner for a pleasurable end. With each art object, he creates an image possessing unity, harmony, and balance. The artist as creator can give life increased value." (1971:7).

Without labouring to critique many plays and theatre productions that have toured the African continent, our generation must judge for itself if some of the contemporary African plays staged have done justice to the province of arts, and by extension, if they have promoted audience participation in theatrical productions. Once again, it is important to note that the right to freedom of expression in the realm of creativity should adhere to the principles of "*arts*". The emphasis here is "arts" as opposed to other media forms.

In many satirical creations and stand-up comedy series that have

overwhelmed the African scene, use of acceptable techniques are often glossed over in the name of freedom of expression and pursuit of the unconventional. Some of the operational tools of satire – irony, parody, caricature, lampoon, invectives, ridicule, burlesque, sarcasm and others, are almost always mistaken for, or confused with the genre proper (Ebewo, 2002; 3). Many productions of satire, which have incidentally dominated the African theatre scene, direct hostile attacks on their victims. Within the precinct of its subject, satire is a blend of amusement and contempt. Highet (1962) posits that "it is scorn, not murderous hostility." Hate alone may be expressed in other kinds of literature, not satire. "If one attacks a person in a literary work simply because he hates him, he is not writing satire. He is writing 'lampoon' popular in Greek comedic dramas (Highet, 1962:26). With this in mind, critics may want to evaluate why some of the theatre for social change or radical theatre in Zimbabwe managed to escape the razor edge of censorship under the dictatorial rule of President Mugabe.

In their efforts to cope with conflicting factors and situations, popular theatre artists constantly strive to be revolutionary, while being non-confrontational at the same time. The ability to manage the paradox of a non-confrontational opposition theatre demands that practitioners create the most aesthetically challenging and political performances . . . popular theatre practitioners who created impressive cutting-edge performances to critique, lampoon and interrupt the status-quo without generating distrust and disaffection among the authorities, survived the tumultuous decade of change and crisis (Zenenga, 2011: 218).

Panic Theatre in Zimbabwe enjoyed freedom and escaped censorship because it utilised coded political satire which depended on "subterfuge of entertainment and comedy." Conversely, popular theatre groups (companies such as Rooftop, Amakhosi, Savannah Arts and Vhitori Entertainments) that appeared too daring paid a high price with subjection to "political harassment with respect to controversial materials used" (Zenenga, 226). Those who are tempted to praise the radical dramatists for the boldness to stand up against authoritarianism should also know that realism is a better form of ambition. An artist who uses indirection and creativity to circumvent the law is an innovative artist. After all, it is the end that justifies the means. Hauptfleisch (1997: 109) opines "that theatre (and most art in fact) is a form of indirect communication. It communicates by association, rather than by direct argument . . . by

utilising the principles of parable, metaphor or the like rather than direct address . . . ." This state of negligence of what constitutes creativity needs to be corrected or knowledgeable patrons may be forced to frown at some theatrical presentations.

The booming video film industry in Nigeria may be a huge success in terms of financial turnover but in terms of artistic value, there is much to be desired. Ekwuazi writes:

"As a means of artistic expression, the Nigerian home video leaves much to be desired. At any rate, no other means of artistic expression has done more disservice to both the Nigerian personality and the Nigerian nation than the Nigerian home video. The enduring legacy of the Nigerian motion picture industry is that trash sells." (2010: 253).

Ekwuazi goes on to blame the industry practitioners for the accumulation of "redundant actions" that often lead to unnecessary elongation of the duration of the films in terms of time; chaotic shot sequencing and duration of shots that are not determined by the artistic interest they create; unmotivated utilisation of establishing shots; use of 45-angle shots that create impression of two dimensionality; camera movements that have no relationship with the storyline of the script, and the artistic use of suspense, light and sound that are often ignored. To the amateur practitioners in this industry, the story is more important than the techniques of filmography. In the professional industry, the story is not as important as the techniques used in the telling of the tales.

Another kind of popular theatre that has made an inroad into the theatrical profession is in the applied theatre umbrella known as theatre for development. Since the late 1980s, theatre for development practice has gained grounds in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. Though its practice is not totally alien to advanced countries, it is in the development of the third world countries that its relevance is more profound because the practitioners' objectives coalesce around the subject of encouraging human and societal development (Desai, 1991: 8). Invariably, theatre for development practice is anchored in the grassroots approach to education and development, and it is meant to be an instrument of empowerment for the socially deprived individual. It serves as the people's media, it is participatory and democratic in outlook; It provokes social awareness in people, encouraging a society to change or modify their thinking and discover ways of combating challenges. Its major concern is with the role of culture as an agency for

the development of people's minds because studies have revealed that cultural awakening is arguably a crucial stage in the development of a people. "There is little point in introducing high-technology to improve the efficiency of developing economies if one does not stimulate the minds of the people to take creative control of their destinies." (Van Erven, 1992: 1).

Contrary to popular theatre for development intentions, some of the outlined principles in its blueprint have become mere rhetoric. The communication process has on many occasions become top-down as theatre facilitators, engaging Pavlovian psychology, dictate and impose development agendas on communities instead of allowing the communities to motivate their needs. Many opinion leaders and privileged members of the communities hijack discussions and transmit information at the expense of the helpless majority who are passive participants, thereby creating only an illusion of democracy. The process-oriented approach of theatre for development practice, as opposed to possession of theatre skills, undermines creativity and aesthetics and may cause theatre patriots to clamp down on quacks and touts. Most pathetically, international donor intervention by some multi-national corporations has caused more harm than good as they use their donations to foster "goodwill" and "forestall resentment and opposition" from theatre practitioners and governments of the countries in which they operate.

From the above painted scenario, it seems obvious that creativity should be given room to blossom in order to check excesses in our communities. Artists should be allowed to enjoy their God-given and community-sanctioned freedom of expression. On the other hand, artists should not abuse their freedom by exhibiting recklessness; decorum should not be treated with kid gloves. Artists should not become insular; they should act responsibly in the execution of their art. Ethical considerations and creativity should guide their practice and when the arts shun the province of pedestrian journalism and ascend the ladder of creativity, there will be little room for probing and censorship.

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NEWS

Phiona Okumu

Phrase 2.0: How Digital and Social Tools Empower Storytellers Today and Enable Modern Day African Conversations

Phiona Okumu is a digital evangelist for African creative communities with a heavy bias towards music promotion.

She began her stint in print media in 2002 as Y Magazine's deputy editor before heading to the UK where after studying at London's City University she committed to a freelance career in which she has amassed by-lines at the Guardian, Vogue UK, Mail & Guardian, City Press and MTV Iggy, and also edits African pop culture website Afripopmag.

Okumu is a newbie speaker (Berlin Music Conference, HIFA), and also consults for Sony Music Africa, MTV Base, the British Council in South Africa, Samsung and other brands and organisations looking to interface within Africa and the rest of the world.

Phase 2.0: How Digital and Social Tools Empower Storytellers Today and Enable Modern Day African Conversations

Phiona Okumu

MUCH HAS BEEN said about the so-called "Arab Spring" – a surge of protests that arose in the Arab world, having been kindled in Tunisia 2010, before raging further on in North Africa and the Middle East.

The common thread in this succession of revolts was the use of social media to leverage two things. One was the unprecedented collective citizen power to challenge previously unopposed dictatorships. Secondly, it also unearthed new communities within and outside of their territories who provided support in sympathy and allegiance, and by being conduits of information through these social sites.

Protesters in the thousands effectively mobilised and broadcast activity using Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

On the African continent, the use of social media has been similarly adopted to instate a type of engagement not possible a decade ago.

In Kenya, writer and political analyst Nanjala Nyabola opined in Al Jazeera recalling helplessness when inaccurate reports about the post-election violence in Kenya circa 2007 flooded foreign media.

This imbalanced narrative was what informed the alarmist stance employed by some foreign reporters (namely for CNN) who arrived in Kenya for the 2014 presidential elections. They predicted an outbreak of ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley, implying an expected repeat of the events from seven years ago.

Unbeknown to them, in that short span of time the Kenya's digital class had ballooned in size, reach and influence. According to Mark Kaigwa, founder of Nairobi-based brand consultancy Nendo Ventures, and

author of the 2014 Nendo Trend Report, Nairobi is the most active Twitter city in East Africa. And Kenyans on Twitter clock in at just over 1.5 million users. They are an advanced social media-savvy digital tribe who play a gatekeeper role on matters varying from sports and entertainment to politics and terrorism. #KOT, as they are known, were responsible for the pushback on Twitter following CNN's inaccurate reporting last year using the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN. They continually lampooned the network with a barrage of wry tweets setting the record straight on the status quo eventually forcing a public apology and retraction out of CNN. In the past, the average disgruntled Kenyan could easily be ignored by a giant multi-media new agency. The zero-distancing in today's digital dispensation brings sparring Davids and Goliaths to a mutual eye-level and forces a discourse to take place.

Two years prior, neighbouring Uganda was thrust into the limelight thanks to *Kony 2012*, the conception of a California-based non-profit, Invisible Children, that released an online documentary about Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA). The Invisible Children campaign proposed to make Kony "famous". In so doing the crimes he had committed against humanity would come to light and ultimately bring him to book.

Simplified as it was, the campaign gained immense traction from international celebrities who, by posting on Twitter and Facebook, influenced their fans and followers to do the same. The message was simple: spread the word, catch the bad guy. On the one hand, social media users lured in by the noble prospect of capturing a (now) common enemy participated not only with hashtags but also purchasing memorabilia from the campaign sold to raise funds for the cause. Allegedly the fastest growing viral video of all time at 100 million views in 6 days, #Kony2012 was a trending Twitter conversation shared multiple times on Facebook too.

On the other hand, it wasn't long before another faction of social media users both inside and outside of Uganda, opposed to the simplification of the geo-political issues surrounding the notorious rebel leader, began to voice critique. The debates raged on, punching holes in the campaign and effectively bringing Kony2012 to a halt. Invisible Children is following suit, withdrawing slowly from the public eye, and has all but disappeared from the international NGO community.

Online activism varies in impact from one situation to the next,

often compounded by the availability of follow-through action (or the lack thereof) offline.

#BringBackOurGirls, is the social media campaign devised as an outcry to help rescue 276 girls abducted by Boko Haram from a secondary school in the Nigerian town of Chibok, demonstrated this perfectly. Thousands of people posted images of themselves holding placards with the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag written on it on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Social media was pivotal in creating awareness in mainstream media and in some parts on the agenda of world leaders. But so far, these efforts have had no visible impact on the extremist group who remain resolute in their demands for an Islamic state, and their custody of the kidnapped girls persists.

In the socio-political arena the parameters for dialogue in Africa continue to shift. The discussions travel vertically and horizontally among the various players at remarkable speed and in several directions at the same time. The media, governments and publics alike are adjusting to a heightened expectation for accountability as more tools become available to facilitate this.

In this climate, as content becomes more democratised, African popular culture also gets to sail along the winds of change.

South African cartoonist Jonathan "Zapiro" Shapiro created a puppet satire show for South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) the national broadcaster, but was shut down at every turn because of its controversial nature. Instead of stopping dead in its track *ZA News* has emerged as a popular and subversive web series on Youtube which thrives thanks to a cult audience of satire fans tickled by the gags aimed at politicians and newsmakers in South Africa.

ZA News is actually an offshoot of *The XYZ Show*, also a political satire-themed skit show which was inspired by the cult French puppet show *Les Guignols*. Its creator Gado, well aware of Kenyan audience's fancy for comedy and history and accurately speculated that it would be a hit. Similarly formatted is the weekly Nigerian *Oga's at the Top.* Some of the puppet personas of Nigerian society to make appearances on the show so far include former President Goodluck Jonathan and his wife, Olusegun Obasanjo, comedian Basketmouth and Nollywood actress Patience "Mama G" Ozokwor.The second (and most recent) season of the show leaned heavily on the run-up to Nigeria's just completed presidential elections.

While *The XYZ Show* was originally created for local Kenyan television viewers, Buni Media, its production company, has used it as the flagship programme with which to launch Buni TV, its mobile and web distribution arm. Buni TV makes shows like *The XYZ Show and Ogas at the Top* available on demand to millions of internet users across Africa and the world.

By doing so it's rerouting the avenues for discovering African content, and ultimately shaping the perceptions of Africa using innovative narrative storytelling, entertainment and humour to reach new audiences ready to engage with African culture on a deeper level than they would with straight forward news and current affairs programmes.

Whether it is television, film, documentary, animation or any other form of media, without the restrictions that traditional mainstream television channels often present – advertiser suitability, regional constraints, for example – this type of content organically finds its way around the world and offers an alternative narrative.

It is on this very premise that the current trend, in which more and more Black webseries are being developed and published, is built. For writers from the African Diaspora communities in the UK and the US who are committed to producing diverse content but aren't granted the platforms to do so on terrestrial TV, YouTube is increasingly becoming the new frontier for showcasing their work. Here, often marginalised representations, ideas and stories are now frequently being brought to life, bringing entertainment and enlightenment to hundreds of thousands of Internet users with appetites for other than what they see everyday on traditional TV.

There are many tiers to the benefits of Internet broadcasting.

The audience-reach potential is unlimited and not limited to geographic territories. The content travels quickly and cheaply within several Internet communities, sparking different conversations along the way and allowing content creators to engage directly with their audience in two-way conversations that only enhance the creation and distribution process. Audiences can meaningfully contribute to these independently produced programmes by providing encouragement as well as critique. These zero-distance relationships between consumer and creator foster new possibilities for the way that these shows can be funded. A lot of them make use of crowd funding, a basic requirement for which is that there is ongoing dialogue between the makers and the viewers.

An African City emerged last year as one such popular web series. Based in Accra, it tells the stories of returnees from America settling down to African city life. Only having just completed its first season, the show has received a fair amount of criticism for presenting an elitist view of young middle-class Africa. The series speaks of a well-off class of Africans who can afford to pay rent in the thousands of dollars and who take up high-ranking white-collar jobs after completing an expensive education abroad. Arguably though, while this is a small minority of the population of Africa it is present and growing. Shows like an *African City* exist purely for light entertainment but their presence is vital in adding diversity to the well-worn narratives that exist to describe the continent.

The Pearl of Africa is a documentary series by Swedish filmmaker Jonny von Wallström about Cleopatra Kambug, a Ugandan transgender girl's struggle to become the woman she's always known she's been.

Wallström traveled to Kampala living with Cleo and her boyfriend, filming them for 18 months as the young trans woman raised questions about identity, gender and homophobic attitudes her country Uganda where president Yoweri Museveni signed a law that not only outlawed homosexual acts, but also compelled citizens to report suspected homosexual activity to the police. While the law has since been annulled on a technicality, there is a good chance it will rear its head again as lawmakers in Uganda fight to grant it life.

The seven-part documentary series showcases the story of the LGBTI community which could never come to light, at least not legally, in Uganda under such circumstances.

Nigeria's former president Goodluck Jonathan's signing an anti-gay bill into law provided Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina with the impetus to publicly declare his in an essay epilogue to his memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, published online in January 2014. Shortly after coming out as gay, Wainaina posted to Youtube a sharp six-series documentary called *We Must Free Our Imaginations* in which he described amongst other things what it was like being gay and living in Africa. (In his native Kenya, homosexuality is punishable by law too)

When it comes to comics and video games the best-known superheroes tend to be of European descent. It's not hard to tell that the legend of characters like Superman and Batman leave a lasting imprint on the impressionable minds of young children at whom it is aimed. For this reason, the work of award-winning, Ghana-based Leti Arts cannot be

lauded enough. Leti Arts is one of Africa's first interactive media studios, with offices in Ghana and Kenya. It develops cross-platform interactive media products based on African history and folklore, including digital comics and mobile games. As one of a handful of interactive media studios in sub-Saharan Africa, Leti introduces global audiences to African storytelling. For instance *The True Ananse*, Leti Arts digital comic and mobile game series, re-imagines Ghanaian folklore trickster character Kweku Ananse in a modern context. ***The True Ananse*** is part of their bigger ***Africa's Legends*** series, which repurposes popular African folklore and historic legends, interspersed with fictional characters, as an elite group of superheroes fighting crime in present day Africa. Comics and games based on Africa's legends tell the stories behind individual characters and the collective team.

"The goal of merging the past with the present in a format that is exciting and compelling is to encourage younger generations to be genuinely excited to learn and read about African history and culture. We believe making history and culture in education relevant through interactive content is a better long-term bet for preserving our heritage," says Eyram Tawia (CEO, Leti Arts) on their company website.

In the era of information, the pros of an unfiltered highway of data continue to reveal themselves. Although there are obvious challenges (non-compliant policy makers who still insist on censoring the web's output, a high cost of broadband which makes it inaccessible for the majority of Africa's population), there has never been a more vital time to be a creative. The opportunities and outlets for expressing art and opinion, sharing knowledge and ultimately determining one's narrative are limitless.

Not only is the option for the message to remain in the hands of the creators, they also have the tools to promote and distribute their content without the proverbial middleman. It means that Africans can be represented more authentically and accurately than ever before whether it is in hard news or softer entertainment shows. And that surely is one of the most prized outcomes of freedom of expression.

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African superheroes take flight in video games (http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/african-superheroes-take-flight-in-video-games-1.2958837)

Raimi Gbadamosi (Nigeria / UK)

This is Not Another Appeal for Arts

Raimi Gbadamosi is an artist, writer and curator. He received his Doctorate in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art. He is a member of the Interdisciplinary Research Group 'Afroeuropeans', University of Leon, Spain, and the 'Black Body' group, Goldsmiths College, London. He is on the Editorial board of Third Text.

Recent national and international shows and events include: Exchange Mechanism, Belfast Exposed, Belfast, 2010; ARCO Madrid 2009; Tentativa De Agotar Un Lugar Africano, CASM, Barcelona 2008; Human Cargo, Plymouth Museum & Art Gallery, Plymouth 2007; Port City, Arnolfini, Bristol 2007. ARCO 2009, Madrid/. Work media including multiples, music, websites, writing and audience participation. Works creates debate, instead of representing preconceived concerns defined by specific social, cultural and political cant.

This is Not Another Appeal for the Arts

Raimi Gbadamosi

Preamble

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Not an Appeal

It seems only appropriate to start with the Declaration of Rights, easy shot I grant. It is just that the United Nations declaration on Human Rights is rather shallow on the question of artistic freedom. It would appear to be a different situation altogether to enjoy the arts to being involved

in making them. It is also worth pointing out that while protection of material and moral interests emerging from the production of artworks is stated, it does not protect the actual freedom to make an exhibit art. Of course it is possible to construe the idea of artistic freedom from the conflation of the two sections of the declaration, but its non—explicit nature should be addressed, if one is to imagine that artistic freedom is a right.

Artistic freedom is not about rights, it is about the existence of works being made, and the right to exhibit such works. The right to speak what is on one's mind, when it becomes quarrelsome, where there is an oppressive regime or situation that seeks to delimit individual rights, and the artist sits in the breach.

The notion of artistic freedom in Africa may therefore need to be considered in the context of resources available to artists and cultural brokers within the continent. It is not enough to protect the final product at the moment of display, it has to engage with the ability to make artworks of any kind in the first place. The limitations of artistic education continentally may be a greater threat to artistic freedom on the African continent than direct and visible acts of oppression by states and their officials.

It might be worth addressing the desires of interest beyond the production of artworks. Where ideology is mechanically linked to cultural production, display is highly politicised. Apart from a few exceptions on the continent, the teaching and material support for practitioners is so limited, and where available limiting, as to undermine notions of Freedom altogether. If these interests were then to argue for artistic freedom they themselves are vested in, some ideas of social aptitude control, within national contexts, then artistic freedom merely stands as defense for a set of powerful interests. So artists are charged with defending lofty ideals, then used to kill an other, what then?

I am arguing that artistic freedom is not a right under the law, it is a 'common' right inherited and defended over time. Within this milieu artworks need to be made public, performed published in order to even question ideas of artistic freedom. Until that point is reached, and that point is made possible, ideas of artistic freedom on the continent will simply remain an idea championed. If exposure of cultural products of all types is deliberately or inadvertently limited through design or neglect, then limitations to all freedoms will remain in place, but especially for

the arts.

I Believe

Belief in artistic freedom informs this polemic, but not in isolation from other rights and needs. I will investigate artistic freedom as a possibility, a model, as an ideal worth striving for. It will mean engaging with cultural frameworks, current and desired, probing artists in what they seek too. This is not an abstraction. Questions of what should be defended loom large: What constitutes art in the first place? Should artists be held responsible for what they do? Is risk of censure and punishment in making and exhibiting artworks important in producing the very types of works desired? Do, or should the, states ever have the right to limit the exhibition ans consumption of art works?

Within this document, 'exhibition' is used to address all forms of making artworks public and 'artwork' is used to address all deliberate and incidental forms of cultural production.

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Saad Elkersh (Egypt)

Revolting or Writing? The Impact of Turbulent Times on Writers

Saad Elkersh started to publish short stories since 1988 in Egyptian and Arab newspapers and magazines. He has published three books / testimonies on what happened in Egypt since the dawn of the revolution of January 25, 201.

Saad also publishing articles, studies on film festivals in several magazines like Literature and Criticism, The Seventh Art, Lines, and Points of View, The Arts. In 2005, was published a book The Concept of Identity in the Arab Cinema.

He is currently the editor-in-chief Editor of Al-Hilal Magazine.

Revolting or Writing? The Impact of Turbulent Times on Writers

Saad Elkersh

«With kind acknowledgement to Fikrun wa Fann.»

- How does a writer with political awareness respond to Egypt's turbulent political tides?
- How does he keep his head above water and avoid being swept along with the current?
- How does he manage neither to become solely a political animal nor to turn his back on politics entirely?
- Saad al-Kirsh takes up the machete of words in an attempt to slash his way through the political-literary jungle.

IN JANUARY 1991 I asked the late Egyptian writer Youssef Idris why he was avoiding serious writing in favour of the polemics he wrote in his weekly articles in *Al Ahram* newspaper, which, if put together in book form, would probably prove longer than all his collections of short stories, from *The Cheapest Nights* to *A House of Flesh.* I thought he might be reluctant to face up to the fact that his best years were in the past – the years when he rebelled against the prevailing type of story writing, brought an end to an era of literary blandness and laid the foundations for a new, unprecedented narrative school. He told me without regret, 'If you were taking part in a demonstration and people were chanting and the police were chasing them, would you go off into a remote corner to write a short story?' He didn't give me a chance to reply. 'Even if you have total peace of mind, people are bound to attract your attention when they appeal to you and distract you from "writing"', he added.

The same day he also said, 'I'm not a writer by trade or profession. I want to change the world.' But I realised that, although the man was

confident he had a role that went beyond literature and culture in the narrow elitist sense, he did think that his weekly articles reflected a principled and enlightened position and sent a message by which he addressed the moment, even if they were not a form of writing that would achieve immortality in the same way as other human creations.

Youssef Idris' literary revolution succeeded but his appeals have gone unanswered in the public sphere outside literature. That aspect of his work appeared in several works, such as *The Importance of Being Cultured* and *The Poverty of Thought, the Thought of Poverty.*

After Youssef Idris the literary scene lacked a 'star writer', except for temporary stars manufactured by commercial publishers to satisfy the demands of the market for reading fodder for a season or two. They then looked for someone else to save readers from boredom. The scene also lacked a major critic who won respect, a 'local boss' who had the courage to call for a campaign against the unemployment that had encouraged some people to resort mistakenly to writing; someone who also had the integrity to suggest that semi-talented people go and look for other work, and to expose the inadequacy of shallow or Orientalist writing. I'm not suggesting that anyone be deprived of the right to be published; rather, I am calling for critical awareness that treats light literature as light literature, so that people who have just started reading are not confused into thinking that a mirage is water.

Childhood in poverty

In this context, writing becomes a personal matter for the writer – a form of training in the perpetration and enjoyment of beauty. And because I'm a fatalist who doesn't plan anything, this is a chance for me to look back on a life and career that has been long enough for several people and several lives. I can see the boy that I once was, holding a stick to guide my donkey, his hands stiff from the cold, blowing into his hands to warm them up so that he can hold the scythe to cut the clover for the animals. Working in the fields made him late for school assembly. I can see how he learned by chance, without anyone noticing, although his mother, who was illiterate, was eager that he should pursue his studies. I remember that child when he had become a boy and had just started secondary school, in about 1982, in a time when getting to the Cairo Book Fair was a dream that could be made true with just one pound, but even that was impossible: the pound and the dream. I can see that

child and I look behind me and heave a deep sigh as though I've lived a hundred years and I can't believe that that child, who has lived a life like a fairy tale, now has friends – people and places – across the continents.

I sneaked into the word of 'writing'. Coincidence played a part in my completing my education. I was only a step away from escaping basic education, had it not been for my mother, who passed on to me a love of storytelling. Another coincidence drove me to write the stories down in a form that people called short stories when they read the drafts. Many were enthusiastic about them being published, starting when I was a student at Cairo University. I didn't plan anything, as far as I remember, and I didn't dream of changing the world, and I didn't claim that I had an ambition I was trying to achieve. I'm not interested in finding a definition of 'writing'. It's enough that it has a magic that fascinates me and makes everything else seem redundant. It makes me feel that I am above life, richer than anyone else, doing something more important than any job, and this has proved true.

I sneaked into this world and sometimes I laugh at myself, even make fun of myself, and imagine that some priest of the literary world is going to tell me to leave.

I have an aversion to pretence. I don't like flabbiness or cosmetic embellishments, on faces or bodies or in writing. I can't claim to be creative or revolutionary. I have written things and people said it was literature, or sometimes an evocation of a city, and I have taken part in a great event that I thought was a revolution, though I'm not saying other people don't have the right to call it what they like. Recklessness often leads me into danger. People urge me to play roles that should be theirs, and then back out or watch the reactions, and I don't regret the result or apologise. I have often lost, and lost many people too, but I don't care about the outcome. On the Day of Wrath, 28th January 2011, the hardest and most beautiful day in my life, Mohamed Abla took a picture of me at about seven o'clock in the evening. We had managed to reach Talaat Harb Square and we faced a minor battle to get to Tahrir Square. He laughed and said, 'A picture for history, next to this great man.' (He pointed at the statue of Talaat Harb.) I never saw the picture, and whenever I reminded Mohamed Abla of it he laughed and made promises. There's also no picture of me in Tahrir Square throughout the eighteen days that brought the reign of Hosni Mubarak to an end, except for one picture that Abdel Razek Eid sprang on me when he sent it to me on 14th June 2012. It

seems to have been taken at dawn after the Battle of the Camel. There's a tank behind me with a soldier on top, and thick darkness around several faint street lamps in a street leading into Tahrir Square.

Hunger for publicity

I have never written the immortal phrase 'When I was in Tahrir Square...' or said it in a broadcast programme, and I didn't invite my children to come to the square until after Mubarak stepped down. They came to celebrate, and arrived early on the following day, which would have been 12th February 2011. Throughout the demonstrations, and the protests and the clashes that followed, I didn't write that I was on my way to such-and-such a place, and when I came back I didn't say I had taken part in such-and-such an event. I remember Abu Dhar al-Ghifari, the seventh-century Arab often described as the first Muslim socialist, and I envy him and love him. I thought it a good omen whenever I found myself in a group where no one knew me and I didn't know anyone. Then I felt confident that the revolution would continue and that it would triumph, because these people were seeking revolution, justice and freedom. They were honest and were not hungry for bread or for publicity.

Hunger for publicity ruins many things. On 5th June 2013, I wrote a statement of protest by intellectuals in the Ministry of Culture. There were about twenty of us, I discovered later, when I went over the signatures on what was the only statement written during that protest. There wasn't time to write it on a computer and I was careful to formulate it in a few lines summarising our demands. The rest of the page was left empty for signatures but the rapid success of the protest induced people who were indebted to the Mubarak regime and its policies to jump on the bandwagon and try to take it over. Myths would later be invented, such as when one woman proudly told me, at the birthday party of a friend in the Café Riche, that she was one of the people who had stormed the ministry. I hadn't seen her on the first day, nor maybe the second. I smiled, and she mistakenly assumed that I was endorsing what she said. It was almost as contradictory and incompatible as what we were consuming at the party – beer and birthday cake.

As usual I don't have any pictures of the protest, except for one picture that Osama Afifi took with his phone when Soheir el-Murshidi was reading the statement I had just finished writing. With the noise and the camera lights as people jostled to sign the statement and have their pictures taken at the protest, it was no place for those who prefer the

shadows, who are comfortable in the company of those who believe in revolution and do not boast about having 'stormed' anything. Yet again, I protested in the street and I remembered Abu Dhar al-Ghifari, and that Sumerian poet who said, in ancient times, 'We poets are driven out of this world.'

Now, after four years, I have discovered that I wrote a lot. I finished my novel *Washm Wahid* [A Single Tattoo] on 8th January 2011. Then there was the succession of events, with wild twists and surprises, and even after Mubarak was overthrown I never imagined I would write anything about the revolution. I had taken part like any other citizen. I don't claim to have predicted a revolution or to have any special knowledge. In my book *Revolution Now: Diaries from Tahrir Square,* before narrating the daily events, I wrote a chapter entitled *The Road to the Revolution: An Apology to Every Egyptian,* in which I revived what I had written on my Facebook page on 25th January 2011: 'In a state that is very old, with a bureaucracy that is 4,600 years old, the political system becomes sponge-like, absorbing demonstrations and protests, as it proved to be in 1977 and 1986. I propose that sensible people gather ten million signatures, for example, and guarantee the president a safe exit – leaving power but not leaving the country, in a way that isn't followed by any prosecution or ridicule ... at least for the rest of his life. That would be a simple solution that might get us out of this impasse.'

I ended that introductory chapter with this confession: 'I admit that I did not think highly enough of the capabilities of the Egyptian people, the giant that stirred, and so I must apologise.'

Chronicle of ups and downs

I wasn't interested in the temptation to meet the demand for writings on the revolution. I wrote with pleasure and candour. I recalled scenes that I had written about and I couldn't contain my tears. I didn't write on behalf of the revolution or for the sake of 'writing'. I was just myself and I chronicled my ups and downs, my hopes and disappointments. I made a commitment to be honest, indifferent to the superlatives that interested some people – that they should write the first book that documented the events of the revolution, for example, or the first novel inspired by those wonderful eighteen days that changed the face of Egypt.

I was interested in evoking the spirit of those days, the days of innocence, and I wrote my account in the book *Revolution Now* with

painful honesty. This is a book, a testimony for history, that I am proud to hold in my hand. *Revolution Now* developed out of a book that was never completed. I began that book in August 2010 and gave it the title *Words to the President … Before the Farewell,* and I had in mind Youssef Idris' book *In Search of Sadat* and Safinaz Kazim's book *Baghdad Diaries: 1975–1980.*

I began writing before anyone had any idea that in days to come Egyptians would unite around a single goal, until they discovered that they were divided into factions struggling for power. I wrote it out of affection, and writing in general is an emanation from friendly souls, and if that spirit is missing it becomes something artificial and dry – just words. I didn't intend to be critical or vindictive, because writers should stay aloof from settling scores. I told myself to be accurate, to record an aspect I knew or had seen and had heard and to attribute everything properly and not to pretend to be a hero. I imagined myself in the presence of the gods: Maat, Thoth, Osiris and Isis. I shut my eyes and confessed. I called things and people by their real names, and told my friends that a witness in court does not receive a fee, and that I was in a hurry to publish the book even if I had to print a hundred or two hundred copies at my own expense and give them away to people for free, then and there while the people that the book mentions are alive. I'm not a judge to pass judgement on anyone or any political position. I left that to the reader and to time. I merely laid out the details that I knew, as a witness who had sworn not to lie and had given his testimony, because 'anyone who withholds it is sinful at heart'.

Then I realised that God loved me and loved my book more than I had expected, and the book was published in instalments in a newspaper, in the lifetime of people who had borne false witness in the time of Mubarak and who had started to die. The first edition was sold out in a few days because it was so cheap (more than four hundred pages for four Egyptian pounds, or about fifty U.S. cents), but the second edition showed that the book was no longer just an account of an important event; it had become a commodity priced at forty pounds, rising later to fifty pounds.

I apologise to every Egyptian that, like many people before the revolution, I was worried it would be accompanied by such chaos and violence that it would leave nothing standing. But in the first days of innocence the revolution revealed a core of civility that had been

concealed by the swamp in which Mubarak and his governance had allowed weeds and poisonous moulds to grow and from which many people had tried to escape as individuals. The challenge was to ensure that the writing was worthy of the revolution and was true to the revolution's inventiveness and spontaneity. I wanted to write 'in the revolution', not 'about the revolution', to complement what the world followed from above with details for which the cameras could not capture the undulations, or the spirit that inspired people to share dreams, fears, nights, cigarettes, loaves of bread, cups of tea, laughs, hope and a safe place to meet. In Tahrir Square a young man could feel safe about his wife or his girlfriend in the crowd because she was among family, even if he did not know their names.

I shut my eyes and wrote. I knew that a witness shouldn't make compromises or try to balance things out. I don't like the phrase 'I have nothing to lose', which some desperate people use to claim spurious courage, and I had much to lose – 'things that can't be bought' – and so I was candid in the extreme.

I now discovered, through writing this testimony, that I had written a good deal and I was waiting for the day when I could give up writing about public affairs and go back to a novel of which I had written several pages in January 2014. I wasn't busy with politics but I was obliged to take an interest in extraordinary transformations that only a godlike figure could understand with any certainty. I didn't have the luxury or the serenity to seek out a quiet place while storms raged in the streets and the flame of the revolution was in danger of being extinguished, with the police reverting to their old brutality to take revenge for being humiliated and defeated on the Day of Wrath.

The pleasures of the poor

I hope that my writing on public affairs makes good reading even when it does not attempt to address immediate needs. I am not inclined to pamper or mislead the reader. I come to him or her with all my doubts and I lay myself bare, because I am not one of those people of strong religious, nationalistic, revolutionary or humanitarian convictions who give themselves the right to issue fatwas declaring others to be religious, nationalistic, revolutionary or humanitarian infidels, especially at a time of hysteria when those who speak for Islam are quick to declare people infidels and political spokespeople stand up in public to issue superfluous

wisdom and judgements. About such people George Duhamel said, warning of the passion for politics in his 1937 book *Défense des Lettres,* 'Politics and love are the pleasures of the poor in France, free pleasures. Ordering something in a small café costs money... but politics doesn't cost anything. It is intoxicating and arouses emotions and brings surprises. It feeds on all desires, especially the most base, and appeals to empty spirits.'

What I see now in Egypt, and maybe in the Arab world, reminds me of something that François Truffaut said: 'Everyone has two professions: his own profession and film criticism.' Although I have followed the developments and the heartache of the Arab uprisings, I'm not in a position to cast judgement on them, and I'm amazed to see Arab Orientalists who are happy to pick up news or rumours and, before verifying them, are able to issue judgements with enviable boldness and certitude – boldness and certitude that are unjustified if it is about something happening in the Gulf states or protectorates that finance their platforms. Duhamel (1884-1966) was right when he advocated that politics should be placed 'in the hands of the professionals': 'When the populace, willingly or unwillingly, has to devote good time to political questions, then it seems to me to be in state of decline. Political fever has afflicted people who should have stayed well away from politics by virtue of their tastes. (It brings) … deep and dangerous disruption to our social life.' In other words, it's a frightening disease.

When I write about public affairs, I avoid commenting on the news and ephemeral events because they are like a destructive fuel that wastes time and creates stress. I look at the ideas that underlie appearances. I avoid insulting individuals or countries, even if I'm talking about the destructive effects of people who have caused strife, such as Muhammad ibn Abdel Wahhab, Hassan el-Banna or Sayed Qutb, and honesty does not prevent me from criticising the government when it vents its wrath on people other than the religious right.

The psychological flaws that afflicted the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists did not spare four representatives of the revolution on the secular side, each of whom thought himself entitled to the presidency. The revolution turned their heads and led them astray, and they refused to sit down and agree to choose one of their number as the candidate of the revolution. They kept trying and they thought they were doing the revolution a favour. They all lost and they didn't listen to a statement

headlined 'Before It's Too Late … An Appeal to the Four Leftist and Democratic Candidates', written by Ahmed al-Khamissi and signed by more than five hundred intellectuals and other people who cared about the revolution and the country. The statement urged them to settle on a single candidate to muster all possible votes behind him against obscurantism or the return of the old regime. If that had happened and the candidate had not won, for whatever reasons, at least we could have said that we had done our best and we had tried. The statement called on them 'before it's too late' to agree amongst themselves on one candidate, especially as the differences between the platforms that the four candidates offered were not vast. And if they didn't do so – if each of them preferred to cling to the ambition to win the presidency, then we begged them after that not to go on and on to us about leftist politics, democracy and the country's concerns, because all of that was at stake and they threw all of that aside. They didn't attach any importance to what people said and each of them drowned in the delusion that he alone could win, by his own efforts or by a miracle which wasn't going to happen. It said that if they didn't agree on one candidate, the elections would result in victory for Ahmed Shafiq, who represented Mubarak, or for Mohamed Mursi, who represented the reactionary forces, and in that case we would hold them responsible for the result and we wouldn't listen to any claims from them, either collectively or as individuals, about rigged elections or the power of money and vote-buying, because from the very start they were split, and they threw away their chance and with it our own chances. We had often heard the four leftist or democratic candidates – Aboul Ezz al-Hariri, Hamdeen Sabahi, Hisham al-Bastawisi and Khaled Ali – saying how they listened carefully to people's voices, and yet when people spoke to them, were them listening? Did any of them have the grace to answer this message?

Babel of voices

On 13th May 2012, Khamissi sent them a copy of the statement, but it didn't arrive. Or perhaps it did arrive, but the four losers thought that all four of them would win. On 28th May 2012, the result of the first round was announced: Aboul Ezz al-Hariri had 40,090 votes, Hesham al-Bastawisi won 29,189 and Khaled Ali had 134,056 votes, compared with 5,764,952 for Mohamed Mursi and 5,505,327 for Ahmed Shafiq. Farcically, supporters of Sabahi rushed to Tahrir Square the same

evening, along with Khaled Ali hand in hand with Kamal Khalil. The two losers felt no shame in objecting to a result that disappointed millions of people and put to end to their presidential dream.

Objecting was a joke in itself, an overt rejection of the democracy that had exposed the insincerity of the religious and secular right. But stranger than strange, and inconceivable to any sane person, was the suggestion that Mohamed Mursi should withdraw in favour of Hamdeen Sabahi, so that the run-off round would be between Sabahi and Shafiq.

It's hard for me to ignore this babel of voices. I see it as a travesty that has infected both the religious right and the secular right – the remnants of a fundamentalism in different forms and shades. One of the virtues of the revolution, when it welded the people together and made them highly politically-aware, was that it brought these maladies out into the open and cast them aside as dross.

I look behind me and it surprises me that I have written weekly articles that put a distance between me and a reality that breaks one's heart. Writing gives me a margin that prevents me from getting involved in the mire of politics. Ahmed Mustagir, the geneticist, couldn't take the outrageous Israeli attack on Lebanon in July 2006: he died of grief. I was close to the film director Madkour Thabet when his heart was broken, losing hope in Egypt. He saw it heading in a direction from which it could not return for twenty years. He died of grief at Brotherhood government in January 2013.

I'm waiting for my assignment as editor-in-chief at *Hilal* magazine to end. I'm waiting to give up writing articles. I'm waiting for Egypt, whose revolution has gone astray, to find its way again. I'm waiting to go back to 'writing', and until that comes about I don't want to meet the fate of Khalil Hawi, the Lebanese poet who killed himself when the Israelis entered Beirut in 1982.

Saad al-Kirsh is the editor of the Egyptian literary magazine al-Hilal, one of the oldest and most prestigious in the Arab world. His numerous books include a chronicle of the revolution, al-Thaura al-An [The Revolution Now].

Translated by Jonathan Wright

June 2015

Sade Adeniran (Nigeria)

Graveyard of Dreams

Sade Adeniran has written for radio, theatre and film. She's a self-published author whose debut novel Imagine This, won the 2008 Commonwealth Writer's Prize. Adenirian is also a film director, her first short film More Cake was made in 2013 and was adapted from a short story she wrote, called Martha Mauden & Co. Her second short film will be shooting in June 2015 and is the sequel to her book, Imagine This.

In her spare time, she produces short story podcasts, promoting African literature, writers and stories.

Sade's collection of short stories "A Book of Shorts" will be published in 2015.

Graveyard of Dreams

Sade Adeniran

I KNEW I was going to be late for work the moment I opened my eyes that morning.

It was one of those mornings I questioned the very reason I was put on this earth.

Why was Bisi Alatika here?

What was my purpose for being? Or as my sister Ola would say, "What is my portion?" What has the Lord Jesus Christ, our very own saviour, have for me this day?

These thoughts ran through my head, missing the crowing cock and the early morning call to prayer I used to hear from the backyard of my father's house in Surulere.

That early, all I could hear was the hum of my fridge and through the paper-thin walls; my neighbour, as he peed and flushed in the adjoining flat.

I missed home. Every day the ache became deeper as I wished for a life that would never be. I closed my eyes and transported myself to Lagos and the bedroom I shared with my big sister Ola. Or as she would say, "This is my room you are my guest."

We fought like only sisters could, but I loved and looked up to her. She was seven years my senior and acted like she was my very own mother. When she did annoy me and I reported her to our mother, I was told in no uncertain terms "She is your senior sister, you must respect her."

That of course gave my so-called senior sister carte blanche over me.

Not that it concerned me very much. She was the good sister who shared everything she had, and more.

She shone like a beacon. As my parents' firstborn, Ola was also the favoured one – meaning they were more tolerant of my naughtiness.

God showered my very own sister with all the blessings of twenty

people and more.

Not only was she beautiful; she was the very one who was academically gifted, the one who was good, even to cockroaches and mosquitoes.

Ola – the one who would never disrespect her elders, and would do whatever our parents asked.

She was the one with the bright glittering future as a high-flying lawyer. Apart from an autocrat demanding my absolute obedience at all times, she was paragon of virtue,

My very own dreams were smaller in comparison to Ola's shimmering future.

I wanted to dance, to lose myself in the music and feeling.

My girlhood was spent watching too many too many music videos, copying every step of intricate choreography and adding some Alatika moves.

Before I knew it, I had won every dance competition I entered. At school, a party was not a party unless my very presence had graced the dance floor.

There was a joy in the movement of dance, an ebullience I have not experienced since I had stopped. I miss those carefree days – all there was to worry about was what to wear to the next party.

My parents encouraged the dancing until I told them it is what I wanted to study.

"Is dancing going to pay your rent, put food on your table and clothes on your back?" was my mother's response, as she threw her hands in the air and invoked our ancestors and beseeched God for my deliverance from the devil that was turning my head to iniquity.

According to the Gospel of Mummy and Daddy, women who chose dancing as a profession were nothing more than prostitutes.

They believed that if it was a respectable profession, it would be taught at universities.

I was 14 years old when they tried to crush my dream, but I was not the good child who listened and complied.

I was stubborn and knew what I wanted. It was to learn jazz, tap, ballet, latin and travel the world and dance in music videos. Nothing they said would change my mind. But that was all before it happened. All our lives changed.

A forgotten memory rose like a helium-filled balloon and I could

feel the tears, but I refused to cry as I remembered how it once was.

I took a deep breath and imagined the savoury aroma of spicy akara teasing my nose.

It was a smell that woke me up every Saturday morning. It was one more thing mummy could not bear and another thing that always reminded me of the past.

Akara was Ola's favourite thing to eat and if she had her way, she would have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. But mummy would not allow it and the compromise was we had akara every Saturday instead.

The alarm on my bedside table startled me and just like that, the memory went pop.

I hit the snooze button and burrowed back under the covers, loath to move a muscle as I tried to recapture memories.

A futile effort, everything had evaporated back in to the mists. Everything that is, but her smile and her love for life. What would she make of her very own junior sister now?

I'd never done it before, but the spitting rain and grey clouds that had gathered outside made me call in sick.

Maybe it was because winter was just around the corner, not that the sun had made much of an appearance during summer. It had been cold, wet and windy.

I had a new ailment and it was called the weather disease. The calendar on my phone told me I did not have any important client meetings. The ones I did have could be cancelled, so I sent Peregrine Marshall an email telling him not to expect me in chambers as I was taking the day off.

A part of me wanted to send a very different email, but I was a coward.

My courage left me on the day the car rolled over.

That was the day I became the good daughter.

How else could I ease my parents' pain?

My stomach growled and I knew there was no food in the house, which meant a quick dash to the corner shop. I dragged my thin frame from under the covers, put on some sweats and a hoodie, grabbed the front door keys and made a mad dash across the street to Mr. Gupta for some bread and eggs.

He hadn't opened, so I decided to walk to the supermarket instead. I was hoping the crisp morning air would cull my doldrums.

I cut through the church's cemetery and it was a route I normally avoided, but there was nothing normal that morning. In fact, things had stopped being normal awhile back.

My feet slowed to a stop as I spotted a woman who looked a little bit like Ola in the way she held herself.

Of course I knew it wasn't her. It was just another person who in between a blink reminding me of the sister I missed terribly.

The lady was bent over a grave, placing flowers on a fresh mound of dark earth.

I watched her shoulders shake and wondered for whom she cried.

Lover, friend, sister, brother, father, mother, husband, daughter or son?

I felt the pain screaming from her pores and my lead-filled legs refused to carry me further.

My breath came in rapid bursts and I fought the urge to scream in rage. My head felt light and my heavy body moved of its own accord and plopped itself on the grave of Ellen Yoke: beloved wife of Henry Yoke, born in 1852, died in 1901.

Numb fingers traced her name and I wondered who else she had left behind to mourn her passing and remember her life. I wondered what footprints she had left behind for her loved ones to follow.

"Are you alright, love?"

The crying woman from the fresh grave had finished paying her respects and now stood in front of me.

I must have looked like a vagabond in need of a wash and a hot meal because she dropped £2 beside me and picked up.

"Get something to eat," she said in a soft voice drenched in compassion, before floating off. If it hadn't been for the money in the palm of my hand, I would have thought I'd imagined the whole encounter. Of course, she looked nothing like Ola up close. She didn't have Ola's oval-shaped head or her long natural hair, which she sometimes wore in braids. This lady had permed hair, a style Ola vehemently eschewed. What she did possess was my sister's goodwill and kindness.

On the day it happened, we were out celebrating my 17th birthday. I had passed all my A levels early, so my parents' gift was a trip to London to visit my big sister, who was in the final month of her pupilage. She was on her way to becoming the high-flying barrister she had dreamed of. Mummy and I travelled from Lagos together; daddy as usual could not

get away. He was in the middle of a big merger with a foreign bank. The plan was to spend a week in London before going New York. Mummy was going there for a shopping spree. I, of course, was going for my secret audition. I had passed the pre-screening and had been invited to audition at the most prestigious dance school. The only person who knew was Ola as she helped me make my dance video. It was Ola who encouraged me to follow my dream.

She was "My Small Mother". I sometimes called her by the acronym MSM, a term which delighted or annoyed her, depending on my tone at the time.

"This is your life. Do not let mummy or daddy dictate how you live the rest of it."

That was the advice she gave me the day I sobbed my heart out because our parents said I could not be a dancer.

Together we plotted and planned how we would convince our parents about not only the respectability of dance as a worthy profession, but what it meant to me.

When I danced it made me feel free. There was a freedom of expression in the movement of my body. How my soul soared on invisible wings that temporarily removed any and every problem. It was not only my escape; it was also my voice and spoke words of meaning in what sometimes felt like a meaningless world.

MSM was, is a master tactician and strategist. She knew how to get what she wanted from our parents, and from life.

She would have made a great politician. She could have been the country's first female president.

But that was then, before our car rolled on the way back from the amusement park. A high-speed puncture, loss of control and our lives changed forever.

The sky above changed to a darker smoke-like grey and the spitting rain became a steady drizzle. Early morning commuters hurried pass with their heads down as the wind whipped hair, coats and snatched at umbrellas.

A steaming cup of coffee was placed on the tombstone beside me. I lifted my face to the heavens and let the rain mingle with my tears. The knot in my stomach tightened further as I replayed the doctor's words that day.

"She has suffered a severe diffuse axonal injury. If she survives the

first operation to remove the clot and wakes from the induced coma, the chances are she will be severely impaired, so I want you to hope for the best and prepare for the hard slog ahead."

Mummy collapsed, being a doctor her she understood what a diffuse axonal injury was. The rest of us had to look it up online. In the early days we were full of hope, she was the golden child and God would surely not forsake her.

It was not her portion to suffer such a calamity. My once-a-year churchgoing mother found God as she held vigils at her bedside and in church. The pastor gave her holy water, which was meant to wake Ola once she drank from the cup.

My mother did not question how it was possible for a comatose patient to sip from the cup of eternal life, none of us did.

We just wanted her to get better. Eight years later, my mother's hope is steadfast and she clings to hit with a ferocity born of desperation.

I have become the good daughter, the one who does what her parents want. Dance school was no longer an option. Choosing law was my way of keeping my hope alive. When I visit, I tell her about the life she's missing. I told her about getting in to law school, about graduating with a first, and about passing the Bar Professional Training Course and securing a pupilage in the same chambers she had.

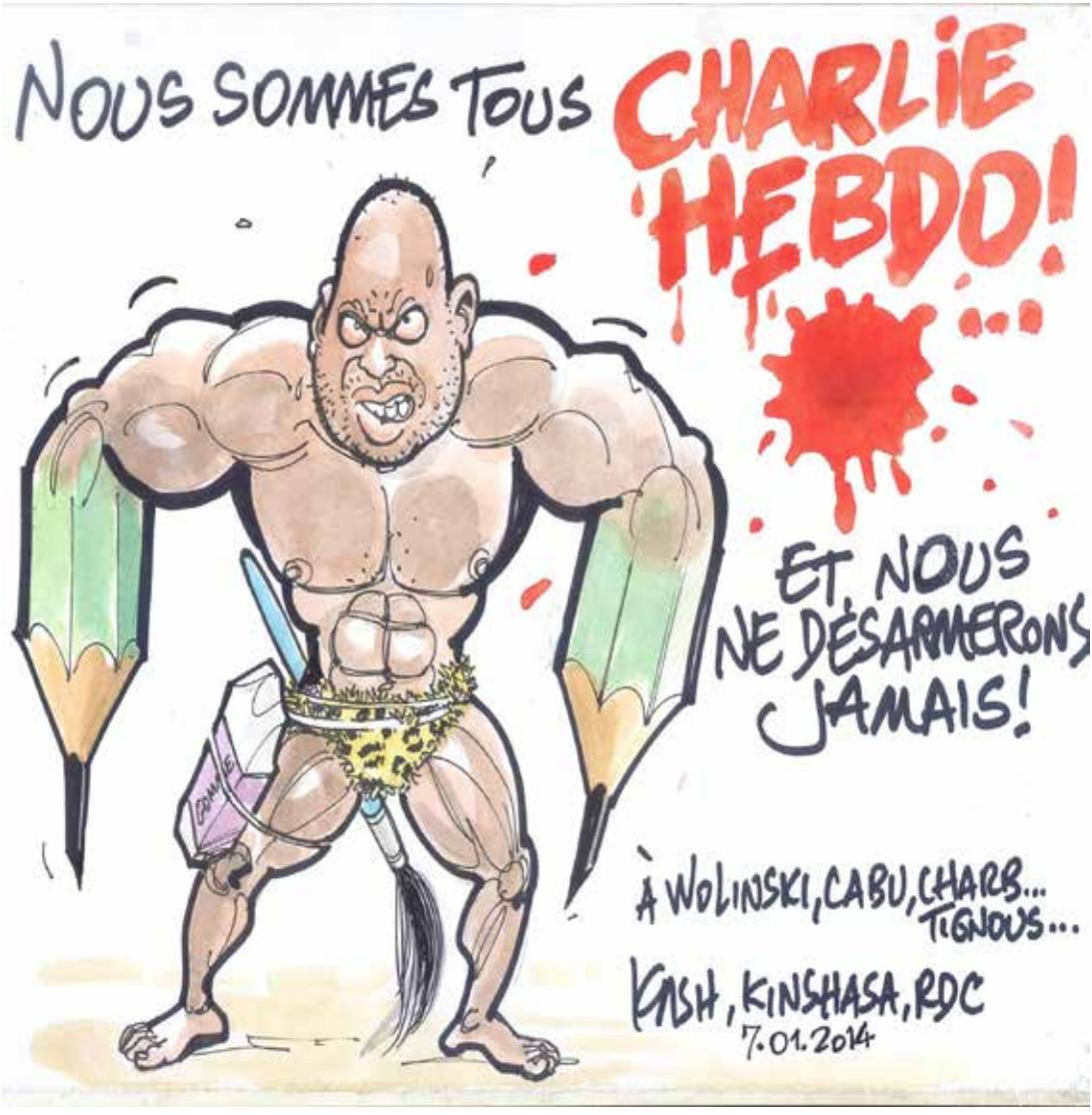
I buried the dreams I had. Part of me believed if I lived the life Ola wanted, it would help ease the family's pain. With one child in a coma, they would not cope with the disappointment of the other choosing dance as a profession.

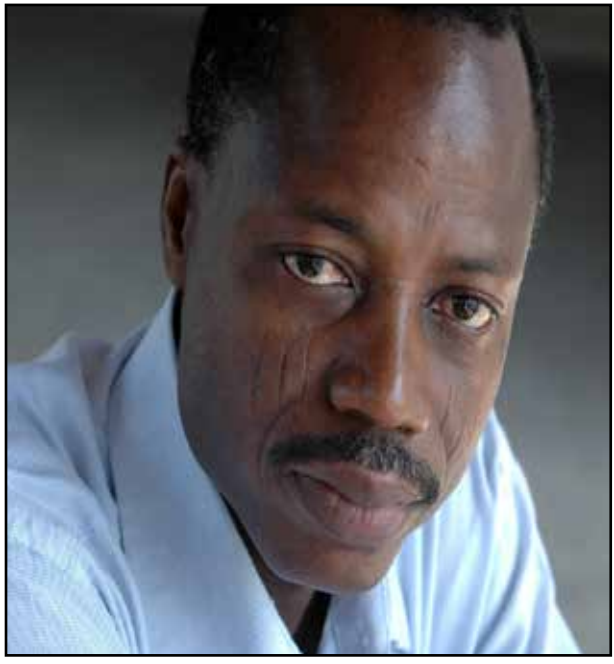
My mother is the big doctor; my father the powerful banker, MSM was to be the great lawyer and Bisi Alatika? What is she?

The almost magical dancer who would have brought joy to people's lives. Maybe that is what I will have them write on my own tombstone when it is my time to go.

I got up and said my farewell to Ellen Yoke. The knot inside tightened further as I left the graveyard with broken dreams and unfulfilled promise. It may be too late for me to follow the dream I once had. Then again, maybe it isn't and tomorrow I'll find the courage I need to live the life I really want.

For now I will go and tell my own sister what a crazy morning I've had.


NOUS SOMMES TOUS CHARLIE HEBDO!...
ET NOUS NE DÉSARMERONS JAMAIS!
À WOLINSKI, CABU, CHARB... TIGNOUS...
KASH, KINSHASA, RDC
7.01.2014



Sami Tchak (Togo)

The Children of Norbert Zongo

Sadamba Tcha-Koura, better known as Sami Tchak, was born in 1960 in Bohouda, Togo and has been living in France since November 1996. As an author of eight novels he spends his time writing and travelling. Amongst his writings, one can cite Formation d'une élite paysanne au Burkina Faso (essay) and Place des Fêtes (novels).

The Children of Norbert Zongo

Sami Tchak

THEIR FIRST MEETING took place on that Tuesday in April at Dieudonné Tapsoba's place, in Ouagadougou, in the Tampouy neighbourhood. There were five of them, three men and two women: Dieudonné himself, a journalist and writer, Francine Tapsoba, a humourist and actress, Judith Kaboré, a painter, Joseph Sawadogo, a rap musician, and Bouba Traoré, a writer and history professor at the University of Ouagadougou. They constituted the core of this association that had been officially created a week earlier, and which they had christened The Children of Norbert Zongo. This had been their first victory, not over the political system of Burkina Faso, but over themselves, to quote Dieudonné Tapsoba, the chairman, who stressed the importance of « intellectual and moral rigour applied, in the first place, to oneself, and thereafter to facts, opinions, emotions, ideas and people.

These words, especially "intellectual and moral rigour", embodied the very soul of this association, or at least they defined the code of ethics that the members wanted to hold themselves to. In choosing to call themselves The Children of Norbert Zongo, they positioned themselves within an idealised lineage, they submitted to a moral authority reinforced by the fact that it emanated from a dead man.

It is necessary, in order to understand all of this, to be reminded who Norbert Zongo was, although the man's story has already been widely circulated. Born in Koudougou, 1949, Norbert Zongo, who was managing editor of the weekly newspaper, L'Indépendant, wouldn't have achieved such fame if he had only been the author of the novel *Le Parachutage*, relatively unknown even in his own country. It was rather through his work as an investigative journalist that his compatriots became aware of this exceptional citizen. Because Norbert Zongo, who made his professional debut in 1986 at the government gazette, Sidwaya, before moving on to the independent newspaper Carrefour Africain, Norbert Zongo made it a point of honour to find out the truth, whatever

the cost. It thus came about that he started an investigation into the torture and death of David Ouédraogo, the driver of François Compaoré, brother of Burkina Faso's pesident, Blaise Compaoré. He managed to gather evidence implicating the president's, as well as the businessman Oumarou Kanazoé, a well-known billionaire enjoying close ties with the authorities.

Realistically, Norbert Zongo would never have been able to triumph over those in power, as they had the official judicial system on their side. But his one act of audacity, the fact of having started and pursued his investigation, constituted an intolerable offence that would cost him his life. On 13 December 1998, Norbert Zongo was burnt alive in his car along with his three companions, Blaise Iboudou, Ablassé Nikiéma and Ernest Zongo.

Everybody remembers the popular outrage, the grief and the angry protests that followed Norbert Zongo's murder, the reaction in Burkina Faso and abroad, against a crime which almost provoked a real political crisis, partially repressed in blood.

Maybe it was through his death that Norbert Zongo, like Thomas Sankara before him, became immortal, or at least became a hero purged of his shadows and remaining only as a symbol of the cardinal virtue of journalism.

As to the subject of his investigation, it underwent all kinds of new developments until the indictment, in August 2000, of five members of the Presidential Guard, found guilty of having murdered the driver Ouédraogo. But on the 19 July 2006, the case was dismissed after foreign journalists and an international commission of inquiry had taken it up, but failed to bring to justice those most plausibly suspected of being the perpetrators : François Compaoré, the younger brother of President Blaise Compaoré, and the billionaire Oumarou Kanazoé.

Maybe this is how legends are born, and also how they take root in the memory of people: (they emerge) from the shadowy zones maintained around the truth. That is how Norbert Zongo was born, in part because of his death and the impossibility of punishing the perpetrators, even if their faces had taken on the look of the obvious, the obvious crime, the obvious murderers. That is how Norbert Zongo became, in part through his death, the hero that Alpha Blondy, the famous reggae artist from Ivory Coast, sang about in his hit song, *Journalistes en danger,* (*Journalists in danger*), which denounces both the assassination of journalism and

the ploys of those in power in Burkina Faso to sweep the matter under the rug. That is how he became a hero, Norbert Zongo, how he earned his place among "The Martyrs" that the other famous Ivory Coast reggae man, Tiken Jah Fakoly, sings about in a song denouncing the numerous political assassinations carried out on the African continent. That is how he was born into immortality, this victim of assassination who is an inspiration to some of the youth of Burkina Faso, among them the rapper collective Artistes Unis pour Norbert Zongo (United Artists for Norbert Zongo). That is how Norbert Zongo went down in the history of his country, so much so that a commemorative site was erected in 2012 at the place where he was murdered, next to the N6 highway between Ouagadougou and Léo, not far from the town of Sapouy.

Let's get back to our artists, the five friends who had founded the association The Children of Norbert Zongo. So they saw themselves as part of this heritage, that of a man, Norbert Zongo, who, in their opinion, like Thomas Sankara before him, embodied the dignity of a whole nation. But it wasn't enough for them to sing a hero's praises in order to honour art, because art has its own demands.

The group's chairman, Dieudonné Tapsoba, none of whose writings (narratives, novels or poems) had been published at that time, but who held himself in great esteem as an author, had penned these lines for the benefit of his peers:

"High standards in journalism for journalists (the staggering mediocrity of many of our journalists, their connivance and their spirit of sycophancy, of prostitution … constitute a real scourge), the highest standards in creation for creators, in whichever domain (many of those, men and women, who claim to be artists, are an insult to art) are paramount."

In accordance with the code of conduct they had adopted, their first meeting was devoted to studying a text, a lengthy short story of more than 60 pages, written by Bouba Traoré, the history teacher at the University of Ouagadougou, who had already had four novels published by a small local publisher. He was a tall man of 1, 95 metres, light-skinned and slim. On that day he was dressed in a suit made of blue bazin fabric. Everybody acknowledged that he was objectively handsome. He had studied in Paris, where he had brilliantly defended at the Sorbonne his doctoral thesis about the empire of the Moro Naba. The members of the association wanted to use his short story as a basis for a debate on art

itself.

So each of them had dissected Bouba Traoré's text, with the aim of critically analysing firstly the form, and only thereafter, the content. They were convinced that the freedom of the artist, his power of subversion, resides against any intimate and exterior obstacles in the form, which is also the only aspect wherein his singularity can come into its own – if he succeeds in attaining the artistic summits that he aspires to. In this respect, the rap musician Joseph Sawadogo had had this to say: "The artist entirely comes into his own in his manner, that what others call style." The painter Judith Kaboré contributed the idea that "the artist can be free against all odds, on condition that he transcend his subject by the effrontery of his style."

And so the lengthy short story of Bouba Traoré was brought before The Children of Norbert Zondo. To put the question plainly, did Bouba Traoré, a history teacher claiming to be a writer, have a style which expressed his freedom? Was Bouba Traoré worthy of art to the point of, for instance, going as far as putting his life in danger to defend it; putting his life in danger like Norbert Zongo had, in the name of truth, put his in danger, pushing his convictions to the limit – in other words, to death by fire? To put it differently, even with freedom to create, if it had been guaranteed in Burkina Faso, was Bouba Traoré one of those individuals who project onto our world a ray of light by the singularity of their vision, through their art?

The honour of opening this session of "judgement" in the name of art fell to the painter Judith Traoré, the youngest member of the group. She was a small woman, badly overweight and very dark-skinned. Beauty hadn't crossed her path; one could even, without being too cruel, consider her to be ugly. But she had an alert mind and was a gifted painter with an unsettling artistic universe. She took her inspiration from her rural origins, more from her rural origins than from her visual arts studies in Italy. She was already quite well known, since an Italian journalist had devoted a programme of half an hour to her, and she had consequently succeeded in selling ten of her paintings to foreign collectors. Her work was born from a messianic feminism, and she painted women with small angel wings, flying away towards a new world, symbolised by a red star. She spoke with a soft voice which surprised by its contrast to the fleshy mass from which it emanated. On that day, she was wearing a flared dress in a brightly-coloured wax fabric. Her badly-fitting wig gave her a

comical air.

She smacked her lips, and sighed. Everyone immediately suspected the gist of what she was going to say. She stood up from her chair, suddenly took on an expression of severity, and looked straight at Bouba Traoré who, already floundering, had lowered his gaze. She was holding the accused's manuscript in her hand. "Comrade Bouba," she started, " you know that I hold you in high esteem as a professor of history, but allow me to hurt your feelings by telling you in your face, here, in front of all the others, that, as a writer, you are mediocre. I will give my reasons, and I forbid anyone to interrupt me. Let me briefly summarise your story: you based it on the sordid affair of the serial killer who spread panic in a neighbourhood of Ouagadougou from 2008 to 2011. You seized upon the story of the infamous axe killer who, over three years, brutally murdered at least 10 people, either at their workplace or at their home, usually with an axe which he left next to his victim's body as a signature. I can accept that you use this criminal as a symbol of our government and that, in your story, you endow him with the all too recognisable features of a superior officer in the Presidential Guard. You have the right to use this news story to denounce political crimes in this country. As you can see, I started with the content, whereas we are supposed to judge the form first. But I think that, in your case, both content and form are worthless."

She stopped talking and turned towards the others. Her deep-set eyes glowed with anger. "Comrade Bouba, who do you take us for, hey? Do you call this 'creating'? What does writing mean to you? Just saying? Let me quote your most beautiful sentence: "General Magnrica Biga went to see the mother, Paga, of the girl Pogossada, and, with the money in one hand and the axe in the other, with the licence to kill accorded him for life by the bloodthirsty government, keeping in mind that the government regard the poor as pigs to be slaughtered or bartered, he could be assured that, whether she wanted to or not, the girl Pogossada would follow him to be lawfully raped, because rape is one of the rights accorded by the rapist State to all its most contemptible servants who spend all their time raping our mothers, our fathers, our sisters, our aunts, our cousins, our wives and especially our Constitution, which they would like to change so that their Ablassé can remain on his throne and keep enjoying his royal residence at Ziniaré, where his lions are fed the meat that the people will never taste."

She allowed herself a burst of laughter, letting the manuscript fall

on the cement floor of the veranda of the chairman of the association. Everyone's face, and especially that of the accused, had clouded over at the cruelty of the accusation.

"Anyway", resumed Judith Kaboré, "listen to me, comrade Bouba. I know very well that in our countries, under the pretext of denunciation, we have opened ourselves up to mediocrity. I know, I know it, everybody here knows it – the officer that you based your odious character on deserves to be hanged. But the way in which you execute him is, in my opinion, a suicide. You've committed suicide, Comrade Bouba, you've committed suicide as a writer, because through this short story you have proven that, in spite of your education and refinement, creation is not the way forward for you. Maybe you should try writing political essays or history books, genres that will showcase your knowledge, but I don't think art is your calling. Now, we formed this association in order to defend the freedom of artists. I turn to you, comrades, with this question: can we allow someone who is absolutely not an artist to remain in The Children of Norbert Zongo?"

It was hot that day. But on the veranda it was cooler. The yard of Dieudonné Tapsoba, chairman of the association, was located a short distance from the Baskuy Dam, and even closer to the eponymous bridge. The modest home gave no indication that this man was himself a journalist, nor that his wife, Denise Balkouma, was an English teacher at a private school – they had two children of six and four years old. While they were discussing art, the domestic servant, Pogossoda, a slight 14-year-old village girl, underpaid and overworked, was busy in the kitchen, appearing among them from time to time to pour dolo (millet beer) from a big earthen pot into calabashes for them. She was a timid young girl, very devoted, ugly, and docile as a servant should be. No one spoke to her, except to demand that she bring them something.

The rap musician Joseph Sawadogo, with the dreadlocks that he regarded as his tool of seduction among the tourists from the West, even though his success with the women of Burkina Faso was even more impressive, this rapper who had become famous in his country and in the West-African sub-region thanks to his hit, *Amour à mobylette* (Love on a scooter), this rapper, as I was saying, was wearing jeans and a white t-shirt with a picture of Che Guevara on it. He was 27 years old, had a degree in Philosophy from the University of Ouagadougou, and made a living from his music. While Judith Kaboré was busy executing Bouba

Traoré with her venomous tongue, the rapper glanced questioningly at the other members of the association – firstly, Dieudonné Tapsoba the chairman, then the humorist and actress Francine Tapsoba – slender and refined, famous thanks to her role in the successful Burkina soap opera ‚*Quand les éléphants se battent* (When elephants clash), dressed that day in a short pink dress, without too much makeup – and lastly, Bouba Traoré himself, whose suffering everybody could imagine – especially his humiliation.

The rapper decided to get up and interrupt Judith Kaboré. " My sister Judith," he said "I think you have mentioned the most important issues, and that I can also give my point of view on our friend's text. And thereafter, I think it might be a good idea to go for a walk around Ouagadougou." Judith Kaboré sat down, her hands still trembling with rage.

"I would have liked to be able to soften the blow of Judith Kaboré's remarks," began the rapper, "but regretfully, I have to agree with her. Comrade Bouba, your text is hopeless. But, contrary to my sister Judith, I wouldn't say that art is not your vocation. I rather think that you have not yet given yourself either the time or the means to be worthy of it. The humiliation that you have just been submitted to, that we have all been submitted to through our empathy with you, this humiliation might put you in the ideal situation to prove to us that you are equal to your pretensions. To come back to your text, I want to ask you something: why was the axe murderer singled out from among all the sordid news stories of Ouagadougou? There are thefts that turn into massacres, rapes, all kinds of crimes. To what does the axe murderer owe his 'fame'? I think he owes it to his style, because it was the first time in the history of our country that a criminal signed his crimes in order to distinguish them from all the others: he signed them by leaving the bloody axe next to the victim. Bouba, my brother, if you hadn't given in to the temptation of turning this event into an allegory of political crimes, maybe you would have been able to produce from it something more powerful, with a more universal impact. Because, in truth, this criminal in a certain sense represents each of us, our continent, the world as the West has reconfigured it. What exactly was he doing? He had invented a persona for himself, based on the stories of European and American serial killers. He drew the inspiration for his style from those stories. Haven't we, in the midst of what people call globalisation, and what I call

the Westernisation of the world, haven't we all become a little porous? Haven't we become imitators? I'm a rapper and I know what it signifies. And I think that in your case, probably even in your sex life, the values promoted by Internet have already taken root. The axe murderer is the product of this hybrid identity that every one of builds around himself with the cascade of images that the West inundates the world with. What I criticise you for, brother Bouba, is having drawn inspiration from an anecdote for a text that is not even worthy of the bloodied axe of the murderer. Through his crimes, that odious being got closer to art than you have. I am really sorry to say this to you, but between the murderer and you, it is alas he who is the artist, he who is the creator."

The rapper sighed. The other members of the association maintained an uneasy silence. Even Judith Kaboré, who'd been the first to open fire, now felt pity for the accused. A few flies, attracted by the shade on the veranda and by the smell of the dolo, landed on their foreheads and arms.

"I have to conclude," resumed the rapper, "and I'm going to try to develop my argument. The freedom to create, even though it is much greater in really democratic countries, still has to be conquered, or preserved, everywhere. Nowhere can it be taken for granted. One only has to look at the number of lawsuits brought in France against writers for invasion of someone's privacy, to understand that nowhere the freedom of the artist is unlimited. Here, we need to fight for it even more, because it is still in an embryonic state. That is why we cannot allow ourselves to waste it. I believe that it is by his excellence, his high standards, that an artist frees himself from all the obstacles he encounters. And it is by his excellence, his rigour, that he can place himself out of reach of all kinds of hostilities. I'm thinking of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who we became aware of after his hanging. I'm thinking of Ahmadou Kourouma, who spent his entire life outside of his country, who towards the end of his life was even declared undesirable in his own country, who died in exile, but whose ashes will be repatriated to Ivory Coast in November 2014 by decision of that country's government. I'm thinking of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who spent time in prison… I'm thinking of them because, by the quality of their work, they placed their destiny, even their death, out of reach of all the obstacles that were placed on their path. My brother, an artist, a true artist, conquers his freedom through his art. We still have to conquer our freedom, our freedoms, through our artistic excellence. It is only thus

that we might, now or later, during our lifetime or after our death, enter into the consciousness of our people. Because this is the dream of any artist worthy of the name – to enter into the consciousness of his people thanks to his work, to enter into the consciousness of his people like our Norbert Zongo entered into our consciousness. I thank you and I think we should go for a short walk before we come back to have lunch with our brother and chairman Dieudonné Tapsoba."

All of a sudden, Bouba Traoré, humiliated, burst into tears. His comrades left the veranda in order to give him some privacy in the midst of his humiliation.

"Uncle, are you okay?" It was the servant Pogossoda. He turned his face, wet with tears, up to her. " Yes, Pogossoda, I'm okay. And you, are you okay?" She knelt close to him. "Yes, Uncle, I'm okay. That's life."

Norbert Zongo

Sylvia Vollenhoven (South Africa)

Free To Be Me

Founder of VIA – Vision in Africa, that has spearheaded innovative international media training initiatives. As the Africa representative for the Thomson Foundation (UK) Sylvia Vollenhoven was the lead trainer for the Foundation's first-ever documentary filmmaking course at Cardiff University. Her students' work was chosen for screening on the UK's Channel 4.

In the early 90's, Vollenhoven was the Southern African Correspondent for the Swedish newspaper, Expressen, and was awarded Sweden's top journalism prize by Scandinavia's prestigious Publicist Klubben.

For a decade Vollenhoven was a TV executive at the SABC and was simultaneously the Southern Africa Coordinator for the International Public Television (INPUT) organisation. Award-winning Journalist, Filmmaker and Writer, Sylvia Vollenhoven won the inaugural Adelaide Tambo Award for Human Rights in the Arts.

Free To Be Me

Sylvia Vollenhoven

PREFACE

In 1870 //Kabbo, a pipe-smoking Bushman rainmaker driven by his need to safeguard his fragile culture, travels hundreds of miles and endures imprisonment to find city people whom he has heard can preserve stories in books. The result of this quest is an archive recorded over a thousand days and nights. More than a century later, it is entered into UNESCO's «Memory of the World Register».

In modern day South Africa, a journalist who is seriously ill begins to smell the fragrance of old-fashioned pipe tobacco in empty rooms. She "hears" //Kabbo talk with her as easily as listening to a telephone conversation. These are just some of many strange happenings that lead towards her healing and to the revelation that //Kabbo – the main informant in the UNESCO archive – has journeyed through time and space to continue his Vision Quest. Is his aim this time to contribute to the healing of the fractured communities of his descendants?

This is a story born in a place where the material and non-physical realms meet and dance for a while. It is a parallel story of //Kabbo's journey in the 19th Century and a no-nonsense modern storyteller's Ancestral Calling. //Kabbo is arrested for stock theft, jailed at Table Bay Harbour's Breakwater Prison and is taken to a house on a hill in Cape Town where he tells his story to German linguist, Dr Wilhelm Bleek and his British sister-in-law ,the researcher Lucy Lloyd.

«The Keeper of the Kumm» is a cross platform initiative that comprises of a book (being published by Tafelberg), a feature-length documentary film (developed with the assistance of the National Film & Video Foundation as well as the SA Department of Trade & Industry) and a musical theatre piece being directed by Basil Appollis, in collaboration with Cape Town's Artscape Theatre, the National Arts Festival and the Joburg Theatre. This is an extract from the story that was shortlisted for the City Press Nonfiction

Book Award.

THE KEEPER OF THE KUMM[66]

A 19th Century Bushman Comes Calling

I looked into the mirror and a girl with a gemsbok face stared back at me. She knows when to eat the springbok meat. She follows the guidance of her Ancestors. She understands science is suffused with spirit. But the landscape around her speaks of stories denied.

A LINEUP OF the long dead stands waiting. I am afraid but they will not go away. Who are these souls jostling for space on white pages? If I don't tell the story of these stars on an inner sky I will die.

I've burnt a forest of incense, chanted mantras from Betty's Bay to Bangalore and cleansed my space until the spirits left of boredom. And now here it is – a painful reality that makes me wish I had never come down this road.

Long sessions of weeping have become gut-wrenching howls. Waking up from a lifetime of fantasy is much like a trip down the birth canal. A painfully dark loneliness expressed best with primal screams.

Sick and tired of a medical condition some doctors cannot name and others call chronic fatigue syndrome, I don't have the courage to tell anyone about everything that's happening to me. Don't talk about the things that are vanishing. Losing pieces of myself.

In the mornings I do a body check to gauge whether I've lost anything important during the night. Each day another piece of my sanity slips away. I dress slowly. Everything is painful. My skin hurts, my body aches, and my mind revels in fantasies of death.

"Elize have you seen my gold bracelet?"

Things have started disappearing from my life. My reality has become a rickety tableau. Chunks are simply vanishing. I am homeless and jobless. I have wasted everything I owned chasing healers and cures. I know that when enough pieces disappear, I will die.

I open a drawer and a favourite piece of jewelry is missing. There is only an empty box where my delicate gold bracelet used to be.

66 *Kumm* is the word for story or anything told and retold in the now extinct /Xam language of the Bushman people of the Northern Cape. The plural is *Kukummi.*

Living alone in a remote village, I hardly ever get visitors. The gaps in the tableau are growing but here it doesn't matter. If the spaces meet I will disappear.

Sometimes, when I run my hands over familiar places I feel the body parts of other people where mine should be. A former lover's thigh or the hard pubic bone of an old man darkening the shiver of a young girl.

I want the high-pitched ringing in my head to stop. I want the ache in my body to understand the language of the painkillers. I want … I don't want my life to close down while I'm still alive.

When the illness gets worse I am far away from home. I read books and watch films avidly. Everywhere missing elements prevent me from understanding. I sit in a movie house looking at the end credits and wonder what on earth happened in the film.

I become devoted to my journal, imagining that the daily writing is insurance against losing my mind. I wake up every morning struggling to breathe as the panic returns from the dark corner where it resides at night.

Voices come and go, not attached to anything at all. Whispers of things I am losing and stuff escaping that's been locked away in abandoned warehouses.

I dance alone in the light of early morning. The music softens the pain of loss, helps me lay out the pieces in some kind of order. Not so long ago I had a marriage, a home and a flourishing career. Everyone has left and the house is gone.

Healer Niall Campbell sits cross-legged in front of me, dominating the small consulting room with his six-foot frame. For the first time in the many months that I've been seeing him he is grave. Not a trace of a smile.

I clutch at only one source of comfort. An Ancestral story I've started to write is like a beacon flickering across a dark, heaving ocean.

A Story Beckons

The girl saw the dust devils fighting their way across the plains
and knew it was an invitation to dance.

STORIES KNOW NO boundaries of time and space. Stories know no limits of place. Stories travel from one realm to the next as easily as a

mountain stream falls to the ocean. It is given to a few to be the guardians of the story, to protect the treasures that touch the hearts of people. These guardians are The Keepers of the Kumm who roam the astral planes at will. My Ancestor //Kabbo is one such Keeper, a timeless visionary weaving story threads, delicate but powerful enough to hold the world in place.

I don't understand when he begins to talk with me. We, the hybrid people of a scarred city landscape, no longer know the language of The Elders. We shoulder the burden of the label "Coloured" with anger, frustration, embarrassment and, occasionally, a bit of offbeat pride. We are Africans shaping new identities with deep longings where our histories should be.

"So with two disabled languages, English and Afrikaans, and an upbringing stripped of guidance, I have to write a story about a Bushman Visionary who lived in the 19th Century?" I ask nobody in particular.

The answer from Niall and the spirits who have come bursting into my world – dominated until now by the deadlines of journalism – is a resounding, "Yes!"

To describe Niall as a sangoma or traditional healer is probably accurate but it is insufficient. The word sangoma has lost some of its currency. I have been brought up to abhor these saviours of African sanity. Niall Campbell, the Botswana-born son of a Rhodesian[67] policeman, is a qualified diviner, a doctor of traditional ceremonies as well as institutions and my spiritual teacher. In Botswana he is called *a Ngaka ya diKoma*, a Doctor of The Law.

The irony of a white man guiding me through the complex maze of African tradition, a man who knows the law before laws, embarrasses me. Niall has been helping me step by step through the process of responding to The Call from my Ancestors.

//Kabbo arrives in my life many years ago, but sits patiently waiting until I am ready. He travels across time and space to help me on a journey from forgetfulness to remembrance, to being re-membered. Put back together again.

When //Kabbo Hani-i Uhi-ddoro Jantjie Tooren, a Bushman Visionary who lived in the 19th Century enters my world, the fine line that I walk between rational and chaos becomes a razor wire.

I have no money and I've borrowed from the bank and from friends.

67 Before independence in 1980 Zimbabwe was known as Rhodesia

It frightens me to write this. My energy level is struggling to inch the needle out of the red zone.

"I've been getting ill every few weeks and right now I'm spending half a month in bed and the other half working myself into a standstill to make up for it. But no matter what I do I feel as if my life is closing down. As if I am now operating in narrow fissures, minute breathing spaces that remain open with great difficulty," I tell Niall.

I wake up tired. My head throbs, especially when I lie down. I am afraid to eat because so many things make me nauseous. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I have to go to the bathroom to throw up. My body aches and even short spells of writing makes the pain in my left shoulder unbearable. The relief I usually obtain from exercise is limited because my left knee is swollen. In some places my skin is covered with eczema. Specialists cannot find the cause for a constant pain in my left side.

"I know I need healing but I don't know what it is precisely that I need. I am so, so tired," I say. I can see by the look on Niall's face that this kind of illness is familiar territory.

I don't mention the fear that sits there, that has grown too large for a name.

"I have a suspicion about what might be happening to you but I will have to check to make sure," says Niall.

Several projects that I've worked on recently start out attracting great interest from all the right people and then suddenly the enthusiasm disappears. Constant dead ends. I have never had to cope with all my ventures hitting cul-de-sacs all the time.

Niall's face becomes very serious. I've never seen such a shadow between us before. He reaches for the genet skin pouch in which he keeps his traditional "bones'.

"Give it a blow if you will," he says pushing the contents toward me. We sit opposite each other on the floor, his rooms bedecked with the symbols of African healing and divination. Neatly stacked jars of herbs flank a small altar.

After several minutes of incantation Niall opens his eyes and empties the pouch's contents onto the reed mat between us.

"Yes, it's just as I thought," he says looking up at me. It is truly frightful to see an expression of dread in a sangoma's eyes.

What he says next doesn't make sense to me as a complete sentence,

not at that moment and not for a long while after.

"You have picked up a death energy… the energy of a dead person, maybe several entities, and it's causing chaos in your life."

I do silent, mental cartwheels of denial without absorbing what Niall is saying. I miss some words and I run away deliberately from others:

"Terrible… hate this… very dangerous… do something fast."

Niall sees the panic and confusion on my face so he repeats a few things more slowly. The words drift aimlessly between us like unclaimed baggage in an airport terminal. Until one comes that I have to deal with because it knocks me over.

"Do you know the Femba ritual?"

I look at him blankly.

"Exorcism!"

A single word that makes all the others disappear. I see a 70s movie with Linda Blair's neck rotating on her body. A host of frightening stories come rushing in to stand side by side with the word Niall has just uttered.

"I can't offer to do it but I can tell you that I am qualified to perform the ritual. You can seek a second opinion."

My mind at last has something with which to tie down the barn doors of fear and confusion flapping wildly in the wake of the E-word.

***

The night before the Femba ritual I have an intense headache when I lie down and my temperature goes haywire. I veer between shivering to sweating. Several times I fall asleep exhausted and then wake up with a start. My stomach cramps and rumbles throughout the night. It sounds and feels like something is boiling in my insides.

In the early hours of the morning I read a humorous novel but the words get lost making the long journey from the page to my mind.

I can't get myself to switch off the reading lamp. Only when the winter sun nudges the drapes, does the fear subside a bit.

A Femba Cleansing

The rituals were not for the benefit of the gods. The slow rhythm of the dance held threads in place so The Ancestors could weave magic uninterrupted.

"I WILL EXPLAIN what is going to happen," says Niall when I arrive. One by one, five fellow sangomas join Niall and his brother, Colin

Campbell. The healers each wrap African cotton cloths over their western clothes.

They greet me and I smile but only slightly in case my facial muscles let me down and jerk away from the feeble attempt at looking relaxed.

"You have to sit in the middle here," says one of the sangomas.

I feel like I am about to be sacrificed. Horses neigh outside the window as they are led from the paddocks to the stables in a mink-and-manure neighbourhood.

"I have to ask you to get undressed and come back and sit here," says Niall pointing to a spot with a lion's head on the reed mat.

I sit in the middle of a sangoma circle. One healer is beating the sacred cowhide drum said to have a spirit of its own. Two of the women are helping Niall prepare medicine in a wooden bowl. He is trembling slightly.

When they are done mixing the medicine the women help him tie a series of cloths, some crisscrossed on his chest like bandoliers. The style of tying the sarongs leaves long cloth tails. Niall's trembling has now become an almost uncontrollable shake. He is grumbling, looking like a soldier animal rearing to go into battle. The women pull at the knots to test the security of the cloth bandolier. Niall is looking less and less like the man I know.

The room heats up in defiance of the midwinter cold. The sangomas sing and chant, beating the sacred drum. For the first time I think about the fact that everyone in his room is white except for my son and I. Ryan Lee is part of a small crew filming the ritual.

How has this happened? What ancient battles are being reenacted, wrongs are being addressed?

One of the women, who has been holding onto Niall's cloth tails as he groans and shakes, let goes. He darts into the adjacent kitchen on his knees. The women follow him, also on their knees, and they stay there for a while. When they return, the shaking has become so violent the traditional sangoma wig flies off Niall's head. His eyes are wide open. It is a look of complete innocence.

But the Niall I know is absent from those eyes. An ancient presence fills the room. I am now so far out of my comfort zone, fear seems just silly. Niall shuffles towards me on his knees grunting. Brushes me all over with herbs

In no time at all the cold medicine being splashed onto me with a

whisk soaks my hair and clothes. But still I feel warm. Niall and a female sangoma move around me, spraying medicine and chanting.

Niall has a round, white beaded implement that he uses as a stethoscope, listening to vibrations in my body here and there. Each time he places the small round tool on my body he taps into a place where I have been having problems with pain. His movements are rapid and jerky like an old man in a great hurry.

Suddenly, he lunges toward my stomach with the "stethoscope". First, he bends low to listen and then sits bolt upright, his eyes even wider now. The movement is so sudden and violent I fear for his safety. The singing and chanting abruptly stops. Niall grumbles incoherently. His voice sounds very old. Then he shoots upright and almost flies towards the window. The other sangomas struggle to hold onto his huge body. I understand now the need for tying the cloths around him so that there are tails and "bandoliers" for the healers to grab. He looks like he could easily fly out of the small cottage. His brother Colin challenges the entity that has now left me and entered Niall.

"Who are you?" shouts Colin.

Aggressive mumbling from Niall. Instinctively I don't look up. I don't want to engage whatever is making its way from me through Niall to where it belongs. I don't want to look in case it goes wrong.

"What do you want?" demands Colin.

Niall is writhing violently and the sangomas are holding on to him with all their might. Hisses and groans. A very old voice is coming out of Niall's body. Mumbling. The drumming and chanting stops.

"Tell us your name!"

More hisses and groans.

"Hamba!" Colin orders the spirit to leave and repeats the order in Setswana. Colin and Niall grew up in Botswana and both did their *twasa*[68] there.

Niall stops straining against the grip of the sangomas and his whole body contorts in a kind of giant sneeze. His huge frame collapses on the floor. I worry that he might be hurt. But he gets up. The singing, chanting and drumming resumes… a signal that the danger has passed for now.

He carries on dousing me in medicine. Each time when he puts the round white talisman on a part where I've been experiencing pain, the chanting and drumming stops. Niall rears up, his body contorts.

68 The traditional healer initiation rites

Everyone goes quiet. Colin challenges the spirit that is being exorcised. Niall "sneezes", collapses and after a short while the drumming and chanting begin again.

My body trembles. A strange quiver as things are shaken up inside me. Some of Niall's "sneezes" are worse than others. Each time Colin asks the spirit its name. Only one responds.

"Adrian," says Niall clearly in between all the groaning and hissing,

The voice of "Adrian" sounds much younger than any of the others, much younger than Niall himself.

Without warning the room calms down, the drumming and chanting stops. Niall seems to wake up. He sits looking at me like someone who has been very far away.

"You're still here. You didn't go home," he says smiling.

The sangomas begin to ululate joyously. As they untie the bandolier tails his eyes become familiar again. He is back.

"Please get some coals out of the fire," he asks one of the women.

Searching for Freedom in All the Wrong Places

Before the warrior leaves, he sings her a song that will hold her hand while he is gone. In the spaces it lingers, winding a red ribbon tune between her fingers.

OUTSIDE, AN OUTRAGEOUSLY bright moon, a super-moon, hangs low and yellow in the winter sky above the quiet paddocks.

"You have been working with your Ancestors, with your Calling. This opens up portals. Sometimes unwanted energies use these openings and you become ill. Your writing will be part of your healing," says Niall.

We march against politicians and their hankering for censorship. We rise up when our institutions do not serve us. But the more insidious forces that invade our freedoms are left unchecked. We are suffocating in the shrinking spaces where the guidance of our elders – living and dead – should flourish.

Weighed down with the bondage of a questionable political freedom and whimpering in a language we don't fully understand, we have become ill. The hospitals are overflowing with those who search for freedom from the illness. Searching in all the wrong places.

Words in an interloper language are like surly servants, inherently useful but resistant. And, the thunder of the march of modernity drowns out

the subtlety of what we would like to say.
So I have taken to telling a story. It is the story of how I became ill, of how I lost my mind. And, how letting go of it has helped me to heal. Becoming truly free by finding the way back to my own authentic account of who I really am.

Epilogue

By the light of their stories they danced in a huge arc across the pages of the night.

AS IT ALWAYS is with an epic story, the forces that combined in response to //Kabbo's powerful vision span continents and centuries:

In Germany, Dr Wilhelm Bleek, a passionate academic given to bouts of illness, was drawn to Africa to study dying languages. In Britain, the family of Lucy Lloyd, a governess, followed in the wake of the 1820 Settlers and set sail for Durban. Later Dr Bleek began the linguistic work that captured //Kabbo's story with the help of his sister-in – law, Lucy.

In the shade of the Strandberge near Kenhardt, //Kabbo and his people were battling to survive the encroaching Settlers. When he attempted to feed his family, //Kabbo was arrested for stock theft and taken to the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town. Things fell in place just as it did in a dream where he saw city people who could preserve his cultural legacy.

In the spring of 1870, Dr Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd were at the Breakwater Prison looking for people who could help them compile a dictionary of the dying /Xam language. They found //Kabbo, a master storyteller. And so it was //Kabbo's Vision Quest became reality.

In modern day South Africa, I discovered the archive when I wrote about a book by Professor Pippa Skotnes, *Sound from the Thinking Strings*. It was an entrancing introduction to //Kabbo's stories and poetry in the Bleek-Lloyd archive. Here on these pages, for the first time, the voices of my Ancestors spoke to me directly. And, except for the translations – the original /Xam is there as well – without too much mitigation by interlocutors.

It's been a very long journey from my upbringing in a fundamentalist Seventh Day Adventist family to an exorcism and cleansing with a team of white sangoma healers. The forbidding dictates of the Old Testament have dominated my life. Strangled my African self. African spirituality


RDC
LE PROF D'UNIVERSITÉ!
RDC
LE CLOCHARD!
MAIS... MAIS... OÙ EST LA DIFFÉRENCE ENTRE LES DEUX??
DROIT À L'ÉDUCATION
KASH 07

Yewande Omotoso (Barbados/ Nigeria)

Cupboards in the Dark

Yewande Omotoso is Barbadian-Nigerian and currently lives in Johannesburg. A trained architect, she completed a masters in creative writing at the University of Cape Town. Her debut novel 'Bomboy' (2011 Modjaji Books) was shortlisted for the 2012 Sunday Times Literary Awards, the MNet Film Award and the 2013 Etisalat Prize for Literature. It won the South African Literary Award First Time Author Prize. Yewande was a 2013 Norman Mailer Fellow and a 2014 Etisalat Fellow.

Cupboards in the Dark

Yewande Omotoso

Suppress – to inhibit the growth and development of
(Merriam-Webster)

THEMBI COULD HEAR it. A knock-knock. She thought to get out of bed and put her ear to the wall between her room and her parents. She peeped over the top of her duvet.

The big shape was the cupboard, but in the dark it looked like a ghost, a giant tokoloshe, a monster waiting … one of those things from the horror movie she was not supposed to watch but did anyway.

The dark shape looked as if it could talk, as if it had moving parts and if she stared long enough it would start walking. It was on nights like these that Thembi wished she had a sister, older or younger didn't matter. There was that sound again. Knock-knock.

She would even be happy with a brother on such nights.

Her parents had told her she was going to have a brother and her mother's belly grew a bit and then after some time it became small again. And still she had no brother.

Thembi ducked back underneath the duvet, and to really feel invisible she closed her eyes. The noise continued. The reason she wanted someone else in the room with her, someone like her not an adult, was because on nights like these she wanted to be able to talk, get through the darkness and the unnerving knock-knock.

She wanted to be able to say, "That noise again, can you hear?" and "Can you see the tokoloshe?"

There was no one to talk to right away. And talking about what happened at night the next day was not the same. But it was better than nothing so Thembi spoke to her only friend, Esther.

The following day at school, during playtime, Thembi looked for Esther. She wanted to ask her to come to the far-off swings that scared the other children. There was a story that if you sat in those swings – the ones

with rust and not nice paint – an evil spirit will enter through your toes, move up your legs and never leave your heart. Thembi didn't believe in things like that – not during the daytime anyway. Swings could not send spirits up your toes, it was stupid.

Cupboards in the dark, though.

She asked for Esther to come with her. "We don't have to swing,' Thembi said, quelling Esther's worried looked. "I just want to tell you something."

They sat on a piece of log, checking first that no beetles were moving about on its bark.

"I hear 'knock-knock' at night,' Thembi said.

"And my cupboard can talk in the dark."

"Knock-knock?"

"From my parents' bedroom."

Esther laughed. Her tongue was very pink and her gums were pink and two of her teeth were brown. Thembi didn't like being laughed at but she didn't say anything.

Esther's father was not around and Esther's mother had many boyfriends. Esther had told Thembi about the boyfriends. In fact one of the boyfriends liked Esther.

"He likes me and his name is Jimmy," today it was Esther's turn to talk.

"Why does he like you?" Thembi asked.

They always talked on the log. Sometimes, if it was a very important talk, they would sit on the log even if it had beetles moving along the surface. This was one of those talks.

Thembi used a stick to try and get Mr Beetle to move another way.

She listened to Esther. Thembi's mother liked to say "Look at me when I'm talking to you", but Thembi knew you didn't really have to look at someone to listen to them.

"I don't know why he likes me. He just told me like that. And he came to my room last night. Asked how old I was."

"What did you say?"

"I told him I was eight, almost nine."

"Why didn't you lie?"

When was it a good time to lie and when was it not, Thembi wondered. She had received many beatings after telling the truth

"Lying is a sin and you won't get into heaven if you lie," Esther said.

"Okay. So what did Jimmy say?"

"He said he liked me."

"Likes you how? And then what did he say?"

Esther frowned and looked at Thembi, but kept quiet.

Thembi's mother didn't know her daughter and Esther were friends. Thembi had heard her mother talking to her father. *"Prudence is at it again. I saw her standing. What does she do with the child when she goes out at night?"* Then Thembi's mother had asked her at dinner whether she knew of a little girl called Esther *"I don't want you playing with her, you hear?"* Thembi nodded. That meant she'd heard.

"The noise you hear in your parents' bedroom," Esther said with that look Thembi hated because it made her feel stupid, "Is the noise of your father putting his thing inside your mother's thing and moving it around. When they move around like that it shakes the bed and bangs the wall. Like knock-knock."

"Move around like what?"

"Like this."

Esther moved her hips and the log started to shake.

"Does the noise sound something like this?"

Esther arched her back and let out a sound that was not like the mooing of cows Thembi had heard on TV but close. Esther's lips parted.

"Isn't that what it sounds like?" Esther asked again.

"Is it nice?"

"Sort of. It's nice for the man."

"Why?"

"I don't know. That's what my mother said," Esther revealed.

Thembi knew her mother would not want her believing anything Esther's mother had said, but she just nodded so her friend's feelings wouldn't get hurt.

"How's Jimmy? Is he your boyfriend now?"

Esther shook her head. "It was someone else last night. I don't know his name."

"Who?"

"He's fat. Heavy."

Thembi didn't have anything to say.

"And also," Esther continued, "cupboards don't talk. And tokoloshe is never a giant. He is small like a baby."

Thembi heard the sound and now she knew it was her parents

having sex, moving their things inside each other. Thembi had a thing too. She pushed down the duvet with her feet and turned on the light. She collected the mirror from underneath the bed where she'd hidden it. She'd taken the mirror from her mother's cabinet earlier that day before her mother got home from work. Lying, staying friends with Esther and stealing mirrors, these were things she was not to do. But life wasn't that simple as grownups thought it was. She will put the mirror back before her mother notices.

Thembi pushed down her underwear and parted her legs. It had been Esther's idea.

It was dark brown, with some pinkish-purplish parts. It looked like a grub she would hear spoken about on the National Geographic channel if her parents bought DStv.

The sides hung low, dangling. Those must be the lips Esther spoke about. So her thing could talk even if the cupboard could not.

There was the little spout her pee-pee came out of. She touched it. There was a small slit and that was where the man's thing was supposed to go. How would it fit?

That was also where a baby came out of. That was also the hole out of which blood would come one day. The blood had to come first and then the baby would come.

Thembi had a nightmare.

"What's wrong?" Thembi's mother asked at dinner.

"You're not talking. Normally I can't keep you quiet."

"Nothing."

Thembi knew her mother only asked her to speak if her mother was feeling bad about something. Like if she'd had a Bad Day At Work. This had happened once and Thembi had asked what that meant and her mother had said to never mind. Or if Thembi heard her father shouting at her mother before dinnertime then she knew her mother would ask her to speak.

"You sure?"

But it was a trap. It wasn't really that Thembi's mother wanted her to speak. It was that on such days the badness of Thembi speaking was better than whatever other badness had already happened.

"Good appetite. Can I give you another piece?"

Thembi nodded. It was a trap but sometimes it was hard to not fall inside.

"How was school?" Thembi's mother asked. Her father said nothing. He'd said enough, in a very loud voice, before dinner was served.

"My friend…"

"Yes?"

"… has two boyfriends … " she could see it was too late, but she continued.

"And Jimmy likes her."

Occasionally, you could save it all with a question. "What does that mean, Ma? If he likes her does he have to put his thing?"

Of course, it didn't go well.

She was sent to bed early and the only noise she heard from her parent's room was more of her father shouting. She tiptoed and put her ear to the wall.

"What are you teaching her?"

That was her father. Her mother's voice too soft to hear.

Thembi went back to bed. Sometimes she let herself be trapped, just to give them a different badness, her own badness, to protect them from theirs.

Sometimes it worked.

Not this time.

Thembi decided it was Esther that had gotten her into trouble. But at playtime, she listened to her friend when Esther called her to the log in the corner.

"It's paining."

"What?"

Esther's eyes were big, Thembi thought; round like bottle tops.

"What?" Thembi asked again.

"Down there?"

"Down there? Paining how?"

Just then Teacher Mandisa came to call them into class and Esther looked away. They walked back to class, Esther limped. In class Thembi passed her a note. "is yur blod coming?" But Esther did not respond. Maybe when your blood comes it pains, Thembi remembered hearing somewhere that there would be pain. And also that you don't smile as much anymore.

"What's wrong with you, Thembi? Stop pushing your food around like that."

"Don't slouch. Sit properly. Like a lady.'" Her dad seldom joined in,

but today was different. “What did the doctor say about the test results?” he asked Thembi’s mother.

“Not now. I’ll tell you later.”

Thembi straightened her back against the chair.

She tried to be good for the rest of dinner but she was worried about Esther.

Her mother asked her how was school and her father wanted to know whether Maths was still her favourite subject.

There had already been shouting, louder and for longer.

Thembi had to chew her food and then answer. She dare not answer while chewing. They would frown. She had to chew with her mouth closed. But when she talked then she had to part her lips and make the right sounds in the right places or her mother would say she wasn’t properly learning English.

Thembi struggled with saying “r”. Instead, “w” came out. She tried explaining to her mother the tongue was going the wrong way. But her mother said all it meant was that she was lazy. She answered their questions but asking her own questions at the table was dangerous so she waited ’til she was with her mother in the kitchen, drying the dishes.

She lowered her voice. Things you’re not sure about should never be shouted. She was nervous but, still, Thembi knew she had to try, for Esther’s sake.

“Ma?”

“What?”

“When you get pain down there does it mean your blood is coming?”

Thembi’s mother came to her bedroom.

“Come and sit next to me on the bed.”

Thembi sat placing her hands, palms down, on either side of her.

“Do you know how babies come?”

Her mother was talking softly which was a type of happiness. Not full on, but a sign that she was not in trouble. Well, not today, not with this. Thembi released her breath.

“Do you?”

“A man puts his thing in a woman’s thing but before that time a woman’s blood comes and maybe there’s pain down there. I don’t know. And then they shake around and make noises a little quieter than a cow. And when it’s time for the baby the woman poops it out of her thing.’

“Who told you that?”

"Esther."

"But I told you not to play with her. Listen to me, I don't want you sitting next to her or talking to her, you hear me?"

Thembi nodded. She wished she had lied.

"I was only going to tell you this in a few years' time."

Thembi watched her mother play with her hands in her lap … play with her ring.

"You're growing too fast for me," she smiled. Thembi saw that her mother could be beautiful.

"If one day you see blood in your underwear, don't be frightened. I keep sanitary pads in my cupboard and you can take them at any time."

Thembi had seen advertisements for sanitary pads on TV.

Sometimes, if her dad was watching with her, he would change the channel and then she would only see part of the advert where the white woman is walking down the street in a short skirt that only women like Esther's mother wear. Or she would see the part with the black woman dancing with a black man, spinning and spinning and smiling.

Or her favourite bit, where they showed the sanitary pad and a blue water-type thing and how the water-type thing stays on the pad and doesn't go anywhere else and how pads have wings and can fly.

And Thembi knew why they made it blue on the TV; she didn't need Esther to tell her. They made it blue because the TV-people knew that everybody was afraid of blood and they didn't want to a scare anyone. Everybody was afraid of blood but blue? Most people weren't afraid of. TV was never supposed to be scary unless it was a horror movie.

After Thembi's mother had told her about the sanitary pads, Thembi wondered if her mother knew that her blood was coming soon which is why she had come to talk to her. Maybe mothers, who knew many things, also knew when to warn their daughters about the coming of blood which when it came would not be blue at all. It would be red and sticky and it would go for seven days and there would be pain down there.

"Teacher Mandisa is a lesbian, my mom says so."

"What's a lesbian?"

"It's a woman men don't like anymore, so she has to try and sleep in the beds of women."

"What did she do that the men don't like her?"

"I don't know. Maybe she's ugly."

Thembi sat for a while, shifted her leg to let a beetle pass, and resolved to check if what Esther said was true.

Since her mother had told her about sanitary pads, she spoke softer and touched her sometimes on the shoulder. The dinner table was still a hard place but the kitchen, with wet dishes being dried, was softer… easier.

"Ma, can a woman and a woman put their vaginas together?"

"What?"

It was her father. She hadn't heard him walk pass the kitchen door.

His eyes bulged at her but only a few seconds. He then turned to her mother and Thembi was sent to her room.

Sanitary pads, small touches on shoulders – forgotten.

"Why did you do that?" Thembi's dismay was visible.

"What?" Esther asked.

"Why did you talk to me about lesbians? Now my mom thinks I'm a lesbian." Thembi complained.

Esther shrugged and toyed with a scab on her exposed knee, just below her uniform's hem.

"You said they're ugly, right? Do you think I'll be ugly when I'm bigger? Like after my blood comes and I'm bigger … Do you think I'll be ugly?"

Esther looked away to the other end of the playground where the other kids played. The boys had a blue ball they kicked around and the girls sat in clusters of three or four. Some were playing ingle-angle with an old stocking. Esther could just make out the girls' singing, singing along in her head. Her throat was scratchy.

Ingle Angle Silver Bangle. Inside. Outside. Outside. In …

"Esther, did you hear me?"

She turned and looked at Thembi's face.

"You won't be ugly."

They didn't talk much after that.

Thembi discovered a colony of ants in their log; they weren't bothering anyone though so she let them be. They were tiny white ants; they looked likely to squish if caught under her shoe.

"How's your blood?' Thembi asked Esther as Teacher Mandisa shouted for everyone to come back inside.

"My what?"

"Your blood. Didn't it come?"

"No. It didn't. Are you stupid? I'm too young for it to come. It only comes much later."

Thembi wanted to cry.

"But I thought you said there was pain down there?"

"That's not what I meant," Esther said.

One evening Thembi and her mother ate dinner but her father wasn't there.

This had never happened before. Her father worked for a big office. Thembi couldn't remember the name, but she knew it was an important job because he brought home a car every day and it had writing on the side. Why couldn't she remember the writing? She'd seen it enough times.

"What's the writing on Daddy's car again, Ma?"

"Shh. Eat your food."

Her mother was angry but Thembi couldn't tell if it was her talking with food in her mouth or for some other reason. There had been no shouting before dinner. Her father had not been around.

This should be a good thing. Maybe she was upset because she'd had a Bad Day At Work. Before dinner ended Thembi's mom put her fork down, elbow on the table and dropped her forehead into her palm.

"My God."

"Ma?"

She shook her head as if Thembi had asked her a question and now she was answering "no". But she didn't actually say "no".

"Your Dad has left us. It's not easy to know men … To understand," came her mother's voice.

And Thembi knew not to say anything but always trying to even out the badness; and she knew this time there would be no Esther to blame. The question asked itself.

"Ma, does Daddy not like us anymore? Are you a lesbian now?"

Thembi heard the slap and only then felt the sting. As if sound travels faster than feelings. For a week it felt to Thembi her cheek had doubled in size, that half her face was boiling, that life would change forever. But things came back to normal.

Thembi's mother told her that she was sorry and that she'd had a Bad Day. After a few more days Thembi's father came back but there were no cow-like noises coming from her parents' bedroom.

There was shouting and once Thembi's father slammed the door and drove away. It was still dark outside and not morning yet. Thembi's mother went to work every day, she worked in a hospital. "My mother helps people," Thembi told Esther.

Then there were also the things that changed. Their log at school, Esther and Thembi's. One day they sat on it and fell to pieces, the two landing on their bottoms.

The log had rotted, chewed from the inside by insects of various colours. They laughed when it happened.

"Every nait is worser," Esther wrote to Thembi during class. Thembi did not know what to do with the note so she tore it in to little pieces. The next day, Esther wrote her another note and she tore this up too. Esther came to her during the break but there was no log to go to. The other girls played their game.

Ingle Angle Silver Bangle. Inside. Outside. Outside. In …

Esther asked Thembi to ask her mother for help. "Help with what?" Thembi asked.

"Just ask her," Esther begged.

"She can talk to my mom," Esther said. "My mom won't believe me but she'll believe your mummy." Thembi nodded but she knew this was impossible. And she also knew if she even mentioned Esther's name again, she would get slapped again.

Thembi had a nightmare and her mother had to wake her up because she was screaming. Even her father came into her room and he looked worried.

They didn't argue so much after that but after a week, her father came to pack his clothes and he drove away before Thembi had remembered to check the writing on his car.

"Worser and worser" Esther wrote in another note. Esther was Thembi's best friend.

She had her hair in small braids that reached her shoulder blades. Thembi's mother said it was the Devil's money that had bought the hairstyle. Thembi knew her mother did not get any money from the Devil so she had to have her hair cut every few weeks and it was so low the boys called her Bozzo.

Another note came. "did you ask?"

This time Thembi did not know what to do with it. Teacher Mandisa was coming down the aisle checking their exercise books. Thembi put

note, written on a piece torn from Esther's exercise book, stuffed it into her mouth. And chewed. It didn't pop like bubble gum.

Instead, the piece of paper spread on her tongue for a few seconds and then after a few chews it melted. During lunch, Esther started walking towards her and Thembi decided to run from her. Thembi ran past the boys and their soccer ball – it was red this week.

She ran past the girls playing ingle angle.

Ingle Angle Silver Bangle. Inside. Outside. Outside. In …

She looked over her shoulder and Esther was running after her. This made Thembi run faster although she wasn't sure why she was running.

From Esther and the question on her face? From the monsters in her nightmares? The tokoloshe? The evil cupboard in the dark?

From her father and her mother?

From a hard slap that was so heavy it could change the direction of the whole wide world?

Thembi kept running until when she looked back and didn't see Esther.

That was when she stopped and panted and panted and tried to catch her breath and she wondered if that was what it sounded like when a man shook his thing, his penis, around in your vagina.

But Esther was not close by for her to ask.

It was the school holiday, a few weeks that went by like a speeding car. So fast you couldn't see the writing. Thembi's father came back to the house to collect some stuff he had forgotten but he came back on foot.

"What was the writing on your car, Daddy?"

"What writing? What car? I do not own a car."

The day before the first day of school, Thembi's mother called her. She'd fixed her uniform.

"Don't forget to polish your shoes."

"Okay."

"Wait, I want to tell you something."

Thembi sat beside her mother on her bed.

"Remember that girl you used to play with? The girl I told you not to play with anymore, many months ago?"

"Esther?"

"Yes. Something happened."

"What?"

Thembi knew something bad was coming because her mother played with her hands in her lap and she rubbed her fingers on the place her wedding ring used to be.

"Esther has gone to Jesus … To heaven."

"But what happened?"

"She was called away to God."

On the first day of school, Teacher Mandisa called Thembi to the front of the class and asked her to say a short prayer for Esther. The other girls asked her if she wanted to play ingle angle and Thembi said she would watch them because her leg was sore.

Her leg was not sore. It wasn't right that Esther was called away.

It wasn't right that the girls wanted Thembi to play with them.

In the playground everyone was talking.

They said Esther's mother was not good. It was the school holiday but she'd gone and left Esther on her own. And bad mother's go to hell and boyfriends aren't supposed to put their things in little girls – even if you're pretty like Esther was.

Because boyfriends' things can break little girls, break them in half, cut them the way that bad man cut Esther.

This is what the boys and girls were saying. Thembi had a sore stomach. She wanted to put her finger down her throat and throw up. She went to Teacher Mandisa to complain of a store stomach and Teacher Mandisa called her mother to pick her up.

And while she waited with her teacher, Thembi asked what had happened to Esther.

Her teacher said the police were investigating. Would the police ever find out about the letter she had chewed and swallowed? Would they come and look for her. Thembi went home and slept all afternoon.

The next morning she told her mother she had a stomach ache and that she didn't want to go to school. And when Thembi's mother reached across to check her temperature with the back of her hand, Thembi grabbed her around the waist, dug her face into her mother's belly and cried.

"No. No," her mother kept saying, but she held onto her daughter.

Later, the stomach ache was still there but not as loud. Thembi asked her mother if she could say a dinner prayer.

"Go ahead."

"Dear God. I'm angry with you about Esther. You could have called someone else, you know? Yes, I shouldn't have eaten the letter but you could have called anybody else … I didn't protect her. And now it's your turn to take care of her, okay? You need to talk to her. And listen ... She knows a lot of things. And she never lies. And tell her that I'm sorry. And … and hug her. Just tell her it's from me, okay? Me, Thembi."

Endnotes : Jane

(Endnotes)

1. These next two sections build on an article I wrote in preparation for this lecture, published on the Conmag site and entitled 'Artistic freedom then and now'. See Duncan 2014.
2. Playwrights Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka, long associated with the black consciousness and Pan Africanist movements respectively, but fiercely protective of their independence from AZAPO and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), told me at the time that consultation effectively amounted to 'asking for permission' to go overseas, which they refused to do. They never experienced problems with taking plays overseas, though, but the Afrika Cultural Centre, under the leadership of Benjy Francis, did. Although the Centre was often associated with Pan-Africanism, it was vocal about its political independence. The British AAM was particularly insistent about cultural groups consulting with the ANC before they toured in the country. When Francis and the Azanian National Theatre toured the production 'Burning Embers' – a strongly anti-apartheid play – in 1986, they were told repeatedly that they could not hand out promotional pamphlets or secure venues without having 'ANC approval'. As Francis told me the time, the AAM's reaction to them was 'petty and ill-informed' and 'an affront to the fact of our struggle. He concluded '…They [the AAM] cannot live our cultural history for us' (Duncan 1988: 58).
3. For instance, in an interview with Master's student Ross Passmore, Brett Murray noted that in the 1980s, producing posters, t-shirts and other art constituted much of his 'day job' (Passmore: 97).
4. As far back as 1845, Karl Marx argued in *The German Ideology* that this tradition's concept of a 'natural individual' vested with pre-political

rights is a historical product of capitalist property relations and forms of production, and personal freedom has in reality been the freedom enjoyed only by those who developed within the relationships of the ruling class (Marx 1978, 146-202). In outlining the conditions for freedom of the working class, Marx recognised a difference between negative freedom and positive freedom. For Marx, negative freedom was a bourgeois concept, as it is the freedom primarily of those who own the means of production. Positive freedom is built up as a result of the struggle of the working class, and gives the working class an opportunity to develop as human beings. But, he argued, both negative and positive freedoms need to be advanced (Marx and Engels 1845).

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