



Azania = Land of the Black People

By George Wauchope

There often exists an undeclared state of war among people involved in the struggle for liberation as between those who support and those who are against the use of the name *Azania* as an alternative name for a liberated South Africa. This is because the debate concerns much more than a name: it involves everything that we are fighting for; it concerns the very nature of the society we seek to build.

Those who oppose the use of the name "Azania" often argue that it means "the land of the slaves". This is a contradiction in terms, for slaves are by definition people who are owned: they can hardly own a thing, let alone land. In any event, this tenuous logic would oppose the use of the word "proletariat" because it derives from the parasite of Ancient Greece who lived at the expense of slave society. It would also oppose the name "Cuba" which recently referred to a slave society.

CIVILIZATION

Azania is a Greek transcription of the Arabic name *Ajam*, which refers to the East African shore consisting of countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania.

It is very important to note that *Azania* has been placed on linguistic evidence in the central area of the northern Savannas. From here it seems likely that the small groups (different linguistic groups) followed the rivers that traverse the rain forests till they reached the central part of the southern Savannas. From this point the steady pressure of population growth probably caused the migration of the Black groups in all directions, thus bringing them into contact with peoples of different stocks like the Bushmanoids of Southern Africa, the Azanians of East Africa, the Indonesians and the Arabs of the coast with whom they merged to form Swahili.

Swahili comes in because of the very strong relations between South Arabia and *Azania* which date back to many centuries before Christ. This Azanian civilisation was mature, had a culture of its own and an accomplished language viz Swahili. Here one must stress that the Swahili language and culture is an arabised African product whose basis and most of whose elements are African.

The characteristics of the Azanian civilisation were that it consisted of a sedentary, agricultural and iron-age folk who practised irrigation works such as canals and terraces, roads, mine workings and smithies, cairns and rock paintings.

The years between 500 and 1500AD were the millenium of maximum growth and development of iron age culture in Eastern and Southern Africa. Social and economic growth was given an impetus by a more advanced agriculture; the emergence of large and stronger tribal societies; the increasing demand from the coast for ivory, iron, gold and other goods, and the expanding capacity of these settled peoples of the interior to supply this demand and to buy in turn imports from the coast.

The move downwards came about during the 14th century when East Africa suffered a long series of migratory invasions from the north, mainly by pastoral nomads from the horn of Africa. The Azanians were organised whether for peace or war on the extended family of negroid and bushmanoid tradition, while the nomads were organised to move and fight in larger cohesive groups. The technically more primitive nomads were militarily stronger, both by the manner of their lives and the method of their organisation. The Azanians were thus overwhelmed by this barbaric invasion from the north, their civilising growth stultified and brought to an end.

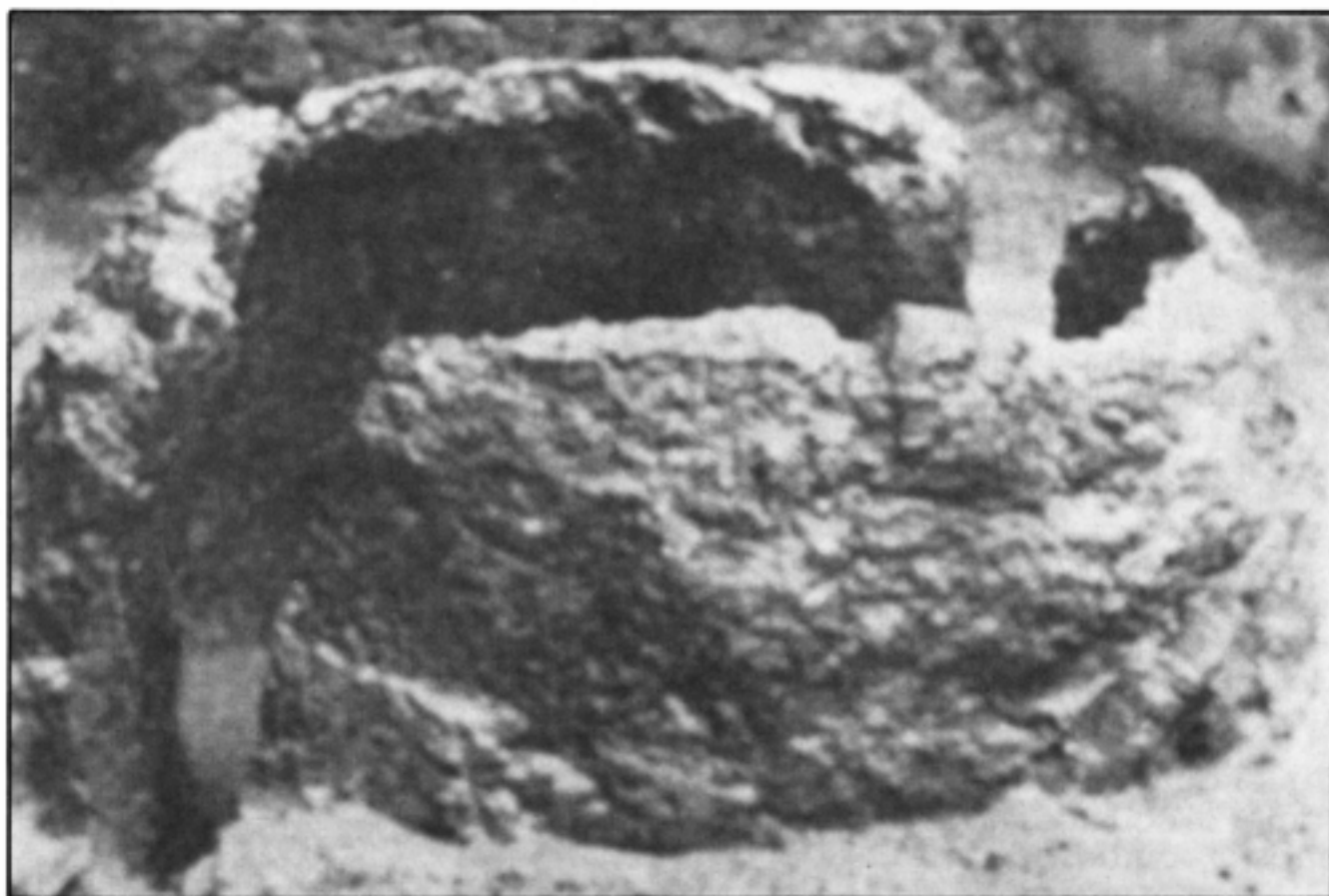
However, in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Transvaal, the nature of the Azanian culture modified and changed once more by further migration and development in the new circumstances, re-emerged flowering and outlived the barbaric invasion in its splendour and majesty. The re-emergence of this civilisation emphasised the fact that these Africans were all branches from a single stem because of the

similarity in their use of stone dwellings, irrigation, soil conservation, in their mining and metal work, in their knowledge of a widely various pharmacoeia, in their fusion of tribal law and custom with an intertribal and tribute-paying system of centralised power, in their trading habits and in their indigenous pottery.

Etymologically the common heritage of Swahili clearly emerges. The word 'Zanj' is a Persian word meaning 'Black'. In Zulu *zansi* means down or south. When one looks at countries where the phoneme *za* or *z* emerges, one discovers that such countries are situated in the southern hemisphere, e.g. **Zanzibar**, **Mozambique**, **Zambia**, **Zaire**, and perhaps **Zimbabwe**. In the latter *zi* can be compared to the Zulu *ningizimu* which also means south. *la* is a suffix that denotes land whilst the Swahili *nia* refers to the innermost part of man, heart, mind, conscience or disposition. Therefore *Azania* means land of the Black people.

It is for this reason that Black Consciousness refers to our beloved country as *Azania*. It is calling upon the Black people's conscience, hearts and minds to rise up, to recreate and relive the life that was created by the Azanian civilization. It calls on Black people to realise their importance in this continent, see their value and to recognise the contribution they have made to the world in general.

In the 19th century, when imperialism gained momentum, everything great, everything fine, everything really successful in



Iron Age Smelting Furnace, excavated on Melville Koppie, Johannesburg. Date: ca. 1060 A.D.

human culture was white. Black people in Africa who showed any trace of progress were labelled as white. A system first conscious and then unconscious of lying about Blacks became so widespread that the authentic history of Africa ceased to be taught. With the winking of an eye, printing, gunpowder, smelting of iron, the beginnings of social organisation, not to mention political life and democracy, were attributed exclusively to whites.

MYTH

Azania is both a historical and a political myth. But myths are not lies. They are an outline of reality. And a liberation movement can certainly use myths in order to unite the oppressed, to serve as a rallying point.

We may draw a valuable lesson from the current anti-colonial struggle being waged by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) near the Philippines, which was once a Spanish colony. The current anti-colonial struggle is being waged against both the Philippines and the United States of America.

In the 16th Century the Spanish conquerors of the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Palawan referred to the natives as *Moros* because they practised Islam much as the Moors of North Africa, who once ruled the Spaniards, had practised Islam. The term *Moro* was used to denote a savage and treacherous people.

Abdurasad Asani of the MNLF explains:

"But despite its colonial origins the MNLF has cleansed the term of its unpleasant connotation by propagating the more correct view that the tenacity with which the natives conducted their war of resistance against foreign intrusion was a classic example in heroism.

"The term is not only common to all the indigenous tribes of the region but included Muslims, Christians and those still adhering to traditional religious values — in a word, all those who share a common aspiration and political destiny. Hence, the MNLF adopted *Bangsa* (nation) *Moro* as a national identity and implants it in the consciousness of the masses. Today, it is rooted in the heart of every man and woman and the defence of its integrity has become a national duty."

SOURCES

The term "Azania" carries with it an essentially anti-imperialist content. It was adopted (initially by the PAC) because it helped to situate the struggle for the liberation of the people of South Africa in the context of Africa's history.

We should remember that the names of countries have mainly two kinds of sources:

★ **The tribal past:** names develop organically through a struggle for

national liberation and the country bears the name of the main tribe or of a confederacy of tribes.

★ **Outstanding geographical or historical features of the country:** Zimbabwe is an example where an outstanding historical feature (the Zimbabwe culture, not simply the Zimbabwe ruins of the tourists!) has lent its name to the liberated country. Namibia (from *Namib*), a KhoiKhoi word meaning desert is a clear example of a geographical name.

In South Africa, there is neither an overriding geographical feature because of the variety of nature nor is there a single common historical event or personage that can serve to unite symbolically all the oppressed people. Hence, names such as *Ulundi* or *Maluti* are as artificial and as arbitrary as *Azania* might sound to some.

In the final analysis, it is the historical action of masses of people that decides questions such as the name of a country. The activities of the Black Consciousness Movement during the '70's and especially during the 1976 Soweto Uprising have put the final seal on this question in our country. *Azania*, like *Namibia*, has come to stand for a political programme that is accepted by all the oppressed people of this land. It embraces no less than the aspirations of the people for an undivided, anti-racist, socialist country. To accept the name *Azania* simply means that one identifies with the aspirations of the oppressed people for liberation. We cannot play silly games with new "names" for our country. *Azania* has been baptised on the bloodstained streets and banners of Soweto, Gugulethu, Chatsworth, New Brighton and even in the remotest corners of the land.

AZAPO calls upon all Azanians to resume their position as pace-setters in the world. The *Muezzin* calls the faithful to prayer with the *Azaan*: to a Muslim, the *Azaan* is an observation of the value of the doctrine, it is cherishing all that is of value, appreciating all that is good and revering the beauty and the majesty of creation. AZAPO calls upon the Black people to restore Azania to its formidable position in the world. We are all beneficiaries of that magnificent, superb and inimitable Azanian civilization. Let us all then rise up, one in deed, united in action, steadfast in our goal and fight for our inalienable rights as ONE PEOPLE in ONE AZANIA, ONE NATION.



Mokgethi Motlhabi in *Black Resistance to Apartheid* (Skotaville Publishers, 1984) incisively points out: "It seems probable that change in South Africa will ultimately depend on the *maturity of Black Power*, if this is understood as a direct, lasting challenge to the system by Blacks after summoning their strength and uniting in unrelenting action against it for better or for worse." (emphasis ours).

In order to advance the liberation struggle, a clearly defined Programme of Action is a necessity. If we have vague, nebulous objects then we will still be chattering about conscientization and support in a general sense twenty years from now. There simply has to be a yardstick whereby we can ascertain if we are actually achieving our objectives or not and this is the vital task of this Congress.

NATION-BUILDING

The idea of nation-building towards a socialist Azania is an idea whose time has come. AZAPO has to consolidate itself in every facet of the Black experience — in labour, health, law, culture, religion, sports, education, social welfare and community development. As the revolutionary vanguard of the Azanian people, AZAPO must become as close to the masses of Black people as bones are to the flesh. It has a duty to reveal to the masses the essence of the situation in Azania, and explain the scope and depth of this situation, arouse the consciousness of the Black workers and their revolutionary determination and direct the struggle towards its goal.

A great revolutionary once said: "History is thorough and goes through many phases when taking an old form to the grave. And the last phase of historical development is comedy; so that the people may part with their past cheerfully."

The Azanian people and their vanguard, the AZANIAN PEOPLE'S ORGANISATION, are sure to obtain their liberation. However complacency is an enemy of the people in struggle. The Black people must shun alliances with reformist groups as exemplified by bantustans and liberal petit bourgeois organisations lest they share also in their defeats. For to falter here is to blunder at a crucial point because of which the Azanian working class will never be able either to rediscover revolutionary greatness in itself or to win new energy from the connections newly entered into, until *all classes* with which is contended in 1652, 1832, 1960, 1976 and 1984 themselves *lie prostrate beside it*.

 ONE PEOPLE ONE AZANIA