Staffrider

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Wole Soyinka The Nobel Lecture
Nadine Gordimer Censorship and the Artist
David Hlongwane His Life and Art
Chris Chapman Popular Music and the Markets of Apartheid
Barbie Schreiner The Progressive Arts Project
Short Stories and Poetry

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by David Hlongwane

COMMENT

In his introduction to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Letter to M. D'Alembert On The Theatre,* Allan Bloom points out that any suggestion in favour of censorship in the arts and the sciences is invariably regarded as arising from the oppressive interest of a particular party or sect. This is so because repression has without exception been deployed to either bolster corrupt and decaying regimes or to enable the establishment of tyrannical ones. A study of the relationship between censorship and the State will undoubtedly reveal that the intensification of censorship is directly related to the increase of tyranny in any given society.

This is precisely what is presently happening in South Africa. It is so despite claims by the State that its reform initiatives involve the extension and broadening of democracy to segments of the South African population which hitherto have been excluded from meaningful representation. The manipulative and basically unrepresentative nature of this exercise, initiated primarily to preserve the power and privileges of a white minority has, however, encountered such powerful opposition among the oppressed people of South Africa, that the rhetorical veneer of democratic reform was swiftly displaced by the weaponry of brutal repression.

Contrary to the customary and worn-out justifications advanced by the State that censorship is a prerequisite for morality and social stability, the present state of affairs in South Africa indisputably reveals the wide-ranging repressive measures unleashed by the State to be nothing more than the arbitrary, if systematic, deployment of coercion to destroy the rights of individuals, organizations and the media in general to freely participate in the social, political and cultural affairs of this society. It discloses to all those who are concerned with the establishment of a democratic society in South Africa that the prolonged legitimation crisis of the State has now reached such proportions that it will not hesitate to eradicate all opposition in its bid to retain power.

Over the past decade South Africans have experienced the gradual and almost inexorable erosion of basic rights to organize and participate in organizations of their choice as well as the right to disseminate or have access to information about what is happening in the very society in which they live. The past four years have seen the almost complete eclipse of whatever vestiges of the rule of law and freedom of speech were still present before the advent of three successive States of Emergency. Commencing with the first State of Emergency on 21 July 1985, the State's reply to profound challenges from the oppressed people of this country was to supplant the more than 100 legislative restrictions embodied in the Defence, Prisons, Internal Security and Publications Control Acts with Emergency Declarations which facilitated the rapid slide towards totalitarianism.

The upshot of this was initially the tightening of restrictions on foreign and local media and a subsequent frontal attack on all local media that resisted subordination to the dictates of the floundering State. As a result a number of publications have been shut down by the Minister of Home Affairs while others have been warned of pending closure if they do not heed the sectarian interest of the ruling clique.

How has this increased repression affected cultural activities? For a while, it seemed, as Nadine Gordimer suggests, that writers who had regularly fallen foul of the Publications Control Act were overlooked or deliberately tolerated as the machinery of oppression swung into force against political activists, organizations and the news media. Under these circumstances the emerging radical culture which has been flourishing alongside the national democratic movement established a space within which the aesthetics of liberation could be diligently pursued. But it is now clear that the State, as represented in the Minister of Home Affairs, has discovered what is known as alternative culture.

From the point of view of the State, the development of cultural activities with a radical anti-apartheid content and orientation is nothing more than means of incitement or fronts for fostering a revolutionary atmosphere. Given this distorted understanding coupled with the revolutionary paranoia of the State, the complete liquidation of every manifestation of criticism and opposition becomes imperative. At every opportunity South Africans are exhorted to regard this as indispensable for 'law and order, civilization and democracy'. While this programme of brutal repression has become the central means whereby the State hopes to contain the sustained struggle for liberation, progressive forces know that only a just and democratic social and political order will bring stability and peace. To regard this demand as a threat to the State, is to admit implicitly to the unjust and untenable nature of the status quo.

Cultural workers, be they writers, visual artists, performers, critics or commentators, can and will not acquiesce to this state of affairs. Aware of the fact that the present crisis does not automatically signal the imminent demise of the nationalist State, the creative initiative which has underpinned the search for an aesthetics of liberation commensurate with the immense courage, suffering, hope and aspirations of the fighting people of South Africa, must continue unabated.

In line with this *Staffrider* Volume 7 Number 2 has a variety of material to offer to its readers. Nadine Gordimer's essay on how censorship affects the artist should be seen as a central piece to this issue. Wole Soyinka's address on accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature has, as far as I know, not been published in its entirety in South Africa in spite of the fact that it is dedicated to Nelson Mandela and pertinent to literature and culture in this country. There is an interview with David Hlongwane, a young artist from Cape Town, along with reproductions of his work. Reports on some important re-

cent cultural events, of which Achmat Dangor's report on the question of the cultural boycott should be of special interest, also appear in this issue.

The new *Staffrider* with its compact format and broad critical perspective has been enthusiastically received by readers and critics. At its launch, in early June in Johannesburg, a large number of people from the cultural world gathered to listen to readings by contributors and individuals who had played important roles in the magazine over the past decade. The occasion marked the beginning of a new phase for the magazine which we hope will strengthen the interplay between radical cultural discourse and the struggle for fundamental social transformation.

Andries Walter Oliphant

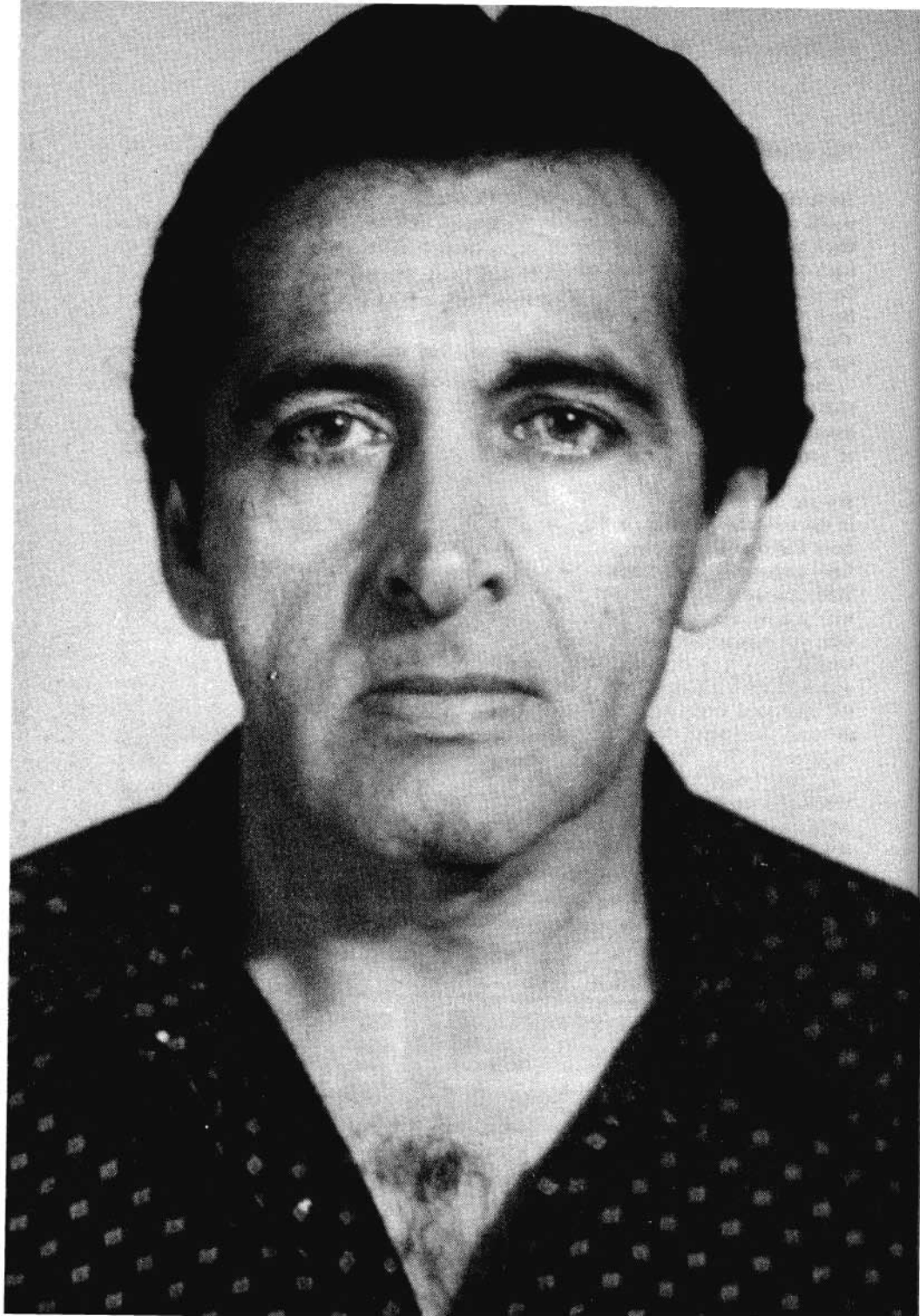
The Return of the Soldiers

Someday
you'll return my fighter brothers.
Back from exile
Back from the slums of London
Back from the kerbs of New York
Back from the gutters of Harlem;
You shall bring back
the core
in the many-sided truths
that led you away
from the bleeding land
of your birth.

We are one
in the solidarity of struggle
from Cairo to Cape Town
from Lagos to Dar es Salaam
With you on Afrika
with you against racist lies
with you against the sugar candy
bluff
with you against pillage
the oppressed world mourns
the starvation death of our Afrika
children.

When you return
Afrika will shout 'Uhuru!'
We shall receive your return
together with the children of Vietnam;
Where Saigon shall no longer
be a Coke & Pepsi town.

Mafika Pascal Gwala



The Concrete Fountain

Ahmed Essop

Nazir had been a teacher for many years at the Nirvana State High School. Then, inexplicably, he found himself subjected to a succession of transfers to other schools. Towards the end of the year he was appointed to a primary school – his fourth transfer. He objected. He sent a telegram to the Director of Indian Education demanding an explanation. The Director responded by posting him to a school in a distant country town. Nazir refused to go. He was visited by the Chief Inspector of Education, a tall, stooping, beige-suited man who told him: 'A good pupil obeys his teacher and a good teacher obeys his superior.' Nazir remained adamant. He was soon charged with insubordination and suspended from the teaching profession pending an inquiry.

Six months passed and the inquiry did not take place. Then he received a letter dismissing him 'in terms of the authority vested in the Director of Education by Act of Parliament'.

A journalist came to hear of Nazir's treatment and telephoned him to come to his office in downtown Johannesburg as he wished to write a report for his newspaper.

It was about ten thirty in the morning when Nazir reached the premises of *The Criterion,* a ten-storey glass-panelled tower that stood on a platform. Below the entrance was a rectangular concrete fountain; no water-plant grew there nor goldfish glittered. Along the wings, skirting the steps, were some cacti among grey rocks.

When Nazir came close to the entrance doors they opened automatically and he stepped into a foyer where an old lithograph machine was displayed. He went to the reception counter where a lady with straw-coloured hair was reading a picture story magazine.

'Can I help you?' she asked, looking up.

'I have an appointment with John Royce.'

'Fill in this form,' she said, pushing a paper towards him.

He filled in the required details: his name, his address, the journalist he wished to speak to, the purpose of his visit, his signature, the time and date.

He gave the receptionist the form. She took it, telephoned the journalist and said to Nazir, 'Mr Royce will see you in fifteen minutes. Please take a seat.'

There was a bench running along the wall and he sat down. People were coming and going through the foyer and he watched

them. A security officer in black uniform with guns in holsters at either side came from an inner door, spoke to the receptionist, laughed, and walked back in a strutting way. A copy of the week-end *Criterion,* an eighty-page tabloid, was lying on a small table. Nazir took it. As three-quarters of the space in the newspaper was taken up by advertisements and photographs of women's bodies, the rest could be read very quickly. He read about 'terrorists' who had left a bomb in the lift of a government building. Fortunately no one had been in the lift when it exploded.

The receptionist called Nazir and told him it was time for his appointment. 'Here, take this visitor's ticket and go through that door to the lifts. Mr Royce is on the fifth mezzanine floor.'

The ticket was a sticker. Nazir stuck it on his finger and when he entered the doorway he was confronted by two security officers who came out of a small side office. One of them was the officer he had seen.

'Where is your visitor's ticket?' he asked in an uncouth voice. Nazir showed it.

'You can go in.'

He passed through a corridor and came to the lifts.

After the interview, on his way out, Nazir found the corridor crowded. It was lunch time and those leaving the building formed a queue to show their identity cards to the two security officers. When he reached them he was asked for his card by the officer who had seen his ticket when entering.

'I am a visitor,' he said.

'Then where is your ticket?'

He could not remember what had happened to it. He had either crushed it inadvertently or it had fallen off his finger. No one had told him that he would have to show it when leaving.

'Stand aside,' the officer said. 'How do we know if you got permission to enter this building.'

'I filled in a form. Ask the receptionist.'

'I am not interested in her. Stand aside.'

Nazir watched. It seemed that the entire newspaper staff was leaving the building: journalists, editors, sub-editors, news-editors, photographers, typists. Some well-dressed cigar-smoking men gave Nazir the impression that they were the owners of *The Criterion.* Everyone showed their identity cards as though they were prisoners in a vast modern penitentiary.

When the stream subsided the officer turned to Nazir.

'Do you know we can charge you for trespassing, call the police, even shoot you.'

Nazir did not answer.

'What is your name and what is your business?'

At this moment John Royce appeared and seeing Nazir asked if he could help. Nazir explained to him.

'I interviewed him a short while ago,' John Royce told the officer.

'This is a security matter,' the officer said. 'It doesn't concern you.'

Nazir saw the journalist open his mouth, but he was unable to speak. His face flushed with embarrassment and he walked away meekly.

'Come here,' the officer said, going into his office. 'What is your name?'

Nazir told him.

The officer examined a number of forms similar to the one Nazir had completed at the receptionist's counter when he arrived.

'Your form is not here,' he said, turning angrily.

'I filled in one. Ask the receptionist.'

'I am not interested in her.'

'Can I look for it?'

'No! Write your name on this paper.'

Nazir wrote his name and the officer started looking again. He examined form after form, matching the name on each form with the name on the paper. At last he found it.

'Is this the form?'

'Yes.'

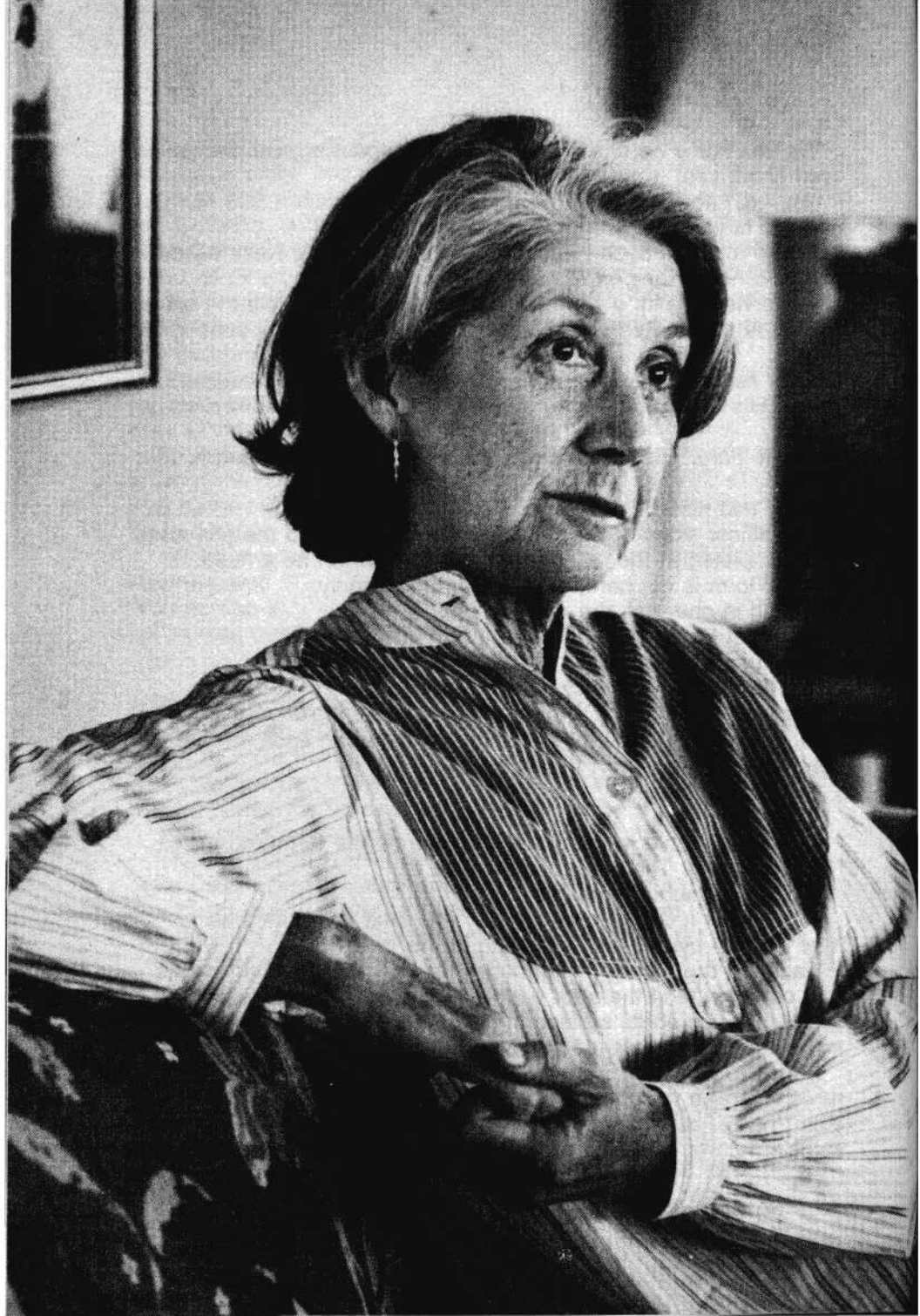
He looked at his watch, wrote the time on the form and asked Nazir to sign it. The other officer came in.

'Have you found his form?'

'Yes. He is just giving us trouble. The next time he comes here . . .' He placed his right hand on his gun.

Nazir left the building. He passed the concrete fountain on his way out. He stood there for a while looking at the livid water. He seemed to see on its surface the elongated face of the Chief Inspector who had visited him.

After two days, when he did not see John Royce's article in the newspaper, he telephoned him. The journalist told him that the editor had rejected the article as he did not consider it to be of sufficient news value. Nazir was not surprised.



CENSORSHIP AND THE ARTIST

Before 1963 there were no specific censorship laws in our country. Obvious pornography was spotted at the customs offices when it arrived at our ports from overseas. There was no formal *internal* censorship of books or the visual arts. Apparently it was presumed that the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church ensured that there would be no explicit sexual references in the work of local writers and other artists; and as for ideas subversive to the apartheid regimes, these would come only in the form of corruption from Europe and America. It was not thought that South Africans themselves would be capable of articulating such ideas except in the form of crude pamphlets which could be easily dealt with by seizure by the police and would be useful as evidence of treasonable activity. You didn't need a censorship board for that.

Of course, then, already, there were other forms of censorship being exercised informally, so to speak, at the discretion and whim of various individuals, groups, and petty authorities. Long ago, back in the early Twenties, a young man named William Plomer, who had been born of English parents in Louis Trichardt, educated in England, and then had come back to work for a farmer in Zululand, wrote a novel. It was called *Turbott Wolfe,* and, more or less contemporary with the publication of Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka,* it was the first fiction to expose race prejudice and in particular racial sexual taboos from the point of view of a white narrator. It contained one sentence that shocked readers more, far more, than the idealized love affair between the narrator and a Zulu peasant girl. One of the characters in the novel says: 'Native question? It's not a question, it's an answer!'

Now, this brief statement contained the heresy, the appalling suggestion that blacks would take their lives into their own hands in South Africa, that their presence would not be 'solved' by white oppression, but by their own ending of that oppression. And although, in the 1920s, that must have seemed a remote possibility, sufficient foreboding was present in readers for them to be frightened by that book. I don't specify 'white readers' because I think it goes without saying that at that time, no blacks read the novel. What happened? There was no internal censorship administration to deal with it, but the library committees responsible for buying books refused to buy it, and if it had slipped in, removed it from their shelves. A number of bookshops refused to sell it. In Durban, Plomer was shunned and reviled, and there were so many threatening letters and vitriolic editorials in the newspapers that it was not possible for Plomer to live in a South African community any longer. He had to leave the country. And the book, never banned, disappeared from our literature for

Photo: David Cooper

about 30 years. By the time it was republished anti-apartheid fiction was a dominant literary mode here that people had to accept, and his character's prophetic remark had been realized in movements such as the non-violent resistance campaigns, the pass-burnings and bus boycotts, and the rise of mass liberation movements. Events had overtaken prophecy; there was no sense in banning the book since it could not incite people to what they had already done.

What had happened to Mofolo's *Chaka*, and some of Dhlomo's writings which also contained statements that, if less pungently expressed, were heretical to white supremacy? Well, *Chaka*, as you may know, was first published translated into French by French missionaries in what was then Basutoland, so it was not until 1930 that it could be read in English and Sotho. I don't suppose it was stocked by South Africa's segregated white libraries, and if there were libraries for blacks outside institutions such as Fort Hare, I have still to hear about them. Evidently nobody thought writing by blacks of sufficient importance to incite or shock anyone . . . .

In 1936 – the year of the centenary commemoration of the Great Trek, remember – a novel appeared that was actually, officially banned. I do not know exactly what legislation was used, but it is not hard to see why, in the absence of a censorship structure, something had to be found to serve. The book was Stuart Cloete's *Turning Wheels*, it was about the trek, and it showed the trekkers as flawed human beings, not entirely shining heroes. They were also explicitly depicted making love — not married love, either. There was lust in the laager. So you can imagine the outcry. I was twelve years old at the time and I remember being very eager somehow to get hold of this wicked, sexy book that was forbidden even to grownups. I didn't succeed; it did not appear again until recent years, when it was passed by the Publications Control Board since it was by now tame in comparison with some of the demythifying works of young Afrikaans writers about their ancestors.

But by 1960 it was clear to the government that the customs officials were not competent to decide which imported works, whether nude statues or books, should not be allowed into the country. Sometimes these books, although published abroad, were the work of South African writers, over whom a special vigilance was to be kept. The customs men had a list of names of such writers (myself among them) but you can imagine them scratching their thick heads, trying to decide on the evidence of a title, a jacket illustration, and an author's name, alone, whether a book was subversive or indecent or both. It was decided the books would actually have to be *read* by someone.

There was also the problem of internal censorship – local publishing of more than coffee-table books was beginning, and writers were getting wise

to the fact that if you published within South Africa, there was no procedure of censorship to threaten your work, except for the unusual and unlikely means of prosecution in the courts.

The first draft of a Censorship Bill was drawn up, and, as is customary, the public was invited to make submissions about its provisions. We writers and artists were asked to help devise means of censoring ourselves. The writers' organizations that existed at the time fell for this ploy made in the name of democratic participation. The PEN club, for example, asked for the Minister's assurance that 'competent literary experts' would be the judges of what should be banned and what should not.

They got the Minister's assurance. And when the Censorship Act was finally passed in 1963, there was established a roster of judging committees whose names and identities were not, and never were to be, revealed. The 'competence' of these people was anonymous.

One or two writers, like myself, had opposed the Act from the beginning three years before; you didn't have to look into a crystal ball to see that once you agree to accept censorship conditionally, you have endorsed it in principle and you will have to accept whatever means are used to apply it, in the end.

At least, in its first legislation, the Act allowed the writer to appeal to the courts of the land against a banning. A later amendment took away this right, and substituted a system that by-passed the due legal processes of the courts entirely. A Publications Appeal Board was set up. The Director himself, a government employee, chose its members. The appellant may hire lawyers to state his or her case against the banning of a book, play or film, but the verdict will come from appointees of the Censorship mechanism itself.

I am not going to go through the lengthy list of works that were banned in the Sixties and Seventies. They include books by Mothobi Mutloatse, Ingoapele Madingoane, André Brink, John Miles, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Miriam Tlali, Oswald Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, and three books of my own. Plays were restricted rather than banned outright, in most cases; some could be shown only in particular places, to audiences of a limited size. A few – very few – visual artists had the police come and remove certain of their pictures from exhibitions. It was the novelists, poets and essayists who were the main victims of censorship. Our ranks were swelled by those, such as Don Mattera, who were forbidden to publish at all; and by the exiled writers – Nkosi, Mphahlele, Modisane, La Guma, Brutus etc. – whose work could not be read here because they were listed under a blanket ban on their writings and pronouncements.

What effect did these book-bannings and play-bannings and the occasional removal of works of visual art have on writers and artists?

People who are lucky enough to live in countries where there is freedom of expression often remark that they almost envy the stimulation of the challenge of a banning; and they have the peculiar idea that it makes a book 'sell well'. They are innocent rather than ignorant; innocent of the fact that a book is dead, in South Africa, if it is banned, and no writer of any worth would like to think that his book would find readers overseas not for its qualities but for the spurious distinction of being banned at home. And unlike Poland, for example, where a banned book is quickly printed and distributed underground, we have never managed to create underground distribution here on more than a pitifully inadequate scale.

I think the fact is that although it was not a boost to creativity to have a book banned, and therefore to have the writer's essential means of communication with his own people cut off for the time being, established writers at least had the consolation that not *all* of their works had disappeared, and they went ahead writing the next book without allowing themselves to brood about the possibility of what might happen to it. I don't believe that there was ever any self-censorship. The unpredictability of the censors' decisions was, oddly, something to be counted on: the book you didn't expect to get away unscathed, did, and the one you thought certain to pass, was banned.

It was the beginning writers, the potential writers, on whom the existence of the Publications Act had the most depressing effect. They felt inhibited, uncertain, every time they sat down to write: would they ever be published? And publishers were less likely to take a risk with them; for even with the faceless, nameless censorship committees there was probably more tolerance for the occasional lapse (from the censors' point of view) in the work of writers whose other books were not banned. So at a period when personal and societal frustrations were rising steeply, terrible and traumatic events were taking place among us, people moved to write about these did so without much faith in reaching readers.

Why do I talk about these bannings, and the psychological pressure of the hand of the censors on writers and artists in the past tense? The Censorship Act is still with us, with its over 90 definitions of what is considered undesirable.

The fact is that it is being imposed less and less. None of the books by the writers I have mentioned is any longer under ban. All have been released. Of the exiled writers, some of the works of those listed appear here in South Africa and we don't – we certainly won't – enquire how or why this happens. I watch the lists of bannings which appear weekly, and in the past months

the only works of fiction that have been banned are those published by Kliptown Press in Britain, and we know why that is – Kliptown is an ANC publishing house. The single exception I know of is Mandla Langa's novel, *Tenderness of Blood,* coming from another publisher, and also banned.

Fiction by foreign writers never seems to be banned, any longer. Censorship used to have two criteria for bannings: one, sexual explicitness; two, liberation politics and theory. The tutelary guides who breathed down the committees' necks while they were reading were, apparently, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Security Branch. The *tannie* from the DRC seems to have slunk away; explicit sex doesn't get the chop whether in South African literature or books from abroad, and you have only to go to the cinema, to any of our indigenous plays, or to art exhibitions to see that sexual – including homosexual – explicitness is not banned. The weekly bulletins issued by the Publications Control Board consist of lists of an extraordinary mixture of radical pamphlets, tracts, trade union publications, reports of congresses in remote countries of Eastern Europe and Latin America, with hard porn in the form of posters, calendars, and the memoirs of prostitutes.

This should be an occasion for rejoicing, for writers and artists. But we are also ordinary citizens, men and women living and working under the laws that restrict and inhibit and mentally impoverish South Africa. The State of Emergency is the culmination of many laws that have been steadily taking over and extending the functions of censorship for some years, sending out tentacles far beyond the reach of a censorship board, in response to situations that dwarf the problem of keeping mere writers and artists in line.

The problem of controlling freedom of expression in its broadest sense is a priority on an enormous scale, for the government now. There is not much time to bother about the small minority of creative people – always an obstreperous, iconoclastic lot – when the urgency is to control what influences the masses: the mass media.

This brings up another fact that artists, particularly writers, have to face. Our influence can be ignored by the censors at a time like the present because yet another form of censorship, one that comes from the roots of our society and has been there for generations has always controlled our high potential influence and rendered it negligible. South Africa has a boasted high rate of literacy, but it is school primer or comic book literacy, not book literacy. You know the reasons: the majority of the population gets a third-rate education, and even that has been sporadic since black schools have been for more than ten years drawn up in the battle lines. Libraries in major cities have only recently been opened to all races. In the smaller towns and dorps they are still

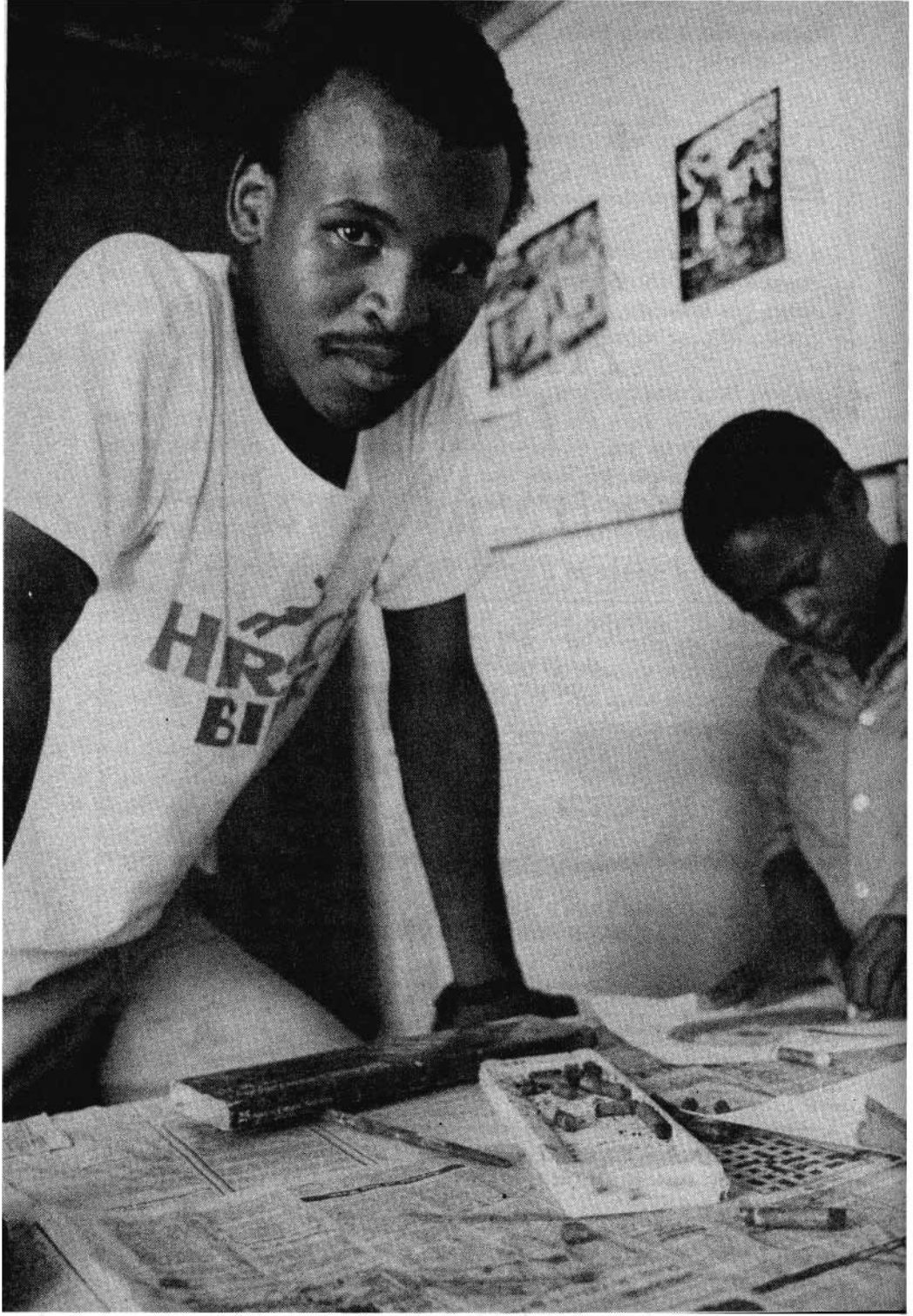
segregated, whites only. And most ghettos and all black schools I know of still don't have anything worthy of being called a library. Writers cannot be a cultural force worth censoring until there is a mass population that can, and will have the facilities to, read our books.

If you ask yourself why writers are having a breather now, the answer is there for you: how many people read books, in comparison with newspaper readership, radio listeners, TV watchers? Mass impact is aural and visual, immediate. Books take time to act upon the human personality. This country is living from day to day.

There is no occasion for the writers and artists to feel privileged. We are not, as it might appear, being 'left alone' to do our work while the heat is on the journalists and other media workers. For we need information just as anyone else does. Creatures of our time and place, we cannot fulfil the creative task of going deeper than the surface of social reality if information on our social and political situation is withheld from us. The banning of journalists and the closure of newspapers and journals in order to stifle information and weaken independent thinking is a *general* cultural deprivation from which we are not, in our calling, exempt. On the contrary, our task to express, transformed in words, in paint, in film or on a stage, the lives of the people we belong to and live among in our country cannot be fulfilled while we are kept from knowing what is happening to them in the next town, when our knowledge of vital events is restricted to the bald statement of the numbers killed, when the words of a speaker at a meeting can't be quoted to those of us who were not present, when a photographer is turned away by the police or the army from a street drama that will not be recorded as our real, current history.

That is the vast extent of censorship today. It is far more fundamental than anything the Publications Control Board could do.

Nadine Gordimer



DAVID HLONGWANE
His Life and Art

David Hlongwane and Robert Zithulele Siwanqaza were born in Worcester. In 1984 they travelled to Cape Town to look for an arts school.

They started at Community Arts Project at the beginning of 1985. It was a full-time course which lasted for two years. At first there were seven students; later this dropped to five.

David is now teaching in Khayelitsha and in Langa at Vineyard Christian Fellowship. He has exhibited locally and abroad.

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ROBERT: When did you start drawing?
DAVID: I started drawing by looking at books and magazines. At that time I had no instructor. I was teaching myself.
ROBERT: So your first opportunity to get formal training was at Community Arts Project?
DAVID: Yes. We were invited by Derek Joubert in 1984 to start a full-time course in January 1985.
ROBERT: Did you leave your job when the course started?
DAVID: No, I had already left my job. I was a labourer at Rainbow Chicken Farms, in Worcester. I learnt how to survive as a labourer. How to earn a salary from hard labour. How to spend it wisely, or else . . .
ROBERT: What made you leave your job?
DAVID: It was racism and exploitation that drove me away. I continued drawing at home, teaching myself.
ROBERT: Did you look for another job?
DAVID: Not at all. I just left Zweletemba for Cape Town to attend a welding course.
ROBERT: Which school was it?
DAVID: It was Kmetcon Welding School. I went there in 1984.
ROBERT: Didn't you want to use the knowledge and skills you learnt at the chicken farm?
DAVID: No, I never returned to that job. I stayed in the township, unemployed.
ROBERT: Did you have any intention of going back to school?
DAVID: No. I left school due to the ignorance of our teachers. The system teaches them to avoid reality and alternative education. You know, the system

Photo: Roger Meintjies

trains them to be bureaucratic. They work in a rigid framework designed by whites for exploitation and oppression.
ROBERT: You mean you didn't look for any art school in Worcester?
DAVID: I tried many art schools, but I was not accepted. I had no matric. I wanted to be trained as an artist. I was driven to frustration.
ROBERT: Did you have a way of overcoming it?
DAVID: I decided to join youth organizations and participate in their activities. Our aim was to organize the youth. To get them away from playing in the streets and getting into trouble. We were working at grassroots level.
ROBERT: How did you find out about the Community Arts Project?
DAVID: I found out that CAP was working with progressive organizations. Since I was interested in art, I made inquiries.
ROBERT: Were you certain that you would be accepted?
DAVID: Positively sure. So we started at the beginning of 1985. I was glad. I worked with you, Sophie Peterse, Eunice Sefako, Cameroon Voyiya, Billy Mandindi and Andile Siyo.
ROBERT: What do you think about the problems the group faced and which still remain unsolved?
DAVID: Ja. I still remember those problems in the studio. The country was chaotic. There was violence every single day. There were transport difficulties to attend the workshops in Cape Town, but we continued.
ROBERT: Do you still want to further your studies in art?
DAVID: Sure, sure. What matters is finance. Funds are hard to come by.
ROBERT: You didn't pay much attention to oil painting. I noticed you were always making ceramic sculptures and graphic prints. Why?
DAVID: Simply because I don't like painting too much.
ROBERT: What do you prefer?
DAVID: Well, I prefer printmaking.
ROBERT: Who inspired you?
DAVID: Two people. They are Kathe Kollwitz and Manfred Zylla.
ROBERT: What influences you in your work?
DAVID: It is the situation in my country. I didn't want to throw stones so I decided to use visual art as a weapon for our liberation. Another thing that caused me to document the situation through my art was the death of my cousin-brother, in Worcester, in 1985.
ROBERT: Do you mean art should be political?
DAVID: I don't want it to be too political, but one must not just draw fantastical pictures. Artists must get involved and be aware of the long struggle for freedom. We must change this framework created for the people by the white

ruling class.
ROBERT: What do you think about working in an oppressive country?
DAVID: It is hard. Black artists are oppressed in all aspects of life. They are exploited even in the galleries. We don't have proper studios. There are no jobs. There is no financial assistance.
ROBERT: Can you give me an example of how black artists are oppressed and exploited.
DAVID: Private collectors and galleries buy works from white artists at high prices. Bear in mind, the subject matter is often not worthwhile. Black artists struggle to sell their work. They want to buy our work cheaply and resell it at high prices. Just for profit. It is exploitation.
ROBERT: Do you think black artists can survive under these conditions?
DAVID: We will. The only problem is that the white market is dominant. You must have some qualification, perhaps and become known if you want to sell well.
ROBERT: Is it possible to alter this dominant white market?
DAVID: Ja, we can alter it. We have to seek alternative venues. We have to look for financial backing. We must teach our people how to approach the arts. It is a long process. We must create jobs for artists but it will take time.
ROBERT: Should artists try to form a shield to stop this exploitation?
DAVID: What do you mean?
ROBERT: I mean, form a national organization. Is it possible?
DAVID: Ja. It should be formed so that we can overcome this dominant white market. It is very urgent that we do this.
ROBERT: What do you think about radical art?
DAVID: I see myself as a radical artist. That is what I want to be and should be. When our frustration is growing higher we can turn our pencils and brushes into AK-47s.
ROBERT: Are you concerned about imprisoned artists?
DAVID: Yes, very much. But I admire their courage and regard them as heroes of our people. We have to learn from them.
ROBERT: Can you say something about artists like Thami Mnyele, Gérard Sekoto and others?
DAVID: They showed the world how we struggle in S.A. It is painful. They have shown this world that we are really oppressed but that we are also fighting.
ROBERT: What do artists like you working within communities get involved in?
DAVID: We make banners, posters and print T-shirts. We have taught the communities how to make these things and utilize the arts as a whole. As I said, we must work towards liberation and justice.

ROBERT: Where have you exhibited so far?
DAVID: At the University of Stellenbosch, CAP, the Durban Arts Association, in West Germany, Gugulethu, at the CASA Festival in Amsterdam, COSATU events and many other local places.
ROBERT: Have you organized a one-man show yet?
DAVID: No. I have mostly submitted my works in group shows.
ROBERT: I noticed you are now working on some cartoons. What inspired you to do this?
DAVID: I was influenced by other cartoonists. You can even make political statements without writing down a single word.
ROBERT: Do you intend to exhibit your cartoons?
DAVID: No. Not now. I first want to establish a collection.

Robert Zithulele Siwanqaza

Opposite: Domestic Worker, 1986
Overleaf left: Pain in Detention, 1987
Overleaf right: At Home, 1986
Untitled, 1986


NO TO
WITDOE

To Speak the Truth, Laughing

Rose Zwi

Anna Bronstein began paying her dues the night she spent in the cells at John Vorster Square. They had been owing since, as a child, she had seen a policeman beating up a black man in the street. She had run away, sobbing, to her father's workshop.

'For this we fled from the Lithuanian pogromists?' her father had said, getting up from his old Singer machine and taking her into his arms. 'Will we never stop running? From one continent to another, and where's it better? The *goldine medina,'* he added bitterly, holding her close until her sobs subsided. 'The golden land. For whom? Not for us and not for the *schwartze.* My family was right to remain in the old country; there's a time to stop running.'

You never knew your grandfather, Anna wrote to her son Adam as she stretched out on the dirty grey blanket on the floor of the cell, *except from photographs. You look a bit like him: tall, thin, with the kindest brown eyes imaginable. When his whole family was massacred by the Nazis, his heart cracked like the floes of his* shtetl's *river and his blood turned to ice. 'I live,' he said, 'only to grieve.' He did not grieve long. And before he died, wonder-tailor that he was, he sewed for me a garment of memory and guilt that could only be sloughed with my flesh. But your grandmother – short, round, bespectacled like me – gave me the antidote to despair: the* bittere gelechter, *the ironic laughter which sustained our people through centuries of exile. It assuaged my anguish, tempered my guilt, and drove you crazy throughout your childhood. You think you can laugh at everything, you used to say, missing the underlying pain. Almost everything, I'd reply: Why should one not speak the truth, laughing? A quote from Horace, I told you. You thought Horace was a talking horse invented by Walt Disney.*

Anna rolled onto her left side and looked at the other women in the cell. Five of them lay sleeping in the opposite corner; the four nuns sat quietly near the barred door, heads bent, in silent meditation, and the rest sat around Joan, the student, talking in whispers. Three weeks ago Anna had not even known of their existence. She lay down again, cushioning her head on her folded arms against the cold stone floor. There must be a name, she thought, for people who compose letters in their heads that never get written or read.

Opposite: Dollar Brand Salutes SA, 1987
No to Witdreke, 1986

Her parents' heritage of laughter and despair had immobilized her politically. Armed with collective memory and perspective, Anna had developed an acute historical sense, which, however, was impaled on her mother's ironic laughter, a twin-edged weapon: It cut through cant in both just and unjust causes, exposing not only the tyranny of frightened despots, but also the rigidity and earnestness of the radicals and the limp humanism of the liberals. As for the blacks, they withdrew to their insulated ghettos from which an unambiguous message filtered through: Don't colonize our suffering, you whites; this is our struggle.

Unable to commit herself, Anna had joined movements and left movements, signed petitions and marched in protests, all of which became increasingly absurd to her.

'We make useless gestures while we retain our privileges and power,' she had said to her husband, Simon. 'Tokenism, that's all it is.'

'So make a revolution,' Simon replied, 'or leave the country.'

Simon had had a way of dismissing her conflicts with a logical, laconic remark that paralysed her completely.

'I can do neither,' she said.

'Then don't agonize.'

'You simplify,' she replied.

'I have as much right to be in Africa as any black, provided I make a contribution to the country,' he said.

'Like teaching Chaucer to white University students.'

'There is no grand solution to the problems of Africa,' Simon replied loftily. 'Everyone must work out his own destiny.'

Which was precisely what he did, about a year later.

In the meantime, Anna wrestled with her conscience. Like a lapsed believer on her death bed, she reverted to her former faith, trying to evade the hell-fires of hopelessness. She joined a civil rights movement, worked in their advice office, and stood on lonely vigils with placards that reflected the issues of the moment: *Troops out of Namibia; NO to Apartheid; Charge or Release Detainees; End Conscription; Release Mandela!* The women stood alone; to be in sight of one another contravened the Riotous Assemblies Act and they were committed to protest within the law.

But what if the law is repressive and is framed to safeguard a powerful minority? Anna, at that time, was reading Thoreau. '. . . Law never made men a whit more just; and by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made agents of injustice.' Civil disobedience, she thought, might be the answer.

The first test presented itself during a protest against detention without trial. The demonstration was planned for the rush hour, in the late afternoon. She was to take her stand at five o'clock outside the University at the Jan Smuts Avenue entrance.

As she drove through the cool green suburbs, saturated with the smell of newly-mown grass and damp earth, Anna removed her glasses, shutting out the harsh reality of ever-higher garden walls, iron security gates, and burglar alarm plaques. She saw only a green tunnel of trees with people of indeterminate colour walking along the pavements. Observing the world through a misty gaze, however, had its hazards. Like the red traffic light she drove through because it merged with the brilliant hibiscus flowers hanging over a garden wall. Then, further on, she wondered why those large yellow caravans had chosen to outspan in the parking lot near the University tennis courts. Only when she put on her glasses did she see the blue-uniformed police.

She drove slowly up Jan Smuts Avenue, lined by armed police one side and students on the other, in time to see Martha Egdus being bundled into a police van. 'This is a legal demonstration!' she was shouting, clinging to her placard – RELEASE ALL DETAINEES.

That might have been me, Anna thought as she turned into a side street lined with students' cars. No parking, I'll go home, she decided. No point in offering myself up for arrest at this stage. But she couldn't drive away. Abandoning her car in a no-stop area, she hurried back to Jan Smuts Avenue. The police had dispersed but the students still stood around in groups.

'They've arrested the women all along the road,' a student told her.

'But it's a legal demonstration,' Anna said. 'They're not in sight of one another.'

'Since when is legality a protection against brute force?' someone asked.

'I was supposed to take over from her,' Anna said.

'Come join us. We're going to make our own posters.'

They looked so vulnerable in their jeans and sloppy shirts; pale, dry-lipped, indignant, pitting themselves against those strutting policemen concealed in their yellow vans down at the tennis courts. Adam might have been among them. Anna longed to embrace them, protect them, send them home. Instead she found herself saying: 'I've left my car in a no-parking area.'

'Then you'd better move it, lady,' a sarcastic voice told her. 'You mustn't under any circumstances break the law.'

Later that evening, she gave Adam an edited version of the day's events. You can't tell a son everything.

Adam's call-up papers had arrived at about the same time as the black townships erupted into what the news media called 'unrest'. And out of the dust and dry grass of the veld, names the whites had never heard of hit the headlines: Sebokeng, Bophelong, Boipatong, Tumahole, Duduza, Tsakane, Kagiso . . . Burning, stoning, singing and dancing, the young ones of the townships defied the Army which had been sent in to 'pacify' them with bullets and teargas.

'There's no way I'm going into the Army,' Adam had said. 'Especially now. But I don't want to leave South Africa. This is where I belong.'

'Leave,' Anna urged him. 'I'll carry on with what you call The Struggle.'

Adam had looked at her – middle-aged, grey-haired, bespectacled and podgy – and laughed.

'You'll have to go into training first,' he said, poking gently at the tyre of fat around her waist. 'Twice around the golf course before breakfast. Better still, instead of breakfast.'

'You think you can laugh at everything,' she mocked.

'Almost everything. I had a good teacher.'

Anna had paged through his army call-up papers and found a letter addressed to her and to the absent Simon: *'Dear Parents . . . within the next few weeks your son will report for his National Service. As parents we realize that you are concerned about his well-being . . .'* Adam's call-up instructions were printed in green: *'In accordance with the Defence Act, 1957, you have been alloted . . .'*

'They can't spell,' she had said to Adam rubbing her tingling nose, then added thoughtfully, 'You could, of course, shoot off your big toe. Your paternal great-uncle Itzik did just that when he was summoned to the Czar's army.'

'But he wasn't a long-distance runner, was he?' Adam had said. 'My father gave me a good training.' Simon, while he still lived with them, used to take Adam on his daily run around the golf course. Until he ran off in the other direction.

'True, Itzik didn't run very far. From Yaneshik to Zagar, perhaps, but he never left the old country. Not that it helped. The Czar didn't get him but the Nazis did.'

After Adam left the country, Anna's progress towards the cells at John Vorster Square had been swift and direct. She and her fellow-felons, a disparate collection of students, academics,

housewives and nuns, had been shamed into action by a black woman at a meeting where Anna had read a paper on civil disobedience:

'. . . all our sons,' Anna had said, 'black, white, brown, are being drawn into a tragic conflict which cannot be resolved through violence but which nonetheless has already claimed hundreds of young lives . . . Many of our white sons have fled rather than serve in an Army which enforces a deplorable system; many of our black sons have crossed the border for training . . . The time for making peace is now, before the land is saturated with the blood of all our sons . . .'

I'd like to say that there wasn't a dry eye in the audience, Anna had imagined another of her letters to Adam, *but that would be an exaggeration. There was certainly an incisive voice that cut through the rhetoric: Nomsa Modise's. 'You white women talk and do nothing,'* she said. *'Our children are shot and arrested; yours serve in the army or run away. If you really want to show solidarity with black mothers, go into the townships and tell them.' So we're going into the townships . . .*

'If you go into the townships during the State of Emergency,' Lisa, a civil rights lawyer told them, 'you'll be arrested. And remember how volatile the mood is. Anything can spark off violence, even a group of tame white women.'

'When they release the dogs,' a seasoned protester advised, 'stand still, or they'll tear the flesh off your arms. And if there's teargas, cover up your eyes and nose and walk away quietly, don't panic.'

After this invaluable advice, their numbers dropped from thirty-seven white women and three black women, to nineteen whites and three blacks. Reality, Anna discovered, was an effective extinguisher of moral ardour. Hers flickered dangerously, reviving only when she remembered her promise to Adam, Thoreau's essay on Civil Disobedience, and her father's injunction to stop running.

'Shall we pray?' Sister Imelda had asked softly as they were about to leave for the township.

Anna liked the nuns. They were pink-cheeked and serene though Sister Caroline did tremble as they joined hands to form a circle. If she, with her Connections, is so nervous, how should I feel? Anna thought.

'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,' Sister Imelda began. Anna raised her head from her chest and looked around the circle: She was the only Jew among them and an agnostic at that. A little prayer wouldn't hurt, she thought as she lowered her head again.

Dear Anon – even her prayer took the form of a letter – Please arrange a roadblock so's we'll be able to retreat with honour. And if you can't manage that, please give me strength to cope with my claustrophobia. You'll have noticed that all week I've practised incarceration in the toilet, but it's not the same; I could get out any time I liked. I don't want to disgrace myself before the Enemy and go stark staring crazy. You know how I panic in closed-in places.

Friends drove them into the township. There was no roadblock, and Anna's scepticism about the efficacy of prayer was reaffirmed. Her hands grew clammier and her tongue felt like sandpaper. When they were dropped off in the open lot opposite the police station, her stomach lurched and heaved. What, she wondered, if I get an attack of diarrhoea? Call off your hounds, sergeant major, I have to go to the lav. Heroic. She drew back her shoulders, raised her head, and tightened her sphincter. Above all, one had to retain one's dignity.

'Let's sing Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika,' one of the younger women suggested. Anna wondered if she was an agent provocateur; the dogs would maul them before they could say 'Nkosi'.

'The only anthem I know is God Save the Queen,' Anna said.

'Perhaps a silent demonstration is better,' said Debra, a very large, very black woman whom Anna had often seen at meetings. Anna moved nearer to her. She hardly knew any of the others; they had met only a few times before. From across the road Lisa, their lawyer, waved reassuringly at them. She should worry, Anna found herself thinking.

They drew their white calico bibs over their heads. *Solidarity with Black Mothers,* hers read. *Release the Children; Troops out of the Townships; End the State of Emergency; No to Conscription,* were the other messages written on the bibs in varying degrees of calligraphic skill. They had no strategy, no plans, only words. Linking arms in groups of five, they crossed the main road, forming a long, straggling line opposite the police station, in whose cells large numbers of black children were being held.

How long is a protest? someone had asked at their last meeting. No one knew. Until we're chewed up by dogs, poisoned by gas or shot dead by the riot squad, Anna thought as she watched four policemen stride out of the police station towards them. They wore jeans and floral shirts but had holstered guns around their waists. She'd rather burst than ask to use their toilets.

'This is an illegal gathering,' the tallest one shouted.

Why, Anna wondered as gooseflesh exploded all over her body, were law-breakers thought to be hard of hearing? They'd have

heard him had he whispered. He filled the place with menace as he took up an aggressive stance in the middle of the road. A worn-out horse and cart, a battered car and two bicycles came to a halt beside him. There were few other people in the street.

'You've got three minutes to disperse!' he boomed.

'Don't move,' a whisper rustled down the line. They drew closer together, supporting one another through linked arms. 'And sit down on the pavement when time's up.'

How difficult it is to break laws, Anna thought as the ferret-faced policeman shouted. 'Time's up! Disperse immediately or we'll take action!'

And how scary it is to put oneself outside its protection. A life-time's socialization prompted her to rise and retreat when the order was given, and it was with difficulty that she remained sitting in the dust. From where did the young blacks draw the courage to pit themselves against such power, to defy authority? She knew the answer, of course, but she hadn't articulated it until the ungentle arm of the law yanked her up from the pavement and marched her, together with the other women, into the police station: The laws that protect us, oppress the blacks. And the blacks, as the time-worn saying insists, have nothing to lose but their chains.

The lines of battle were now drawn: she had shed her suburban anonymity and joined the transgressors, a decision she had always postponed, albeit with guilt: Adam's too young; it's not our struggle; I'm not a joiner; the blacks don't want us or need us . . . Her father's heritage, finally, demanded acceptance; she had never managed to shrug it off, not with laughter and not with tears. I owe, I owe, I owe, she acknowledged, just as a religious Jew smites his chest on the Day of Atonement, crying: I have sinned, I have sinned, I have sinned! What she owed and how exactly she had sinned was not altogether clear to her, but it was a relief, finally, to stop running and to take a long, hard look at what was pursuing her.

No dogs, no teargas, she continued her letter to Adam as the women were roughly propelled into the Charge Office where black and white policemen stood behind the large wooden counter, bemused by the unusual haul. *And no eager crowds to cheer us on. Not that we'd planned to storm the Bastille and release the children – though that might have been a more appropriate action – but we were disappointed that only a few stragglers sauntered by, wondering, no doubt, what the hell those white women – with three black ones in their midst – were doing in the township, so far from home. In vain our messages fluttered over our agitated*

breasts; only the long-sighted could read them. And the police, of course.

In the two hours it took to enter their names and ages into a book, to have their bibs removed by a policewoman after they had refused to do so themselves, and for whispered consultations to be held over the telephone between the station commander and Higher Authorities, the women stood around or sat on the floor, no less dusty than the pavement, and talked among themselves.

'Are you at University?' Anna asked a long-haired girl who was reading a dog-eared copy of *The Canterbury Tales.*

'Ja. At Wits. Majoring in English.' She raised her book as though it were made of lead. 'I hope they keep us in for a week. I've got an exam on Monday and I'm totally unprepared for it.'

'Does Julian Bronstein still lecture on Chaucer?' Anna asked.

'Ja, he's great.'

'His students always did admire him,' Anna said drily.

'Bronstein! I didn't connect it. Are you related to him?'

'Only by marriage.'

'Oh! I thought . . .'

'That he was married to a younger woman?' Anna laughed. 'He is now. But he does touch up his hair, you know,' she leaned forward confidentially. 'Light Natural Brown. I used it too. Until he ran out on us, taking the tint with him.'

Some things are harder to laugh at than others.

'Us?'

'Me and our son Adam who will be twenty-three next May.'

'Gosh! What does your son do?'

'He's a long distance runner,' Anna said, moving towards the three black women who were standing in the fortress-like courtyard.

'I was so nervous,' she confided to Debra. She did not know the other two women. 'This is my first time,' she added.

'Theirs too,' Debra said. 'And they are also shaking. Me, I've been inside for five years. Under the Terrorism Act. After '76 I used to take the young ones over the border. Then someone pointed to me.'

'Five years.'

'In solitary most of the time,' Debra smiled grimly, passing her hand over her intricately plaited hair that formed geometric designs on her gleaming head.

'That's what scares me most; solitary,' Anna said. 'Weren't you panicky? I'd go mad within hours. How did you survive?'

'I was very angry. I danced and stamped my feet and sang

freedom songs until my voice was finished and my body was tired. Then I slept.'

'Do you have family, children?'

'Four daughters. Three of them are in exile and I haven't seen them for nine years. The youngest is still at school. When there's school.'

'I have one son, an architect. He's been in exile for seven months. He wouldn't go to the army,' Anna said.

'I know. I heard you speak at that meeting. You got to be strong. Strong,' Debra repeated, gripping Anna's arm firmly.

'Why did you join us?' Anna asked, rubbing her nose furiously. 'You've done more than enough.'

'We got to be together, man. To show them,' Debra said, nodding contemptuously towards the counter.

Lisa, who had been speaking quietly to the station commander, now came over to the women.

'You're being moved to John Vorster Square,' she told them.

'And the black women?' someone asked.

'They're remaining here.'

'This is a hell-hole. We must refuse to leave without them. That's what we're protesting about,' Anna said.

'No point in complicating matters,' Lisa said briskly. 'It won't help. They keep black and white prisoners apart. I'll see you at John Vorster in about an hour or so. I'll contact your families and try for bail.'

'I'll demand that we be locked up together,' Anna said.

Debra laughed, kindly. Anna reddened: she was acting like a white madam only minutes after she had renounced her privileges. She walked resolutely towards the counter. Debra was right; anger held off fear.

'Excuse me,' she said to the station commander who was writing into a large black book. He looked up. 'We're all in this together. We don't want to be separated from the black women.'

He straightened up, bared his nicotine-stained teeth under his thin moustache, and wedging his hand into the back pocket of his jeans said, 'What do you think this is, lady, a morning market?'

'A humorist,' Anna thought bitterly as she walked away. 'Such brilliant repartee. Our middle class slips must be showing. But what can we expect if we turn up at the barricades armed with a lawyer? Rosa Luxemburgs we're not.'

'Follow Sergeant Loubser out to the vans!' the station commander shouted, thumping on the wooden desk.

Anna put her arms around Debra.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I'm sorry we'll never really be together.'

'Be strong,' Debra said.

They were all very quiet as they got into the yellow wire-windowed van which rattled through the township at great speed, blurring the shabby matchbox houses. The people didn't even look at the van; it was part of their everyday lives. In a shaky voice the Chaucer student started singing 'We Shall Overcome', and Anna thought of Adam's guitar-playing days.

What did you mean, get into training? she continued her dialogue with Adam. *There I go, all 150 pounds of me, pounding the red path between the oak trees, my cellulite dimpling in the mottled morn, getting fit for the Struggle. 'Morning, morning, morning', I grunt to the joggers, the strollers and the overalled blacks who are actually going someplace along that path. If I'm getting so fit, I keep asking myself, why am I always so exhausted? And to what purpose? All I'm doing in the Struggle is sitting down and getting up, moving out of police stations into wire-windowed yellow vans. For that I need to run five kilometres every day? My pulse rate, at the moment of writing, is higher than when I'm torturing my Achilles tendons. Perhaps all one needs to keep fit is to live in a state of fear and tension. By that measure, we must be one of the healthiest nations in the world.*

Anna had been greatly relieved to be locked into a very large cell with the rest of the group. Its grime and dust, the seatless toilet and the headless shower, did not worry her. There was space, and through the barred door, she could look onto the corridor that ran between two rows of cells. Some had bars like theirs; others, the kind she had dreaded, were shut off by heavy wooden doors. None of them seemed occupied.

If I could be assured of such accommodation, she added a postscript to her letter to Adam, *I'd become a full-time revolutionary, not a mere week-end protester.*

'If you hear shouting or screaming during the night,' Lisa said when she visited them later that evening, 'try to ignore it. The security prisoners are kept on the floor below. The Commandant has hinted that you'll be released on bail tomorrow. You're obviously an embarrassment; they don't know how to label you. And then, Anna? You'll probably be charged with staging a gathering prohibited under the Emergency Regulations and for entering a black residential area without a permit. If they choose to trivialize it, the Magistrate will caution and discharge you. If he wants to make an example of you, you may get 100 days or R200. You'll refuse to pay the fine? Not morally guilty? That's a

legitimate plea, but do remember you'll be sent to Diepkloof where they have only single cells, small ones,' she said, looking at Anna.

The group sitting around Joan, the Chaucer student, were becoming very animated; they were preparing a statement to the court: '. . . brutalization of our youth, black and white . . . moral obligation to demonstrate our distress in a non-violent manner . . . we are one nation and we demand to live together in peace . . .'

Words. Words, words, words. Anna put her ear against the grey floor and listened intently for screams or groans. She heard only the muffled clang of an iron door and the intermittent buzz of traffic outside. She longed to seep through the iron and concrete into the cells below and shield them, turn aside the blows. Adam might have been there. Or Debra and her daughters. The single light bulb cast an eerie glow on the greyness of the oil-painted walls, the floor, and the three high windows that were netted and barred.

There were iron bars everywhere: In the suburbs they kept people out, in jail they kept people in. In their homes, freedom was an illusion, in jail, incarceration was. Not since her childhood when she had seen that black man lying in the gutter, bleeding, had she felt so helpless, so despairing. She would always be on the periphery of history, unable to either redeem the past or influence the future. Only the nuns, sitting so quietly in their corner, dared hope for absolution.

'This experience has welded us into a group,' the Chaucer student was saying. Anna recoiled from her simplistic confidence. 'We must plan our next action. How about a mass march on Pretoria, on the Union Buildings? We could contact trade unions, church groups, women's organizations, students . . .'

Perhaps. Anna turned onto her back. Perhaps. She began her last letter of the day to Adam.

How can you say I'm a poor correspondent? I communicate with you all the time. But I do have a confession to make: you were right – one can't laugh at everything. Especially not at the question that has obsessed me for months now: What will I do when the flames leap across the townships into our cool green suburbs? Will I get into my running shorts? Will I raise my fist and shout 'Viva'? Or will I call the Fire Brigade? I don't know, Adam, I don't know. And because I don't know, my laughter leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

Beyond the Next Funeral

if i were
but a bird
i would worry less
about where the next funeral
will be
at night
i would be comforter of the homeless
i would sit on the trees under which they sleep
on roofs of their dilapidated squalid houses
and chirp all night
telling them never to cry
in daylight
i would sing them soporific songs
in all the graves where they lie
worrying about those they have left behind
i would fly to the fear-stricken
in the vale of death
to tell them the fierce sun
is about to set
the island would be my next destination
there i would hover in the air
looking down at all the moving skeletons
they have the audacity to call men
i would extol them for their bravery
and bring them the good news
that the chill of winter
will soon give way to the long awaited summer

Kaizer M. Nyatsumba

Living a Deadly Life

Advertisements for tombstones
and for coffins
stick to the stinking breeze
laced with the message of mortality.

At night you can hear it crying
through the streets.
Special sizes for everybody's needs:
large, for fathers
and their full grown sons,
down to very small for infants.

The bigger brave children
die outside challenging soldiers
in the streets.
Conjuring up the spectre of a revolution.

The resoluteness, the sacrifice
and suffering of women
ranged against tyranny of those
who call us maids.

A man in a blood-stained uniform
keeps the death toll
with the diligence of one
who believes in the power of numbers.

A baby is another hit for him,
to notch down and recount
to friends with beers in bars.
The full fortune of figures.

And in our mourning houses
the gates pine
whispering a litany of names.
We live a deadly life
fighting to emerge from tombs.

Annemarié van Niekerk

These Sundays

These Sundays used to stir in me
romantic loneliness. Memories of old loves
released into the blood. Even the closed doors
of this small town were flaps of skin to hide a wound.
There's nothing of that fascination anymore, and what goes on
behind those doors seems so predictable today.
Sunset stretches rusted clouds across a dry blue sky.
Along the roofs the pigeons chase each other, heavily.
Did you also use to hope that people would be different?
Look at this Sunday's greasy video shops, cars parked all around
the church, *Rapport,* the *Sunday Times,* defrosted steak,
this is the culture I was born into.
White people: their shy airport smiles,
their helpless wonder at their sexual fantasies,
their children restless, too obedient.

The darkness transmits directly into violence,
no gearing up or down through metaphors of hell.
I know that fear is at the root of it
but how it penetrates into the lamplight
of our solemn arguments, I do not know.
Once I descended, in a dream, a tower in the ill-named
town of Germiston, and on each stair the bodies of dogs
lay half-alive, no bigger than a finger.
The stairs were carpeted with them and on the ground
dogs and crabs and ticks entwined in clustered writhing balls.
I'd like to think that that was hell, but it's no different here.
Except you wouldn't notice it as sunset sweeps the streets
with its withdrawing light. This is election year.
The faces of the candidates stare out on the voteless.
What makes fifty year old men acquire such twisted faces?

Evening, and the news has settled in the stomach
with the dinner. Down the road, under the streetlights,
people stare around the Super Snacks cafe.
They're on their way to somewhere else, a township
or a farmhouse. All they want from this town
is petrol and hot pies. The TV shows a cold front
approaching from the southwest. Geography, we're good at that,
we all know where the food for next week's breakfast grows,
but nothing of the people who must harvest it, transport it here.
The light drains from the sky, leaving the Southern Cross,
its image welded to a fund to comfort lonely soldiers.
What happened to the flickering eternity of the stars?
To get that back we'll have to work so hard
that even violence will be worn out, defeated.

Robert Berold

The Debt

I heard the crescendo of guns
bursting my people
into churned liquid pain

Running, I felt
(and this was the worst)
the dragging of the dry dugs
of every kind of suffering
under the great mother of all pain
hunting me to suck compassion
from my very pores

I fled, turning; jigged, crawled, sped,
as she followed, spewing
benediction after supplication
her wanting of my all, like lunacy
(or love)
possessing, tearing, raking at my spoor
with claws starved into curved blades,
her dry tongue licking at my anguish

For she must take me, in order
to have definition at all.

E. de la Harpe

Two Poems by Kobus Moolman

Free the Children

Quick! Quick!
They are releasing the children!
They are releasing the children!

Here is a mother: she has not seen her Thandi
In six months.
Here is a father: he has to carry Pius
Whose feet are swollen and red.

Come! Look!
This is Eunice: she will not speak
For the ugly things they did to her.
She is only thirteen. (Perhaps pregnant.)

And oh! oh!
Put down that stone now,
Put down that gun for a while.
Here is Paulos: how still, how small:

His little fist is still clenched I see.

From Plato to P.W.

This poem
is not universal
It rejects the great tradition
and other transcendentalisms
This poem
is moral
and didactic
This poem struggles for Democracy (x2)

Such Silent Streams

All my slumbers are tortured by horrid dreams
The seal of sleep is melted by rounded claws
These dreams in my life
seem to emerge from God's sickly voice
crouch up the corroded sheets of zinc
unveil a lacerated curtain in my house
peeled off day by day
by my mother's prayings
by my father's cursings
my brother's wailings, whimperings, wrigglings, twistings, turnings
The dreams drag their hairy legs wearily
scribbling winding footprints on my wealed chest
and extend their fingertips
to touch my brows
drill quietly into the sockets of my eyes
and nestle down on the cushions
of my churned blood

Dreams, such dreams
feed upon my fresh blood, grow strong,
grow eyes, grow hands . . .
multiply, stab me,
whip me, mow me down
I watch my blood, muddled up in a pulsating overall
I watch it leaving, my nose thick with blood

Dreams harangue me out of slumber
I flounder along prolonged nights
that limp by wallowing in distress
Evenings toss me about
fling me to long solitary walks

The world is wreathed around a garland
of dark blue sky
A humid cloud pursues another,
moonlight wisps my forehead
leans on the roof of my house
Elbows' darkness hiding in street corners
Resplendent stars shimmer through
dilapidated alleyways of my eyes
to barely lit shacks of my brain
guarded by my malaise
armed in my depression

dressed in my sweaty distress
In stinging boots of nostalgia
wound tightly strong laces of despair

A halo of streetlights
red, orange, brilliant white
showers me, drenches me
gulps me, swallows me
peels the scorched flesh off my face
my hands, my torso,
legs,
my feet, my arms . . .
I flounder helplessly in naked darkness

Silent streams squirm underfoot
wriggle
and a long wavy neck of water whispers
a song known only to stones
It resounds to those pebbles cuddled up
on a hammock of weeds
Excitement quivers them still
They leap quietly over
and silently move in time to music
They lie widow and concubine
side by side
a sinuous tail
with an eye on its back
caresses them full
of licks and fondlings

A solitary loincloth of green algae
hankers alone on the imperturbable waters
trembles with cold
wanes slowly
slowly
wanes
to the shape of a balded skeleton

Mcebisi Ntleki

The Song of the Dog

I'm beautiful but hated
I don't know why.
I work but it seems
As if I'm playing.

What have I done
To the people? Because
When I enter the house
They chain me.

With the chain around my neck
They lash me with a stick,
As if I have killed a man,
Or as if I have killed the owner of the house.

During the day they hate me
Because I steal their food.
During the night
I'm their bosom friend.

When I have caught an animal
They act as though I am loved.
But they are evil
Because they don't even give me the meat.

But they give me the bones.
What can I do
With the bone that is sucked?
The bone that doesn't even have a piece of meat?

They give me food once a week.
But count how many times
They eat in one day.
But look, what about myself?

When I go away to search for food,
I must know that when I come back
I'm going to get delicious food
Which is the stick.

D.P. Ripinga

When the Children Come Home

Among demolished shacks
and the streets dividing mansions,
through drab strings of tenements
I call impatiently for the children.
In parks, in garbage-encrusted alleys,
in passages, parking lots,
in dank and stifling prison cells
I look in anguish for the children.
From the early hours down to dusk,
from the garden gate to the edge of horizons,
behind the clouds, beyond the sun
I hunt for traces of the children.
In my search I have demolished buildings,
dug up roads, cut swathes through dense bush,
I have dredged the dams and sea.
I have hunted so long, my memory is frayed
and my hopes have lost their heels;
across a country, through shadowless deserts
and snow-blind mountains I have roamed.
With my voice cupped in palms of tears
and my eyes magnified by fear,
I cry to the children
to end their strange, bitter day
and make their tired way home.

****

Though it is to you, children, that I cry,
though it is you alone I seek,
I know that your relentless hearts
are too engaged by history to hear
and, deep within my loss, I know
it's still too early for you to return.
All day you've been busy along the street,
the street that is your only school,
watching your wire model cars turn to rust,
learning how balls and balloons –
when shot at – collapse with shrieks,
how eyeless dolls, dumped in the dust,
curl their limbs and writhe in pain.
There is so much, today, to learn.
Around your razor-wired sportsground
you study the syllabus of quirts,
play the game of dodging bullets,
practise the chorus of stones

and quench the flames licking
your class leader's delirious bones.
You have put aside desiccated textbooks
and read the eyes of playmates
who have not eaten in a week,
whose bellies bulge like the full moon
and draw not water to their lips, but dust;
your calloused fingertips
and shrivelled skin
are the only diplomas you've earned
from your starved academic lust.
There is so much, today, to learn:
the geography of barricades and bars,
of clouds that gnaw away your lungs;
the syntax of a litany of hate
tearing the sky, ripping your love like silk;
the muttered insults of ancient heroes
detained behind mists of steel;
the zoology of rabid dogs
kicking fallen bodies with their boots;
and your souls are inspired to follow
the choirs of barefoot acolytes
praying before the khaki jaws of hell.
All you now believe, and all you tell,
is that heaven will be gained
with a curriculum of fire and pain.
It is a long day for you at school,
a day of defiance and invention,
of counterthrusts from ignorance,
invasion and misrule.

****

Deep within my loss I know
that you, children, long to be learned
and humble in an educated way,
and that you long to come home,
not with your heads slunk upon your bellies,
but a little wise, fully parented and proud.
You long to have your father learn
by gazing deep into your eyes,
to have him free the stones
gripped in your gnarled, sullen hands.
You long to pour your hearts –
stripped naked by buckshot –
into his lap, and feel him knead them tenderly.
But I am exhausted now

and have nothing to teach or show.
After so much searching, so much crying,
I have covered with rank experience
the avid keening of the child,
the sharp wit that pares
a generation to the quick.
On the edge of your ambition
you will cut me from forehead to bowels
and in these blood-washed wounds
you will plant new dreams, new plans –
fistful by fistful,
brigade by brigade.
I will gratefully be cut
by your triumphant blade.
And now – though I be blunted
on the granite of tears,
on the dolomite of groans –
I will go back, unaccompanied
but in my duty not alone,
and – with youthful festivities in mind
and the rituals of novelty
and far-flung wisdom implanted
by children's battle-cries and laughter –
I will, with trust and sharp resolve,
go back and solemnly prepare your home.

Francis Faller

A Dirge to the Gods
(For all the fallen heroes of Africa)

Hear me O Sobukwe and rejoice,
For your falling gave the grains to grow.
Hearken for you cannot mistake the Voice,
Tears on the cheek and sweat on the brow.

Hear me O meek and loving Luthuli,
And you Biko who recently departed.
Rejoice for your labours shan't be forgotten,
By all black flesh still animated.

Hear me O martyrs of Sharpeville and Soweto,
And you all of the smouldering Vaal Triangle.
And weep no more but thunder praises,
For what follows not long shall resemble a miracle.

Hear me O Lumumba of home,
Tongogara, Mondlane and you Nkrumah,
For your labours and prophecies dawn
The African Advent – Unification.

Hear me O African son and daughter,
Buried at home and on foreign shores.
Rejoice now everywhere with song and laughter,
For Azania shall be free to refree Africa.

J.R. Ratshitanga

It's Over Now

I remember those days when we used to
Come to each other with faces full of smiles,
With eyes full of joy and loving,
Hearts full of longing.
But now it's over.

I remember those days
When we used to talk and never stopped.
Mouths full of stammering and murmuring,
Not knowing what to say and what to leave out.
But don't be sorry for yourself, it's over now.

I remember those days
When we used to sit under that musharagi tree,
With arms around each other's neck,
Owning all creatures and nature.
Never remind yourself about it, it's history now.

I remember those days
When we used to make some earthly promises,
Not knowing that one day
You will be the tornado that'll wreck my life apart.
I may be dreaming but it's over now.

We used to see each other everytime
Laughter was our breakfast,
Smiles our lunch,
Joy our supper.
And love was our day and night dish.

A.H. Magagula

WOLE SOYINKA

Nobel Lecture

1986

THIS PAST MUST ADDRESS ITS PRESENT

Dedicated to: NELSON MANDELA

A rather curious scene, unscripted, once took place in the wings of a London theatre at the same time as the scheduled performance was being presented on the actual stage, before an audience. What happened was this: an actor refused to come on stage for his allocated role. Action was suspended. A fellow actor tried to persuade him to emerge, but he stubbornly shook his head. Then a struggle ensued. The second actor had hoped that, by suddenly exposing the reluctant actor to the audience in full glare of the spotlight, he would have no choice but to rejoin the cast. And so he tried to take the delinquent actor by surprise, pulling him suddenly towards the stage. He did not fully succeed, so a brief but untidy struggle began. The unwilling actor was completely taken aback and deeply embarrassed – some of that tussle was quite visible to a part of the audience.

The performance itself, it should be explained, was an improvisation around an incident. This meant that the actors were free, within the convention of the performance – to stop, re-work any part they wished, invite members of the audience on stage, assign roles and change costumes in full view of the audience. They therefore could also dramatize their wish to have that uncooperative actor join them – which they did with gusto. That actor had indeed left the stage before the contentious scene began. He had served notice during rehearsals that he would not participate in it. In the end, he had his way but the incident proved very troubling to him for weeks afterwards. He found himself compelled to puzzle out this clash in attitudes between himself and his fellow writers and performers. He experienced, on the one hand, an intense rage that he had been made to appear incapable of confronting a stark reality, made to appear to suffer from interpretative coyness, to seem inhibited by a cruel reality or perhaps to carry his emotional involvement with an event so far as to interfere with his professional will. Of course, he knew that it was none of these things. The truth was far simpler. Unlike his colleagues together with whom he shared, unquestionably, the same political attitude towards the event which was being represented, he found the mode of presentation at war with the ugliness it tried to convey, creating an intense disquiet about his very presence on that stage, in that place, before an audience whom he considered collectively responsible for that dehumanizing actuality.

And now let us remove some of the mystery and make that incident a little more concrete. The scene was the Royal Court Theatre, London, 1958. It was one of those Sunday nights which were given to experimentation, an innovation of that remarkable theatre manager-director, George Devine, whose creative nurturing radicalized British theatre of that period and produced later icons like John Osborne, N.F. Simpson, Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter, John Arden etc., and even forced the then conservative British palate to sample stylistic and ideological pariahs like Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht. On this particular occasion, the evening was devoted to a form of 'living' theatre, and the main fare was titled *ELEVEN MEN DEAD AT HOLA*. The actors were not all professional actors; indeed they were mostly writers who jointly created and performed these dramatic pieces. Those with a long political memory may recall what took place at Hola Camp, Kenya, during the Mau-Mau liberation struggle. The British Colonial power believed that the Mau-Mau could be smashed by herding Kenyans into special camps, trying to separate the hard cases, the mere suspects and the potential recruits – oh, they had it all neatly worked out. One such camp was Hola Camp and the incident involved the death of eleven of the detainees who were simply

beaten to death by camp officers and warders. The usual enquiry was set up, and it was indeed the Report which provided the main text on which the performance was based.

We need now only identify the reluctant actor and, if you have not guessed that by now – it was none other than this speaker. I recall the occasion as vividly as actors are wont to recollect for ever and ever the frightening moment of a blackout, when the lines are not only forgotten but even the moment in the play. The role which I had been assigned was that of a camp guard, one of the killers. We were equipped with huge night-sticks and, while a narrator read the testimony of one of the guards, our task was to raise the cudgels slowly and, almost ritualistically, bring them down on the necks and shoulders of the prisoners, under orders of the white camp officers. A surreal scene. Even in rehearsals, it was clear that the end product would be a surrealist tableau. The Narrator at a lectern under a spot; a dispassionate reading, deliberately clinical, letting the stark facts reveal the states of mind of torturers and victims. A small ring of white officers, armed. One seizes a cudgel from one of the warders to demonstrate how to beat a human being without leaving visible marks. Then the innermost clump of detainees, their only weapon – non-violence. They had taken their decision to go on strike, refused to go to work unless they obtained better camp conditions. So they squatted on the ground and refused to move, locked their hands behind their knees in silent defiance. Orders were given. The inner ring of guards, the blacks, moved in, lifted the bodies by hooking their hands underneath the armpits of the detainees, carried them like toads in a state of petrification to one side, divided them in groups.

The faces of the victims are impassive; they are resolved to offer no resistance. The beatings begin: one to the left side, then the back, the arms – right, left, front, back. Rythmically. The cudgels swing in unison. The faces of the white guards glow with professional satisfaction, their arms gesture languidly from time to time, suggesting it is time to shift to the next batch, or beat a little more severely on the neglected side. In terms of images, a fluid, near balletic scene.

Then the contrast, the earlier official version, enacting how the prisoners were supposed to have died. This claimed that the prisoners had collapsed, that they died after drinking from a poisoned water supply. So we staged that also. The prisoners filed to the water wagon, gasping with thirst. After the first two or three had drunk and commenced writhing with pain, these humane guards rushed to stop the others but no, they were already wild with thirst, fought their way past salvation and drank greedily from the same source.

The groans spread from one to the other, the writhing, the collapse – then agonized deaths. That was the version of the camp governors.

The motif was simple enough, the theatrical format a tried and tested one, faithful to a particular convention. What then was the problem? It was one, I believe, that affects most writers. When is playacting rebuked by reality? When is fictionalizing presumptuous? What happens after playacting? One of the remarkable properties of the particular theatrical convention I have just described is that it gives off a strong odour of perenniality, that feeling of 'I have been here before'. 'I have been witness to this.' 'The past enacts its presence.' In such an instance, that sense of perenniality can serve both as exorcism, a certificate of release or indeed – especially for the audience — a soporific. We must bear in mind that at the time of presentation, and to the major part of that audience, every death of a freedom fighter was a notch on a gun, the death of a fiend, an animal, a bestial mutant, not the martyrdom of a patriot.

We know also, however, that such efforts can provoke changes, that an actualization of the statistical, journalistic footnote can arouse revulsion in the complacent mind, leading to the beginning of a commitment to change, redress. And on this occasion, angry questions had been raised in the Houses of Parliament. Liberals, humanitarians and reformists had taken up the cause of justice for the victims. Some had even travelled to Kenya to obtain details which exposed the official lie. This profound unease which paralysed my creative will, therefore reached beyond the audience and, finally, I traced its roots to my own feelings of assaulted humanity, and its clamour for a different form of response. It provoked a feeling of indecency about that presentation, rather like the deformed arm of a leper which is thrust at the healthy to provoke a charitable sentiment. This, I believe was the cause of that intangible, but totally visceral rejection which thwarted the demands of my calling, rendered it inadequate and mocked the empathy of my colleagues. It was as if the inhuman totality, of which that scene was a mere fragment, was saying to us: Kindly keep your comfortable sentiment to yourselves.

Of course, I utilize that episode only as illustration of the far deeper internalized processes of the creative mind, a process that endangers the writer in two ways: he either freezes up completely or, he abandons the pen for far more direct means of contesting unacceptable reality. And again, Hola Camp provides a convenient means of approaching that aspect of my continent's reality which, for us whom it directly affronts, constitutes the greatest threat to global peace in our actual existence.

For there is a gruesome appropriateness in the fact that an African, a black

man should stand here today, in the same year that the progressive Prime Minister of this host country was murdered, in the same year as Samora Machel was brought down on the territory of the desperate last-ditch guardians of the theory of racial superiority which has brought so much misery to our common humanity. Whatever the facts are about Olof Palme's death, there can be no question about his life. To the racial oppression of a large sector of humanity, Olof Palme pronounced, and acted, a decisive No! Perhaps it was those who were outraged by this act of racial 'treachery' who were myopic enough to imagine that the death of an individual would arrest the march of his convictions; perhaps it was simply yet another instance of the Terror Epidemic that feeds today on shock, not reason. It does not matter; an authentic conscience of the white tribe has been stilled, and the loss is both yours and mine. Samora Machel, the leader who once placed his country on a war footing against South Africa went down in mysterious circumstances. True, we are all still haunted by the Nkomati Accord which negated that earlier triumphant moment of the African collective will; nevertheless, his foes across the border have good reason to rejoice over his demise and, in that sense, his death is, ironically, a form of triumph for the black race.

Is that perhaps too stark a paradox? Then let me take you back to Hola Camp. It is cattle which are objects of the stick, or whip. So are horses, goats, donkeys etc. Their definition therefore involves being occasionally beaten to death. If, thirty years after Hola Camp, it is at all thinkable that it takes the ingenuity of the most sophisticated electronic interference to kill an African resistance fighter, the champions of racism are already admitting to themselves what they continue to deny to the world: that they, white supremacist breed, have indeed come a long way in their definition of their chosen enemy since Hola Camp. They have come an incredibly long way since Sharpeville when they shot unarmed, fleeing Africans in the back. They have come very far since 1930 when, at the first organized incident of the burning of passes, the South African blacks decided to turn Dingaan's Day, named for the defeat of the Zulu leader Dingaan, into a symbol of affirmative resistance by publicly destroying their obnoxious passes. In response to those thousands of passes burnt on Cartright Flats, the Durban police descended on the unarmed protesters killing some half dozen and wounding hundreds. They backed it up with a scorched earth campaign which dispersed thousands of Africans from their normal environment, victims of imprisonment and deportation. And even that 1930 repression was a quantum leap from that earlier, spontaneous protest against the Native Pass law in 1919, when the police merely rode down the protesters on horseback, whipped and sjambokked them, chased and harried

them, like stray goats and wayward cattle, from street corner to shanty lodge. Every act of racial terror, with its vastly increasing sophistication of style and escalation in human loss, is itself an acknowledgement of improved knowledge and respect for the potential of what is feared, an acknowledgement of the sharpening tempo of triumph by the victimized.

For there was this aspect which struck me most forcibly in that attempt to recreate the crime at Hola Camp: in the various testimonies of the white officers, it stuck out, whether overtly stated or simply through their efficient detachment from the ongoing massacre. It was this: at no time did these white overseers actually experience the human 'otherness' of their victims. They clearly did not experience the reality of the victims as human beings. Animals perhaps, a noxious form of vegetable life maybe, but certainly not human. I do not speak here of their colonial overlords, the ones who formulated and sustained the policy of settler colonialism, the ones who dispatched the Maxim guns and tuned the imperial bugle. They knew very well that empires existed which had to be broken, that civilizations had endured for centuries which had to be destroyed. The 'sub-human' denigration for which their 'civilizing mission' became the altruistic remedy, was the mere rationalizing icing on the cake of imperial greed. But yes indeed, there were the agents, those who carried out orders (like Eichmann, to draw parallels from the white continent); they, whether as bureaucrats, technicians or camp governors had no conceptual space in their heads which could be filled – except very rarely and exceptionally – by the 'black as *also* human'. It would be correct to say that this has remained the pathology of the average South African white since the turn of the last century to this moment. Here, for example is one frank admission by an enlightened, even radical mind of that country:

> 'It was not until my last year in school that it had occurred to me that these black people, these voteless masses, were in any way concerned with the socialism which I professed or that they had any role to play in the great social revolution which in these days seemed to be imminent. The "workers" who were destined to inherit the new world were naturally the white carpenters and bricklayers, the tramworkers and miners who were organized in their trade unions and who voted for the Labour Party. I would no more have thought of discussing politics with a native youth than of inviting him home to play with me or to a meal or asking him to join the Carnarvon Football Club. The African was on a different plane, hardly human, part of the scene as were dogs and trees and, more remotely cows. I had no special feelings about him, not

interest nor hate nor love. He just did not come into my social picture. So completely had I accepted the traditional attitudes of the time.'

Yes, I believe that this self-analysis by Eddie Roux, the Afrikaner political rebel and scientist, remains today the flat, unvarnished truth for the majority of Afrikaners. 'No special feelings, not interest nor hate nor love', the result of a complete acceptance of 'traditional attitudes'. That passage captures a mind's racial tabula rasa, if you like – in the first decade of this century – about the time, in short, when the Nobel series of prizes was inaugurated. But a slate, no matter how clean, cannot avoid receiving impressions once it is exposed to air – fresh or polluted. And we are now in the year 1986, that is after an entire century of direct, intimate exposure, since that confrontation, that first rejection of the dehumanizing label implicit in the Native Pass Laws.

Eddie Roux, like hundreds, even thousands of his countrymen soon made rapid strides. His race has produced its list of martyrs in the cause of non-racialism – one remembers, still with a tinge of pain, Ruth First, destroyed by a letter bomb delivered by the long arm of Apartheid. There are others – André Brink, Abram Fischer, Helen Suzman, Breyten Breytenbach – with the scars of martyrdom still seared into their souls. Intellectuals, writers, scientists, plain working men, politicians – they come to that point where a social reality can no longer be observed as a culture on a slide beneath the microscope, nor turned into aesthetic variations on pages, canvas or the stage. The blacks of course are locked into an unambiguous condition: on this occasion I do not need to address *us*. We know, and we embrace our mission. It is the *other* that this precedent seizes the opportunity to address, and not merely those who are trapped within the confines of that doomed camp, but those who live outside, on the fringes of conscience. Those specifically, who with shameless smugness invent arcane moral propositions that enable them to plead inaction in a language of unparalleled political flatulence: 'Personally, I find sanctions morally repugnant.' Or what shall we say of another leader for whom economic sanctions which work against an Eastern European country will not work in the Apartheid enclave of South Africa, that master of histrionics who takes to the world's airwaves to sing, 'Let Poland be' but turns off his hearing aid when the world shouts: 'Let Nicaragua be.' But enough of these world leaders of double-talk and multiple moralities.

It is baffling to any mind that pretends to the slightest claim to rationality, it is truly and formidably baffling. Can the same terrain of phenomenal assimilation – that is, one which produced evidence of a capacity to translate

empirical observations into implications of rational human conduct – can this same terrain which, over half a century ago, fifty entire years, two, three generations ago produced the Buntings, the Roux, the Douglas Woltons, Solly Sachs, the Gideon Bothas – can that same terrain, fifty, sixty, even seventy years later, be peopled by a species of humanity so ahistorical that the declaration, so clearly spelt out in 1919 at the burning of the passes, remains only a troublesome event of no enduring significance?

Some atavistic bug is at work here which defies all scientific explanation, an arrest in time within the evolutionary mandate of nature, which puts all human experience of learning to serious question. We have to ask ourselves then, what event can speak to such a breed of people? How do we reactivate that petrified cell which houses historic apprehension and development? Is it possible perhaps that events, gatherings such as this might help? Dare we skirt the edge of hubris and say to them: Take a good look. Provide your response. In your anxiety to prove that this moment is not possible, you have killed, maimed, silenced, tortured, exiled, debased and dehumanized hundreds of thousands encased in this very skin, crowned with such hair, proudly content with their very being? How many potential partners in the science of heart transplant have you wasted? How do we know how many black South African scientists and writers would have stood here, by now, if you had had the vision to educate the rest of the world in the value of a great multi-racial society.

Jack Cope surely sums it up in his Foreword to *The Adversary Within,* a study of dissidence in Afrikaner literature, when he states:

> 'Looking back from the perspective of the present, I think it can justly be said that, at the core of the matter, the Afrikaner leaders in 1924 took the wrong turning. Themselves the victims of imperialism in its most evil aspect, all their sufferings and enormous loss of life nevertheless failed to convey to them the obvious historical lesson. They became themselves the new imperialists. They took over from Britain the mantle of empire and colonialism. They could well have set their faces against annexation, aggression, colonial exploitation and oppression, racial arrogance and barefaced hypocrisy, of which they had been themselves the victims. They could have opened the doors to humane ideas and civilizing processes and transformed the great territory with its incalculable resources into another New World.
>
> Instead they deliberately set the clock back wherever they could. Taking over ten million indigenous subjects from British colonial rule, they stripped them of what limited rights they had gained over a century and tightened the screws on their subjection.'

Well, perhaps the wars against Chaka and Dingaan and Dingiswayo, even the Great Trek were then too fresh in your *laager* memory. But we are saying that over a century has passed since then, a century in which the world has leapt, in comparative tempo with the past, at least three centuries. And we have seen the potential of man and woman – of all races – contend with the most jealously guarded sovereignty of Nature and the Cosmos. In every field, both in the Humanities and Sciences, we have seen that human creativity has confronted and tempered the hostility of his environment, adapting, moderating, converting, harmonizing and even subjugating. Triumphing over errors and resuming the surrendered fields, when man has had time to lick his wounds and listen again to the urgings of his spirit. History – distorted, opportunistic renderings of history have been cleansed and restored to truthful reality, because the traducers of the history of others have discovered that the further they advanced, the more their very progress was checked and vitiated by the lacunae they had purposefully inserted in the history of others. Self-interest dictated yet another round of revisionism – slight, niggardly concessions to begin with. But a breach had been made in the dam and an avalanche proved the logical progression. From the heart of jungles, even before the aid of high-precision cameras mounted on orbiting satellites, civilizations have resurrected, documenting their own existence with unassailable iconography and art. More amazing still, the records of the ancient voyagers, the merchant adventurers of the age when Europe did not yet require to dominate territories in order to feed its industrial mills – those objective recitals of mariners and adventurers from antiquity confirmed what the archeological remains affirmed so loudly. They spoke of living communities which regulated their own lives, which had evolved a working relationship with Nature, which ministered to their own wants and secured their future with their own genius. These narratives, uncluttered by the impure motives which needed to mystify the plain self-serving rush to dismantle independent societies for easy plundering – pointed accusing fingers unerringly in the direction of European savants, philosophers, scientists and theorists of human evolution. Gobineau is a notorious name, but how many students of European thought today, even among us Africans recall that several of the most revered names in European philosophy – Hegel, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire – an endless list – were unabashed theorists of racial superiority and denigrators of the African history and being. As for the more prominent names among the theorists of revolution and class struggle – we will draw the curtain of extenuation on their own intellectual aberration, forgiving them a little for their vision of an end to human exploitation.

In any case, the purpose is not really to indict the past, but to summon it to the attention of a suicidal, anachronistic present. To say to that mutant present: you are a child of those centuries of lies, distortion and opportunism in high places, even among the holy of holies of intellectual objectivity. But the world is growing up, while you wilfully remain a child, stubborn, self-destructive child, with certain destructive powers, but a child nevertheless. And to say to the world, to call attention to its own historic passage of lies – as yet unabandoned by some – which sustains the evil precocity of this child. Wherein then lies the surprise that we, the victims of that intellectual dishonesty of others, demand from that world that is finally coming to itself, a measure of expiation? Demand that it rescue itself, by concrete acts, from the stigma of being the wilful parent of a monstrosity, especially as that monstrous child still draws material nourishment, breath and human recognition from the strengths and devises of that world, with an umbilical cord which stretches across oceans, even across the cosmos via so-called programmes of technological co-operation. We are saying very simply but urgently: Sever that cord. By any name, be it Total Sanction, Boycott, Disinvestment or whatever, sever this umbilical cord and leave this monster of a birth to atrophy and die or to rebuild itself on long-denied humane foundations. Let it collapse, shorn of its external sustenance, let it collapse of its own social disequilibrium, its economic lopsidedness, its war of attrition on its most productive labour. Let it wither like an aborted foetus of the human family if it persists in smothering the minds and sinews which constitute its authentic being.

This pariah society that is Apartheid South Africa plays many games on human intelligence. Listen to this for example. When the whole world escalated its appeal for the release of Nelson Mandela, the South African Government blandly declared that it continued to hold Nelson Mandela for the same reasons that the Allied powers continued to hold Rudolf Hess! Now a statement like that is an obvious appeal to the love of the ridiculous in everyone. Certainly it wrung a kind of satiric poem out of me – Rudolf Hess as Nelson Mandela in blackface! What else can a writer do to protect his humanity against such egregious assaults! But yet again to equate Nelson Mandela to the arch-criminal Rudolf Hess is a macabre improvement on the attitude of regarding him as sub-human. It belongs on the same scale of Apartheid's self-improvement as the ratio between Sharpeville and Von Brandis Square, that near-kind, near-considerate, almost benevolent dispersal of the first Native Pass rebellion.

That world which is so conveniently traduced by Apartheid thought is of course that which I so wholeheartedly embrace, and this is my choice – among

several options – of the significance of my presence here. It is a world that nourishes my being, one which is so self-sufficient, so replete in all aspects of its productivity, so confident in itself and in its destiny that it experiences no fear in reaching out to others and in responding to the reach of others. It is the heartstone of our creative existence. It constitutes the prism of our world perception and this means that our sight need not be and has never been permanently turned inwards. If it were, we could not so easily understand the enemy on our doorstep, nor understand how to obtain the means to disarm it. When this society which is Apartheid South Africa indulges from time to time in appeals to the outside world that it represents the last bastion of civilization against the hordes of barbarism from its North, we can even afford an indulgent smile. It is sufficient, imagines this state, to raise the spectre of a few renegade African leaders, psychopaths and robber barons who we ourselves are victims of – whom we denounce before the world and overthrow when we are able – this Apartheid society insists to the world that its picture of the future is the reality which only its policies can erase. This is a continent which only destroys, it proclaims, it is peopled by a race which has never contributed anything positive to the world's pool of knowledge. A vacuum, that will suck into its insatiable maw the entire fruits of centuries of European civilization, then spew out the resulting mush with contempt. How strange that a society which claims to represent this endangered face of progress should itself be locked in centuries-old fantasies, blithely unaware of, or indifferent to the fact that it is the last, institutionally functioning product of archaic articles of faith in Euro-Judaic thought.

Take God and Law for example, especially the former. The black race has more than sufficient historic justification to be a little paranoid about the intrusion of alien deities into its destiny. For even today, Apartheid's mentality of the pre-ordained rests, according to its own unabashed claims, on what I can only describe as incidents in a testamentary Godism – I dare not call it Christianity. The sons of Ham on the one hand; the descendants of Shem on the other. The once pronounced, utterly immutable curse. As for Law, these supremacists base their refusal to concede the right of equal political participation to blacks on a claim that Africans have neither respect for, nor the slightest proclivity for Law – that is, for any arbitrating concept between the individual and the collective.

Even the mildest, liberal, somewhat regretful but contented apologists for Apartheid, for at least some form of Apartheid which is not Apartheid but ensures the *status quo* – even this ambivalent breed bases its case on this lack of the idea of Law in the black mind. I need only refer to a recent contribution

to this literature in the form of an autobiography by a famous heart transplant surgeon, one who in his own scientific right has probably been a candidate for a Nobel Prize in the Sciences. Despite constant intellectual encounters on diverse levels, the sad phenomenon persists of Afrikaner minds which, in the words of Eddie Roux, are a product of that complete acceptance of the 'traditional attitudes of the time'.

They have, as already acknowledged, quite 'respectable' intellectual ancestors. Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, to cite just my favourite example, found it convenient to pretend that the African had not yet developed to the level where he

> 'attained that realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law – in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being'.

He continues:

> 'This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained: so that the knowledge of absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting.'

Futile to waste a moment refuting the banal untruthfulness of this claim, I content myself with extracting from it only a lesson which escapes, even today, those who insist that the pinnacle of man's intellectual thrust is the capacity to project his universality in the direction of a Super-Other. There is, I believe a very healthy school of thought which not only opposes this materially, but has produced effectively structured societies which operate independently of this seductive, even productively inspiring but extravagant fable.

Once we thus overcome the temptation to contest the denial of this feat of imaginative projection to the African, we find ourselves left only with the dispassionate exercise of examining in what areas we encounter differences between the histories of societies which, according to Hegel and company, never conceived of this Omnipotent Extrusion into Infinite Space, and those who did – be these differences in the areas of economic or artistic life, social relations or scientific attainment – in short, in all those activities which are empirically verifiable, quite different from the racial consequences of imprecations arising from that post Adam-and-Eve nudist escapade in the Old Testament.

When we do this, we come upon a curious fact. The pre-colonial history of African societies – and I refer to both Euro-Christian and Arab-Islamic colonization – indicates very clearly that African societies never at any time of their existence went to war with another over the issue of *their* religion. That is, at no time did the black race attempt to subjugate or forcibly convert others with any holier-than-thou evangelizing zeal. Economic and political motives, yes. But not religion. Perhaps this unnatural fact was responsible for the conclusions of Hegel – we do not know. Certainly the bloody histories of the world's major religions, localized skirmishes of which extend even to the present, lead to a sneaking suspicion that religion, as defined by these eminent philosophers, comes to self-knowledge only through the activity of war.

When, therefore, towards the close of the twentieth century, that is, centuries after the Crusades and Jihads that laid waste other and one another's civilizations, fragmented ancient cohesive social relations and trampled upon the spirituality of entire peoples, smashing their cultures in obedience to the strictures of unseen gods, when today, we encounter nations whose social reasoning is guided by canonical, theological claims, we believe, on our part, that the era of darkness has never truly left the world. A state whose justification for the continuing suppression of its indigenes, indigenes who constitute the majority on that land, rests on claims to divine selection is a menace to secure global relationships in a world that thrives on nationalism as common denominator. Such a society does not, in other words, belong in this modern world. We also have our myths, but we have never employed them as a base for the subjugation of others. We also inhabit a realistic world, however, and, for the recovery of the fullness of that world, the black race has no choice but to prepare itself and volunteer the supreme sacrifice.

In speaking of that world – both myth and reality – it is our duty, perhaps our very last peaceful duty to a doomed enemy, to remind it, and its supporters outside its boundaries, that the phenomenon of ambivalence induced by the African world has a very long history, but that most proponents of the slanderous aspects have long ago learnt to abandon the untenable. Indeed it is probably even more pertinent to remind this racist society that our African world, its cultural hoards and philosophical thought have had concrete impacts on the racists' own forebears, have proved seminal to a number of movements and even created tributaries, both pure and polluted among the white indigenes in their own homelands.

Such a variety of encounters and responses have been due, naturally, to profound searches for new directions in their cultural adventures, seeking solaces to counter the remorseless mechanization of their existence, indeed seeking

new meanings for the mystery of life and attempting to overcome the social malaise created by the very triumphs of their own civilization. It has led to a profound respect for the African contribution to world knowledge, which did not however end the habitual denigration of the African world. It has created in places a near-deification of the African person – that phase in which every African had to be a prince – which yet again, was coupled with a primitive fear and loathing for the person of the African. To these paradoxical responses, the essentiality of our black being remains untouched. For the black race knows, and is content simply to know itself. It is the European world that has sought, with the utmost zeal, to re-define itself through these encounters, even when it does appear that he is endeavouring to grant meaning to an experience of the African world.

We can make use of the example of that period of European Expressionism, a movement which saw African art, music and dramatic rituals share the same sphere of influence as the most disparate, astonishingly incompatible collection of ideas, ideologies and social tendencies – Freud, Karl Marx, Bakunin, Nietzsche, cocaine and free love. What wonder then, that the spiritual and plastic presences of the Bakota, Nimba, the Yoruba, Dogon, Dan etc. should find themselves at once the inspiration and the anathematized of a delirium that was most peculiarly European, mostly Teutonic and Gallic, spanning at least four decades across the last and the present centuries. Yet the vibrant goal remained the complete liberation of man, that freeing of his yet untapped potential that would carve marble blocks for the constructing of a new world, debourgeoisify existing constrictions of European thought and light the flame to forge a new fraternity throughout this brave new world. Yes, within this single movement that covered the vast spectrum of outright fascism, anarchism and revolutionary communism, the reality that was Africa was, as always, sniffed at, delicately tested, swallowed entire, regurgitated, appropriated, extolled and damned in the revelatory frenzy of a continent's recreative energies.

Oskar Kokoschka for instance: for this dramatist and painter African ritualism led mainly in the direction of sadism, sexual perversion, general self-gratification. It flowed naturally into a Nietzschean apocalyptic summons, full of self-induced, ecstatic rage against society, indeed, against the world. Wassily Kandinsky on his part, responded to the principles of African art by foreseeing

> 'a science of art erected on a broad foundation which must be international in character,'

insisting that

> 'it is interesting, but certainly not sufficient, to create an exclusively European art theory'.

The science of art would then lead, according to him, to

> 'a comprehensive synthesis which will extend far beyond the confines of art into the realm of the oneness of the human and the "divine"'.

This same movement, whose centenary will be due for celebrations in European artistic capitals in the next decade or two – among several paradoxes the phenomenon of European artists of later acknowledged giant stature – Modigliani, Matisse, Gauguin, Picasso, Brancusi etc. worshipping with varying degrees of fervour, at the shrine of African and Polynesian artistic revelations, even as Johannes Becher, in his Expressionist delirium, swore to build a new world on the eradication of all plagues, including –

> 'Negro tribes, fever, tuberculosis, venereal epidemics, intellectual psychic defeats – I'll fight them, vanquish them'.

And was it by coincidence that contemporaneously with this stirring manifesto, yet another German enthusiast, Leo Frobenius, with no claims whatever to being part of, or indeed having the least interest in the Expressionist movement, was able to visit Ile-Ife, the heartland and cradle of the Yoruba race and be profoundly stirred by an object of beauty, the product of the Yoruba mind and hand, a classic expression of that serene portion of the world resolution of that race. In his own words:

> 'Before us stood a head of marvellous beauty, wonderfully cast in antique bronze, true to the life, incrusted with a patina of glorious dark green. This was, in very deed, the Olokun, Atlantic Africa's Poseidon.'

Yet listen to what he had to write about the very people whose handiwork had lifted him into these realms of universal sublimity:

> 'Profoundly stirred, I stood for many minutes before the remnant of the erstwhile Lord and Ruler of the Empire of Atlantis. My companions were no less astounded. As though we have agreed to do so, we held our peace. Then I looked around and saw – the blacks – the circle of the sons of the 'venerable priest', his Holiness the Oni's friends, and his intelligent officials. I was moved to silent melancholy at the thought that this

> assembly of degenerate and feeble-minded posterity should be the legitimate guardians of so much loveliness.'

A direct invitation to a free-for-all race for dispossession, justified on the grounds of the keeper's unworthiness, it recalls other schizophrenic conditions which are mother to, for instance, the far more lethal, dark mythopoeia of Van Wyk Louw. For though this erstwhile Nazi sympathizer would later rain maledictions on the heads of the more extreme racists of his countrymen:

> 'Lord, teach us to think what 'own' is, Lord let us think! and then: over hate against blacks, browns, whites: over this and its cause I dare to call down judgement',

Van Wyk Louw's powerful epic *Raka* was guaranteed to churn up the white cesspools of these primordial fears. A work of searing, visceral impact operating on racial memory, it would feed the Afrikaner Credo on the looming spectre of a universal barbaric recession, bearing southwards on the cloven hooves of the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse, the black.

There is a deep lesson for the world in the black races' capacity to forgive, one which, I often think, has much to do with ethical precepts which spring from their world view and authentic religions, none of which is ever totally eradicated by the accretions of foreign faiths and their implicit ethnocentricisms. For, not content with being a racial slanderer, one who did not hesitate to denigrate, in such uncompromisingly nihilistic terms, the ancestral fount of the black races – a belief which this ethnologist himself observed – Frobenius was also a notorious plunderer, one of a long line of European archeological raiders. The museums of Europe testify to this insatiable lust of Europe; the frustrations of the Ministries of Culture of the Third World and of organizations like UNESCO are a continuing testimony to the tenacity, even recidivist nature of your routine receiver of stolen goods. Yet, is it not amazing that Frobenius is today still honoured by black institutions, black leaders and scholars? That his anniversaries provide ready excuse for intellectual gatherings and symposia on the black continent, that his racist condescensions, assaults have not been permitted to obscure his contribution to the knowledge of Africa, or the role which he has played in the understanding of the phenomenon of human culture and society, even in spite of the frequent patchiness of his scholarship?

It is the same largeness of spirit which has informed the relationship today of erstwhile colonial nations, some of whom have undergone the most cruel

forms of settler or plantation colonialism, where the human degradation that goes with greed and exploitation attained such levels of perversion that human ears, hands and noses served to atone for failures in production quota. Nations which underwent the agony of wars of liberation, whose earth freshly teems with the bodies of innocent victims and unsung martyrs, live side by side today with their recent enslavers, even sharing the control of their destiny with those who, barely four or five years ago compelled them to witness the massacre of their kith and kin. Over and above Christian charity, they are content to rebuild, and share. This spirit of collaboration is easy to dismiss as the treacherous ploy of that special breed of leaders who settle for early compromises in order to safeguard, for their own use, the polished shoes of the departing oppressors. In many cases, the truth of this must be conceded. But we also have examples of regimes, allied to the aspirations of their masses on the black continent, which have adopted this same political philosophy. And, in any case, the final arbiters are the people themselves, from whose relationships any observations such as this obtain any validity. Let us simply content ourselves with remarking that it is a phenomenon worthy of note.

There are, after all, European nations today whose memory of domination by other races remains so vivid more than two centuries after liberation, that a terrible vengeance culturally, socially and politically is still exacted, even at this very moment, from the descendants of those erstwhile conquerors. I have visited such nations whose cruel histories under foreign domination are enshrined as icons to daily consciousness in monuments, parks, in museums and churches, in documentation, woodcuts and photogravures displayed under bulletproof glass-cases but, most telling of all, in the reduction of the remnants of the conquering hordes to the degraded status of aliens on sufferance, with reduced civic rights, privileges and social status, a barely tolerated marginality that expresses itself in the pathos of downcast faces, dropped shoulders and apologetic encounters in those rare times when intercourse with the latterly assertive race is unavoidable. Yes, all this I have seen, and much of it has been written about and debated in international gatherings. And even while acknowledging the poetic justice of it in the abstract, one cannot help but wonder if a physical pound of flesh, excised at birth, is not a kinder act than a lifelong visitation of the sins of the father on the sons even to the tenth and twelfth generations.

Confronted with such traditions of attenuating the racial and cultural pride of these marginalized or minority peoples, the mind travels back to our own societies where such causative histories are far fresher in the memory, where the ruins of formerly thriving communities still speak eloquent accusations

and the fumes still rise from the scorched earth strategies of colonial and racist myopia. Yet the streets bear the names of former oppressors, their statues and other symbols of subjugation are left to decorate their squares, the consciousness of a fully confident people having relegated them to mere decorations and roosting-places for bats and pigeons. And the libraries remain unpurged, so that new generations freely browse through the works of Frobenius, of Hume, Hegel or Montesquieu and others without first encountering, freshly stamped on the fly-leaf: WARNING! THIS WORK IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR RACIAL SELF-ESTEEM.

Yet these proofs of accommodation, on the grand or miniscule scale, collective, institutional or individual, must not be taken as proof of an infinite, uncritical capacity of black patience. They constitute in their own nature, a body of tests, an accumulation of debt, an implicit offer that must be matched by concrete returns. They are the blocks in a suspended bridge begun from one end of a chasm which, whether the builders will it or not, must obey the law of matter and crash down beyond a certain point, settling definitively into the widening chasm of suspicion, frustration, and redoubled hate. On that testing ground which, for us, is Southern Africa, that medieval camp of biblical terrors, primitive suspicions, a choice must be made by all lovers of peace: either to bring it into the modern world, into a rational state of being within that spirit of human partnership, a capacity for which has been so amply demonstrated by every liberated black nation on our continent or – to bring it abjectly to its knees by ejecting it, in every aspect, from humane recognition, so that it caves in internally, through the strategies of its embattled majority. Whatever the choice, this inhuman affront cannot be allowed to pursue our twentieth-century conscience into the twenty-first, that symbolic coming-of-age which peoples of all cultures appear to celebrate with rites of passage. That calendar, we know, is not universal, but time is, and so are the imperatives of time. And of those imperatives that challenge our being, our presence and humane definition at this time, none can be considered more pervasive than the end of racism, the eradication of human inequality and the dismantling of all their structures. The Prize is the consequent enthronement of its complement: universal suffrage, and peace.

Familiar Ground
Poems by Ingrid de Kok.

Home is where the heart is:
a tin can tied to a stray dog.
The only truth is home truth:
preserves on the winter shelf.
Those who carry their homes on their backs
live for hundreds of years,
moving inch by inch from birth to lagoon.

In these opening lines of Ingrid de Kok's first volume we hear the distinctive voice of a significant new South African poet.

Her familiar ground is found in South Africa between Sharpeville and the Emergency, and in Canada where she lived for several years. It is also the personal world of memory and family. Her poetry charts the impact of the state on the individual's psychic and erotic life. Through her lyric verse de Kok creates the means to speak desire and to realize loss.

The poems range across the experience of a girl-child growing into adulthood and explore the complex of identities and positions demanded of women in South Africa today.

Ravan Poetry

The Blood of Our Silence

Poems by Kelwyn Sole

Written in the post-Soweto decade, these poems take the reader through a considerable range of apartheid locales: the result is retentive geography of the moods as well as the landscapes of resistance.

Solidarity with others — in the pauses and on the marginds, as much as through the decisive moments of struggle — never collapses into sentimental affirmation. Laced with a searching doubt, here are poems which nudge the bone as they test the bloodstream.

As well as displaying more traditional strengths — fluency of eye, sureness of ear, a sparing but unerring inventiveness in diction — Sole's work is evidence of a shift in the field of consciousness of South African poetry. Deeply but unpretentiously political at the same time as it is unashamedly and intimately personal, this collection presents a challenge to more than one familiar South African poetic discourse.

Ravan Poetry

Only God Knows the Truth

M.S. Qwesha

She was a slave and an insult to her mother-in-law. Her husband was tolerant. She heard bullets sounding not far away. She knew her home to be on the other side of river Kunene. She wanted to go to her native home, Angola, but thought of her loving husband. The *mahunga* field she was hoeing seemed to be the whole of Ovamboland.

She kept her hoeing harmonized with her thoughts. From far away she saw her mother-in-law approaching. She felt sick. She wished she would not come nearer. She stopped her hoeing and wiped the sweat from her face with her sleeve. Nonj'emnyama came nearer and lowered her basket. She placed it on the ground. Nozamile was at that moment bleeding in her inner self. She hated Nonj'emnyama!

'Have a break. Here's something to eat,' Nonj'emnyama said, pointing to the basket.

'Thanks,' Nozamile said flatly and painfully.

'Bring the basket when you come home. I've got a lot of things to do,' Nonj'emnyama said, leaving her. She travelled the five kilometres back home on foot. Nozamile felt better when she went away.

She didn't trust her mother-in-law. She was very hungry, but decided not to eat the food. She thought that Nonj'emnyama might have poured poison into it. She had no hope of reconciliation with her. She only drank water and slept in the shade under a tree until it was time to go back home.

Slowly walking through the bushes, on her way back home, she threw the food away. She ignored the shouts of soldiers on patrol along the border. She had a 'meeting' in her head. She was thinking of consulting a local *sangoma*. She knew her marriage was on the rocks unless she conceived. She couldn't control the tears falling down her cheeks. She undertook to ask Jolinkomo to decide between going away from home or staying. She knew that he had refused to do so in the past, but this time she was to hear his answer and decide on her own future. 'I can't tolerate this,' she sobbed.

She arrived home at sunset. She threw the hoe down near the kraal, took her twenty-five litre container and rushed down to the river. Later, a string of young women appeared from the plantation.

As they were near her home they parted. She brought her container to the hut.

There was *mahunga* for her to grind. She went to sit in front of the kraal and used cattle dung to make a fire. She rolled the grinding stone nearer and started her task.

Jolinkomo and his mother, Nonj'emnyama conversed around the fire. They sipped coffee. Nozamile was the topic of their conversation. Nonj'emnyama was busy telling her son all the 'wrongs' done by his wife on that day. She complained of her laziness. Ethnic differences played a major role in Nonj'emnyama's reasoning. She was Oshiwambo, while her daughter-in-law was Shimbuundu.

Nozamile finished her task, and was invited to sit at the fire. She responded, and observed the look in Nonj'emnyama's eyes. She could sense how badly she thought of her. She sat down and kept quiet. Almost immediately she asked to be excused, complaining of tiredness. Nonj'emnyama laughed and told her that she was not the only person who was tired. She tried to attribute her tiredness to laziness. Nozamile left them and went to her hut.

When Jolinkomo joined her, she pretended to be asleep. Once he was preparing to sleep on the straw mat, she sat up. She told him how bad she felt about not being able to conceive. The local *sangoma* was uppermost in her thoughts: consulting her could solve her problems, she thought. He ruled out the possibility of being helped by a *sangoma,* but suggested that she consult a medical doctor at Oshakati's state hospital. They agreed.

Early the following morning she got up and prepared for her eighty-kilometre journey to Oshakati.

Nonj'emnyama got up when Nozamile had already set out, and called her son to her hut. He informed her that Nozamile had left for Oshakati.

'Why didn't she tell me? Who's going to the fields today? Who's going to fetch us water?' Nonj'emnyama demanded.

'But . . .'

'But, what? Are you going to do all the chores yourself?' she asked. 'My son, be careful. She took you for a ride. This is the last you'll see of her. She won't come back.'

'Mama, leave that to me. I know she'll be back,' he said in a low voice.

'If she comes back, I'll swallow my head.' She was not interested in what business Nozamile had gone to do at Oshakati.

By midday, the village knew that Jolinkomo had been left by his wife forever! On hearing the rumours, men of Jolinkomo's age

came to hear the story from him. He told them what had happened. Some of them didn't want to believe his story, as they took his mother's version as a true reflection of events.

Three hours later, Nozamile arrived at Oshakati. She was nervous, as she was not used to that kind of rush – many people and cars. She slowly proceeded towards the state hospital and went to stand in a queue at the out-patients department. After her history and temperature were recorded, she went to have a urine test. Then she sat on the benches, waiting for the results. Later, a nurse brought her results and explained to her what they meant. She was two months pregnant!

She couldn't believe it. She asked the nurse to repeat it. Then she asked for a written confirmation. She started feeling as if she was free from the bondages of slavery. She began to smile at all the people passing her. She talked to herself, praising God. Eventually a written confirmation was handed to her.

At the bus stop, she panicked when the bus did not arrive at the scheduled time. She wanted to be home before sunset. Finally the bus arrived and they were on their way. In the bus she greeted her friends and told them about the results. She was excited to get home because she wanted to see the reaction of her mother-in-law.

The bus arrived in their village before sunset. On approaching their huts, she saw them seated near the family kraal. Their dog ran to meet her. Holding the paper she was given by the nurse, she played with the dog as she proceeded homewards. When she entered the yard, the dog snatched the letter playfully and ran inside the kraal. She chased it, but stopped in front of the kraal entrance. Their tradition did not allow a woman to enter the family kraal. She called Jolinkomo to assist her but he did not respond. Standing there, she saw Nonj'emnyama approaching.

'Who the hell do you think you are? Who gave you permission to travel to Oshakati?' she demanded.

'Didn't Jolinkomo tell you?' Nozamile asked angrily.

'Look here, if you don't want to listen to me, it would be better for you to pack all your belongings and go back home. This is not Angola. Do you understand?' she shouted. Nozamile stared at her and stood as if she was glued to the ground.

'I'm talking to you.'

'I think your talking deserves no answer. It's for you to decide,' Nozamile said boldly.

'What? Who?' screamed Nonj'emnyama.

Jolinkomo saw tears falling down his wife's cheeks. He stepped

forward and led her to their hut. Nonj'emnyama followed them, but he told her to stay away.

Inside their hut, she sobbed and told him the results of her test. He smiled, and held her tight to his chest. He kissed her and rolled with her on the straw mat.

Nonj'emnyama was eavesdropping on their conversation. Jolinkomo got up and went to open the door. As he went out, he saw his mother moving away from the back of his hut.

'Mama, I've got great news for you,' he said, in a raised voice.

'What's it?' she asked angrily.

'Nozamile is two months pregnant.'

'Tell that to the birds.'

'But the doctors said so.'

'That would be better for a change, but tomorrow I want her in the field,' she replied.

He felt hurt by his mother's words. He was supposed to leave for the mines in a week's time. It seemed that his mother was over-demanding of his wife. What would happen when he was gone, he thought.

Seven months later, early in the morning, Nozamile was moaning in her hut. She tried to shout for assistance. She hoped help was on the way when she heard footsteps in front of the hut. It was a young woman who had come to ask for sugar. She heard the moaning and rushed to open the door. There she was, delivering her baby all on her own.

The young woman summoned Nonj'emnyama's assistance. When Nonj'emnyama arrived the labour was over. The young woman was holding the baby by his legs, to let him cry.

'A boy!' screamed Nonj'emnyama. She patted Nozamile's shoulder and said 'Well done!' It was the first time Nozamile had ever received a word of appreciation from her.

Gugile grew up being his grandmother's favourite. It seemed as if the bad feelings of her mother-in-law were over forever. Nonj'emnyama would praise – sing her grandchild, take him on her back to drinking parties. No one could place a hand on him without being challenged by Nonj'emnyama.

One day when Nozamile went to fetch water from the river she met her young women friends. Some of them had grown up in the village, and knew her mother-in-law very well.

'Please, don't be taken aback. We know what we are going to tell you might hurt your feelings, but we have decided to warn you,' said one of them, seated on a rock.

'Be careful of her, she's a witch. She specializes in children. Take care', said the other.

'But . . . she loves him. How could she do such a senseless thing?' Nozamile asked.

'Watch out,' said another.

On their way back home Nonj'emnyama's name was frequently mentioned. Nozamile promised to take all the necessary precautionary measures.

Nozamile and Nonj'emnyama were still at loggerheads when Jolinkomo arrived for the December holiday. It was early morning, Gugile was still asleep on his grandma's straw mat. Jolinkomo entered the hut without knocking and saw the surprise in their eyes. Nozamile wanted to cry. She even wanted to jump up and hug him, but Nonj'emnyama's smile put her off. She felt relieved by his arrival. At once Nonj'emnyama told her to fetch fresh water from the river. Nozamile tried to point out the plentifulness of water in the main hut. Nonj'emnyama told her to obey her orders, and with that Nozamile left for the river.

During her absence, Nonj'emnyama wanted to know how much money Jolinkomo had brought home. She wanted to make sure that Nozamile would not get a lot of money. Jolinkomo criticized his mother's attitude towards his wife, and refused to submit to her request. He handed her only five ten rand notes. Hesitantly, she took the money and staring at him she quickly placed it underneath her straw mat.

'Thank you,' she started saying, and then went on in a complaining tone, 'Why do you give me so little?'

'Mama, I see no reason in letting you run the affairs of this homestead,' he said, taking out a cigarette. 'You are old. What is Nozamile to do? Isn't she the one I'm supposed to give most of my money to? She'll buy food, pay bills and so on. What are you going to do with all the money? Nothing.'

She blushed and became furious, alleging that Nozamile had bewitched him to feel bad about her, his mother. He denied the allegation and told her that what he was doing was out of his own reasoning.

Just then Nozamile entered the hut with the water container. All of a sudden dead silence prevailed. She placed the container near the cooking utensils, on the floor, then prepared tea and gave them to drink. Nonj'emnyama told her to prepare to go to the fields. Jolinkomo intervened, asking her if his arrival was not important. Nonj'emnyama agreed that it was, but insisted that Nozamile had to do her daily chores. During her own marriage, at

the time of the second world war, Nonj'emnyama said, she was not allowed to have a say in the family affairs. In hot and humid weather she was forced to work in the fields. Without any comment he got up, took his baggage and went to his hut.

As he entered it, he heard footsteps outside. Nozamile was following him. Inside, they held each other tightly, kissed and sat down on the mud-made bench along the wall.

'I'm glad that you're back,' she cried. 'Please, try and get yourself a piece of land. I'm not prepared to live with your mother anymore.'

'This afternoon I'll pay a visit to the headman,' he comforted her.

'Please, I'm being treated like a slave here,' she sobbed on his chest.

Flies disturbed Gugile's sleep. He tried to beat them off with his tiny hands. He slowly opened his eyes and started staring around the hut. There was no one to attend to him. He crawled, crying. Nonj'emnyama went to pick him up. She took him to his mother. 'Here', she said, handing him over. She then immediately left their hut, unimpressed.

A big smile on Jolinkomo's face revealed satisfaction and love. He took Gugile from her, held him on his chest. He praised him, using poetic language. He called him a future warrior. Gugile returned the smile, as if he understood what was said. Jolinkomo stared at his wife and kissed her. On that day he vowed not to let his mother run his life.

Before he went to sleep he called his mother, who was sitting next to the fire outside her hut. She insisted that he come to her. He went to sit next to her.

'Mama, I'll be ready to move away from you in a few weeks' time,' he said, in a low voice. She opened her eyes wide and stared at his face. She clapped her hands.

'My son, are you alright upstairs?' she demanded, pointing at his head. 'You are finished. You're no longer a man but a skeleton.'

'Mama, I'm not prepared to argue. Tomorrow I'll organize people to help me build my house. I want to be on my own,' he said.

'My son . . .'

'This does not mean I'll neglect you,' he explained. 'You'll remain my mother. I'll do my best to assist you as I've been doing.' Nonj'emnyama began to cry, accusing Nozamile of being responsible for the separation. But Jolinkomo was not prepared to compromise.

Christmas day is just about the only time of the year when even die-hard enemies smile at each other, but it was not the case with

Nozamile and Nonj'emnyama. They maintained their animosity. Jolinkomo was moving to his new home and they were packing their belongings. Nonj'emnyama was busy opening their packed belongings, searching for what they might have stolen from her. She found her teaspoon in their belongings and started shouting at Nozamile, labelling her a thief. Jolinkomo didn't hesitate to intervene as he was convinced it was a mistake.

Village people were standing outside, listening to her shouts. They longed to see such a day in their lives. The clash of great enemies! For them it was entertaining.

On that day Gugile fell ill. They didn't sleep that night. Early the following morning Jolinkomo went to the veld, to look for herbs. The hospital was eighty kilometres away and there were no telephones to summon an ambulance.

Nozamile waited anxiously for Jolinkomo to return. Raindrops slowly and comfortingly harmonized with footsteps outside, gave hope to her. She hurriedly took Gugile in her arms. The smile on his face gave her more hope. Jolinkomo entered the hut as Gugile's eyes were slowly closing. She placed him on the straw mat. Jolinkomo rushed to open his 'medicine' bag and sifted through it.

'This will do,' he said, taking out a dry reddish herb. He burnt the herb on the fire in the middle of the hut. Nozamile cushioned Gugile as he lay on his back. Jolinkomo held the herb under Gugile's nose, making him sniff the smoke. Sneezing is a sure sign of life, but there was no reaction from the child. Gugile was dead!

Nozamile screamed, placing her hands on top of her head. Jolinkomo got up, took a deep breath and nodded as if confirming the situation.

'Nonj'emnyama must die . . . she's the cause of it', Nozamile cried.

Neighbours gathered in front of their hut, to hear her shouting towards Nonj'emnyama's home: 'My child is dead, Nonj'emnyama must die!'

They buried Gugile on the same day.

Nozamile was bleeding in her heart. She vowed to avenge the death of her son. Jolinkomo warned her to stay away from his mother. He didn't want to believe that she was responsible for Gugile's death.

Late in the afternoon, when almost every woman had returned from fetching water, Nozamile eyed Nonj'emnyama walking down to the river alone. She went inside the hut, proceeded to their kist,

took out a spear and stared at it. She nodded, wrapped the spear in a towel and placed it inside an empty water bucket. She stood there, closed her eyes, and looked heavenwards, as if praying. Then she opened her eyes, picked up the bucket and headed towards the river.

She hid herself amongst the bushes, and observed if there was someone else besides Nonj'emnyama near the river. There was nobody else! She took out the towel, unwrapped the spear and held it in her hand. Then she slowly tip-toed down to the water's edge. She approached Nonj'emnyama unnoticed. 'Gugile is dead!' screamed Nozamile, seizing her by the scruff of her neck. 'You bewitched my child!'

'Not me,' cried Nonj'emnyama. Then she said calmly, 'My child, no one has the right to kill. I'm not afraid of death. Carry on. Kill me. Only God knows the truth.'

Nozamile shakenly looked around and put down the spear. Then she cried asking for forgiveness. Nonj'emnyama patted her and invited her to pray.

POPULAR MUSIC AND THE MARKETS OF APARTHEID

The previous issue of *Staffrider* presented a perspective on the general state of affairs in contemporary popular music. In this essay *Chris Chapman* explores the forces at work in the South African music industry.

Just about everyone agrees on one thing; the development of the South African music industry has progressed in leaps and bounds on the black side, while on the white side it has ground to a virtual standstill. There are various reasons for this, but running through them all is one common denominator – apartheid.

Because of the nature of South African society, the music industry is split down the middle into two distinct markets, a white one and a black one. Each market has its own support structure, media, record outlets, concert venues and record companies servicing it. As a result the crossover potential, or combined market potential of locally recorded music has been minimal. This separation of the markets has been most detrimental to white contemporary pop/rock musicians, who find themselves playing to a tiny market with minimal rewards and incentives.

Ironically, imported music from abroad has been very much more successful at crossing over than has local music. For example, artists like Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Sting and Steve Winwood are played freely on black and white radio stations and sell equally well in both markets. South African artists who cross over are few and far between. Savuka, Sipho Hotstix Mabuse and Hotline (who have since broken up) have probably been the most successful at beating the bogey.

And to add irony to irony, local black superstars like Stimela and Ladysmith Black Mambazo had to first make an impact overseas (on the Graceland tour) before they found acceptance and recognition in the white market back home. In a sense, therefore, they qualified as imported artists and were somehow immune from the local syndrome.

It can be argued, of course, that there is a clear distinction between the black and white music markets even in America and Britain for instance. After all, they have the black charts, the R & B charts, the pop charts etc. To a certain extent this is true. Black Americans tend to go for Motown stuff rather than Heavy Metal or Bruce Springsteen. But it is more a matter of taste and specialization, than race.

Back on the home front, music apartheid has virtually snuffed out locally produced pop/rock. It's only offered to whites, who constitute a tiny minority market, and so the rewards and incentives for the artists are minimal. They either head overseas (usually unsuccessfully), or move into other industries.

The black market on the other hand is very much bigger and more worthwhile, and there has been a massive growth in this section of the industry as a whole. There are many more records being made than ever before, two specialist music radio stations, Bop and Metro, have emerged, and new superstars are appearing every day: Chicco, Lucky Dube, Brenda Fasi, Yvonne Chaka Chaka etc.

In response to this development, the record companies have geared themselves to cash in on the boom. The black divisions of big companies like Gallo and EMI have expanded, while many independent companies like David

Gresham and Hit City have mushroomed and prospered on the black trade.

But where is this taking South African music? Are we about to cash in on the exposure that resulted from Paul Simon's Graceland project and start exporting South African music to the much bigger, more lucrative markets of the world?

'Nowhere,' says Ray Phiri, controversial leader of Stimela and shining light of the Graceland tour. 'Our artists have improved, but the record companies are getting worse. In fact they're tightening up on budgets for local artists.'

Ray explained that companies were putting inexperienced musicians into studios to produce quick, cheap albums that all sound much the same. Then they push the records out into the trade, sell as many as they can, and move on. The result is that they are not building new artists with quality records.

'Neither are the companies looking after the artists properly. There are no medical schemes, no pension schemes for artists,' he said, 'and the companies put no money into touring.'

Independent producer, Patrick van Blerk, who has had great success with Margaret Singana and Rabbitt, and is now working on Felicia Marion's (ex-Joy) debut solo album as well as other exciting projects, agreed.

'On the white side, the music scene has atrophied,' he said. 'On the black side it has advanced by leaps and bounds in terms of progress, but it is now at the crossroads. Graceland was not an open sesame to the international market, it was a magnifying glass on the region. We won't be able to sell the derivative stuff we're doing here internationally. Musically it's come to a standstill. You can't go on with this electronic mish-mash. Black music is stuck at that level.

'On the white side, it's pathetic,' he continued, 'compared to the 60s when bands like Dickie Loader & The Blue Jeans could cause traffic jams in the street, Johnny Congas and the G-Men could cause riots, and the Flames could come up from Durban and pack out the Johannesburg City Hall for a week.

'The white thing ended with Rabbitt. The only success since then has come from the crossover acts like e'Void, Johnny Clegg and Via Afrika. There's not one act today that could pull crowds or sell albums the way they did in the 60s or 70s.'

So why is black music churning out inferior formula stuff, and pop/rock virtually fizzling out?

MONEY MONEY MONEY, cries everybody in the business.

To promote an artist properly and produce high quality records to enable them to compete favourably on the world stage takes lots and lots of money. The best producer in the world will turn out a mediocre record if he has a

miserable budget, and hence not enough time in the studio. And one of the reasons why record companies are not prepared to spend more money on artists is the prevailing market forces (divided, in our case). In other words, if you can get away with producing a quick cheap record that sells anyway, why spend unnecessary money. Or in the case of white rock artists, why spend loads of money producing a record that, even if it's very successful in local terms, will be lucky if it sells 10 000 units. Rather just import the latest A-HA album where you're assured of selling well.

Getting back to Patrick van Blerk, he points to another reason why white music is in the doldrums: White musicians on the whole are suffering from a gigantic identity crisis, which starts with the government and politics and goes right through society, he maintains.

Are the artists themselves exempt from blame, then?

It seems not. It has been pointed out that many artists today display a lack of commitment. Also, some of the bigger stars are at last realizing their power, and are getting much more time in the studio to do their albums, but they're not using the time properly to go beyond the fast-selling formulas that work for them here.

As far as exploiting overseas markets is concerned, the record companies are at last climbing in. Shisa International has recently been launched by Gallo with this express purpose in mind. Already they have had some success with Mahlathini and Lucky Dube, especially in France. Sipho Mabuse has been signed by Virgin, so he has more than a foot in the door already.

Johnny Clegg and Savuka are probably enjoying the most success abroad, touring extensively in Europe, supporting big names like David Bowie, Tina Turner and Steve Winwood, and headlining their own shows. But it must be said that Clegg's success is primarily the result of his own efforts, while Ladysmith and Stimela owe their overseas exposure to Paul Simon.

Criticism has been levelled at the industry for waking up to the overseas markets very late in the day. As Clegg said at a press conference recently, the Soul Brothers should have been top of the French charts 10 years ago. Where were the record companies then?

But now the penny has dropped, and it's certainly better late than never. There is, however, always the matter of the cultural boycott to negotiate, but that's another story.

Perhaps the second biggest problem faced by the industry here, after apartheid, is piracy. According to extensive research done by the Association of the SA Music Industry (ASAMI), they have lost approximately 50 percent of their turnover in the past six years due to piracy.

During the period 1980 to 1986, the South African Music Industry experienced no growth in terms of Rand turnover whatsoever – it literally stood still. This unhappy state of affairs was largely attributable to a national economic slump during the period, but was also blamed on the growth of piracy, which coincided with a boom in the blank tape industry and the improvement of tape-to-tape technology.

An aggressive anti-piracy drive, coupled with more favourable economic conditions, has helped to pull the industry out of the trough and according to ASAMI General Manager, Brian Ellis, the trend into 1988 is very positive with the industry entering a growth phase.

The piracy racket, which involves dubbing records for resale purposes and to a lesser extent home-taping, hits the black market hardest, as black music forms the bulk of the local product that is sold in this country. And quite apart from the record companies losing money, artists themselves are estimated to have lost R16 million in earnings in one year due to music piracy.

Looking to the future, the trends in the record industry world-wide are towards Compact Disc and Digital Audio Tape. A Compact Disc plant is planned for construction in South Africa, and ultimately the old vinyl disc will be a thing of the past. Hopefully also by that stage our artists will be competing shoulder to shoulder with renowned musicians in the rest of the world, apartheid will be as dead as a broken old record.

Two Prose Pieces by Kai Horsthemke

Martial Letters

The army was too strong to let the whole thing get out of control. But it wasn't strong enough to suppress it completely. Parts of the cities and of the major towns had been evacuated. Former five-star hotels had been reduced to two- or three-star status because parts of them, sometimes a whole wing, had been blown away: fading memories of accommodation. If the city councils had waited ten years, the dilapidation and demolition of historical but 'unfunctional' buildings would have been taken care of almost automatically. Shortages of basic foodstuffs occurred in rapid succession, striking the consumers as a kind of gastronomic Russian roulette.

There was always news of uprisings and retaliations and explosions. It was entertainment on a grand scale. There was always something happening somewhere. Even on Sundays. People had never been so entertained in all their lives. It was one big, real life soap opera, with new, exciting things happening in every episode, and it would just carry on and on and on, and everyone would think: 'This must be the end', and it wasn't, and everyone knew it would continue. Inexhaustible dramatic chewing gum.

'I'm sick and tired of chewing,' said the postman. He was pulling and pushing his scooter through the rubble, attempting to deliver letters.

'Why don't they have one big war and fight it out and get it over with,' he suggested. He knew it wouldn't be possible. It never had been. There was nothing he could do about it.

He decided to deliver his letters instead. He delivered them with fierce determination, shoving them into letter-boxes as if he was assuming a general offensive. He became the champion of postal blitzkrieg.

Poetry While-U-Wait

It's an original slogan: 'Poetry While-U-Wait', wondermarked in large letters on pieces of cardboard facing north, south, east, and west, pilgrims and believers who can't make up their minds as to which is the right direction on an overcast day.

Andy's poems are usually commissioned by passers-by who want to buy poems about themselves, or dedicated to someone they know, or for certain abstract occasions, or simply to read on the bus home. The last-mentioned are usually ready-mades, while all the others normally take Andy between two and five minutes to compose. People prefer those. They like to read poems for and about themselves even if they don't understand them. The more they don't understand them, the less unimportant they feel.

People browse and page through the jumble of his lyrical history, while Andy nibbles roasted almonds and chestnuts. Like careful words in a delicate situation.

The Alex la Guma/ Bessie Head Fiction Award

The *Congress of South African Writers* (COSAW) announces a R5 000,00 prize for:
***A South African Novel* amounting to not less than 50 000 words.**
OR: *A Collection of South African Short Stories* amounting to not less than 50 000 words.

The award, open to all South Africans at home and abroad, is for original, unpublished work. Entries should be in English, double-spaced typewritten, and must not be the sole copy in the writer's possession. Although every care will be taken in the handling of writers' material, COSAW takes no responsibility for lost manuscripts. The Congress of South African Writers undertakes to publish the winning entry.
Closing date for entries: 30 November 1988.
Announcement of award winners: 30 March 1989.
Entries to be sent to the nearest of these addresses:

P.O. Box 11046,
Johannesburg,
2000.

P.O. Box 130,
Retreat,
7945.

P.O. Box 331,
Verulam,
4340.

Report on a Cultural Evening presented at the Busang Thakaneng on 16 June 1988.

On the evening of 16 June 1988 two historical moments in the struggle against oppression merged in Sharpeville. The name 'Sharpeville' and the date June 16 mark two historical junctures which are deeply engraved in the consciousness of the people of South Africa. This date and place constitute decisive moments in the two decades which saw the culmination of the Defiance Campaigns on 21 March 1960 when 69 people were shot and killed by police in Sharpeville, and June 16 in 1976, when Hector Peterson became the first of more than five hundred victims of the violent repression which has since become the distinguishing feature of apartheid.

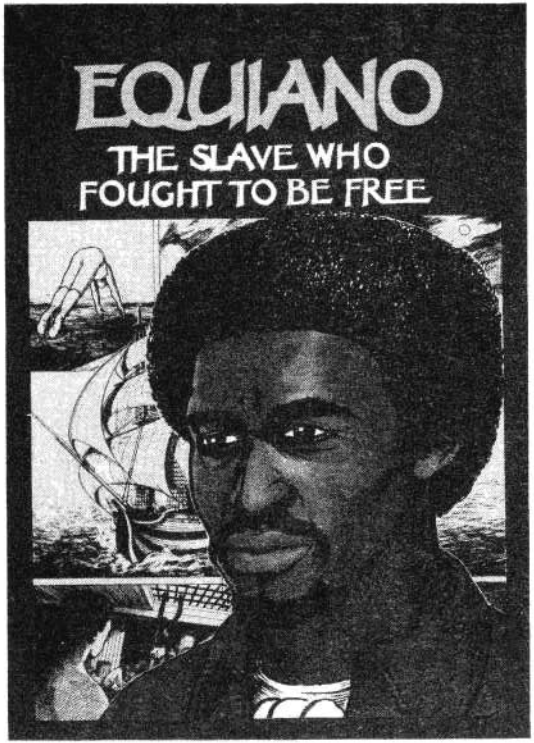
On 16 June 1988, the night on which the commemorative performance at the Busang Thakaneng Theatres took place did more then mark just two decades of struggle against oppression: it also punctuated the current insurrection which has plunged the colonial settler state and its dependents into its worst crisis in recent times. The performance fell a mere five days after the third successive imposition of the State of Emergency. The cultural event, therefore, was circumscribed and inextricably enmeshed in surrounding political and historical forces. Even before the show commenced it was clear that here there was no escape for culture from the contingencies of history. Whether the audience, which had gathered in the auditorium of the self-built theatre was to be rhetorically bombarded and harrowed by the cruelty of which they were already fully conscious, remained to be seen.

The audience was, however, in for a wonderful surprise. As individual performers and choirs mounted the stage to recite poetry and sing songs which had the suffering, deprivation, and humiliation as well as the heroic struggle for freedom from oppression and exploitation as themes the audience began to sense the extent to which the performative arts are capable of casting new perspectives on everyday experiences. As one act followed the other woven together by the commentary and humor of Melodi Modisakeng, Gamakhulu Dinso sat perched above the auditorium, operating the lights.

It was in the second half of the show when a group of young actors consisting of Tefo Moledi, Thabiso Mosolotso, Jabulani Makhunga, Mfenele Mtambo, Tefo Mothibedi and Thansango Modima took the stage, that the evening reached its climax. Utilizing percussion instruments, song and gesture along with the barest minimum of props they dramatized a series of poems which alerted one to the depth and force of the poetry which has been written by poets such as Ingoapele, Wally Serote, Sipho Sepamla, Mafika Gwala and others.

What was even more impressive was the obvious committment and devotion which went into the erection of the self-built theatres of Busang Thakaneng. This has ensured that the community which it serves is directly involved in its programmes. I cannot think of any better way to combat the distortions necessitated by commercialization or the censorship imposed by State sponsored theatres on resistance culture, than the creation of community based cultural centres.

Andries Walter Oliphant



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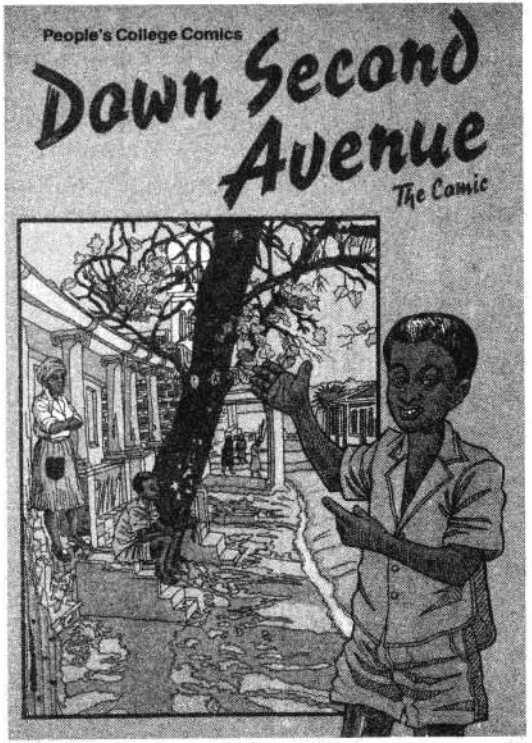

■R4,50

People's College Comics published by SACHED Trust and RAVAN Press.

(Prices exclude G.S.T.)
Available from bookstores or from Ravan Press.

COMIC RELIEF

Report on a Workshop on the 'Cultural Boycott' as an Act of Censorship or a Tool of Liberation hosted by the Congress of South African Writers 14 May 1988

When COSAW first conceived the idea of conducting a workshop on the 'Cultural Boycott' it hoped to focus on issues that specifically affect writers.

The issue, controversial and famous enough to earn an instantly recognisable acronym, the CB, has aroused controversy equalled only by the AWB, the armed struggle and Pik Botha. It has made people like Ray Phiri and Johnny Clegg more famous for while people did not want them to perform, it drew more attention to them and their performances. It is not something that even writers could treat with levity. We hoped that we could have a discussion, less rhetorical, less attuned to the schizophrenic political 'Shareworld' kind of demands.

At the COSAW Transvaal launch, some writers had termed the CB 'an act of censorship', while others called it 'a tool of liberation'. Hence the theme of the workshop. COSAW was also in the process of establishing libraries that it hoped would house books by authors such as Gunther Grass of Germany, Salman Rushdie and others, all of whom who were under pressure from anti-Apartheid groups to maintain the 'blanket boycott': nothing in, and nothing out.

Publishers abroad too, especially the most radical, were under pressure to stop distribution of books in South Africa. Suddenly, writers were facing their Paul Simon dilemmas; to deny themselves Soyinka, Serote, Rushdie Grass and others, to suffer in stoic clarity about what contravenes the CB and what does not? Or to seek a solution that would enable local writers to have access to such literature and still maintain their political integrity.

Such solutions are not easy to find, and worse, very difficult to implement. Friends like ZED books have the habit of withdrawing and leaving the field to less friendly distributors. How could one stop the distributors of the barren fruit of the West's literary winters (Judith Krantz, Jackie Collins etc) from filling bookshelves at the expense of those whose books could lastingly enrich us?

A panel of speakers was chosen that could set the tone for a rational discussion. A prominent journalist and cultural activist, a poet who was also a Trade Union organizer, and Sipho Sepamla, prominent novelist and poet who has outlived many a controversy.

The journalist, in his address, assumed that the vast majority in the audience agreed with the morality of the CB (not censorship) but needed to find common ground on its application. A fair assumption, given that the audience of about 100 was largely Black, largely 'township based', and quite largely, young. He

presented the difficulties encountered in attempting to implement a 'creative' CB, where those who came or went to defend Apartheid would find it difficult, and where those who came or went in opposition to Apartheid would find it easier.

The difficulties would always remain in attempting to define clearly who the 'defenders' of Apartheid were, and who its opponents were. This is not going to be easy, but if we were to defend our culture against exploitation and appropriation, we had no choice but to find solutions. The beginning to answering these questions lay in consultation.

The poet was equally without ambiguity: only those who were not really aware of how the State was attempting to use culture to reinforce Apartheid, who were unaware of the resources the State was pouring into cultural activity in order to co-opt cultural workers, would regard the CB as censorship. It was 'censureship' not censorship. Workers in particular, were tired of being told that to oppose someone who attempts to reinforce Apartheid and the exploitation this system stood for was censorship or 'reverse dictatorship'.

Whilst the State used all its might to repress news, information and the objective communication of real events, it was arrogant and insensitive for people to suggest that the worst victims of such a repression and manipulation should remain docile and acquiescent. Of course we may suffer some deprivation, but in the long term our culture would be stronger, more resilient for having said no to co-optation.

The poet too urged that consultation should take place before people went abroad, or before people are invited to South Africa.

Sipho Sepamla too supported the CB, with one eloquent rider: anything that prevents another artist from performing was undesirable, the CB was a weapon that had to be used under **PRESENT** circumstances to defend and promote indigenous cultural forms. It was, in a sense, a necessary evil that he hoped would be dispensed with when things changed in South Africa. A truly free society would not need a CB.

At the end of the panelists' contributions the response from the floor was in line with what the journalist had assumed: The majority of the audience supported the CB, they were more concerned with the dismal lack of resources and inequalities that grass-roots art forms and their practitioners faced.

Some posed the alternatives starkly, many actors faced the choice of exploitation at the hands of the SABC or starvation or the equal deprivation of abandoning their profession. Musicians and actors faced the most obstacles. The challenge to democratic organizations was to find the organizational and financial resources that would help build a truly national culture, and help

prevent some of the best talent from sucked up into the commercial 'bubblegum' culture being produced today.

There was one exception to this general mood of 'we know what is politically correct, let us find practical ways of making it happen': a lecturer from UNISA posed in the form of a question her unhappiness with the CB. Her institution had invited a prominent 'Marxist' from the USA, Dr Frederick Jameson, to visit and lecture at a special occasion at UNISA. What a 'coup' this would have been, even if Jameson had only addressed perhaps two hundred people. Jameson had refused, she assumed because he had 'consulted' someone.

A refusal by the State of a visa for Jameson would have been a victory too, she said. The response from the floor and the panelists was quick and vehement. Why a foreign 'marxist'? Is it to bring a kind of exotic lustre to UNISA? Was Jameson being invited to bring 'liberation' to two hundred white people at UNISA while the state kept numerous equally profound thinkers, and not necessarily Marxist, in detention or restricted.

Why did UNISA not invite Govan Mbeki or Raymond Suttner? Not that they were marxist, but they WERE South African. Who did the lecturer consult? She was as guilty, someone said, as Frederic Jameson of not consulting the representatives of the South African people abroad.

The lecturer did not stay to listen to the rest of the debate. She had come to do her public 'consultation' and left. We were left to grapple with our problem. In the end at least, we agreed to consult, and agreed that we DID want the books of Gunther Grass, Salman Rushdie, and Wole Soyinka.

We will fight against the Krantzification and continued Collinization of our literature.

Achmat Dangor

Report on South African Writers in Nigeria

On 1 May 1988 when a small group of South African writers touched down on Nigerian soil, there were two things of special interest awaiting us, apart from the unique writers' symposium to which we were invited.

One was the steaming heat. If mention of this seems unduly indulgent consider Durban on a summer day multiplied by three! The other was a national strike which some of us had read about before touching down.

We were accommodated at the Eko Hotel together with hundreds of authors in the African Writers series which Heinemann has been churning out since *Things Fall Apart* and

Arrow of God took off from Achebe's bow all those years ago. (Gabriel Okara, urbane and avuncular, had a room opposite mine.)

A day before the conference opened, the Association of Nigerian Authors packed us into a bus and took us to their Writers' Resort. This excursion took us through waterlogged slums, and posh suburbs, past smoky industrial sites and markets that fluttered with the most colourful flotilla of traditional garments and buzzed with the babel of bartering.

An hour later, The Writers' Retreat; a modest bungalow that contained, apart from an exhibition of sculptures and a dog-eared array of books, nothing. Now why would anyone want to come this far to write a poem or the beginnings of a novel, I wondered.

We spilled out of the two buses and made for the shade provided by a canvas sheet spread over eight poles in the yard of the rather uninspiring writers' hideaway. Refreshment was immediately provided in the form of the Nigerian national drink: palm wine. High green in colour and very similar to our own *Mqombothi.*

Thereafter, between specially prepared Nigerian cuisine of yam, kola nut, okra and coconut we were regaled with a festival of skits, each of which had as its central theme, corruption. This took me back to the townships back home where the skits had apartheid and racism as their common theme.

On and on it went, each prop resembling the other: desk, coveted official form, and the all-important stamp of officialdom whose cue to bang down thunderously on a form was ten, twenty, thirty *naira* passed under desks of corrupt civil servants.

The following day saw the opening of this unique conference which was also a celebration of the Nobel Prize having been awarded to one of Africa's sons. For this event we were ferried to the National Theatre in Lagos – an impressive hexagonal or octagonal complex built by the Bulgarians, who forgot to show the Nigerians where the air-conditioning switch was.

After a protracted fanfare and an unending scroll of speeches each of which began: 'Your Excellency, members of the ruling council, members of the high command, honoured scribes, honoured guests' etc. – the Nobel laureate eventually rose and addressed us.

Or rather, Wole Soyink admonished all those present in the most eloquent of tirades. In short, he told the military regime of Ebrahim Babangida that it was high time the high command allowed a return to democracy, that the Nigerian people had the right to choose their own leaders in free and fair elections, as soon as possible.

Turning to the gathering of honoured scribes he accused us of dining with the devil – the government who partly hosted us –

forgetting that we were the conscience of the people sitting unashamedly in plush comfort while the workers were fighting for a better quality of life.

We heard later that Soyinka had just accepted a job in Babangida's Department of Road Safety.

The next four days consisted of the reading of papers, panel discussions and workshops, many of which occurred simultaneously which made it impossible for honoured, but by no means ubiquitous, scribes to attend everything.

In a workshop which addressed the question: 'Is the writer a citizen of a state or a citizen of a language?' South African poet Chirwa Chipeya shared with other writers an issue pertinent to his own country. Afrikaans, he explained, was seen by many as the language of the oppressor. But recent experiences had taught him that this was also a language in which many countrymen expressed most eloquently their passionate desire for freedom. Breytenbach, one of the exponents of this language and this freedom, was also a participant at this workshop.

Maano Tuwani – another South African poet – had the opportunity to attend a workshop on 'The Writer and Liberation'. Here it was agreed that African writers need to be involved, not only in the process of reading and writing, but that their commitment should extend to teaching the many people on this continent who cannot read and write. Liberation was not confined to freedom from colonial oppressors but included being in control of one's own destiny; reading and writing were important aids towards this objective.

There was a great urgency by settlers in Africa to translate the Bible into as many African languages as possible. If people had control over what they read maybe the works of Karl Marx would be given the same priority.

At a workshop on publishing and distribution of books, I gained the impression, after listening to various participants, that South Africa's extreme and draconian laws regarding the production and dissemination of culture, forced cultural workers in South Africa to react more creatively and determinedly. I gave as an example Ravan's informal distribution network and its dynamic publishing programme. I also mentioned SACHED'S publication of a series of relevant comic books and called on other publishers to give this some serious thought. What one may lose in literary depth, I contended, one more than made up for in effective accessibility. Comic books should not be scoffed at but should be recognized as an exciting medium of importing ideas through literature.

Writers' conferences are very much the same. If you've attended one you've attended them all. The themes are identical: 'Language and liberation', 'retaining and perpetuating the oral tradition', 'literacy', 'the dearth of children's literature in Africa',

etc. Their success depends entirely on whether their resolutions are carried through. Whether this unique symposium was a success or not, we shall have to wait and see.

Christopher van Wyk

Report on The Progressive Arts Project

In early 1987, a group of artists, concerned about the lack of cultural organization within the broad-based democratic movement, and aware of the power of such organization, came together to form a collective called the Progressive Arts Project, affectionately known as PAP (as in mielie-pap).

To begin with it was a group of four or five people from various disciplines within the arts. Slowly the group grew until there were a dozen or so people in the collective, from Johannesburg and Soweto in the collection.

The aims of PAP were established early on and have not changed much since then. It aims to further the struggle for a non-racial, democratic South Africa through the medium of culture and to engage in the building of a progressive people's culture. To achieve this it sees the need to organize cultural workers and particularly cultural activists on a project-oriented basis. One of its aims is to work closely with progressive organizations, responding to their needs and programmes.

The first event organized by PAP was a launch at the Saratoga Cathedral Hall, where artists as diverse as Koos, Azumah, Soshanguve Youth Group and Mzwakhe Mbuli performed.

The second event was organized together with the Detainees' Parents Support Committee to mark the end of the first state of emergency and the imposition of the second. It took place in the precinct outside the Market Theatre on a Saturday from about 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Poets, musicians, dancers and even a mime artist performed in front of huge cardboard figures and banners. A crowd of well over 200 people formed around the performance, and even the police felt obliged to drive up from John Vorster Square to attend. Fortunately, they seemed to be confused as to what to do about culture 'in the flesh' as it were, and finally retreated into their mellow yellow to wait it out.

PAP has been involved in the organization of several public events since then, including the National Women's Day celebration organized in conjunction with Fedtraw last year. This was a huge success, attended by over 3 000 people, with performers from all over the Transvaal who kept the hall rocking and stamping till dark.

Towards the end of 1987, the PAP collective began to worry about issues of accountability, and about having some kind of

formalized membership structure that people could join, since the demand for membership seemed quite high. It began a process of consultation and discussion with organizations in the Johannesburg area, the UDF, COSATU, JODAC, SAYCO, ECC, FEDTRAW, and others. A steering committee was elected at the end of November to take a proposed structure and manifesto back to various organizations for discussion.

Unfortunately, during December, two members of the steering committee were detained. Although one of them was subsequently released, Mzwakhe Mbuli, a founder-member of PAP, is still in detention. The problems of the steering committee were further exacerbated by the CASA conference in Amsterdam which was attended by many cultural activists, and which made organization on the home front difficult.

In January the collective and representatives of various organizations came together again, and this time chose the original PAP collective to organize the structure and membership.

The structure that was proposed was that individuals should become members of PAP, that within PAP members should be organized into discipline-based sub-groups, and that each sub-group should elect a representative to sit on a committee.

At a membership launch in May, this structure was proposed and accepted, and representatives of the writing, music, performance and photography sub-groups were elected. As well as this, an organizer, a media officer, and a treasurer were elected. The COSATU members present at this meeting agreed to return to their cultural local to elect a representative who would sit on the committee.

At this same meeting, the proposed manifesto was accepted unanimously with only one minor amendment.

PAP is now in a position to continue with projects that had been shelved until it had been formally structured, as well as to take up new projects. Already, since the launch, PAP has received requests from other organizations for co-operation in cultural projects that they are working on, and has committed itself to assist.

Any cultural worker who accepts the manifesto of PAP is welcome to become a member of the organization. It is hoped that the way is now open for PAP to put into action all the projects which have been planned and considered over the past eighteen months.

State repression against the media has taken its toll. Now Stoffel Botha is making threats against artists. It is time for all artists to unite in creative cultural action to work towards a democratic future.

Barbie Schreiner

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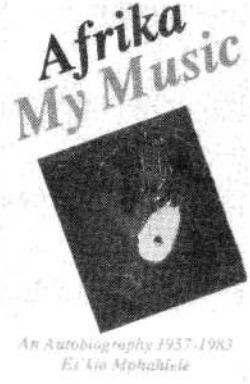

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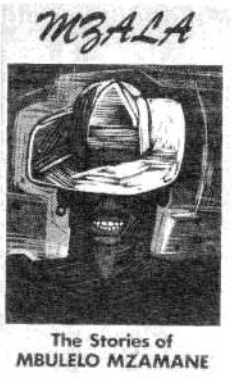

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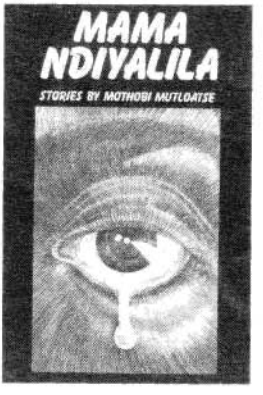

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