

Of memory and forgetting in the beloved country

SOUTH Africa exerts a powerful dynamic. In years of exile it informed virtually every day of my life – through casual memories, through the news, through lobbying at the United Nations (UN) and in Washington. The call of an African dove in some wildlife programme never failed to arouse a pang of nostalgia.

Now, after 33 years, my passport has been returned. It was confiscated because I assisted Chief Albert Luthuli when journalists poured into Groutville to interview South Africa's first Nobel Peace Laureate. To celebrate the election I have come "home".

Home? For several weeks I was not sure. But then from nearby fields a warm wind carried the scent of earth and grass and the sound of drums and singing of black worshippers across this Johannesburg suburb. I knew I was indeed home. How elemental are the feelings for the land of one's birth!

Writer Alan Paton once remarked that when change comes, only those steeped in the past will understand the greatness of the present. And so, for all the profound anxiety about the violence and dismay at creeping corruption – yes, I know it was far worse, and still is, under the Nats – there are continual reminders of victories, like icing on the cake of celebrations.

A blue UN flag fluttering from a car's bumper evoked Reverend Michael Scott's heroic struggle to put apartheid on that organisation's agenda back in 1950; the media circus accompanying the Rivonia men to Robben Island took me back to 1964 when I testified about their lives before a UN committee. Their advocate, George Bizos, after visiting them on the island, wrote: "They are sure they will not become forgotten men."

But what of Bram Fischer? What restitution has been made by the Johannesburg Bar Council for having his name struck from the roll of advocates in 1965? This great Afrikaner gave his life

for the four widows – Nyameke Mkhonto and Mbuyi Mkhonto and Judy Chalmers.

Do you remember that funeral which converged on Lingelihle's arid plain? Viewers in London saw the unforgotten widows at the graveside, bitter grief a day a state of emergency cleared.

Is their story part of a past that is being forgotten as the new nation approaches?

For nine years these women have been forgotten. Goniwe has told of "the weight of the past". She was speaking not just for herself but for families of the many "others".

"It would be liberating to know



By MARY BENSON

we must know who they are, that would heal the wounds. These can be happy memories.

That was before the end of apartheid and Van Rensburg's truth, the whole truth, the signal ordering of a "new society" of Matt Goniwe, teacher, Fort Calata, to the deaths of Mkhonto and Sicele.

What of Van Rensburg? He reported on 8 September that security forces had committed murders which had been unacknowledged and professed.

FW de Klerk told the Transvaal Legislature that no single individual employed by the government had committed any crime.

His party, in its election manifesto, said: "Our Party does not kill, threaten or intimidate."