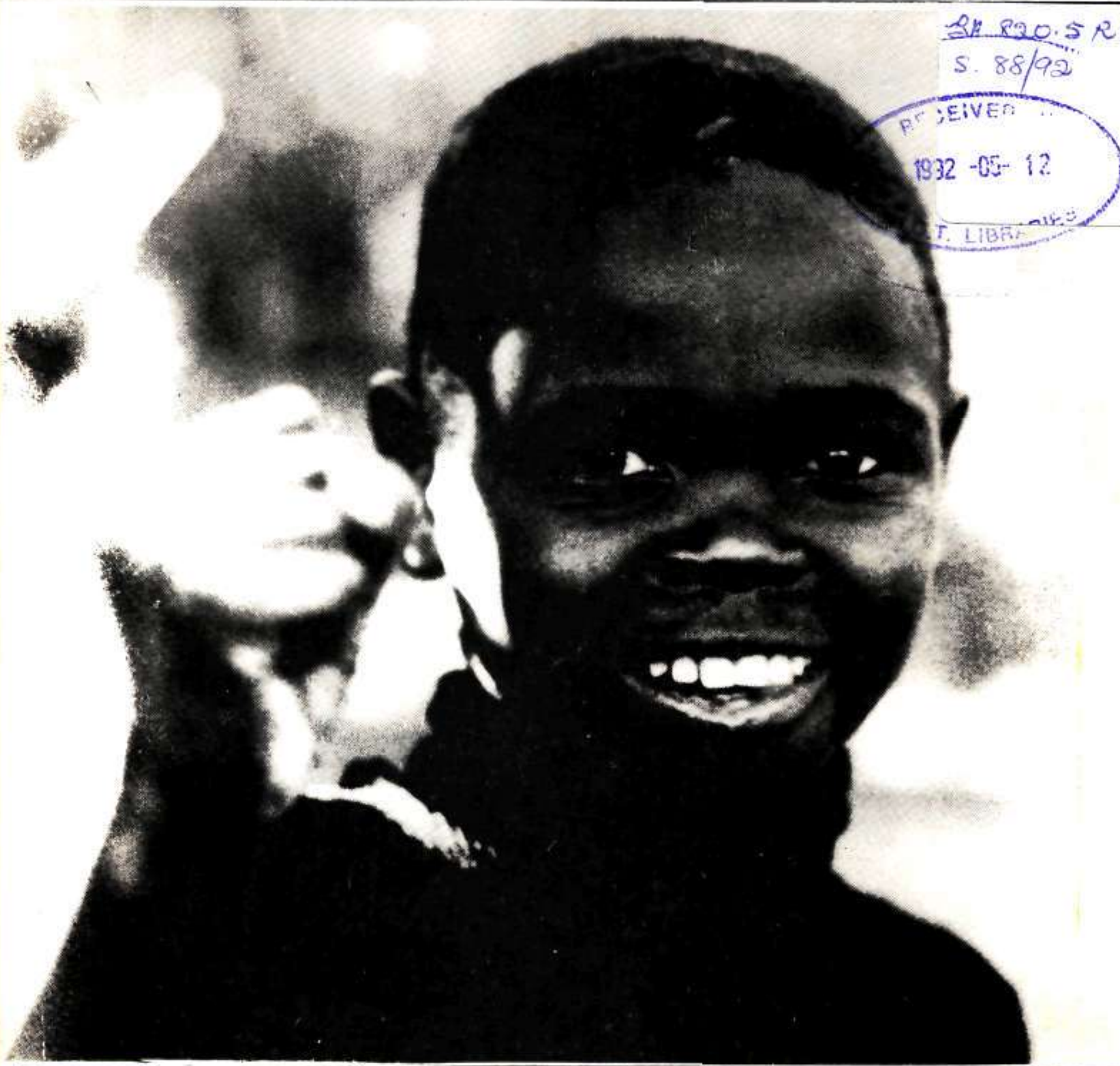


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niwaka

Cultural Journal of the African National Congress



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INSIDE:

Interview
with O.R. Tambo

Artists and
trade unions

Video Festival
Poetry



1985

YEAR OF THE CADRE

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LISTEN TO RADIO FREEDOM

VOICE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL
CONGRESS AND UMKHONTO WE
SIZWE, THE PEOPLE'S ARMY

RADIO LUANDA

shortwave, 40 & 30 m bands;
medium wave 27,6 m band-7,30 pm daily

RADIO LUSAKA

shortwave 31 m band, 9580 KHz, 7,15-8 pm,
Monday - Friday
10,05-10,35 pm Wednesday, 10,30-11 pm Friday
7-8 pm Saturday Sunday, 8-8,45 pm, 19 mb,
17895 KHz

RADIO MADAGASCAR

shortwave 49 m band, 6135 KHz-8-9 pm daily

RADIO ETHIOPIA

shortwave 31 m band, 9545 KHz - 9,30-10,00 pm
daily

RADIO TANZANIA

shortwave 19 m band, 15.435 KHz
8,15 pm - Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Friday;
31 m band-6,15 am Tuesday, Thursday and
Saturday

READ

MAYIBUYE
ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

WORKERS' UNITY

DAWN

Monthly Journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:

RIXAKA EDITORIAL BOARD
P.O. BOX 31791
LUSAKA
ZAMBIA

**Voice
Of
Women**

FORWARD



TO THE READER

In Shangaan, one of our national languages, RIXAKA means nation.

We launch RIXAKA, the Cultural Journal of the African National Congress, with the express view of establishing a platform which will allow the full expression of the cultural voice of our movement for national liberation.

We believe that this challenge falls most directly on all South African cultural workers, in graphics, writing, theatre, music, dance, crafts (modern and traditional). We appeal to all creative workers to send us their contributions for publication in RIXAKA! We know that in the Americas, Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, great works of art have been distilled from the collective political experience of the struggles of the people. We intend to publish these writings, thereby strengthening links with our progressive compatriots all over the world. In this issue we carry poems from Cuba and the United States.

We will on a regular basis in RIXAKA feature progressive writings, photographs and graphics from democratic, anti-imperialist artists worldwide.

The task of articulating the aspirations and experience, of laying the foundations of our democratic future, presupposes a certain audacity on the part of the editorial collective. But we

realise that it also entails a delicate responsibility; particularly, it is an imperative in terms of accuracy of interpreting and depicting human experience. We therefore view our Letters to the Editor columns as of inestimable importance. We hope it will serve to ensure that our choices do not become mere pontification. We hope that readers will subject us to as meticulous a scrutiny as possible, so that the column can become an indicator to our future RIXAKA issues.

We vehemently hold the view that Culture in its broadest sense embraces all aspects of the experience of all levels of all people in a geographical region. It is not restricted to the so-called artistic effort only. We can and must give exposure to all our people, for their lives are the buds that will bloom into the flowering of our nation. The interview of our President in this premiere issues of RIXAKA signals what we intend to be a regular feature that will attempt to cover as broad a spectrum as possible of South African people and thought.

From these nudgings of the best in the performing arts, in criticism of tradition and custom, we are confident that "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened".

—Barbara Masekela—

GOING TO THE VIDEO FESTIVAL

VIDEO IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING A VERY IMPORTANT AUDIO-VISUAL AID OF COMMUNICATION: THIS ARTICLE DEALS WITH A VIDEO FESTIVAL OF THE ANC THAT WAS HELD IN LUSAKA TOWARDS THE END OF LAST YEAR WHERE THE FERMENT CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA WAS ON EXHIBIT.

"WHAT have you done for the people of Africa?" Pik Botha, the racist Minister of Foreign Affairs asks, the cigarette nearly dropping from fingers which certainly itch to throttle the neck of the BBC interviewer. "What do you know about the struggle of African people?" he glowers, his face technicolour red. "Look at your Ghana!" Pik Botha roars. "What gives you the right to be intellectually dishonest?" He rants and raves, bullying; his shameful performance bespeaks the confusion that rages in the minds of people who have held onto power for such a long time, people who are sparring with shadows now it is increasingly clear that power is slowly but irrevocably being wrested away.

It was not in London or — more bizarre still — in South Africa that we watched the video which had been made inside the country by the BBC: *To The Last Drop of Blood*. It was in Lusaka, on a balmy Sunday afternoon. And the date was December 16.

Some of us had been away from South Africa for more than two decades; most had left the country after the convulsions that had gripped the urban areas of South Africa in June 1976. Others had just returned from inside the belly of the beast two weeks before; intrepid fighters would be launching an attack, assault rifles in hand, before the night of the following day.

December 16 had once been called Dingaan's Day, a long hour of gloating by the sons and daughters of the Voortrekkers who had won a battle against Dingaan's armies at eNcome, the river that turned red with blood. Our blood. But then something must have rankled in the collective sensibility of the rulers of the land; *Are the kaffirs celebrating this day, mouthing the phrase with tongue in cheek. Are they with us or are they planning something?* (Interestingly enough, very few racists are asking this question as the phrase *a luta continua* increasingly becomes the parlance of the hour). So what seemed to upset the computers of the racist word-people had to be excised from our national consciousness. Thus the birth of the Day of the Covenant, something inane that has nothing to do with blood, gore and gristle. They could just as well as name it the Day of the Turkey. Beleaguered and fighting people of South Africa know December 16 to be Heroes Day, the hour of the gladiator. The racists and their "defence" force of death have their Neros, but on countless occasions our guerrillas — with unprecedented mass upsurges inside the country — have reduced the predatory hounds to the level of stuck pigs.

This day begins for us with multitudes treading on mud under a driving rain. A roll call is made of all the comrades, young and old, who have passed away. This is a yearly tradition of the African National Congress. Moving from grave to grave, the concourse hears the names of the dead. Drenched flowers and nameless shrubs garland the graves of soldiers lying still, listening in silence to the roaring shower from above.

DIPLOMATIC CORPS

In the evening of the day, ANC and SWAPO comrades, Zambian people — our hosts — and the members of the diplomatic corps get together in the hall to watch videos that comment on the struggle of the people of South Africa. What no-one knows is that members of the Department of Arts and Culture together with SWAPO technicians are really sweating it out trying to kill the voice of Dennis Luwewe as he comments on Zambian TV on a soccer match between a local team and visitors from some other African state. It is a trying time, really; at the trial run of the videos, we were surprised to see the image and sub-headings on the monitor accompanied by this discombobulating voice from the ZTV studios. One technician almost had a heart attack when he realised that he had brought a wrong feeder cord. While Sindiso Mfenyana who is chairing the whole festival greets the audience, we are praying that the monitor, at least, doesn't let us down. He introduces the people who would be making brief remarks on the importance of the day, on the video festival — of the need for information to be perpetually at the fingertips of all the cadres of the movement.

Olley Maruma arrived from the airport two or three days before the festival started. When we saw him sitting with his bags in the front office of the department, looking at the posters on the wall, I suddenly remembered that we had sent an invitation to the film-makers of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. Olley came in at a time when we were having problems with transport. There was even talk at that time that we could use a 26-seater (or so) that would have been truly sold and singly fitting for three cultural organisers to pass through the streets of Lusaka in the people's car. In the end we were loaned a small 1970s Ford. The African Political Committee is now in a bit of a bind. It didn't need anyone with a video camera to go back because something was wrong with the brakes, and Comrade Bassel's car was used three or four times before the video.

was made even more hair-raising by the fact that we had just stumbled into the famous Zambian rainy season and this country, perhaps third behind Cairo and Lagos, has some drivers who believe that stop streets, intersections and traffic lights are minor inconveniences that should be ignored at best.

bought for our video festival a film *Mbuya Nehanda* which dramatised the beginnings of the Chimurenga wars in Zimbabwe long before the country was given its new name. Unarguably a craftsman of great skill, Olley gave us fresh insights into the cultural life in his country and, together, we dreamt and planned further co-operations on cultural projects.



Olley came in as a representative and Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Film Association and as an official emissary of the Zimbabwe Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. Some of us had met him at the Regional Film Workshop that had taken place in Harare in August to September 1984. He

We had him ensconced in one of the more well-known motels on the outskirts of the city where the man fought his own battles with bureaucracy that is the warp and woof of struggling establishments, razor-sharp salespeople peddling flesh and futile dreams, waiters and service people

who still cannot get over the fact that tipping has long been outlawed in this country. We were honoured to have Olley in our midst.

ANC/SWAPO COLLABORATION

You learn a lot about equipment when you involve yourself in the organisation of a video festival. You learn, also, not to trust the signs you see emblazoned on panel vans, awnings of shops in the city centre: most of all, you learn that there is a lot of legwork involved there, children. There are many shops that shout the promise of video hire, but you learn soon enough that they deal with *television* hire or video *cassette* hire. The practice of video cassette recorder hire died with the death of foreign exchange. We saw, for instance, how expensive video equipment is: K4 000 for the VCR. The monitors can be hired, but most of them are not that wide and would have resulted with a lot of the members of the audience suffering from perpetual eyestrain.

SWAPO has a very well-put-together video centre. After we had gone almost everywhere in search of equipment — one jester suggested that we launch an operation inside South Africa purely for video equipment — it took a telephone call from our Administrative Secretary to secure us equipment, technicians and the kind of warmth that one can only get from people who are seriously waging war against the apartheid colonialist regime.

On entering their video centre, you are struck by all this activity, people on the editing board, others dubbing from U-Matic or Betamax to VHS and thrice vice versa. Peter Nangolo expressionlessly tells you that the technicians are going to "make sure that you'll have everything you want before Sunday, December 16." Well. Aren't you afraid, we ask, that the everyday carting of sensitive equipment to and fro will result in it becoming defective? You ask a question like that because you've heard from some reputedly knowledgeable source that this is what happens. Peter merely looks at you, lights a cigarette and says nothing. You feel infinitely stupid. On the evening of the video festival, Peter makes a short impromptu speech — he has been caught by surprise by the Chairperson! — and he outlines the nature of ANC/SWAPO collaboration. The audience cheers because his speech is short: no-one wants to hear a long speech in a video festival; and because he puts his words together with the type of finesse that matches his consummate skill as director of the video centre. As he speaks, Vickie and Sammy, the SWAPO technicians are getting back to their seats after putting their paraphernalia together.

The posters on the walls speak of struggle. All the walls are full of posters, some come from the graphic arts unit of MEDU ARTS ENSEMBLE in Gaborone. Others are from all over the world: Lenin gives an avuncular smile as he salutes from a daguerrotype, the ubiquitous cap perched jauntily on his head; a young Nicaraguan soldier, what we would call a Babyface at home, reads the Spanish version of *What is to be Done?* beneath an inscription commemorating Karl Marx's centenary. *Seine Ideen eroberten die Welt*: Vietnamese kids walking in Indian file on a pavement of a wide boulevard, they are all carrying flags with a yellow star in a field of red. Two spread-out

palm trees lean into the double blueness of the sea that merges with the sky. *Vietnam — gluckliche Kinder im sozialistischem Land*; a smiling Dorothy Nyembe is hugged as she returns in triumph from fifteen years in prison. *Support Umkhonto We Sizwe!* There are many more. On the blackboard there are flags of the liberation of the people of South Africa: black, green and gold; there are the Namibian colours of liberation and the Zambian flag of national unity.

This unity is stressed by Comrade Thabo Mbeki, the Director of the ANC Department of Information and Publicity, as he proceeds to make the official opening remarks. Talking to the hushed audience, he emphasises the fact that the united resolve of the fighting people of South Africa has brought forth unprecedented returns. These are gains which people fighting for freedom cannot ignore. At this moment we hear the hum of the lazy Sunday afternoon traffic filtering into the hall. Comrade Thabo tells us that the fighting people inside the belly of the racist beast have gone very far in proving to the racists that they are no longer willing to be ruled in the old way. People — South African fighters are now ungovernable. The country was transformed into a burnt-out landscape when people went up in arms, no longer ready to countenance carnage helplessly, and fought against the farcical Constitutional Proposal "elections". Our fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers on the frontline made their NO so resoundingly loud that the racists saw it wise to send occupation armies into our townships. In the spring of our rage the regime found itself dealing with a season of fire as multitudes went forth and said NO to rents, to bus fare hikes. They said *no!* We are told here of a story of young people who were seen pursuing an armoured personnel carrier that had killed a woman. When asked what they were doing, these young men in such a hurry, said that they were going to "get that hippo!" A battle of stones, rage, petrol bombs and more rage against the racists bullets and tear-gas ensued. Some of the young warriors fell mortally wounded. We wonder what happens in the minds of the soldiers of death who were in that vehicle. What stories did they tell their loved ones at home after mowing down helpless people, children, the old and the infirm? Did they tell their wives about the unequalled bravery of the throwers of the rocks, the singers of the revolutionary songs who stood there and raised their fists as death whistled past at 1 000 kilometres an hour? Did they see that there was a qualitative change in the choice of weapons? that the people had organised themselves in such a way that mere regular police forces wouldn't be able to quell them? that the only thing they could do was call the fascist army, 7 000 strong? The occupation army came, set up barricades and check-points; they goose-stepped in their jackboots, swastikas tattooed on their forearms, marching past our houses to the beat of *Deutschland über Alles*, Hitler's soldiers of today. The people favoured them with the cold withering look of utter contempt. The people's song will not be stilled!

You hear this singing which becomes part of our consciousness as people go down the steps that lead to the street where a *tricolor-kivela* stands in readiness to take trialists back to prison. &

woman leads them, waving her fist at the camera. It's just too much. During the funeral procession of Dr Neil Aggett, people are running and singing, the marchers in front holding aloft the black-green-gold flag of our liberation: it is a motley crowd, a splash of colour, encompassing all the colours of the South African racial spectrum. Camouflaged police are there, armed to the teeth. The people sing them dizzy. We all look at central Johannesburg, recognising certain parts which are now vehicles to our collective nostalgia, our anguish. At the SAAWU conference, workers sing songs that bring a palpable hush into the hall. The thought that turns like a turbine in our heads is, South Africa is our country, and we need to be in there to see to the freeing of the

and.

Many videos were seen by a vast majority of our membership in Lusaka. Theatre plays which had been taped by various media showed us the contribution of the artists inside the country. In this field, we were able to measure the distances the people had taken — and we were pleased to find that the language we use is the same language of the people inside. There were some moments of laughter as we identified all the things that had made us at home: we saw pieces of ourselves in all the images, all the frames on the small screen.

We feel that we need many such festivals. With them, we end up knowing and understanding the nature of our revolution more. We end up having a deeper understanding of ourselves.



The National Cultural Ensemble, of the African National Congress, AMANDLA, in action. Recently returned from their sensation-creating showing at the KIZOMBA festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, AMANDLA cu CULTURAL ENSEMBLE begin their 1985 season in Zambia. They continue to West Africa and then on to Moscow for the Youth Festival. After that, a trip to European countries seems on the cards.

JUNE 16 YEAR OF SPEAR

They call me freedomchild
I am liberationbound
My name is June 16
But this is not 1976.

Freedomchild homewardbound
With an AK47 resting in my arms
The rivers I cross are no longer treacherous boundaries
Throwing me into the frustrating arms of exile
The rivers I cross are love strings
Around my homeland and me
Around the sun and the new day.

Who does not see me
Will hear freedomsound
Roaming the rhythms of my dream
Roosting warmly palpable as breast of every mother
spitting every day and night
spreading freedomseed all over this land of mine

My mothers fathers of my fathers kinsmen
Because I am June 16
And this is not Soweto 1976
I emerge in the asphalt streets of our want
And because 'my memory is surrounded by blood'
My blood has been hammered to liberation song
And like Rebelo's bullets
And Neto's sacred hope
I am flowering
Over the graves of these goldfanged fascist ghouls
All over this land of mine

I am June 16
As Arab Ahmad says
*My body is the fortress
Let the siege come!
I am the fireline
And I will besiege them
For my breast is the shelter
Of my people*

I am June 16
I am Solomon Mahlangu
I am the new chapter
I am the way forward from Soweto
I am poetry flowering with AK47
All over this land of mine.

WILLIE KGOSITSILE

The Long Road

we cannot lie on our back
we cannot stretch our legs and our arms
we cannot show our soft-white belly to the red hot sun
we cannot lie on our back
how, we ask —
is a long road measured?
does the marrow of the rock say
does the soil, pierced by the blade of the plough say
as it peels and rolls
as it tears
as it ripens into a wound that must receive a seed
does it say anything
with its agreeable whispers
as the blade cuts, and as it turns and rolls
the distance that measures the ability to wait —
for the seed
does the soil say anything?

the sun sings with heat here
we cannot show our soft-white belly to the sun
the sun has teeth.

how is a long road measured

when the seasons
like a woman in love ask
through their eyes and face
through the tips of their fingers
as soft as a day old baby's flesh — they ask:
if love is so bare, what care do you have?

the seasons are strong
they mount time
they mount tops of trees
the seasons mount the sun and the moon
and ask
how is a long road measured?
the rumble of cattle hooves flow to the river
the river floods and flows
plants whistle through the soil

a man bare feet
red soiled clothes
and a heart, harder than a rail track
reads the sun and the river
and picks up a gun.

how, how is a long road measured?

if like the seasons
you have come and left
and come again

how is a long road measured

if the scars of your body
like soil receives the plough blade every season
begin to itch with expectation

how we ask, is a long road measured?

we will not lie on our back
and like a seedling of an aloe
solomon emerges
with horns as bright as the sun rays,
the silence here is very familiar now.

Central Park, Some People, 3.00 p.m.

If you cross a park, in heroic Havana,
in splendid Havana,
in a flood of afternoon light,
white and blinding,
blazing enough to drive that Van Gogh sunflower mad,
and completely filling the eyes of Chinese street-
photographers;

if you cross a park and misjudge
that blinding, white light,
very nearly repeating itself, everywhere in the city;

if you're at a loss, at that time of day,
and you take those unnecessary trips of yours
round Havana's Central Park;

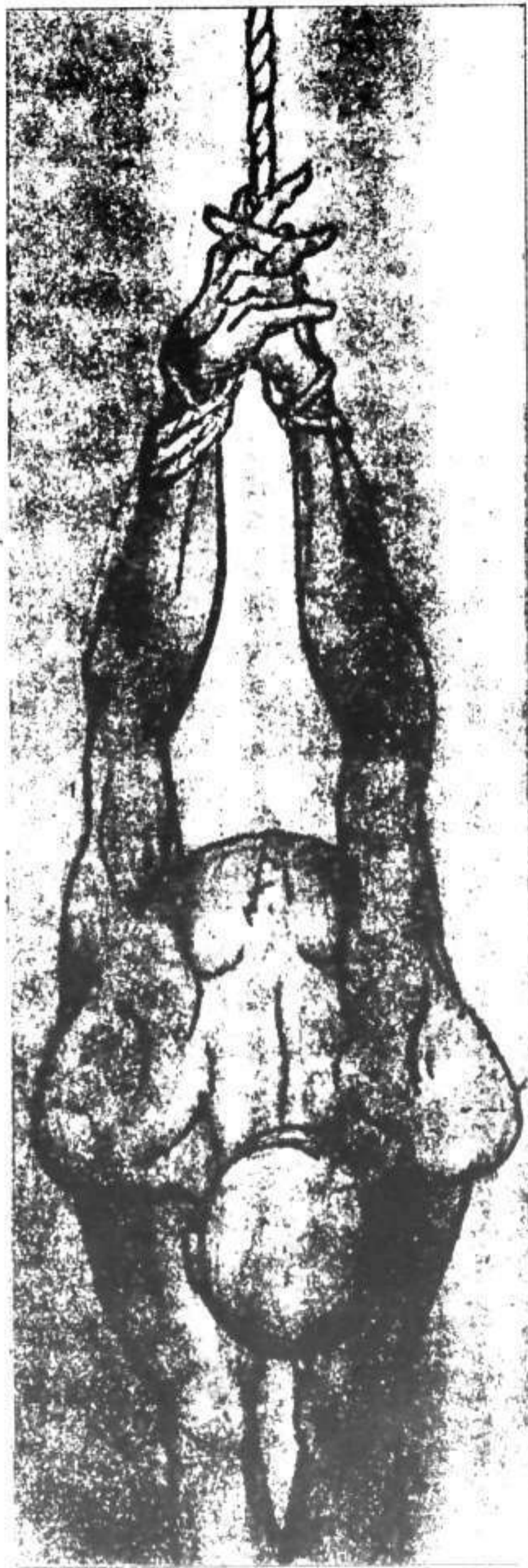
if you cross the Park, strewn with sacred trees,
and walk, seeing everything
and noticing nothing,
and loving the Revolution's impact on the eyes,
then you will know it, like the sensation of rum in the night,
because, in our parks, and in this one,
so central, in Havana,
very old men sit on the benches
and light large cigars
and look at one another
and talk about the Revolution and Fidel.

The old men are pieces of warm toast,
on the benches. It's no secret:
there go two men and a tired brief-case,
a vein-bloated hand,
a shout, wearing a grey felt hat.

The old men meet under the statue
of the Apostle Martí, in 1966,
in December, 1966;
the year is nearly over,
and they wait for "the anniversary of freedom
to pay tribute to the Martyrs",
to the men of the people
who died, and whose blood is drying,
in the afternoon sun,
in Havana, Cuba, free territory of America.

So, if you cross the Park, the world,
the womb of the Revolution,
you must hesitate,
walk slowly, breathe self-consciously,
step lightly,
hesitate,
breathe self-consciously,
walk slowly,
and give your whole life,
violently,
Companeros.

Nancy Morejon



Nancy Morejon

mini
mkaba
molefe
paul peterson
we ask luthuli
mandela tambo
how is a long road measured?
when sticks of arrows thinner than a child's arm
now bloom like flowers in spring
bursting into red, blue, purple, orange flames
at sasol

how is a long road measured, we ask?

if you see my eyes
on my round face as if they were two naked breasts
and they stare and stare and stare
if you hear this silence
like a sigh of secret lovers in the dark
not wailing like breaking glass
and you see
a myriad of red, blue, green and yellow flames
scream to the silent sky
and when you touch —
as if a snake twirled and disturbed,
everything shifts and shifts
ah my beloved
this means time is here
when the little ones, like a seed
must pierce the ground, and let the winter pass by.

remember those days when we sat around a brazier
not far from us, the wind whistling and whistling
and we watched
the gait of the old
as they came back from work to die
or went to work to destroy their strength for nothing
remember how we did not understand
that they were carrying oppression on their shoulders
silent
and plotting?

today in
orlando
moroka
boysens
soekmekaar
dube
sasol
durban power station
new canada
red, blue, green and yellow flames scream to the silent sky.

MONGANE SEROTE

Mother Patriot

June 16th, 1976 Soweto)

I saw yesterday
with sockets wet protruding
from a hollow shack a woman spread
into wilderness fists
teeth
to face death.
Skies hurled fires of doom
mountain mounds of poison
quaked shuddered
me you us
cloven-clumped to hang roots
hunched beads crawled away
toddlers
crept strode
nearer the form
to bring their budding
tomorrow now

What is this day, what was yesterday
shall tomorrow dawn to set for them?
Who ever prophesied this black cloud
this stiletto tear all of her here apart
how could mother-wife patriot human being woman
cow to the blanket of oblivion

how could... .

Death drops scarlet
on the barren earth
engraved onto younglings' palm words

"She must be avenged".

Rebecca Matlou



MY LULLABY IS FOR ALL BABIES

Mpho, you've been swelling. Losing your shape.
Losing it very fast. We heaved with uneasy joy.
We realised you would not, all the same, quench this
thin, small and wintry world.

Back home, teenagers
when a pair of LEE jeans is exhausted, thin and wintry
chop its knees with a blunt breadknife. They prolong
its lifespan. The beauty of some of the games
our townships play.

In American cars are long, sleek and stupid with our
times. The rich lurk behind their dark-tainted windowscreens.
it gives a dose of power, supreme power
to see and not be seen.
Safety of Hollywood agents is security of the guilty.

Mpho, do you realise how I avoided that root
in your stomach
developing in my womb? I planted it in you.
The man in you and the void guilt in me.
It is no transfer of the guilt of the rich. But only
the suspense of tragic achievements.
Not like a supersonic Jumbo Jet in the sky.
It puts the sun to bitter shame and negates nature.
But like a stubborn morsel in your stomach.
It resists when roughage peristalsis past.
It builds a home there. With time, it burns
your inside like solid ulcer. You whimper, sob
and whine.

Black home, our mothers suckle white babies
on their sweaty black breasts. They grow tough
like mules. They play rugby for Springbok and
clip-clip our tickets at the frozen Glencoe Junction.
If you confuse the line, a heavy boot against your
stomach scatters your insides like soya beans.

Hitler, when he came to power, overseered the Olympic Games.
I'm told. He built broad highways and set trains
moving on schedule. But Berlin was torn asunder all the same.

In America across me in a night train under New York
almond-shaped scarlet nails of a whore tug on Hadley Chase.
I shift the ice-cold Coca-Cola can from my chilled hand.
But she does not wink her painted muppet eyes
which say:

“Come my honeybird, syphilis doesn't stick on you”.

Mpho, what shall we say when the root developing in you
begins to crawl out of its layette, through my legs,
into a tubful of tears? Itchy tears of those
we love and choose to die for. It is a crawl larger
than life. So who shall tell it
that our existence is thin, small and wintry?

Whom do we await to tell the whore? To tell her
who manufactured Hadley Chase, Coca-Cola and LEE jeans?
I know her comprehension is dull, deliberately, of course.
Then spit into her face. A sputum that sticks like
a famished cob-webbed spider desperate for life.

Back home, they say Robben Island gradually sinks into
the ocean because they want to build Pollsmoor Holiday Resort.
What will happen to its inhabitants? I don't know!
when Ceylon sank into the sea.



Mpho, what shall we say when it begins to count to a hundred? It shall go to the cobbled streets of our exile life. It shall pick up stones, throw them into the air and count years they take to come back.

We shall tell it, that even our children still have to position the frontline. We still have to die, to die just a little. It is noble. Tell it, I'm crude at such talk.

Klaus Maphepha

ON THE ROAD TO THE CITY

On the road to the city

we
watch the stations and the girders
and a whole nation on wheels
we
look at the sun curving and splashing
the last afternoon with something akin
to beauty to grief to the pain of helplessness
we
watch through pursed eyes cigarette smoke
swirling and creating patterns
the black woman with a child riding piggy back
smiling whiteness on black face a chiaroscuro
that is the story of our life
we
hear her saying, *if you really must know*
and the world says nothing
is mute to the screams as the child falls
as bullets puncture the bodies until
all muscles relax

on the road to the city

we
look at the yellowed posters
on walls scarred by bullets and rain
we
see the bearded face of a onetime hero
of a people's revolution
a luta continua! those words stick
like bad meat in the national gullet
we
cry and scream and thrash and ask
are our children now frontline snakes
hunted haunted and harangued?

on the road to the city

we
ask everyone who can hear,
what is the meaning of all this?
we
are not answered and are looked at
with eyes of a burnt-out landscape
we
don't want to feel a searing sense
of helplessness
this futility
we
have people in our midst whose fund
of knowledge of the people of this land
is nothing and thus sets us at nought
we
watch the distortion of the african life
the devastation of the african world
spirits don't rejoice
we
watch as men with guns silently wrestle
with shadows and give meaning to pain
with their blood
we
are here and will be here to see
the other dawns on the horizon
on the road to the city
of our own creation.



mandla langa



TRADE UNIONS AND CULTURAL WORKERS

THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT TENDENCY TO SEPARATE ARTISTIC ACTIVITY FROM INDUSTRIAL WORK. A SLIGHTLY UPDATED VERSION OF THE ARTICLE WHICH MADE ITS APPEARANCE IN "DAWN" IN 1981 TRIES TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT BY SUGGESTING WHAT CULTURAL WORKERS AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS CAN DO TOGETHER TO COMBAT EXPLOITATION.

Efforts which proved unsuccessful have been made in the past to bring black South African artists together into a united national force. In the late fifties and early sixties, we had a cultural centre in Johannesburg (Bantu Men's Social Centre). Here were the offices of Union Artists, the only coherent body which represented creative workers then, but which, for one reason or the other, died in the early sixties. Since then nothing has come up which really stands for unity of artists and articulates their aspirations, frustrations and objectives.

The apartheid colonialist has taken the land, exploits our wealth and labour and to some extent, calls the political tune; has failed to colonise our cultural heritage. Having wisened up to that, his next move was to arrest it so that it advance no further; and in its place popularise western consumer-oriented (mainly American) culture among the oppressed. This has to some extent succeeded as witnessed by the entry into our society of American style clothes that were made popular by B-grade gangster movies. This went together with jazz, and different periods in the USA reflected themselves in South Africa in the clothes, music, theatre, for example, "King Kong", etc. For over four decades we have borne witness to a proliferation of western cultural styles and values in all forms. We have noticed the portrayal of the effects of the advent of capitalism — Jim Comes to Jo'burg. Now Jim wants to go to USA (Hollywood, Carnegie Hall, Studio 54, etc.)!

Though what follows will touch upon other aspects of art and culture, more focus will be directed to music as an art form.

The Nationalist regime, through a myriad of laws, has closed nearly all avenues of free musical expression. This they have done by excluding any type of music that goes against their interests of perpetuating racist supremacy from the radio and now TV through the Brederbond-controlled SABC. Faced with this state of affairs, recording companies, capitalist-owned and quick-profit-oriented, became willing partners in the campaign to throttle the black song. Only "happy-happy" music that set the nation dancing itself into oblivious disregard of the meaning of commitment was allowed. Banal songs with meaningless lyrics are the ones that get pressed on wax. Choral music — which is a favourite with a vast majority of our people — has been effectively and insidiously denuded of political content. Simultaneously with the above processes, at the end of the fifties, the Boers realised the stupidity of their policy of prohibiting Africans from drinking western liquor — there was also the frustrating question of their inability to tax illicit brews that served as an alternative — and open the door widely to the Africans. This was an act that served the system in two ways. Firstly, the capitalists made huge profits and the regime gave itself the sole right of operating bars and bottle stores in the townships. Secondly, the black masses happily drank openly, danced to the Mickey Mouse music the regime allowed, went to church on Sundays and reported to the boss on Monday with a legal hangover. Everybody was happy all round.

To drink, host and attend parties over the weekend, the worker had to stay employed, and to relieve his frustrations stemming from exploitation and the treadmill he found himself on, the

bottle and the noise coming from gramophones and radios were his only solace, and finally his padre exhorted him to contribute his tithe to the Bank of the Holy Ghost, serve his boss well and expect a better life after death. That was and still is the vicious cycle, complete and serving to dull the consciousness of the masses regarding their future — and their plight.

Jim Goes to the USA

Let us then look at the position of the musicians. Throughout the past four decades, bands have sprung up and disappeared. We speak with nostalgia nowadays of the Elite Swingsters, Merry Blackbirds, the Teachers Band of Port Elizabeth, the Manhattan Brothers, Woody Woodpeckers, African Quavers, and so on. There were and are memorable names like Ntemi Piliso, Nathan Mdledle, Skip Pahlane, the Dark City Sister, Lemmy Special Mabaso — who is with the Soul Brothers today — and others who have cut records that have immortalised them. A few flew out of the cuckoo's nest: Makeba, Dollar Brand, Jonas Gwanga, Hugh Masekela, Letta Mbulu and Katse Semanya. Katse and Letta are based in the USA. Gwanga and Masekela are in Gaborone. Others like Kippie Moeketsi remained behind to face a slow death in the South African wilderness. Others emerged in the sixties and seventies while some are still emerging in the eighties. All these groups and personalities have more than once been exploited by recording companies, agents, managers, producers, promoters, hustlers, and so on. There is not a single South African black musician who doesn't have a sad story to tell. The exploitation still continues and it is still difficult for musicians to unite.

At this juncture, it would be necessary to look at some of the causes militating against music unity. Apartheid has reduced a black musician to the status of a beggar whereby the road to a job is strewn with obstacles, such as stiff competition among musicians: the winner, at the end, sells himself short and gets ridden like a horse, since he offers cheap labour. One sees queues at recording companies of men pleading to be recorded. If not this, they are out there looking for jobs as studio artists. Poverty keeps musicians worried about the next meal, rent, clothes for his family, money to pay off the H.P. on the musical instruments and so forth. There is seldom time to reflect on the past and the future and whenever musicians meet in large numbers, normally at concerts or massive festivals, the mood is not conducive for any serious discussion. The talk is often about the whereabouts of the next gig, who to contact for which job, when is SABC offering openings for commercials, etc. There is no time to deal with the problems of royalties, studios fees, recording rights, that is, the problems that should be tackled by people who have formed themselves into a strong bargaining body — it would be a real strain on the imagination to think of artists under these circumstances really sitting down and discussing the state of the nation. In most cases, bands split within two years of their formation. Most musicians end up standing at the factory gates looking for jobs, frustrated and bewildered, angry. Truly, a few bands make it! These are the bands that have mastered the trick

of keeping the master content by churning out the "right sound and beat". One of these bands is the well-known Harari.

They adopted this name after playing at Harare Township during Smith's rule. Harari comes from the stock of bands that mushroomed in the sixties, bands that fused American Soul music with the township beat. Most of them like the Teenage Lovers, Flaming Souls, Inne Lawes, Movers of the "monkey jive" era, died in the seventies with the change of the American sound or, shall we say, the progression of American music from one level of mediocrity to the other? This brings us in that much debatable question of aesthetics.

Harari, formerly known as the Beaters, moved from soul to British/American rock that found its apogee in the Woodstock era, Afro-Rock that is borrowed from the criss-cross rhythms of Osibisa and presently a mixture of Santana-Mtume-Davie Bowie, Afro-Rock and Disco.

Harari has moved with the times. Gallo (an incredibly large number of black musicians wouldn't mind burning the Gallo studios to the ground!) went on a massive recording/publicity campaign for Harari. Harari keeps the nation dancing and also advertises products which, on closer scrutiny, are as covered with tinsel as is their music. The erstwhile leader of the band, Siphon Mabuse, when asked about the band's future, answered that Harari's dream was a trip to the USA! They did get their trip to the USA and how they were treated there is a subject of another essay. The only competition Harari faces is from groups that play "crossover" like Juluka, Steve Kekana and others whose music is "nice to hear" — and that's just about all!!

Let's take a look at theatre

Without delving much upon the historical developments of theatre in our ghettos, we should look at the frustratingly uphill battle that serious theatre has to fight inside the country, the conundrums faced by actors and playwrights in our society.

"Quality" theatre left our shores for Britain and USA in the early sixties. Remember King Kong? Sponono? The vacuum left was filled by people like Gibson Kente with his unspeakably contrived, screamingly unfunny productions that use every known theatre cliché in the book. The damaging quality of Kente's work is that it is loud in the land about the injustices perpetrated on the dispossessed and wretched of the earth but not even a single play — sketch would be more appropriate — ever addresses itself to giving our people some direction as to how they could do away with these injustices. The advent of black consciousness brought a sudden upsurge of radical theatre with students mainly taking part. There were plays like Shanti, Requiem for Brother X, and so on, which like many other things in black consciousness at the time were borrowed from Black Americans, namely Ed Bullins, Douglass Turner Ward, Le Roi Jones (Imamu Baraka) and many others. One should not, however, get the illusion that the racists sat on the wings and applauded. No. There were many obstacles that lay athwart the path of this new development. Harassment, detention and death were risks cultural workers of the moment faced. This was the time



Nathan Mdledle, left, plays the lead part in KING KONG, a musical that catapulted a lot of black South African artists to fame.

of paranoia and hysteria when the censors and the Security Police viewed a poem as an AK 47 in inchoation. This era was followed by a proliferation of two-man plays popularised by The Wild Geese actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, for example, Sizwe Banzi is Dead, which won them Tony Awards. Perhaps for the first time this genre came closer to addressing itself to the realities of South African life. In a bid to counter this development, the regime, through its administration boards, demanded to see scripts before they were put up in the regime's halls in the townships. These halls serve as venues for concerts, theatre, bioscope, boxing and so on.

This is how the regime tried to phase out radical theatre in the townships. Obscenities like The Schoolgirl and the Taxi Driver were allowed to serve as the only source of entertainment. Radical theatre found a home in liberal centres in the cities like at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, Baxter and Space theatres in Cape Town, etc., and also at liberal universities. The regime turns a blind eye, as the performances are far from the working masses, are quite expensive and serve white intellectuals, students and the few blacks who can afford.

More than once newspapers have carried stories of actors not remunerated, taken for a ride, left stranded on tours by producers. Worse

still are stories of actresses being harassed and exploited sexually — this pressure made to bear upon them if they want parts in plays. On the whole one gets a picture of sleazy disorganisation and depravity on the part of management and the attendant insecurity among workers connected with theatre. Phoenix Players, a centre of actors is and has been a place of exploitation. From time immemorial, it has been run by one Ian Berhardt, a white businessman who has "made it" so much so that he was planning to emigrate to the USA. Actors and actresses who have worked under Kente (Sikalo, Lifa, etc.) and Mzwandile Maqina (Give us this Day) also have their own stories to tell.

Efforts have been made to bring actors together to form a union. Some had temporary success, such as the SA Black Theatre Union of the black consciousness era, before the regime's clampdown. Others suffered an energy crisis from the very beginning, the latest effort failing in 1980. The situation of white artists who are protected by law is well-known. There are organisations like the SA Music Association, PACT, etc., securing the interests of white artists. Time should not be wasted discussing the other side of the moon.

The Present Anti-Imperialist Cultural Movement

It was mentioned previously that there are bands and groups that won't have the wool pulled over their cultural eyes by the regime. There are also hosts of individuals, musicians who are part of the movement that won't ever sell its soul to the Shylocks and moneychangers.

In nearly every township one can think of there is a cultural group that has connexions with a church or a youth club, or carries on autonomously. These are centres of experimentation where alternative theatre abounds, where other creative art forms are learnt. It is in these centres that original poetry is recited and guitars plunk messages that strike terror into the hearts of the sell-outs and their bosses. Here are tambourines, congas, acoustic guitars, ready to accompany voices raised in triumph, in rage, in hope. Here you might find a well-equipped amateur band, a solo artist, a poetry group. You won't hear these young artists playing Cliff Richard's latest song. Their music celebrates that thing in them that sees the need to fight for freedom. The inclination may be towards reggae, or original catchy tunes, or freedom songs, or traditional songs, or poetry ... anything but the *muzak* popularised by the state and recording companies. It is some of these groups that appear at commemoration services, celebrations or political meetings to render a song, a poem or a short drama. Also, there are the other professional groups that are patronised by intellectuals, students, the white left, and so on. The number of these bands is not so big, they manage to survive as professional bands by playing at small clubs, universities, colleges, liberal theatres and cultural centres such as Diakonia, Open School, etc. Some of these bands emerged after the fire of 1976: AK47, Afrozania, Malopoets, Tou, Malimu, Badiri, Sakhile and others. Also there is the third category that comprises of recordable groups and individuals like Juluka, Steve Kekana (remember his song The Bushman?), Joy and others, for example *mbaqanga* groups who have from time to time

performed at concerts organised to raise funds for working class causes.

Groups have been brought together during the Fattis & Monis and Wilson-Rowntree strikes to raise funds for striking workers. It was indeed gratifying to see those groups coming forward knowing fully well the likely reaction of the regime's Gestapo. JOY, the female vocal trio, refused to perform for "the boys at the border" when asked to do so by the South African Death Force during their tour of Namibia. Shortly thereafter, the SABC stopped playing Paradise Road over the air and a feeble explanation was given implying the existence of subversive undertones in the song. The song had long reached the number one spot on the charts and was well within the second gold disc mark. All these groups, including those that are now working with recording companies, need to come together as a strong anti-apartheid, anti-imperialist, progressive and democratic union of South African musicians and artists.

Groundings for our brothers

The Federated Union of Black Artist (FUBA), which was built with Anglo American's and other allied capitalist organisations' funds, has always been that glamorous institution which produces a certain type of artist: one that views creativity as an entree into the higher social strata of our society.

Recently, FUBA hosted an exhibition



of paintings of some of America's and Europe's artists at the Lower Houghton home of Harry Oppenheimer's daughter, Mary. South African artists did not take part. When asked about this glaring omission, FUBA director Sipho Sepamla replied to the Press that black artists were difficult to reach — meaning, of course, that they were not on the phone, live far from town, and so on. This is Sepamla's excuse for class discrimination. So much for the Federated Union of Black Artists.

The Music, Drama, Art and Literature Institute (MDALI) has for a long time seen itself as the saviour of South African cultural workers. It has, however, antagonised a lot of artists with its exclusivist brand of black consciousness. Of the two organisations, MDAI is the oldest coming from the early black consciousness days and could easily have gained respectability, support from the community and the membership of artists. But, like an old spider, it sits in its web in a dark corner, refusing to move out into the light. Like most b.c. organisations, one comes across MDAI mostly in newspapers in the form of press statements; in rare cases at commemoration services.

There is a lot of vibrant cultural activity inside the country outside the "established" structures. In the Cape there are numerous progressive cultural groups. In Natal and the Orange Free State almost all locations boast of one or two cultural formations. There are over 50 cultural groups in the Transvaal. All these operate outside the system. All these different formations need to be brought together into a strong, creative, democratic force of the people's voice.

Trade Unions and Culture

The history of the South African trade union movement is one of battles won and lost; it is of gains and skirmishes against the bosses and the racist tyranny of South Africa; it is of an uphill struggle for workers' organisations and unity. A struggle for economic rights as well as (in alliance with the national liberation movement) for the political rights of the oppressed people in the land. The history reads as an impressive catalogue of bold strikes for economic demands; pitched battles with the regime and bosses. It is a baptism in fire which culminated in the formation of SACTU in 1955 as a realistic compass for the trade union movement, anchored in the revolution.

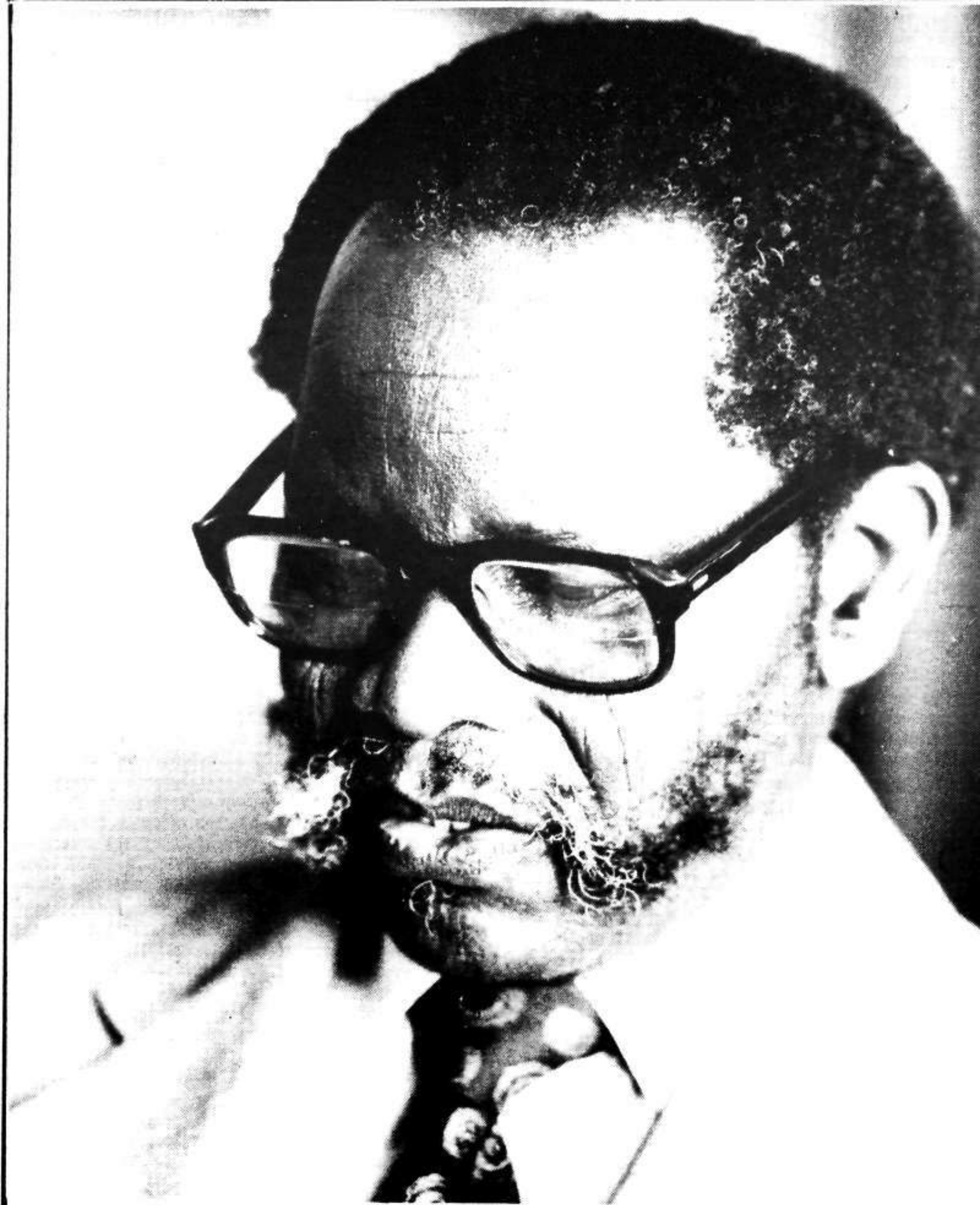
The trade union movement has the difficult task of establishing one union for one industry and one united trade union federation for the whole country. Considering the odds against the workers, unions and trade unionists, much has been done to organise the workers. It is a slow process but one can say that of the 10 million or so workers at least 1 million are organised into trade unions. The growing militancy of the workers indicates their growing awareness of their strength as a class. Workers' political awareness is high. The workers and their unions can be of inestimable help in politicising and organising their cultural counterparts by inviting or adopting them into their fold. Here, we can address ourselves to *how* and *why* this could be done, and in that manner we would be dealing with the heart of this discussion, *Trade Unions and Cultural Workers in South Africa*.

In dealing with the *why* of the matter, it will be seen that 80% of the reasons have been given dealing with disunity and disorganisation of artists. The speedy unity of the trade unions themselves would undoubtedly lessen the enormous task of unionising artists. But with the situation still unresolved, the following could happen: FOSATU, GAWU, SAAWU, GWU, AFCWU, FCWU, etc., are spread out and have representations countrywide. Each of these unions, trade union centres and affiliates have branches in almost all industrial towns and cities right up to chapters within the factories, workplaces, etc. A metal industry union, such as MAWU, could adopt a band, a theatre group, a group of artists, painters, sculptors, etc., (people in the industry could be taught iron and steel sculpture, for instance) and a group of writers. These would take care of creative entertainment at meetings, fundraising shows, make creative educational, agitational or informative posters for union purposes, run a union newsletter, to cite a few practical examples. The artists could be grouped at regional levels of operation and come together at national level when the need arises.

With all unions and union centres adopting groups or whole cultural units, creative workers shall begin interacting with workers on a large scale, learning more about workers' issues and getting involved in their struggle. The fusion, the interaction, is too explosive to imagine! Artists will portray reality, musicians will sing about strikes; they will sing about unemployment and what should be done about it; plays will be based on the workers' struggles and our theatre will find creative sustenance from reality. On the other hand, stimulation of interest in and appreciation of culture will be enhanced among the workers. The two sides stand to benefit. What is of great importance is that the likely result of this marriage will be the perception of the need for unity, need for creative workers in their different fields to get together with industrial workers: this unity of cultural workers will finally take care of the issues affecting artists and act as an example for the future liberated South Africa.

The question of benefits for the artists is very exciting. A trade union or trade union centre could provide employment for, say, musicians, by providing venues and ready audiences throughout the country. The artists would be earning a living while simultaneously raising funds for the workers' organisations. Artists would not have to worry about airplay, galleries, etc., to reach the people. Their work would spread like wildfire. Wildflowers, for all seasons. This would be one way of keeping artists away from the false dreams created by imperialism. A reference point from where the creative worker has long been alienated will be rediscovered. In this way, the artist will be set on the new road leading to freedom, justice and progress.

The imperialists have long recognised the power of culture in winning the minds of the people. Now, the mobilization of artists is an urgent task. Cultural workers and workers through their unions and trade union centres are charged with the task of frustrating the designs of apartheid colonialism and imperialism, and ushering forth an era flowering with the free creativity of a liberated people.



PRESIDENT O.R. TAMBO

"WE CHARGE OUR CULTURAL WORKERS WITH THE TASK OF USING THEIR CRAFT TO GIVE VOICE, NOT ONLY TO GRIEVANCES, BUT ALSO TO THE DEEPEST ASPIRATIONS OF THE OPPRESSED AND EXPLOITED. IN OUR COUNTRY A NEW SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORDER IS BEING BORN. OUR ARTISTS HAVE TO PLAY AN EVEN BIGGER ROLE AS MIDWIVES OF THIS GLORIOUS FUTURE. LET THE ARTS BE ONE OF THE MANY MEANS BY WHICH WE CULTIVATE THE SPIRIT OF REVOLT AMONG THE BROAD MASSES, ENHANCE THE STRIKING POWER OF OUR MOVEMENT AND INSPIRE THE MILLIONS OF OUR PEOPLE TO FIGHT FOR THE SOUTH AFRICA WE ENVISAGE."

Q: In the January 8 statement of the National Executive Committee this year, prominent mention is given to the cultural field. How would you briefly define culture and the task of the artist in the struggle?

A: Culture could be said to be the cumulative responses of a people to their political, economic and social environment which, in historical perspective, have resulted in stabilised behavioural patterns or "a way of life". In the domain of the arts, artists interpret these responses in a creative and dynamic process which in turn influences the outlook and behaviour of society. The dominant class in any given society actively seeks to perpetuate itself and largely uses the medium of culture for this purpose.

The task of our artists is therefore to articulate our struggle, our hopes and aspirations using the varied forms created by their skills and talents. They can then grow into a powerful, recognisable force within the ranks of our broad liberatory movement throughout our country and beyond.

Q: Culture is often seen within our ranks as something mainly ornamental, recreational and entertaining. It is also sometimes seen as mainly for "cultured comrades", rather than for everybody. Is this a correct view for cadres of the liberation movement to hold?

A: On the one hand there is the elitist Eurocentric approach which associates culture with formal education and exposure to certain exclusivist cultural artifacts. In South Africa this view has been deliberately promoted and used for bolstering white supremacy since the whites have always had the monopoly of access to these cultural "prerequisites".

But for the majority of the people on the exploited end of the scale, culture is depicted as neutral entertainment in order to blind the oppressed to its revolutionary potential. In fact all people are involved in culture,

both the performer and the spectator who reacts to what he or she sees or hears.

The ANC cadre should always be aware of this involvement and consciously accept the responsibility to engage in some form of cultural activity which in one way or another brings out the content and direction of the struggle.

Q: We have this situation where South African artists who are by no means apologists for the regime, go abroad to present their works and talents. In view of the cultural boycott, what is our attitude to this.



A: Our position on this is clear. There should be no cultural links with racist South Africa. As part of our struggle, we give all the encouragement to those South African artists who, in their works, are fighting against the apartheid system with all its injustices. Foreign artists who support our cause should actively engage in anti-apartheid activities, either as artists or on a broader plane, within their respective countries.

Q: Despite everything, the cultural scene inside South Africa is vibrant. There are impressive inventive advances as well as technical progress in theatre, writing, dance, music, fine art, even film. On the other hand, culture in the ANC is primarily on the agit-prop model. How can we ensure that we, as ANC cultural workers, do not become irrelevant in a liberated South Africa?

A: The ANC promotes the cultural development of our people and there are no cultural barriers, either geographic or aesthetic, between the ANC cultural workers inside and outside South Africa and the vibrant culture of the people. There is therefore no question of ANC cultural workers being irrelevant.

It is a matter of fact that cultural workers inside the country operate under the constraints of limited training facilities, but they are the ones who determine (within the confines of the apartheid system) what is South African culture. The few who are outside operate under relatively

free conditions and can acquire unlimited skills and benefits from exposure to world culture.

There are cultural institutions in South Africa, but these serve a small elitist minority and are geared towards promoting certain values, most of which are inimical to our goal of a democratic, unitary and non-racial South Africa. By training cultural technicians, administrators, teachers and artists in various disciplines, we would ensure that the existing institutions can be reorganised to serve the type of society we envisage.

Q: The Department of Arts and Culture is planning a Community Cultural Centre for Dakawa. What do you think are the minimum cultural facilities which should be made available in a given community, Dakawa for example?



Abdullah Ibrahim: a portrait of a committed musician at work.

A: I would say that minimal cultural facilities for any community would be a cinema, a library, a theatre for performing arts, sports facilities, centres for arts and crafts, etc. which would cater for children, youth and the adult population.

The Dakawa Cultural Centre should therefore be a live active centre for creating and training cultural activists and, more importantly, producing artistic works as well as traditional and modern crafts. The range is unlimited: woodwork, beadwork, pottery and ceramics, jewelry, silk-screening, leatherwork, batik, etc.

Q: There is an ongoing campaign by the racist regime to cultivate a black middle class that will find itself defending the regime. The media plays a big part in this process. How should cultural workers combat this?

A: Our people are continuously bombarded with various forms of cultural influences meant to give them a false, escapist and anti-liberation orientation. We must congratulate the musicians, poets, writers and other artists

who have successfully withstood this cultural onslaught and have been able to engage in more meaningful community-oriented cultural activities.

We exhort our people, in their various formations — as youth, women, workers, professionals, the converted and the animists, to counter this intellectual and moral attack and help to create viable, constructive and nation-building values among our people.

Q: How can we preserve our traditional African culture(s) — language, oral literature, dance — and simultaneously avoid the pitfalls of tribalism and chauvinism?

A: The apartheid enemy tries to separate us into ancient "tribal" entities and pretends to be concerned with the preservation of our cultural heritage. We are one people with a rich cultural heritage which manifests itself in many variations. Our task is not to preserve our culture in its antique forms but to build on it and let it grow to assume a national character, the better to become a component of all evolving world culture.

In this context language, oral literature, dance, etc., become elemental parts of the national culture — a people's possession rather than a means of tribal identification. In any case the notion of "tribe" has colonial origins, is promoted by colonial regimes and serves the purposes of "divide and rule". Culture does not divide. It unites because it is a universal possession.

Q: Comrade President, are you optimistic about the role cultural work will play in the building of our future, non-racial, democratic and liberated South Africa?

I am more than optimistic; I am confident. For, cultural work is already playing an increasing role in the struggle for a liberated South Africa. Through struggle we are cultivating a sense of common nationhood, embracing the entire people, wherein various cultural strains are seen as components of a united people's national culture rather than works of separate identity; where diversity lends variety and richness to the experience of life in society.

A future non-racial and democratic South Africa will be a product, not least, of our conscious cultural work.

ART AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

JAANTJIE KOM HUIS TOE (or how to become a Cape Coloured Corpse)

Some extracts for a letter sent by a friend in Stellenbosch

Tonight SATV screened "Jaantjie Kom Huis Toe", a propaganda feature film about a "coloured" gent who joins the Cape Corps...

"Jaantjie" is a pro-conscription movie and a love story, and its a little difficult to decide which element of the plot takes precedence. The two themes are so entirely inter-woven — no, now that I come to think about it for a while longer, the conscription theme and the love story are exactly the same. Jaantjie wins his love by conscription; well actually, at this stage, by volunteering for the Cape Coloured Corps.

The lady in question is extremely "attractive", that is to say very white in appearance,

and she eventually rejects the "upward mobility" she has managed to achieve as a dress designer in favour of a life with Jaantjie. Jaantjie of the Cape Corps who clearly has more "moral fibre" than the very rich and cultured owner of the dress shop she's been working in, (and who had somehow managed to get her to agree to marry him).

A very primitive plot — Riegaard van den Bergh clearly felt much more constraint with the "Coloured" community than with intellectual whites (as in "Die Rooi Komplot"). Real pussy-footing — not a single real community issue raised. The overall message, (spelt out in one bit of dialogue and hinted at in lots of little scenarios), is that if your life lacks meaning and direction you should sign up with the SADF. There you will be provided with discipline and stability, as well as being given the chance to let your humanity and compassion, not

to mention your manhood, flourish. The sleaziness of the worlds of others will not touch you, your parents will be proud of you, and most importantly, you will become most desirable to the elusive girl of your dreams

There is also a scooter and medal reward thrown in if you save a helpless white family from desperate terrorists, who hold them hostage on their simple, godly, farm-on-the-border. And you get to shoot these terrorists *really* dead. Drill them from head to toe as you grit your teeth and think of...

Do our cultural masters really believe that scores of "coloured" youth will be queuing outside the offices of the Cape Corps (or more popularly, Cape Corpse) after this rubbish? How long do we have to tolerate our national resources being squandered on such reactionary, culturally-backward and poor quality television productions?



Boetie, hy gaan border toe.

Boetie saves by Barclays Bank
Boetie drives a Datsun tank
Boetie shaves with Wilkinsons
Boetie's on our TV screens.

Boetie veg die Kommuniste
Boetie skiet die terroriste
Boetie veg vir God en land
Boetie sterf . . . in 'n pad ongeluk.

Poor boy

I'm just a poor boy, off to join the army
They told me if I join up a good salary will be mine
Did they tell you that you're cannon fodder, that you're in the frontline?
They told me of their pension scheme and other fringe benefits
Did they tell you that you might die young from AK47 bullets?
They told me its the right thing to defend the nation
Did they tell you of apartheid and exploitation?



A scene from Mike van Graan's play, Minutes of Silence, for the End Conscription Campaign. Art of this nature is burgeoning in our communities.

DUMILE FENI



After years of struggling to find his feet in foreign lands, Dumile is now about to become widely known in New York and North America.

DAZZLING FORCE

His work continues to express, with dazzling force, the cruelties and deprivations of life for black people caused by a system of apartheid. But Dumile never loses sight of the universal dimension of the struggle against oppression, nor of the seeds of hope and compassion, hidden in the darkest night.

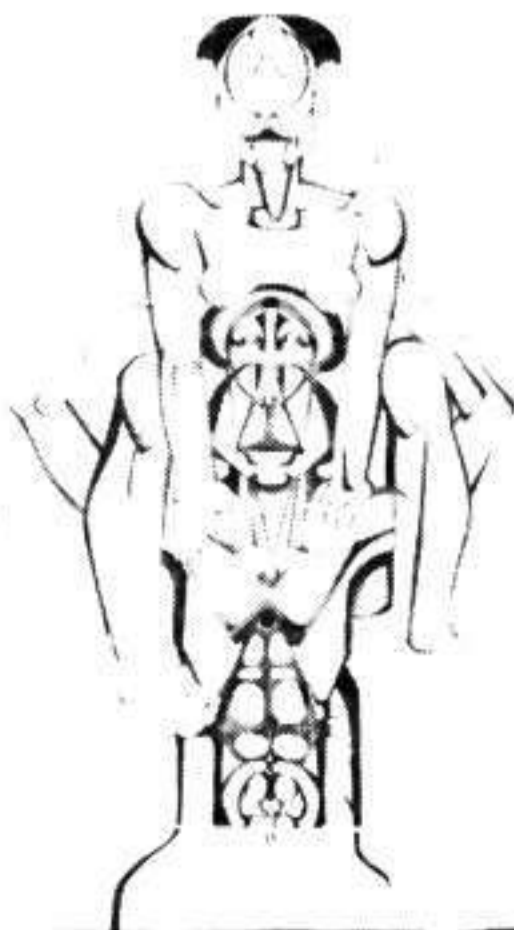
Dumile's friend, Bill Ainslie, has summed up the artist's achievements thus, "Dumile took the raw material of his life in Soweto, and it was a life of real ordeal and translated it into work in a manner which revealed a capacity to face unflinchingly the most frightening extremities of human desperation and cruelty without spilling over into sentimentality or overblown expressionism. His originality led to a new style of drawing in South Africa, but I have not found anybody equal the ferocity and compassion of his work."

**CULTURAL WORKERS UNITE
AGAINST APARTHEID!**

winner Chief Albert Luthuli. They also resented the attacks against apartheid which emerged in the titles he gave to his sculptures and drawings. Dumile was also an active sympathizer of the banned African National Congress. After being in and out of prison and often in hiding, Dumile was forced to go into exile.

YEARS OF STRUGGLE

Despite the great hardships of exile, Dumile has struggled to develop and expand his wide artistic interests. He has made posters, murals and calendars for the cause of liberation; in 1978 he was visiting lecturer at UCLA, and recently he has been attending the New York Film School.



REVIEWS

TWO TIMELY POETS

Dispossessed by Modikwe Dikobe (Ravan 1983)

Inside by Jeremy Cronin (Ravan 1983)

In 1979 a group of literature students went to visit Modikwe Dikobe at his retirement plot in the Northern Transvaal. They went to discuss with him about his now well-known working class novel, *The Marabi Dance*. There was animated discussion about the background to *The Marabi Dance*, about Sophiatown, Alexandra, the Defiance Campaign, Trade unions in the forties and fifties, and the tremendous difficulties involved in first getting the novel published. After all the conversation there was one last question: "Mr Dikobe, what do your friends think of your novel?"

Dikobe looked amused. "None of my friends have read my novel," he said, "In fact I've hardly ever met anybody who's read *The Marabi Dance*." However at the age of 70, Dikobe published another book, this time poetry; a stunning, totally remarkable volume called simply *Dispossessed*.

Dispossessed is poetry from the pen of Dikobe, worker, political activist, trade unionist and author. Someone who after a lifetime of work in South Africa found the land on which he was living declared part of a mad concept called "Bophuthatswana". Here are poems of labour and of the land; city and rural episodes of the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. Muscular, straightforward but constantly surprising lines from the world of the migrant worker, the proletarian, the peasant, the cast down chief and the new emerging South African. The title poem *Dispossessed* narrates the story of a community broken from proud farmers to transient workers:

*You were ordered to call a Pitso
To Mai-is-isi camp
You were told men are wanted
To dig diamonds out of the earth
You cannot pay your tax by selling cattle,
Golden sovereign, Queen Victoria's Head,
You marked X against your name
You raised two fingers "Modimo nthuse —
God help me".*

And so the story of dispossession is played out through the volume — from the pre-colonial glimpses in *Time Immemorial* to the stark modernity of *Border Industry*:

*Pick up
Your Stock and machinery
Homeland labour
Is cheap
No industrial agreement
No trade union organisation
No agitators*

*You are assured
Of output
Best Quality
World Competitive
As long as you
Don't label it
"HOMELAND".*

In a series of finely sketched cameos from *Rosie I: Backyard Boyfriend* to *Rosie VIII: Nannies' Protest*, the trials and tribulations of women domestic servants are revealed. The constant threat of police raids against husbands and boyfriends living in the maids' quarters in the backyards of white suburbs comes under Dikobe's taut, ironical and infinitely humourous scrutiny.

From *Rosie VII: Ear Telephone II*:

*Rumour is rife
Of a big police raid tonight
Against backyard lodgers
Against passless blacks.*

"Rosie you're amazing."

*We women pass information
We're ear telephones
Alert to what goes around
Advising each other
How to treat our boyfriends
You, I vowed, I shall never forsake.*

*There's a house away from here
As big as Castle brewery
Go there tonight: pose as a nightwatchman.*

In *These Black Hands*, Dikobe spells out the mineworker's lot. *A Worker's Lament* sings a plaintive song of an industrial worker's long hours little pay, poor working conditions, long journeys are economically constructed, aphoristic portrayals of rural situations between the powerful and the powerless; white farmer and farm labourer; land owner and dispossessed serf. Under Dikobe's microscope no mundanity of oppression is too small to become interesting poetry, no structural violence without its human cost, no individual incident without its underlying cause. In *Dispossessed* there is always this dialectic, this history that makes life what it is, as in *Hanging Servitude*,

*Mastership and baaskap are stained
Stained into the mind and soul
Since the day of conquest
Till nowadays —
Hard to erase.*

*Hard to accept
In heart-tearing veins
A gushing stream of resentment.*

Despite the precise descriptions of the pain, anguish and bitterness of national dispossession, the voice behind the poetry is itself not bitter. *Dispossesse!* does not descend, even for an instant, into sentimentality; nor ever slide a centimetre into cynicism and resignation. Here and there is a certain verbal gaiety, magnesium flares which illuminate the brittle landscape of South African reality, hinting at a new, splendid dawning. And then to plunge again into the phantasmagoria of defeat, suffering, ignorance, dispossession and terrible loss; and then to push aside, however slightly, the edifice of dispossession weighing down our lives. And we must go forward, as in *Learning*,

*The world is boundless
Each one of us
Can contribute
Provided
We pluck off
Complexes, fear and mistrust.*

UMKHONTO WE SIZWE

When Jeremy Cronin published *Inside* in 1983, he had just emerged from 7 years in various high security prisons. Convicted in 1976 under the Terrorism Act he has lately been reading his poetry to audiences all over South Africa, holding his listeners spellbound with his conversational, yet musical lines.

Inside speaks with quiet passion about Cronin's political commitment, his love for his country, and the all-too-often-cruel touch of experience. His poetry is full of the consequences of actions, both terrible and beautiful; and the unrelenting human need to act, even if only mentally.

Without a doubt, the tour de force of this volume is the 10-page poem *Walking on Air*, which narrates the life of a fellow political prisoner John Matthews. The densely packed prologue describing the prison workshop, "otherwise known as the seminar room", sets the scene for the story to unfold:

*In the prison workshop then, over the months,
over the screech of grindstone, I'm asking
John Matthews about his life and times, as
I crank the handle, he's sharpening a plane,
holding it up in the light to check on its
bevel, dipping the blade to cool in a tin
of water, then back to the grindstone, sparks
fly: "I work for myself" — he says — "not
for the boere";*

And unfold it does, playing out in short, melodic bursts of verse, Matthews' working class origins, his conversion to communism, his work for Umkhonto We Sizwe, his arrest and interrogation, his refusal to turn state witness:

*A man would come to the backyard and
whisper:*

30 ignitors.

*And John Matthews would make 30, to be
delivered to X.*

*And a man would come in the dead of night
These need storing comrade, some things
wrapped in waterproof cloth*

TERRORIST BOMB POWERLINES

*He would read in the bourgeois press, or
MIDNIGHT PASS OFFICE BLAST*

*He'd sigh a small sigh
— Hadn't been sure
Those damned ignitors would work.*

WHITE POLITICAL PRISONERS

Another strong prison poem in the volume entitled *Death Row*, tells of the hours which condemned freedom fighters Shabangu, Moise and Tsotsobe spent within shouting distance of the cells of the white political prisoners. In his epigrammatic *Pollsmoor Sketches*, Cronin brings us a pungent whiff of the wracked humanity of the common-law prisoners.

But most of the pieces in the collection, despite having been written in prison, do not openly declare themselves as prison poetry. We explore *Some Uncertain Wires* of childhood and adult nostalgia. We *Venture to the Interior* in a political archeology, digging word from primeval soil, phrases of sensibility from the fossils of our earth, as in

*If you're asking: whose land?
Under the pounding of wood, consider
Between the grinding conversations, stone to
stone,
Where the sun gives up its vegetable holds,
How many centuries
Have been stirred into putu?*

*Whose land? — If you're wondering
It's no use telephoning. Stamp the earth
Ask among the bones
Where the frogs bring down
Rain on their own heads, and the earth
Chews, chews,
Like a pair of scissors never getting fat.*

*Grain's seed, grass, shrub's roots
Where the men's bones with their snuff
pouches,
Women's bones with their porridge sticks, ask
There where lineage on lineage sits
Tucked in this earth.*

Even the *Love Poems*, erotic and celibate in turns, take us beyond mere sensual contemplation into a world of hard reason and firm commitment. Sexy, sad, comic — and then suddenly tragic; when Cronin finds himself imprisoned but alive, whilst she for whom he longs is no longer. From *Your Deep Hair*:

*Remember the mierkat's
footfall down the inner sleeve of night,
under the milkbush, under the curdled
star clouds of galactic semen
spilled across the sky, you turned in sleep and
from your deep hair tumbled
aromatic buchu and the wide veld.*

*Three months now,
Scalp shaved,
you died, they say,
your head encased in wraps.*

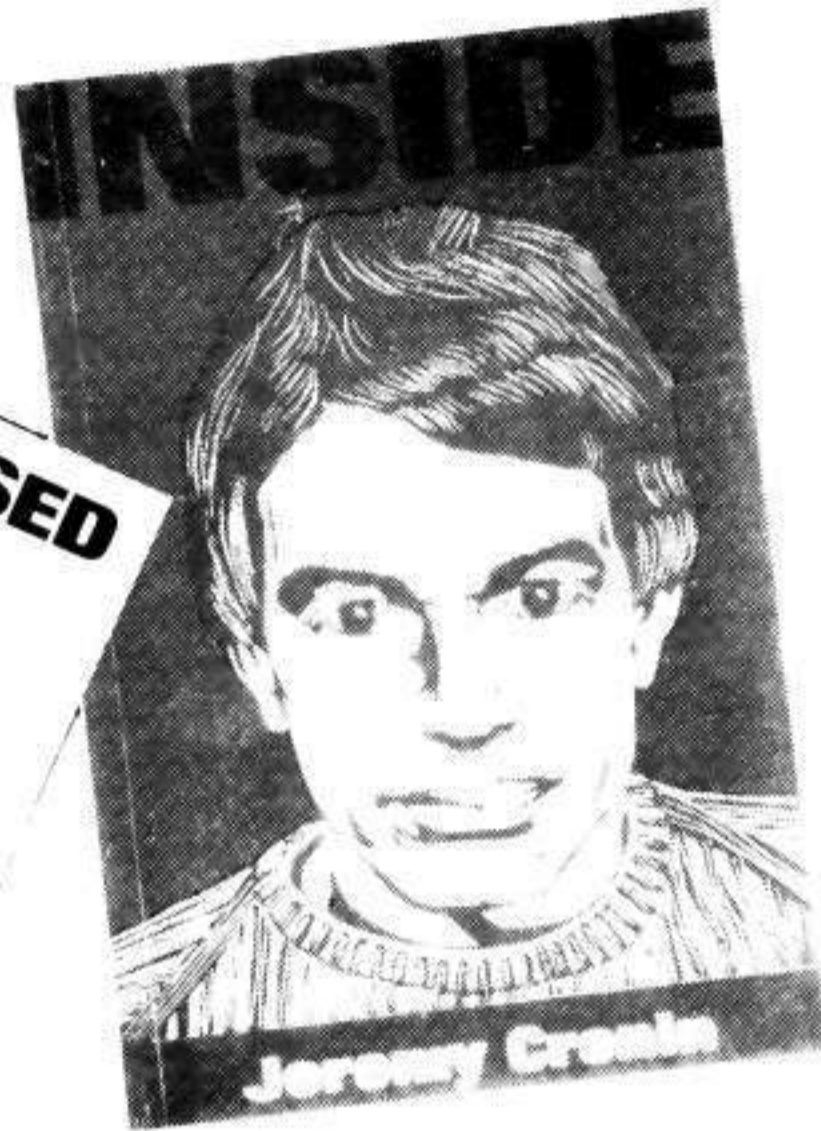
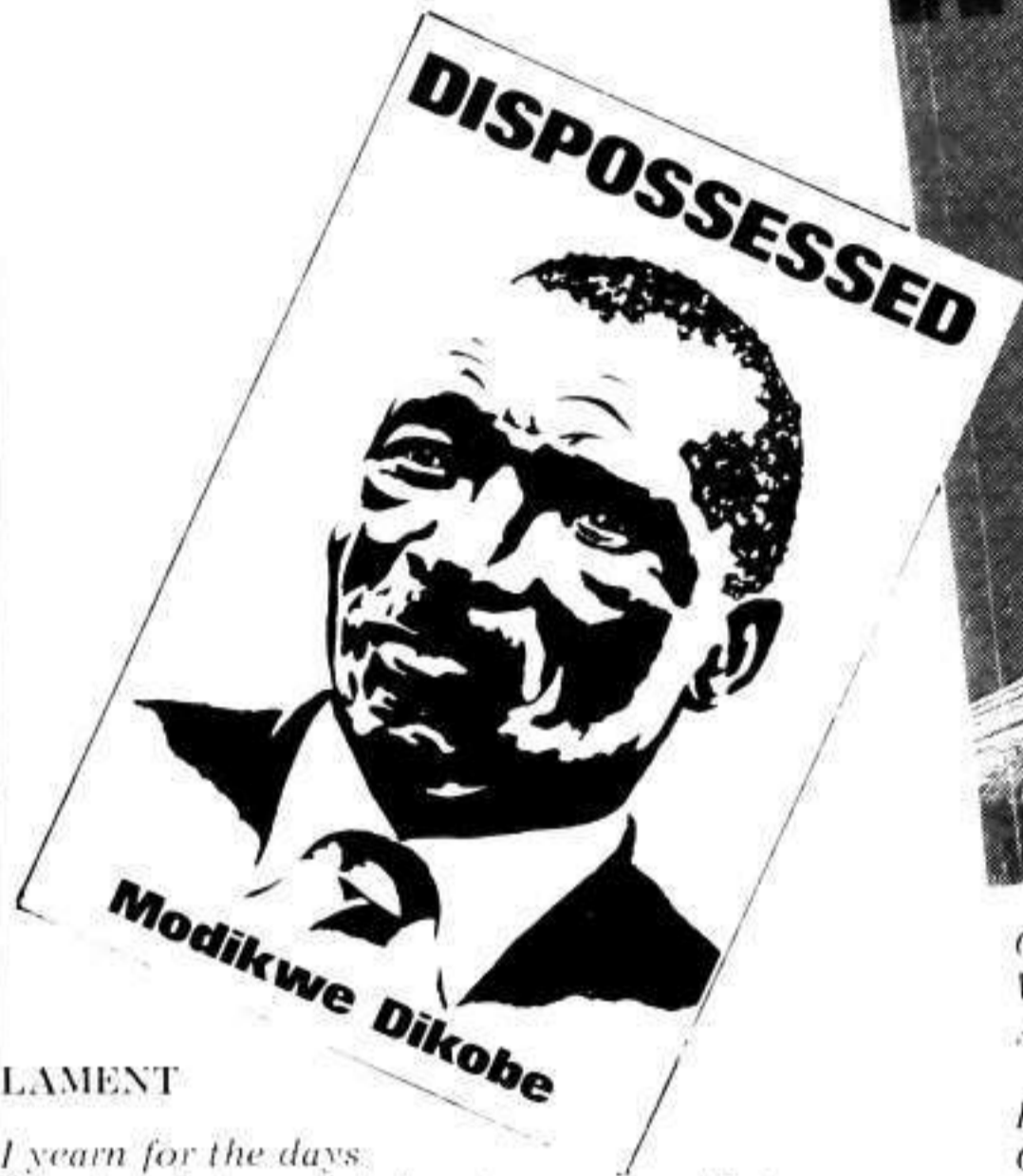
Most refreshing about *Inside* is its significant break with so many of the dilemmas and impasses indulged in by so many of our white South African poets. Breytenbach's work seems increasingly prolix as he becomes more flailingly metaphysical, more self fixated, more and more crushed by self-pity, exile, angst. On the other side of the

spectrum we have the polished vacuity of Hope, the poetical homilies of Gray, Greig et al, and the well-formed but hopelessly elliptical poetry of Nicol.

Cronin has proved beyond doubt that it is possible to be white in South Africa and still write highly readable poetry — but only because he is not only committed to poetry, but also to something else — to a democratic South Africa and to the action needed to bring it about.

Both Dikobe and Cronin are timely poets, singing of the old age and singing towards the new. Here and now as we stand before the amazing fissure called South African society and feel the persistent tremors of shift and change; as we stand on the edge of a great moment of the dispossessed; as we ready to advance, building on the resistance of the past, once more advance...

It is now we need such calm and lucid voices to guide our work and days.



LAMENT

*I yearn for the days
The days I stayed at street corner meetings
Speaking to sightless sight!
Learning the art of speaking.*

*I remember the days
Freedom played hide and seek
In reef trains
In factories
And in every beer hall.*

*I pine for the days
Protest meetings needed no permit
Lunch hour city hall meetings
And Human Rights rallies.*

*Buy me wings
On May Day
On Market Square shall I speak
About pass-laws, trade unionism, votes for all.*

*I look forward for a day
When I shall move freely
Seeing the beauty of Mother Africa
Then I will bid farewell
Without remorse.*

MODIKWE DIKOBÉ (from *Dispossessed*)

*Our land holds its hard
Wooden truths like a speech
A pip:*

*Out at Athlone
By the power station
Over two cooling towers, the wind
Turns visible in its spoors,
Skin and bone, zig-zag,
Through the khaki bush
It hums, the wind tongues
Its gom-gom, frets a gorah,
In a gwarrie bush the wind,
So I fancy, mourns, thin
Thin with worries:*

*Goringhaicona
Goringhatqua Gorachouqua: sounds
Like at the back of our sky
Cicadas' songs ache: Hessequa
Hacumqua, like vocables swallowed
In frogs' throats: Cochoqua,
The names of decimated
Khoikhoi tribes — their cattle stolen,
Lands seized
As their warriors died
Charging zig-zag into musket fire,
Those warriors who've left behind
Their fallen spears that our land
Like a peach its pip*

Holds now:

This unfinished task:

JEREMY CRONIN (from *Inside*)

RIXAKA REVIEWS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT NOVEL OF THE ANTI-COLONIAL, ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLE IN AFRICA. MAYOMBE BY PEPETELA CONTAINS IMPORTANT INSIGHTS INTO THE LIBERATION PROCESS AND IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR FREEDOM FIGHTERS.



MAYOMBE — Novel of the African Struggle

Review of *Mayombe* by Pepetela.
First published in Portuguese
by the the Angolan Writers union
1980.

First published in English
by Zimbabwe Publishing House
1983.

The Mayombe forest is in Angola's enclave province of Cabinda. Sheltered amidst its thick undergrowth an MPLA guerilla group operates against the Portuguese colonial forces. But as the group moves through the Mayombe forest it carries within itself its own particular dynamic, its own tensions and conflicts. As the situation of struggle is unfolded we begin to understand the specific tribal, racial, ideological and personal relationships which constitute the fabric and character of the group. And the nature of the unity that political leadership must continuously forge within the group despite all counter-vailing factors.

Not too far away is the rear base of Dolisie in the neighbouring Congo Republic. Here is located the stores and infrastructure responsible for channelling supplies and equipment to the guerilla group. Here is also the civilian life, the squandering of movement funds and the misuse of political position.

Central to the narrative line of the novel is Fearless; intellectual, soldier, and guerilla commander. It is Fearless who best reads the complex interactions of the group, who balances out the disintegrative tendencies continuously present, who constantly re-orientates the guerillas to the immediate tasks of the struggle.

The novel examines Fearless in his entire individuality. His particular path to the movement, the specific caste of his political thinking, the type and nature of his commitment. In snatches of guerilla conversation, in the reflective moments just before a battle commences, over a beer or meal at the rear-base, we gather in the patchwork of one particular revolutionary life. His rebellion against Christianity, sexual awakening, the torn tissue of personal relationships, regret concerning events past, reservations concerning the future

being built; all bear on and indelibly mark each new decision he must face.

But Fearless is not portrayed as a man who happens to be a guerilla commander, but rather a someone whose lucid insight into Angolan necessity constitutes his real freedom. The question arises then whether Fearless is merely that familiar creature of bourgeois literature — the romantic hero whose personal qualities lead only to greater and greater unhappy contradictions. The point is however that involvement in revolutionary struggle does not remove from one's consciousness the basic question of human purpose and fulfilment — it brings them under a new, intense light; it re-orientates them. Surely that is the real point.

But *Mayombe* is not the story of Fearless alone. An ingenious narrative technique allows a series of other voices to speak and comment. These openings in the text where the author suddenly transfers us into the thoughts of one or another character, takes us into the person's inner-dialogue, allows each apparently basic situation to show its more subtle lights and shades. We are reminded that a group of armed freedom-fighters is made up of real and complex human beings who carry into the struggle their own weaknesses, prejudices and inspiration. We are reminded that the unique intricate weave of each individual's life should be no barrier to unity-in-action.

Of the issues that emerge most starkly from the novel, it is the issue of tribalism which is most brilliantly handled. There is no intellectual flinching, no literati stuttering in the portrayal of this problem. *Mayombe* explicates very fully the dangers of tribalism within a liberation movement, without objectifying the phenomenon as in any way separate from the actual process of anti-colonial struggle. Tribalism should be nobody's obsession — *Mayombe* makes it very clear that it's an incorrect turning in the path through Mayombe forest, it is an out of context response to a particular social dilemma, a mental laziness, an enemy manoeuvre.

Another deftly described topic is the inevitable interactions between intellectuals and

non-intellectuals, not to mention intellectuals and other intellectuals. Hierarchical relationships are also explored — the visit of the "leadership-comrade" to Dolisie and his conversation with Fearless about discipline and morality is a brilliant vignette.

Perhaps the most controversial element in *Mayombe* is its portrayal of women. The sexual issue is handled frankly and the descriptions of sexual relations appropriate and well written. Yet beyond the scope of sexual contacts, the women characters do not seem to properly live. The sensual, passionate Ondine is graphically portrayed within her relationship to the Commissioner, Andre, Fearless. Yet alone of all the main characters her own politics, the engine of her own unique commitment, remains opaque. How did Ondine become an MPLA militant, how does she see her political role? We are not told.



Fearless' reminisces about past lovers do bring in the idea of women as full active participants in the life-process. Yet the major figure of his memory, his lost lover Leli, was someone who somehow held him back, someone who could just not properly adjust to the rigours of political commitment. When Theory, the teacher, longs for Manuela, long left behind, his need is primarily for sexual comfort, for the divine forgetfulness of the sensual. The operations chief thinks about his life in terms of his house and a warm meal on the table.

It is true that the male-centric attitudes of the characters are not endorsed within the text. At no stage is male domination shown as correct or inevitable. Perhaps Pepetela is merely reflecting, highly accurately, the attitudes held by the freedom-fighters: is simply distilling the dialogues as he remembers them. Yet in the case of the tribalism issue the narrative always goes beyond the bare attitude expressed, beyond the simply empirical to a more dialectical reference. Perhaps tribalism was a priority issue to tackle, the women's issue secondary? Can such issues be ranked?

We must of course see *Mayombe* in its full context. Written in 1971, it was first published in Portuguese in 1980, (simultaneously in Luanda and Lisbon). Publication at that stage was at the express wish of Angola's first president, Agostinho Neto, who died shortly before the book came out. It is believed that he felt the open debate on the dangers of tribalism and racism was worth pursuing in the wider context of independent Africa.

On the backcover of the Zimbabwe Publishing House (English) edition stands the claim that *Mayombe* is 'the most important work of fiction to emerge from any African liberation movement'. It is, in such very well defined terms, the movement that is the primary guardian of Mayombe's African roots.

VOICES FROM MAYOMBE

I, The Narrator Am Theory

I was born in Gabela, in coffee country. From the land I received the dark colour of coffee, from my mother's side, mixed with off-white from my father, a Portugese trader. I carry in me the irreconcilable and that is my driving force. In a universe of yes or no, white or black, I represent the maybe...

I, The Narrator Am Miracle, The Bazooka-Man

Intellectual have an obsession that it is we, the peasants, who are tribalists. But they are as well. The problem is that there is tribalism and tribalism...

I, The Narrator Am New World

As if it were possible to make a revolution only with selfish men, egoists! I am not egoistic, Marxism-Leninism showed me that man as an individual is nothing, only the masses can make History. If I were egoistic, I would be in Europe now, like so many others, working and earning good money...

I, The Narrator Am Mautianvua

I sailed the sea for years, from North to South, to Namibia where the desert joins the sand on the beach, as far as Gabon and Ghana and to Senegal... The women I loved were from all tribes, from Moroccan Riquebat to South African Zulu. All were beautiful and knew how to make love, some better than others for sure ... From what tribe, if I am from all tribes, not only of Angola but of Africa too? I who do not say a sentence without using words from different languages...

I, The Narrator Am Andre

The worst is over. In Brazzaville they won't eliminate me. I've still got my supporters. Not those types that didn't dare defend me even, not that mob. I have well placed supporters, people of influence. I shall do my self-criticism just to disarm my opponents... I shall go to another posting where I shall get on just the same: there is such a shortage of cadres that the one-eyed man is king...

I, The Narrator, Am Stores Chief

I am already old, I have already witnessed much. Words have value, the people believe in words as gods. But I have learned that words have value only when they correspond to what is done in practice. Fearless speaks as he does. He is an honest man. What do I care about the language his ancestors spoke?

I, The Narrator, Am Operations Chief

When he fights he has the same hatred of the enemy as I do. The reasons are different, but the actions are the same. So I joined him in his fight. The fact that he is an intellectual, that is the only thing he will ever be able to make sense out of in the struggle, is not his reason for fighting.



BLACK WRITING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Twenty years later: in a way this is a return to the scene of the crime! In a much-quoted essay¹ which appeared in my book *Home & Exile* some twenty years ago I expressed some doubts about the direction in which Black fiction was taking in South Africa. I contrasted this literature unfavourably with the examples provided by the evolving traditions of our popular music. In 1985 the eddies and reverberations from that essay are still spreading in ever-widening circles, wider than I could have anticipated at the time, as the latest comments on South African fiction by Njabulo Ndebele amply shows.² Ndebele merely recasts the terms of that essay in *Home & Exile* in his latest formulations in which he argues:

What we have (in fiction by South African writers) is a conflict between the aim of story-telling and that of imparting social information. It is at this point that a competition between creative writing and journalism ensues. Lewis Nkosi's criticism of this 'competition' is well-known.

Ndebele then goes into an analysis of the forms that this 'competition' takes an analysis which though occasionally full of insight, is in my opinion sometimes more confusing than illuminating. This is not the place to pick up the fault lines where Ndebele's analysis strains to "extend" the discussion about the nature of the conflict between, in his own words, 'sloganeering' and 'creative writing.' It is sufficient here only to point out that a racist, capitalist society presents South African writers, both black and white, with special problems in their attempt to grasp and rewrite their reality for fiction.

To put it in a nutshell, though the shell is always larger than the nut in these discussions, I suppose the problem of black fiction in South Africa has always been one of conflict between representation and interpretation. As I argued in that seminal essay Black writers in South Africa have always assumed that their mission is merely

to represent their society, to show the extent of its dismemberment, of its social mutilations. Such a representation, with its naive empirical assumptions, takes as its total aim the mimicking in fiction or the portrayal of social conflict, as the ideal fulfilment of its function. Since such a representation is merely an attempt at adequating language to the fragmented reality it portrays, it stands to reason that the language

his celebrated formulation in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that men do not make history "under circumstances chosen by themselves", the question arises as to what a South African writer ought to do confronted by the brute facts of his social existence.

The answer, it seems to me, resolves itself into a choice between two conceptions of the role of the artist: *representation* versus *interpretation*. Since representation and interpretation



Bassie Head



Mongane Serote

too, even at its most overheated, perhaps because of just this uncontrolled calefaction, itself becomes fragmented, disintegrates. Some of Sepamla's poetry cruelly exposes the dangers of this approach; and no one has encapsulated the problem better than Sepamla himself in one of his poems titled *Drum Beat*:

my batteries have charged rage
to an unbridled pitch
if I should stop to rant and rave
i know I won't be counting for
long...

That a writer, producing his work in such an atmosphere of fierce struggle, should conceive "ranting" and "raving" as the imperatives of his historical moment however debilitating, may be understandable but is no less tragic for that! 'Bridling' rage, even in the interests of art, may be thought not necessarily a virtue. However, if Frank Kermode is right to say "we cannot emigrate from our historical moment", which may be taken as simply another annotation on Marx's second half of

can easily coexist within a single work, I would like to present the problem in a slightly amended form as one of choice between *production* and *reproduction*. Current theories of textual production try to distinguish between on the one hand texts which aim at transparency, attempting to smooth out the folds and kinks of narrative representation in the interest of easy, readerly consumption, and on the other hand those texts which invite the reader to an active participation in the *production* of meaning. Texts which merely aim at representation of reality belong to the former group.

The process of writing as a means of reproducing in works of literature the appalling miseries of our social existence has been a dominant mode in writings by Black South Africans. Paradoxically, it was precisely because White writers were able to imagine their lives as existing independently of the black masses oppressed by the system that



Alex la Guma and Family



Miriam Tladi

they were able to construct characters whose lives, however superficial and morally reprehensible, from the outside looked fuller than those created by Black writers. There is an *aporia* here that must be thought through, not merely shrugged aside.

Far from representing an advance on the prose works of the 'Fifties generation', as Ndebele recently argued, in the current stories and novels by Black Consciousness writers like Mothobi Mutloatse, Miriam Tladi, Sipho Sepamla, and in many stories by Njabulo Ndebele himself, the overwhelming impression of Black South African fiction has therefore been one of repetitiveness resembling, and in many ways paralleling, the impersonal objective forms of capitalist social relations of production which these writers themselves must work to transform. As the poems and stories flooded the market, each one replete with quotable gestures, one's powers of concentration inevitably flagged but it was too shameful to admit that one's attention was continually distracted. After all, no accusation

is more damaging than the charge of formalism, the perennial yearning after style.

What has therefore been missing from South African literature is the conception of writing as a process of production rather than reproduction. Equally, nothing was more certain to confer the right credentials than the commendation that one was "telling it like it is." What such simplistic notions of artistic representation forget is that there is no easy unmediated passage from brute reality to artistic forms; if art were simple reproduction of external reality we would not need it.

La Guma's success, it seems to me, has been to operate both inside and outside of the reality he is supposed to represent; the prophetic, daring nature of works like *In the Fog of the Season's End* and *Time of the Butcherbird*, whatever their other limitations, has been to rework reality, to restructure it, to reinterpret it. The effect, necessarily, has been to disrupt our routinised perceptions of the black character in South African fiction as the pathetic victim of circumstance. In this respect, it is appropriate

to recall Merleau-Ponty's comment: "The writer's thought does not control his language from without; the writer is himself a kind of new idiom, constructing itself." (*The Origin of Truth*). The extreme physicality of South African writing, the insistence on sheer physical detail about slum life at the expense of interior life and thought, may sometimes give the impression of extreme objectivity, but *positivism* is simply another version of a sophisticated lie. To recount is to modify and to narrate is to interpret.

Wally Mongane Serote's poetry, especially those disruptive images in *TSETLO*, genuinely transform our perceptions more radically than his first novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* and Njabulo Ndebele's main story in *Fools* contains some of the best insights South African fiction can offer, but it is hard to see that much of the current crop of fiction represent any advance on either Bessie Head's stories or La Guma's fiction. Ndebele may yet be more valuable for his critical work, his insistence on the political significance of technique, quality and craftsmanship, a thesis that 'slogan writers' find merely irritating.

By Lewis Nkosi.

¹'Fiction by Black South Africans' in *Home & Exile* (Longman 1965).

²'Some Thoughts on S. African Fiction' *Staffrider*, Vol. 6 No. 1, 1984.

THE WILL TO DIE

Can Themba



baptism of fire

dikobe wa mogale



Alex la Guma

In the Fog of the Seasons' End



SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR

By Klaus Maphepha

In New York travellers do not wait for the train. They look for it. It is there always. One shuttles away only to give platform space to the other ; unceasing steel veins in the depth of New York.

As I touched the subway platform, I also craned my neck and looked for the train in the dark tunnel-way. No. 6 rattled into the Third Avenue platform and slid into a grating stop. Its doors winked like shutters as we leaped in. It sneaked out of the platform and immediately clattered into the dark tunnel. From Bronx the train descends upon the city.

I squinted for an empty seat. There was none although the train was not full. I sought for balance against a vertical steel bar. I gained it. I pulled out a copy of *Harper's* and paged through to the headline 'Revolt on the Veldt'. My four weeks in New York had taught me that people there do not have time to read anywhere else but in the subway. So in order to ingratiate myself with the place, I carried that magazine into the subway. Although the article discussed South Africa's guerrilla resistance, I studied more the people

around me than the article. I could always go back to *Harper's* under the funnel of my bed-side lamp.

Life had put a pair of whitish horn-rimmed spectacles on the nose of the man standing in front of me. The nostrils which opened into two tubas contrasted with the meek but incisive eyes which were gliding on the glossy pages of *Esquire*. He must have been forty-five and with a resolve of his own when he tuned in his transistor radio and learned of Martin-Luther King Jr's assassination. In my mind I immediately begin to see him bounce out of his chair. He paces his miniscule apartment four times before he stops suddenly and peers through the window hopefully, seeking a non-confirmation from the throbbing Harlem of shoeshine urchins and newspaper vendors. Harlem wore a blank face of gray dizziness. The transistor voice had insisted, cold, hollow and metallic.

More white people jumped into the train as we moved away from the Bronx towards the city centre a jarring reminder that America is still segregated. The tuba-nosed man made it onto a seat at last. He hung one leg on the other and got



sucked into the pages of his magazine. Clad in a slightly oversized chestnut suit whose trousers pulled up to the belly button, the wrinkle between his legs told of a fine suit. His light-brown shoes were cut and tanned by Florsheim. I knew them from window shopping at Hollywood Men's Shop and Ajmeri Arcade in Durban. It was our favoured hobby back at home, as young boys in the township, to tell labels of expensive clothing from a mere outside look. It had become part of our township culture, we studied whatever we could not afford. That's what our lives were made of: vague window shopping, crazy trains and incessant giggles of urchins drunk with benzine. Even the man's off white sweater underneath I knew. It was knitted by Cashmere. This man set my mind back to the township of the old timers who brought everything by Stetson, listened to Mankunku and talked fervently of Coltrane. It had all made suicide a boring undertaking.

The Black lady next to him did not lift up her eyes from her novel as he sat next to her. She only fidgeted welcomingly. She was wearing long suede boots, taut jeans, and a poncho draped in all the colours of the rainbow. Her hair was fried into a beret of shiny filigrees. She was reading a thick novel. It took me some time to spy the author — Sydney Sheldon, a best seller then.

Her long red nails lay flat on the deep outside cover. Kent — white smoke curled out of her lips, seemingly more from habit than out of any purpose. Long red nails on the bloodless body of the sky. Who is this eunuch of the twentieth century who has kissed our women with red? Long red nails, red lips waving smoky shoots celebrating the bonanza of Western Civilisation. It is the train coming to a stop which cut off that poetic traffic of thought running through my mind.

The horn-rim-spectacle-man jumped out. I took his seat. The lady in a poncho did not lift her eyes as I sat next to her. The train pulled away and we tossed into the dark hole.

In a strange country, they say it's better to uncover your ignorance of the place to a woman than to a man. I don't know the real reasons, but they may prove too controversial. But one of them says women possess less physique to wrestle one out of one's purse. I turned towards the poncho lady and asked my question with no apparent eagerness; give her the option of ignoring the question without dislodging my Adam's Apple. "I always wondered at the idea behind the graffiti in these trains?"

She chose to respond. She lifted her eyes. Not to me but to the graffiti on the walls of the coach, as if I had broached a subject she had never thought about. Her eyes fell on the magazine photo-cutting pasted in front of us. A hobo must have derived amusement at leaving it there in full view of the public. It was the work of a photographer who specialised in making nudes look like vegetables. The lady did not blush. She studied more graffiti and her eyebrows jerked up as if nudged by an invisible elbow. She shrugged and said, "Well, I guess it's an American craze." She said it with the same lack of eagerness, with that oily American accent of illusive syllables sliding out of her lips. Her eyes dropped back into her novel without ever looking in my direction.

All subway trains in New York are scrawled

and splashed with graffiti. The graffiti made no sense to me, and I guess neither to New Yorkers. The slant is more to Arabic. At least to the eye. It must have been as an afterthought when she turned her cone-shaped face to me and asked, "Are you Nigerian?"

Most Americans think that all Africans are Nigerians and Africa is one country.

"What is your criterion, sister?" I regretted after I had asked the question. I knew that she was embarrassed because she smiled like a filly. She shrugged again.

"Well, your cheekbones and that loaded accent." She answered. It was my turn to get embarrassed. I got embarrassed at her ignorance of the history of her slavery. I hated to tell her that I'm not Nigerian but an African still. I simply shook my head.

The crowd thrusting from the platform at Grand Terminal conveyed into our coach a threadbare and scraggy man. He wobbled and collapsed on the floor. He was sandwiched between two shapeless boards scrawled in white, "I am a Viet. I am hungry. Give me money."

The area around him began to clear as people shuffled away from him. By increasing the distance between themselves and the man on the floor, New Yorkers seemed to say, New York is impersonal. Don't encroach upon my privacy. Your freedom ends where mine begins.

He climbed on his knees and arms. He crawled towards us. Passengers shuffled further away and others filed into the adjacent coach. His smell began to fill the whole coach. His blond hair had been plaited by dirt, sweat and oil into disheveled threads.

He smelled like a putrefying grimalkin. He cleared his throat vehemently and catapulted his phlegm across. It stuck on the foggy window like a green postal stamp that sent me thinking of the many letters I could not write home.

The cone-faced lady's nose was already on tiptoes. She had closed her novel and was looking askance at this bedbug crawling on the snow-white collar of civilised society. I jostled her lightly and said, "What is a Viet, sister?"

She stood and then stooped towards me. "He is a Vietnam veteran." She whispered. She drifted away from us, the smell was becoming unbearable.

I had changed trains by the time I reached Manhattan, my destination. The multitude surged as we burrowed out of the subway, out of a hole like the contents of a toothpaste tube. In the street the cold bite of winter sucked my face like a teething cub.

From the corner of 157th street and Broadway, Sithombo's apartment was only four blocks away. I did not know her but when she had phoned me in my friend's apartment in Bronx, she had summarily given me directions to her place. She had spoken in Zulu that was unadulterated, self-effacing but uncompromising. My Zulu stammered in my throat, uncertain and shy. It made me happy and angry at myself, as if I had always thought that Zulu cannot find its way into a telephone receiver. I resorted to English without avoiding a blush.

Over the phone her voice was thick and torn. It scraped my eardrum, the feeling one gets when a shovel bumps on gravel. She said she had heard

that I write poetry. She wanted us to discuss new South African Black literature as she worked as a columnist for a local cultural magazine called *Afro-Splash*. I had hesitated. I was still contemplating declining the invitation for fear of failing below her expectation when she cut in with a question. "Have you devoured Serote's *To every Birth Its Blood?*" I accepted triumphantly. I had read it twice. This gave me a measure of confidence. I accepted her invitation. Snow-flakes began to drizzle. I also began to run against the blistering wind.



I pressed the doorbell. The door swung open. Sithombo stood before me, too small, too thin for her clothes. Judging from the contours of her face, accentuated by her elated smile, she must have been on the better end of the forties. From her turn I concluded that her limbs were still swift. Her loose knitted skirt followed her and clung to the body like a nervous mountaineer. Her skirt, although it looked old, did not offend her turtle-neck sweater of angora.

I sank into an ottoman sofa and got the feeling of being swallowed by an amoeba. The apartment was beautiful and modest. There weren't more than six pieces of furniture in the room, all placed with an economic sense for space.

"Call me Sithombo." She said making for the other door which I guessed led to a bedroom. "I prefer to be called that way. I know you are young, young enough to be my son." She broadened her smile to show me that her words carried no insolence. I didn't think it was necessary to respond. I simply returned her smile to set her at ease.

Out of the bedroom emerged a chubby bald head who shook my hand thrice with a vice-grip. He introduced himself as Cliff. He sat in front of me with his stomach cantilevered over his legs. He sat there eyeing at me and I wondered if he was not studying my face as I studied his. We sat eyeing each other like two specimens in a test-tube. His face was the kind familiar in a Harlem corner drugstore.

That evening they drove me out for dinner at Sweet Basil. Abdullah Ibrahim and Carlos Ward were on feature for the evening. Abdullah hopped on his notes. They clanked and sounded like a series of insistent questions. He leaped and ambled. He prowled in and out of the pit of things. Carlos minced the thick air in the club with his horn. They blended into a conversation of incriminations and recriminations. When the exchange became acrimonious, a big tear hung on Sithombo's left eye. It was as big as an untrampled dew drop. When it decided to fall, it splashed on her ashtray like diamond on a cutter's table.

Back in her apartment Sithombo listened to Abdullah, Makeba and Ndlazilwana. She discussed brilliantly. She took more Haig Scotch Whiskey as if it was a potion against all nostalgia. She puffed more Kool smoke which turned lavender under the influence of lights. Cliff left. Another man came. He seemed also to have access into Sithombo's bedroom.

Sithombo took alcohol phenomenally. Her shoulders drooped when she had taken too much. The glass which was always in her hand quivered and spilled over with every gesture. I began to understand that the bleach on her lower lip was not born with her. She began to tell me the story of her life. The narration seemed to touch her. She wizened around her eyes like a withered aristocrat.

She had left South Africa in the early 70's. Whilst she worked as a model for Lever Brothers in Durban, she had spiralled into bed with a White film director. They were caught red-handed. Her partner's lawyer advised them to quit. In America her lover developed a heart condition. One hot summer night in a club he fell. He had collapsed. Simply. Permanently. "The tragedy transfixed my soul on a dry thorn like a dry locust," she said as she showed me into another bedroom.

The next morning she remained in her bedroom until late. I wanted to go back to the Bronx. I hesitated in front of her door, before tapping it very lightly with two fingers.

Inside the blinds were drawn tight against the winter outside. Lights were off except for a bedside lamp which syringed a pool of light into a notebook in Sithombo's left hand. She was sitting on the bed with her back against the wall. The heavy blanket covered her only up to the waist and her floral flannel pyjamas took care of the rest. Next to her, not exactly covered by the light, lay one of her visitors. He lay with his face

down. I sized his bust. It was not Cliff. When I entered he peered over his shoulder like a one-eyed gargoyle. He never looked my direction again.

I helped myself to the chair nearby. Sithombo tore a page from her notebook and extended it to me. She pressed something and a shower of light fell on the paper in my hand. I began to read.

She was writing about the events of the day before, at sweet Basil. Each sentence WAS what it inevitably had to be. Not a line seemed superfluous. Ideas, images were austere and simple until one looked at them and realized what work, what complexity of method, what tension of thought had achieved that beauty of words.

When I looked at her she had closed her eyes. "Why don't you write a novel?" I said with a serious face. "Who'll publish it?" She said despondently without opening her eyes. "But you said you write for a cultural magazine? Prospects look good. They can put you through."

"*Afro-Splash* is only a community baby. Poor people, I mean. Big publishing houses want something that will run in the market. Who in America wants stories about Kippie Moeketsi, about Kwa-Mashu and Magaliesberg? That is not sensational."

I had words to continue the argument. I still had a lot to tell her. I looked at her forehead, her closed eyes. She stretched her arm and fumbled for something in the shade of the lamp. She came back with a glass half-full. My eyes followed it to her mouth. As the content ebbed it began to smell. It was a sharp pang of Dry Gin. I looked at her forehead again. I looked at that flower blushing in the desert unseen.

"America is a jungle and I haven't mastered its laws. I know I'm a worse beggar than those

who infest the streets of New York." She wiped her eyes and let them open. "I say I'm worse because, as you said in dissimilar words, I'm a guilty beggar. I wish my epitaph to read: SHE WAITED FOR DEATH."

As I stood up ready to go she said, "I'll see you to the subway." She closed the door behind us and we tossed into the snow. With shoots of vapour steaming out of our nostrils and our shoes caked thick with snow, we looked like an odd couple. The wind nibbled at my nose, threatening to break it. We passed a beggar. He had just pulled out a sewerage lid and was seeking warmth from the nauseating gas the way a nightwatchman would do to a brazier. As we passed, from below the thick neck of her sweater, Sithombo murmured, "They are the flower-pots of New York".

I had seen many beggars and lunatics in South Bronx, Madison Avenue and Broadway. Sithombo's comment did not make me think about beggars but about the severity of winter. A thought about beggars always rolls a cold ball of lead into my stomach. I never spin a cent in their direction. They are pimples and it is the blood that needs to be cleansed; a cent from some good Samaritan doesn't make their case better.

As we moved along kicking cakes of snow, Sithombo elbowed my ribs and pointed at the three-wheel bike of a newspaper vendor. Splash headlines read, "Guerrilla Raids On Apartheid Institutions Increase!" Sithombo sighed a sigh which died as she beamed with excitement. She picked up the newspaper. Her eyes became comically round. As the newspaper unfolded in her hands, she said, "Perhaps such news gives us hope *there is something to live for* after all."



THE BALANCED NEWS STORY

They seek Sakharov
with boldface headlines
And 45 seconds tomes.

No one misses Mandela
They don't know how to
Spell Robben Island.

John A. Williams

POEMS FROM CUBA

The Guerrillas arrive

When the great doors of the day don't open
the guerrillas arrive
When our dreams suddenly lose their steering wheels
the guerrillas arrive
When at the birth of the infants death is carried in
under the arm instead of lengths of fresh bread
the guerrillas arrive
When freedom can only be written in secret codes
the guerrillas arrive
When blood is spilled and forgotten, dropped from the
memory with the weight of quarry stones
the guerrillas arrive
When a joker assures us that men can't reach up
and touch the stars with their hands
the guerrillas arrive
When our small delights must be kept in dungeons
under lock and key until later in the evening when
there are no witnesses and we can sit down in a corner
and savour them
the guerrillas arrive
When the mornings are dark and we open our eyes in fear
the guerrillas arrive
When bread and laughter and salt and hope can no longer
be shared
the guerrillas arrive
When the ghosts of heroes wander troubled and alone
in the gloom shouting their protest again and again
When we begin to feel ashamed of being men
the guerrillas arrive
with their heavy boots and their old guns
and with the bright morning of the world in their hands
the guerrillas arrive
the guerrillas arrive
and it's dawn everywhere

Felix Pita Rodriguez



For an instant

That glow in the night:
Is it one of *our* reflectors?
Is it one of *their* weapons?

(For an instant,
I'd forgotten
that there's a moon
in the sky,
and that there are stars)

Roberto Fernandez Retamar



THE SISTERHOOD I CHOOSE

IN THIS STUDY, THE PUBLICATION OF "LIP" -- A COLLECTION OF WORKS BY SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN -- IS USED TO TRIGGER A DISCUSSION CONCERNING WOMEN, ART AND SOCIAL REALITY. THE AUTHOR CHOOSES A SISTERHOOD THAT IS WHOLLY POLITICALLY COMMITTED.

After long discussions with male colleagues on whether there should be a separate "women's art", by and for woman, and just what art should do, I awaited with some eagerness the arrival of LIP. LIP is an anthology of art by South African women: the introduction states: "...What emerges is a search for an artistic language that does not derive its vocabulary from Western Europe or the United States, a language that fits with women's lives". The editors stress LIP "should not claim to be representative or definitive". But LIP does raise again all those long debates about what woman's art could do — and one has to ask, does LIP begin to do it?

At the time of those long discussions, I argued that there are unique experiences that women go through as women. The obvious biological ones: childbirth, abortion, menstruation, the female side of sex. More all-encompassing, the position women take in society: concern with family and children, support for the man, lower wages and heavy housework. The specific assaults of rape and illegal abortion. The caring and help from other women who have been through it too. At the same time women are forced a "false consciousness" about what it means to be a woman — all the images of advertising, of pulp magazines and novels, which tell us: our role is to be decorative and subservient; and incidentally to do the women's work (only "light tasks" like cooking, washing and childcare — and conveniently forgetting how many women hold down wage jobs as well); and meanwhile to give emotional support to everyone else around us. Women cultural workers, by virtue of their personal experience, should be the first to raise the questions of who women really are and what do with their lives, to break down this "false consciousness", to create images of what it means to be a woman in this society that will help us take control of our lives.

So, does LIP make a beginning towards this? To what extent does the picture presented there begin to give us an idea of what it means to be a woman in South Africa?

The overwhelming majority (although not all) of the work presented in LIP deals with what society tells us should be "woman's awareness" — how to behave ourselves as women, our dreams, our families, sex and sexual conflict. For the most part these are dealt with in the context of the privileged white women's world. There are few pieces about employed women, practically none about childcare and housework. We are forced to ask ourselves, does this reflect the gross actuality of women's experience in South Africa?

WALLS OF PRIVILEGE

Most women are poor, and uneducated, and black. The questions most women must ask themselves are: how do I, or we my family, eat? Where do I live — can it be made habitable? How do I feed the children, pay the doctor, clothe the kids in winter? How can I keep my family together? Just from simple statistics this is "being a woman" for most of us. Rape and subservience and looking pretty and sex become part of that "being" too: they are the processes which sustain that "being" within the framework of physical realities.

If there is a purpose to "woman's art", it is to explore the links between us as women, the images of what "being a woman" means in reality and not in the Sunday newspapers. It would seem logical to start here, with what women do with their lives. And yes, it is the privileged woman who has the time and materials and skills to write short stories or paint pictures; and yes, that privileged woman probably does not herself carry the burdens of near-starvation and no Section-10 rights and emigrant husband. But if we honestly want to explore what being a woman means, it is our responsibility to go beyond the walls of privilege to where most women live. What do we share as women? How should we relate our experiences as individual women to other women's experiences? What unites us? If we cannot find that common ground between women, there is no reason for a specifically "woman's art", as opposed to art by individuals who happen to be women.

Yet look at the number of pieces in LIP about a woman isolated in her room, or a woman's dream or memories of herself in isolation:

*I sit in my room
There is a smell of oil ...
The voices I hear
are disembodied,
peripheral...*

(Jenny Roberts)

"Occasionally Meg broke her sitting on the long green couch." (Floss M. Jay) "The earliest memory I have is of being in my cot. The nappies hanging around me are still wet. They shut out the light." (Sharyn West) "Crosslegged on my marriage bed, blowing clouds of smoke into this airless room obliquely lit by a winter sun..." (Elana Milner)

*Sometimes I would be still
as coral beneath the waves.
Blue white stone my face,
moveless perfection instilled
with human grace.*

(T.M. Raubenheimer)

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

But as we said, women do NOT exist in the abstract, composed of socialisation from the movies, and our mothers' desires for us, and our men's fantasies, and our daydreams. These are precisely the myths we are trying to reject, that "false consciousness" that hides what women are and do with their lives. To limit ourselves, as the majority of LIP does, to this isolated realm, is to perpetuate this "false consciousness". We reject as invalid the image of woman sitting dreaming about love and marriage and dressing up; do we replace it with an image of woman sitting dreaming about how alienated we are and our unhappy childhood and slicing men's testicles? This is no image of reality to counter the myths we have been drugged with.

Even in the privileged white woman's existence, a woman is not cut off with her dreams. Rather, social issues only seem remote from her because she has accepted the false consciousness that they are remote. Does she have a maid, who she depends on for her family's day welfare? That maid is not remote, she is a major ingredient of that white woman's life, her solution

to housework and childcare. Does she drink wine who makes it, how? Does she feel cut off in her large house with high walls to keep out who? An artist should dig into the roots of our lives - and privilege in South Africa is very much rooted in exploitation, on a very concrete, daily basis. We are all living in this one system. To show any woman as isolated from the forms and structures of that system is to reinforce those very sexist myths of a pretty woman on her pedestal: silenced, alienated, powerless.

A depressingly small amount of work in LIP avoids that particular trap. Sherm Ahmed's *Nice Girls Don't Work* does in fact talk about an Indian woman as an integral part of her society, and the specific difficulties she faces: an exploitative job (she needs money) interwoven with a sexual relationship which makes the job more bearable, but which also turns out to be exploitative; and her escape into the traditional surrender of marriage. Gina Mhlope's *Nokulunga's Wedding* describes a "traditional marriage" composed of a rape with lobola; the woman is no more than a possession; the men sing "the bride is ours, the bride is ours" after the rape. Her boyfriend rejects her when he realises that she would literally cost too much to buy back.

A few other pieces, Jane Barratt's *Part of My Life*, Brenda Goldblatt's *I was born at Babanango*, the photo-story *Nightshift* by Lesley Lawson, give fairly factual, straightforward descriptions in a black working woman's life. These pieces point to a particular and important role for feminist art: to present us, without artistic obscurantism, with an account of what happens to a woman. Can Themba in *The Will to Die* presented a nearly sociological description (albeit beautifully written) of black township life; such simple facts about the lives of women still need to be explored. (Although here we have an artistic question: does it help for Brenda Goldblatt's story to appear in the first person singular? To this reader it gives the story a feeling of falseness from the start, which seems unnecessary. It would not have hurt,



perhaps, to write "she was born in Babanango", or to give it an interview context that would justify the "I".)

In this context, one could comment on the graphic work in LIP. The most successful are the documentary photos: they give us straight, images of women to counter those we have been inundated with. Migrant women, domestic maid, white woman dissolute. Documentary photography records, it does not soften the edges of our actualities.

The non-documentary photos, and nearly all the rest of the graphics (excepting Bongive Diomo's *Removals*, Elsa Miles' *Freedom Charter*) tend also to retreat into dreams, to abstractions, to isolated aspects primarily through surface and colour when it is reproduced! small in cheap black and white. But ask: how many of these images have tried to get us out of our socialised cubicles of "woman"? How many confront a woman's life? Do these graphics help us know what it means to be a woman, here?

We know that women do not spend their time in designer dresses with three-hour's worth of hairdo making love to expensive stereo sets. Contrast that image, from posters in a music shop (in one poster the

girl was white, in a second black, wearing a gold lame pants-suit), with the woman in the Lou Haysom piece, *Thola Cardboard Waste Thenza*:

"Nomathemba uncurls her legs, folds the plastic and newspapers which serve as mattress and blankets, careful to conserve what she can still use tonight. The child is awake, it kicks against her, hungry. She feeds it."

Nomathemba, here, in her very particular context of oppression, has to face the same problems many of us as women face; she is real. We know her. If we want to find out what it means to be a woman, these are the pictures we need to find and relate to.

LIP was compiled by asking women to contribute artwork about being a woman. This article makes no attempt to evaluate the technical quality of the work: some of it no doubt very successfully captures the present level of woman's consciousness. My point indeed lies there: that too many of us still, as women and as cultural workers, are trapped in the official definitions of "being a woman". And that is reinforced by the approach to art as an exploration of one's own

head. Woman's art needs to be more than poetic flower-arrangements of feminine or feminist fantasies. It is time we as cultural workers, moved towards finding real image of women, towards exploring the texture of a woman's life.

And beyond that: from understanding the texture of being a woman in South Africa we must build a foundation from which to talk about change and taking control of our lives.

I remember reading a factual record of Dora Tamana's early life, an account not attempting to be artistic at all:

"Dora Tamana was born in 1901 at Gqamabhe in the Transkei. When she was 20, her father and two of her uncles were killed at the Bulhoek Massacre, in which 163 people were shot dead by the police.

In 1923 Dora married John Tamana, also from the Transkei. Over the next seven years she bore four children, three of whom died of starvation, tuberculosis and meningitis. The family moved to Cape Town in order to have a better chance to survive. Dora's life continued to be a bleak struggle for basic essentials. Her husband eventually deserted her. She nevertheless became increasingly involved in the wider problems she saw around her, joining the African National Congress and the ANC Women's League, and becoming an energetic organiser in the African and Coloured townships."

And then her words, speaking in Cape Town in 1981, aged 80:

*You who have no work,
speak
You who have no homes,
speak.
You who have no schools,
speak.
You who have to run like
chickens from the vulture,
speak.
Let us share our problems
so that we can solve
them together.
We must free ourselves.
Men and women must share
housework.*



*Men and women must work
together in the home
and out in the world...
Women must unite to fight*

That account said to me: this is my sister, who lives also in this land, she is talking about what we as women must do. She too had children; how would I cope, how would I feel; if my own two small ones died because of society's carefully maintained deprivations? She too had a husband, and separated. Yet she survived as a woman, and from that survival became strong. This is the sisterhood I choose, an image I will take for my own, of what it means to be a woman.

Woman's art should make these links.

And then go past these links, towards developing not only a knowledge of who we are, but also who we should be. Take these two poems from MALIBONGWE, ANC women: Poetry is also their Weapon. In "Superwoman, (Grown by Apartheid)", Lindi Mabuza begins by describing the life of a rural African woman:

*She
wakes up each morning
to the vacant sound of
beetle...*

*She
moves, stranger in her
country
empty...
Beleaguered by laws and
bound to infant and hut
she must face a land criss-*

*crossed
and dissected by droughts...*

From this description she develops into resistance, and then to a new world and a new woman.

*with all
i am
with man
i am human
with husband
i am wife
with father
the children must grow
with other hands
the earth brings forth
without without
we will no longer be
without*

And Lerato Kumalo, in "No More Words Now", gives this answer to those people who tell us to "be nice"; this answer, to all those people who feed us that false consciousness of "pretty-pretty"; this answer, this image, of what a woman can be:

*But my point argument and
logic
come
from piles of dead bodies
and the necks struggling
under the yoke
ask them what they think
of me
"a nice girl like you" as you
put it
when I shoulder with pride
this AK47
ask what they think of you
and your cocktail party
wisdom
"a nice person like you".*

LIZZIE ADAMS



SHARPSVILLE

SOWETO

UTICA BRIDGE