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# rixalka

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COVER: THAMI MNYELE

**INSIDE:**

Interview with  
**Ruth Mompati**

POPULAR THEATRE  
AND STRUGGLE

MUSIC AND  
CENSORSHIP



**"To help concentrate our creative energies on the attainment of this goal and in the name of the National Executive Committee of your organisation, the ANC, we declare 1986 the Year of Umkhonto we Sizwe — the People's Army! Let this Year of the People's Army see us engulf the apartheid system in the fires and the thunder of a people's war! Let the Year of MK see us mount a military offensive that will push the enemy into a strategic retreat! Let us use the opportunities that this Year gives us to replace each combatant who fell last year with a hundred more, and building on our achievements, to create a formidable fighting force of the people, superior to the enemy forces because of the justice of our cause, the discipline of our combatants and the bravery and boldness of our warriors."**



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## LISTEN TO RADIO FREEDOM

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CONGRESS AND UMKHONTO WE  
SIZWE, THE PEOPLE'S ARMY

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## READ

# MAYIBUYE

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

## WORKERS' UNITY

# D'AWN

Monthly Journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe

## VOICE OF WOMEN

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:  
RIXAKA EDITORIAL  
P.O. BOX 31791  
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA.

# FORWARD



## TO THE READER

Here is our second issue of RIXAKA.

Today, perhaps more than at any period of our history of struggle, the role of the cultural worker has never found a sharper definition. The ferment going on inside South Africa, the barricades on the streets and the sandbags in front of police stations — not to say anything about the sound of gunfire, the spent cartridges on the pavements, the acrid smell of tear-gas and burning flesh — means that the racist regime is losing control and that we, the people, must take over. It is as simple as that.

But the question that should exercise the mind of cultural workers is, what kind of monster will we inherit with the seizure of power? What are we going to do with the mind-boggling discos and those musicians whose self-image is so destructive as to border on the suicidal? Who is going to come forward and present an heroic image for our children and our children's children when the USA has so insinuated itself in the beleaguered communities via the "A-Team", "Knight Rider" and "Dynasty"? What about those Voortrekker Monuments and museums and art galleries and libraries that say nothing about our history, but go out of their way to celebrate the death of anything positive? What about the cult of mercenaries that is perpetrated by films, pulp novels and comic strips? What is the role of the artist here?

The problem that has always affected some of our cultural workers inside and outside South Africa has been the lack of that consciousness to create alternative structures to the death-oriented cultural structures of the regime. President O.R. Tambo, in the January 8 Statement of 1984, charged "our cultural workers with the task of using their craft to give voice, not only to the grievances, but also to the profoundest 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." This call, in the face of present-day South Africa, means that as cultural workers we could start dealing with the combatting of genocide and stop trying to "make it" in the Western metropoli. There is nothing to learn there except more refined methods of self-hatred and — delusion.

In this issue we try to focus on some strategies our people can use to create further cracks in the apartheid edifice. The question of theatre, for instance, has been left too long in the hands of people with their dollar-green eyes (as Kgositsile would say) glued on Broadway and Tony Awards.

*From P.2*

Popular theatre, which doesn't need a visa, can be used to sensitise and give direction to our people. Our writers need to understand the discipline needed in their craft and portray images that are going to be emulated by the coming generations. Our graphic artists have to reflect the world we live in with the dignity that will spur people to forge ahead and resolve to create a vibrant new world.

We have included here some poems from Nicaragua — a country that was birthed in fire and is undergoing trying times now with "Bitburg" Reagan putting the scare on everybody, American people included. As an answer to some questions on what needs to be done, we also have an interview with National Executive Committee member Comrade Ruth Mompoti.

It is our feeling that for cultural work to succeed inside the country, certain steps need to be taken. Although art always requires a basic exercise of individual effort, united cultural workers become more effective than mere solo artists. If we rally together and form collectives that can affiliate to democratic formations, we would go a long way in heightening our creativity and in ensuring that we are moving in tandem with the struggling people. We must find ourselves involved in industrial unions that have made their choice of weapons in the battle for South Africa. RIXAKA takes this opportunity to commend the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)!

It is in culture that you see how completely insane the racist regime has become. In the aftermath of the Gaborone raid where skilled artists like Thami Mnyele were butchered, it should have chilled the consciousness of rational people to see Craig Williamson exhibiting paintings, posters and poems — captured booty that the "terrorists of the ANC" were intending to use to subvert "law and order". It brought to mind the picture of the army officer who had his finger stuck in a wound on Che Guevara's still body. But history is replete with late and unlamented people like Williamson, and South Africa will yet prove to be the graveyard of many such — and many more still.

In the year 1986 we need to inculcate a new consciousness among ourselves. We need to come *rook uit* and show the regime — and our own people and ourselves — that Vuyusile Mini and the countless patriots who have been slain in these long hours of madness have not perished in vain. In our artistic and cultural work we need to start celebrating all those things that will usher in an era of freedom. In the words of Margaret Walker, we must,

Let a new earth rise  
Let another world be born  
Let a beauty full of healing and strength of the  
final clenching be the pulsing in the spirit and  
our blood  
Let the martial songs be written  
Let the dirges disappear  
Let a new race of men now arise  
and take control!



# POPULAR THEATRE AND STRUGGLE



With the present pace of struggle inside South Africa, not excluding the cultural struggle against apartheid, it becomes vital to examine in depth every possible cultural weapon. Popular theatre is such a weapon.

"It is generally in culture that the seed of protest, leading to the emergence and development of the liberation movement is found".

— Amilcar Cabral —

Throughout the entire developing world, including those countries where people are waging popular struggles against repressive regimes, popular organisations and progressive individuals are rediscovering the potential of popular theatre as a weapon and a component of struggle. South Africa with its rich legacy of theatre experience dating from the pre-colonial period, cannot be an exception in this process. To rediscover the potential of popular theatre in the liberation struggle, re-evaluate its function and to re-define its perspective is a burning necessity. It is an imperative that confronts all those theatre activists in our midst who are committed to the cause of liberation.

Perhaps, as theatre activists, we should derive inspiration and take our cue from the final declaration that emerged from the 1982 Culture and Resistance Symposium that was held in Gaborone, Botswana, calling on all cultural workers in South Africa, whether behind the pen, brush, camera, saxophone or holding a chisel, to be as effective as anyone behind the gun in the service of progress. On our part, as theatre workers this call poses a renewed challenge and development of more effective methods of work and theatre techniques in correspondence with the ever developing revolutionary situation currently obtaining in South Africa.

Popular theatre, like any other art form, is a cultural force for social change and societal development. It is a genre which, inherently collective in nature, promotes interpersonal communication. Just as a good axe is one that cuts keenly, good theatre is one

that educates. While popular theatre is effective for heightening political consciousness, it is also a vehicle for galvanising people into action. It is not conceived here as an elitist pursuit, but is viewed as an activity geared at improving the lot of the downtrodden. It cannot afford the luxury of



Cultural workers of the ANC doing an opera of struggle.

neutrality. Popular theatre must be both relevant and functional and should address itself to the needs of society. Pablo Neruda, in one of his poems, exhorts artists and their art to be

useful and usable  
like metal and cereal  
that waits for plowshares  
tools for the land.

Within the context of the South African situation, popular theatre, above all, must articulate our struggle, our hopes and aspirations, thereby enhancing the revolutionary con-

sciousness of the people and mobilising them into active struggle. In order to realise this objective, theatre workers need to re-define certain conventional attitudes and concepts; and break off from the exercise of performing only at established institutions that are usually removed from the masses financially and geographically. They need to climb down their ivory towers, march out of the Market Theatre, Space, Baxter, etc., and go to the people in the streets, factories, single-sex hostels, villages, etc. Popular theatre derives its vitality and sustenance from the communities to be found at these many ordinary, everyday places.

The thesis that theatre should go to the people must not be confused with the cathartic approach where people in a given community are only given a chance to vent their grievances and frustrations in the course of participating in a performance. Nor does it have any kinship with the so-called banking method where people are spoon-fed with externally prescribed solutions that in most cases are ineffective and/or irrelevant to their situation. Going to the people should actually challenge the people themselves to look critically at their own situation and inculcate in them a sense of urgency and commitment to changing that situation. Here, theatre ceases to be a monologue that fosters passivity in the audience. It is transformed into a dialogue in which the people/audience actively participate in a performance based on their collective experience, criticising scenarios and using the analysis discovered in working out political strategies and engaging in active struggle.

Popular theatre rejects the artist who sees theatre as a spaceship that launches one to a life of riches and fame. It abhors cultural prostitution. In our context, an artist exists in a dialectical connexion with his community, charged with the imaginative exploration of

the process of social life (in which he participates), the interpretation of its dynamics, evoking deep responses in his audience and consequently influencing the behavioral patterns and outlook of his community.

### Development of Theatre in South Africa

South Africa boasts of a rich theatre history traceable to the period before colonial subjugation. Then people evolved indigenous dramatic forms that found their expression in the religious rituals, the traditional song, dance and story-telling exercises. The distinguishing feature of all cultural forms was their participatory nature with performances becoming, in the final analysis, festivals for all: Dancing would be open to all: a man or woman getting into the dance pitch, showing his or her expertise there — certainly not with an aim of out-shining anyone — then going out to give a chance to another. Audiences would respond by stamping their feet, for instance, and clapping their hands when witnessing a particularly spectacular dance.

Praise singers always found themselves reciting to the chant of ululating women, or men thundering assent. No storyteller would finish his narrative without someone from the audience supplementing the story by his own version of the truth. Most of these traditional forms still exist in an almost pure form: some have been commercially packaged and sent out for export by the Bertha Egnoses of the world in the inane form of *Umabatha*, *Ipi Tombi*, *Meropa*, and so on. From the traditional forms itemised above, modern South African theatre has emerged — finding its maximum creative sustenance from the trials and tribulations of black urban life, the rhythm of poverty, death and struggle — embracing in this process of European dramatic forms.

Competent theatre talent left South Africa with the migration to the bright lights of the western world with the theatre spectaculars of the early 60's: *King Kong*, *Sponono*, etc., creating a certain void. This cultural vacuum was filled in a way by the plethora of plays that inundated the townships informed by the Jim Comes to Joburg and Crime Does Not Pay formula. Common stereotypes in these plays were a church or funeral scene dominated by a highly spirited and lecherous *umfundisi* (priest), a jail scene depicting a *ja bass*, servile African policeman who brutalised the convicts and, for laughs presumably, the inevitable shebeen with the shebeen "queen" involved in gossip and *tsotsitaal* sequences with her hipster patrons.

The object of these plays was entertainment for commercial purposes with little or no political comment except by mere coincidence. The last because there is no realistic way one could write anything on South Africa without touching on political reality. In the main, this theatre was for amusement and the success of the performance would be measured in terms of laughter evoked in the audience. The crown prince of this movement is Gibson Kente, a shrewd businessman-cum-playwright who is able to cash in on this genre, milking unsuspecting patrons to the point of overtly identifying with the status quo, as demonstrated in his play *Laduma* which denounces the people's revolution.

During this period, township theatre was also influenced by works done by white liberal writers, notably Athol Fugard of the *Sizwe Banzi* and *The Island* fame. His two-man play technique, as against the large cast plays that were hitherto the norm, rapidly became popular among theatre practitioners. However, like any literary work penned by white liberals based on the experiences of the op-

pressed majority, Fugard's work falls short of the true reflection of the day to day experiences of the people who constitute his subjects. He also fails to penetrate the experiences of his subjects and bring to the fore the underlying causes of their destitution. He could not, moreover, advance any solutions to the problems that he so half-heartedly unveils. The resultant effect is that such theatre is tailored to hit the Broadway scene and catapult its protagonists into the world of stardom.

The advent of black consciousness in the late 1960's gave a renewed impetus to theatre, adding to it a radical fervour. For the first time ever, theatre directly addressed itself to the realities of South African life. Radical theatre groups, fired and inspired by black consciousness, itself a largely cultural impulse, sprouted in all the major centres of the country, formed by and around student circles. Most prominent amongst these groups were MDALI (Music, Drama, Art and Literature Institute), a union of black artists charged with the task of organising black arts festivals with the aim of promoting its affiliates; Dashiki, an Afrojazz group which combined African rhythms with poetry recitals. They backed TECON (Theatre Council of Natal), a black theatre group based in Durban in their production "Black Images". PET (People's Experimental Theatre) came around, put up a few performances of *Shanti* (a militant play that called for black solidarity and espoused armed struggle) before the cast was dispersed by police harassment. Mihloti Black Theatre excelled in militant black poetry recitals. However, black consciousness had inherent ideological and organisational shortcomings. In a real sense, it was intellectually removed from the masses from whom the theatre workers would have gleaned experience with the result that it ended in the same pitfall of elitism. This theatre



suffered immensely from state action against cultural resistance. A host of repressive legislation was brought into play resulting in detentions, bannings and exiling of many cultural activists. Mthuli ka Shezi, the writer of *Shanti*, was murdered by a railway policeman.

Those who were not harassed by the system retreated to the relative safety of liberal centres in the cities like the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, the Baxter and Space in Cape Town. They found refuge in the white liberal universities where the radical theatre tradition was carried on into the turbulent era after the 1976 bloodletting in Soweto and elsewhere. The gulf between radical theatre and the oppressed was further widened. These venues were situated far from the people who really mattered; they were, moreover, prohibitively expensive to the average black theatre-goer. The paid voyeurs of the regime conveniently turned a blind eye.

### Towards a People's Theatre

The 80's ushered in a period where struggle took a qualitatively marked upward swing. There is no day when the anger of the people doesn't manifest itself in some popular action by the people. Mass student and labour upsurges go hand in hand — in fact, one would dare say, accompany — the kind of theatre that finds its inspiration in the struggle of the people. It is informed by this struggle and it taps its resources from it. Theatre is performed in the funerals that are so much a part of our life in the besieged concentration camps euphemistically called locations. Everything that happens which brings black people together becomes a political statement: Matsemela Manaka's *Egoli* has been performed several times at weddings. In all the areas where our people are fighting raging battles against the teeth of the regime, our people are treated to plays; Zakes Mda's *Dark Voices Ring* was performed

at the Crossroads squatter camps.

Theatre finds its way into the labour sector such as the Junction Avenue Theatre Company's organising of lunch-hour workshops on industrial disputes. This trend, particularly the JATC, in which the audience are also participants, will have far-reaching effects in enhancing the workers' — if not the community's — consciousness and the need for unity in action to be consolidated. *Ilanga Lizophumel'abasebenzi* — *The Sun Will Rise for the Workers* — is a workshop play that was coordinated by JATC together with industrial workers dismissed from their jobs after several labour disputes around the Reef. The content of the play is based on a factory dispute, its historical causes and its analysis seen from the viewpoint of the participants who form the audience. It was performed to an ecstatic working class audience in its leisure time, that rare commodity. It has since been video-taped to be shown to larger and broader audiences.

Junction Avenue has also produced plays such as *Dikhitshining* (Kitchens), based on the experiences of the super-exploited African women employed as domestic servants in white households. The direction and pace set by JATC needs to be emulated and expanded so as to cover the various sections of the oppressed majority in their different occupations throughout the country.

It must be borne in mind that popular theatre does not serve as an end in itself. It is not the consummation of active struggle, but serves the purpose of bolstering those creative energies and skills of the masses that have to be harnessed towards a revolutionary effort. This is our perspective. Rehearsing and role acting the struggle does build up the confidence of the participant audience but does not substitute actual struggle. This, therefore, means that popular theatre activists must be part and parcel of democratic formations inside the country. They



Pure joy on FRAME worker's face on a May Day performance.

must find themselves in women's, civic, community, workers', students', teachers', medical, religious organisations and formations, where the collective experience of the people can be used as a weapon of struggle.

Detractors of popular theatre complain that revolutionaries have robbed this art form of its aesthetic content; that we have denuded the art of its beauty and crudely use it for agit-prop at the expense of artistic harmony and humaneness. Social progress and the ultimate seizure of power immediately grind this argument underfoot. The aesthetics and beauty and harmony that our detractors are screaming about are indivisible from the forms of our creation; bourgeois art concepts are aimed at disarming the artist and divest the masses of a very effective weapon of struggle. The aesthetics, the beauty and harmony of popular theatre lie precisely in its ability to animate the people and rally them into active struggle. The skillful combination of theatre and method, art and skill, content and message, ensures the artistic purity, relevance and commitment of popular theatre — a component of our struggle.

— Bob Mooki —

# POETRY

## **Muganderedzi re tlo Mugunda (We Shall Defeat the oppressors)**

We come a long way,  
locked in battle against capital  
between the spiders of poverty  
and the webs of hunger.  
We said explosively:  
No to malnutrition in the sea of wealth!  
No to ignorance imposed in the golden age  
of science!

We come a long way,  
dogs and batons salting our wounds,  
Sharpeville and Matola peppering our anger,  
but massively in defiance we chant:  
*Mugandaredzi re tlo mugunda!*  
Yes to the Freedom Charter!

We relive the spoiled Dimbaza of our memories  
and the poisoned nectar of Limpopo.  
From Soweto to Bulhoek  
we are the sons and daughters risen  
against the granary of thieves in Pretoria!

We come a long way,  
we sprouted from the command towers of Isandlwana  
flowering in the battle-fields of Wankie,  
we flourished in the ravines and gorges of Sipolilo  
where our spears stood poised to sever the jugular vein  
sucking the juice of our motherland.

*Mugandaredzi re tlo mugunda,*  
we shall defeat the oppressor!  
We rock Koeberg,  
*Eina! Kwakhal 'umiesies*  
We pound Sasol in blazing infernos,  
*Kuvuth 'umlilows.*

*Re tlo vagunda, re tlo vagunda!*  
We hear rumbles of fear in the belly of apartheid,  
cold sweat of panic bathe the brows of generals  
in Voortrekker  
but we, M K, with deadly precision of T N T's  
and bazookas  
are shattering the night of repression,  
certainly, *Muganderedzi re tlo mukunda,*  
and Tambo is leading us to the shrine of victory!

— Makhanda Senzangakhona —

## Children of My Country

In my country  
children are born old  
with the taste of fear  
in their famished mouths

Children are born old  
with eyes staring-betrayed  
by and insane world  
exploding with the shock of war

Children are born old  
knowing hunger pains  
and violent death  
before the age of life

In my country  
children are not innocent babes  
for a moment longer than  
the blink of an eye

For time more than  
a split second that it takes  
children are born old  
before their innocence can survive

— Dee September —



to Thami Mnyele

aah...!  
yet another drop of blood  
on the scaffold  
from the womb of slavery  
to the humiliating symphony of mine dumps  
and you stretched your palm  
across this time and space  
to plant meaning with a dare  
of your heart heartening

aah...!  
yet another drop of blood  
on the scaffold

i am looking for space  
to plant the heroic spear of your elbows  
in the path of triumph beyond the grave  
gravely  
here where the streets have taken a stand  
against the burning noon of this tide  
here on the palms of warriors  
across Blood River in the eclipse  
in the eyes of the gods

beyond this sacred drop of blood  
this ancestry of wills  
this face of the landscape of man  
on this mound  
i see the misdeeds of the elements  
the mischief of the gods  
in the image of man that they are  
manning the rickety tide of the gold bullion  
down Pretoria Square the insolent step

and you went away thus  
yet another drop of blood  
charioted by violence  
on the main of the struggle for humanity  
you were in love  
married to the fingers of man  
the will of the wheel of posterity  
and you grew up thus  
among the reeds that swayed  
to and fro without rhythm or rhyme  
bending all the time to oblivion  
insulting the heroes of yore  
and you were bitter  
for your love was bigger than the pyramids  
of time that lost time  
in the breath of the fanatics of cowardice

and you went away thus  
and i say  
the fog has failed to lay down  
its thorns  
and the hounds have barked once more  
upon the breasts of patriots  
pawing and pawing  
and questions and bound to be questions  
this side of being  
when patience has formed haloes  
around the heart of humility  
and blood is spilt like that  
across the krantz to become gods  
and we shall make them  
so as to sing and dance  
in the mould of our will  
willing...  
to direct the conscience of man  
to seek vengeance without inhumanity  
this is  
the ontology of brave justice  
that staggers the nerve  
the meaning of this path  
that you inhabited in the fullness of the moon  
bright and ever bright  
until...  
yet another drop of blood  
and i ask you Thami  
of a thousand unbroken spaces of vision  
you who have traversed the poles  
of van Goch and Solomon Mahlangu  
and listened to Che the Guevara of our times  
and spoke in committed brushes and spears  
of colours to the colouring Mother of Gorky  
in Maseru and Matola...

you lived beyond definitions of art  
in art  
and no heavens fell  
except intrigues of dictionaries and puffed lungs  
that must now redress their story  
to match the being of this drop of blood

aah...!  
how big must the grave of the braves measure  
aah...!  
how big

no...  
i will not wait for any answers from you  
you'll tell me of things and things  
of broken arguments by dehydrated drunkards  
with wishing spears

of love of self muffling the anthem  
of empty fields spanning away from deserted mountains  
across rivers with jawless crocodiles  
you'll tell me of men and women  
who must become this path  
to draw a line between life and death  
and i in turn will argue coherently  
about flowers that must inhabit  
this drop of blood  
flowering in the sting of warriors  
no...

i will not wait for any answers from you  
i will sink the rod of meaning  
to stir impatience  
and forward a blank cheque  
to the marauding lion of my being  
i will sing of flowers dying away  
like this  
burnt down by the insipid breath  
of the stinging bees around

i will cry like i am crying now  
and don't you tell me  
you abhor the sound  
i detest the wound that carried you  
beyond the sunset  
my voice is a voice  
married to the thunder and lightning  
in the knot of this drop of blood  
yes...

i hear your voice now  
is it you who is dragging me  
to this dry street of dustbins  
full of emptiness  
staggering into kitchens of hungry cockroaches  
why tell me of breaking muscles  
covered with gold poverty  
down there into the pit of pits  
pitting love against consuming hatred  
of words on words  
on the palm of man  
unpoetic in the extreme .  
leading to this death

Thami...

you deserve a poem of the will of man  
the nation of anthems of steel  
of pictures of the war of victories  
i owe you the immortality  
the breath of heroes  
let Gaborone be the badge  
the mint of posterity...

— Zinjiva Nkondo —

funeral blues

The ghost of soweto  
was seen yesterday after daybreak  
grinning at funeral marchers  
shining metal teeth jutting from red gums  
were sucking the naked blood of cold people

the ghost of soweto  
was seen yesterday at midday  
walking through the townships  
cold human flesh hanging from its lips

the ghost of soweto  
was seen yesterday  
at sunset  
howling at the moon faces  
of boiling and steaming people  
before disappearing 'till sunrise  
To the cold suburbs in Pretoria.

— Titus Motsabi —



## DOC+

It needed time  
for this event of death  
to become a fact of life;  
but the legend persists  
it enters our thoughts and actions.

Legions of people  
their shapes and aspirations untold:  
those who have been oppressed  
or lived with and for the oppressed  
and even they  
who have themselves oppressed  
by willingly or unwittingly  
aiding the oppressor,  
know about this man  
whose smile and twinkling eye  
quietly evoked  
the breadth of land  
the depth of liberation  
we sought after  
fought for  
and still fight  
and die for

to see him  
on platform or picket  
or in more intimate occupation  
was a foresight of our freedom  
the fact of transformation  
as well as its content and character

His image  
a timeless rock  
in the landscape  
of man's liberation  
his weathered profile  
an articulate landmark  
to artisans of history

Yusuf Mohammed Dadoo  
Doc or Mota to friends  
patriot and partisan  
nationalist and internationalist  
implacable opponent  
of tyrants and tyranny  
crusader against apartheid  
carer for all and curer of the oppressed



# OBITUARY



October this year saw the passing away of the great South African novelist, Alex la Guma. RIXAKA pays tribute to Comrade Alex and comments on his lasting contribution to South African writing.

Maxim Gorky once asked a question: "Whose side are you on, artists?" When asking this question, one can imagine, Gorky was addressing himself to the issue of partisanship in the arts. Concerning creative activity of South Africans, especially black South Africans, this becomes a major question. It speaks about the responsibility of the artist, where he stands in this day and age when, as Yuri Barabash observes in his book *Aesthetics and Poetics*, "creativity has been shifted to the epicentre of the battle of ideas, into the whirlpool of political passions of the age... (when) art and literature is now increasingly becoming one of the most important scenes for ideological struggle."

Writing in South Africa has gone through many stages. What we now call the literary tradition of our country found its sustenance in the oral tradition where tales, riddles, myths, legends and children's word games were evolved and passed on

from generation to generation. Poets and novelists later wrote about the glories of past kingdoms. They wrote about the social life of African Communities before colonisation. One has in mind here writings of people like Thomas Mofolo, Vilakazi, Dlomo, etc. All this writing gave flesh to the skeletons of historical research. The main actors in the bantustans farce are aware of the power of the written word and, using the apartheid state machinery, they try to claim creativity for reactionary purposes.

South African literature has for quite a long time consisted mainly of works written by white South Africans whether, as Rowland Smith puts it, they wrote in English or Afrikaans. Whatever had been written by blacks was regarded as non-literature until this racist myth was finally put to death over the last twenty years by writers like Peter Abrahams, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex la Guma, Arthur

Nortje, Dennis Brutus, Mazisi Kunene, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Dugmore Boetie, Bloke Modisane, Arthur Maimane, Nat Nakasa, Can Themba and many others. Bessie Head and others who had left South Africa wrote stories and novels, taking their themes not directly from South Africa but from the new places and societies in which they found themselves.

Certain things happened in South Africa that had a devastating effect on writing. The Sharpeville shootings and the subsequent declaration of the State of Emergency meant that many writers left the country, many in fear for their lives, others as part of a programme of the liberation movement. People like Mphahlele left the country in rage at the passing of the Bantu Education Act.

The writers who remained, such as Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Casey Motsisi, still used the journalistic genre to reflect the reality of South African life.

Most of these writers had at one time or another worked for *DRUM* or the *Golden City Post* in the major cities of the country. South Africa was blessed at that time with talented journalists like Henry Nxumalo and Alfred Hutchinson. Hutchinson left the country, also, and Henry Nxumalo was murdered in cold blood. His murderers are still walking the streets as free men, or they have been promoted to colonels — or they are occupying the seats of the mighty. Can Themba was to die much later in Swaziland and Nat Nakasa, so the story goes, committed suicide in the cold and lonely despairing jungle of New York. Some of these pioneers in black writing had formed writing collectives that gave rise to publications such as *Classic*.

The 70's came and black consciousness became the embraced philosophy of the hour. Oswald Mtshali's *Sound of the Cowhide Drum* was published and the author was declared the "1001st English poet", a most suspicious accolade. Mongane Serote came out with *Yakhal'inkomo*; Njabulo Ndebele and Mafika Gwala wrote incisive essays and miscellaneous prose that finally enriched publishers like Ad. Donker and Renoster Press. Black consciousness poets, most of whom had borrowed the inner-city idiom of Harlem and I dford-Stuyvesant and Newark, translated into a language of the crypts Steve Biko's assertion, *Black man, you're on your own!*

In all these bloody years of writing, of reflecting the nature of the hideous apartheid beast, most writers were addressing themselves to the international arena as well as to the struggling masses. In all the body of work produced very few artists tried to show the way, to put forward strategies and say what needed to be done. But, as an answer to Maxim Gorky's question, a small handful was beginning to say loudly that they were on the side of

the oppressed. They were on the side of progressive forces fighting for change, fighting for peace and a democratic South Africa.

1976 came and blew whatever little respect people had been having for the Pretoria racist regime. People saw for themselves that they were no longer dealing with sane men but with Hitler's children. Writers recorded what had happened in the long winter. Some were thrown into prisons, detainees; others fled the country. In the camps of the African National Congress, cadres began writing poems and stories that exhorted the thinking youth of our country into joining Umkhonto We Sizwe. Goch Street followed and Solomon Mahlangu declared that his blood "will nourish the tree that will bear the fruit of freedom". A thousand patriots are gone, now, and we speak of that minute of changing shadows from Mahlangu to Moloise.

As all these things were happening, Mphahlele was writing. He wrote *The Wanderers*, a journey of man into the jaws of despair. Perhaps its tone and pessimistic vision should have alerted us that Mphahlele, once a guiding light in African literature, would return to the land he had rejected and make peace with its temporary rulers. So much for that.

One of the most enduring writers whose works have more than adequately answered Gorky's question was Alex la Guma. Alex la Guma passed away on October 11, a day of Solidarity with Political Prisoners of South Africa and Namibia.

Alex... Where does one start?

Alex la Guma was born in Cape Town 60 years ago. His father was James la Guma, a leading member in the Communist Party of South Africa. Alex himself was a member of the Party and had earlier on participated in the formation of the Coloured People's Congress. He left South Africa in 1966 per decisions of the ANC. Prior to that he had been under house arrest since 1962. He

was imprisoned at various times most notably as a defendant in the marathon Treason Trial.

He was educated at Trafalger High School and Cape Technical College. He worked as a clerk, book-keeper, factory hand and journalist. It was these humble working class beginnings that shaped his writing and made him create memorable characters that are at once believed and immensely moving.

His own father, an uncompromisingly political man, weaned Alex on the teachings that national oppression is an evil which must be fought relentlessly. When James la Guma went to attend the 10th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1927, he brought back with him an issue of the newspaper *Izvestia* with a report on the work of the Comintern. Subsequently he gave young Alex that newspaper together with other documents. After many searches by the fascist Gestapo, the newspaper and the documents disappeared from Alex's flat in Cape Town.

In his own writings — in *A Walk in the Night*, his first novella — it becomes clear that la Guma had chosen to throw his lot with the oppressed people of his country. *A Walk in the Night* is most memorable in that la Guma gave us characters such as Michael Adonis through whose eyes we see the life of the so-called Coloured people of South Africa. We walk with Michael up and down the fetid streets of District Six where scrawny cats and dogs fight for supremacy over and ownership of the contents of garbage cans. We see how desperate people love, hate, curse, breathe — in a word, live — the rhythm of violence, how heroically, some try to get out from under the heavy boot of repression that has stayed on their necks since the first wars of resistance.

Other books followed. It should be noted that la Guma's books are banned in South Africa. This means that a vast

majority of South African people is unaware of what one of the brighter stars of our country has said and written for and about it. *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country* followed. By this time la Guma had made his mark in the literary world. He wrote *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, which was very favourably received and a number of short stories, some of which appear in *Quartet*. All these were joined by his novel of awesome power about the liberation struggle called *In the Time of the Butcherbird*. In 1969 Alex la Guma was awarded the Afro-Asian Prize for literature.

Receiving the President Denis Sassou Nguesso Prize for African Literature in Brazzaville, in August, 1985, la Guma told RIXAKA that he could not have written what he had without the inspiration derived from the struggle of the South African people. "Whatever I have produced in the literary field," he said, "came out of the stirring influence of our people engaged in the battle to survive the ravages of apartheid, to overthrow the racist

regime and to establish a democratic South Africa. If literature is linked to life, then the life of our heroic people should inspire all writers in our country."

At the time of his death Alex la Guma had shown in action what it means to be a revolutionary committed to internationalism. He was the General-Secretary of the Afro-Asian Writers Association, the Chief Representative of the ANC in Cuba and a leading member in the South African Communist Party.

On the 23rd of May, la Guma was awarded the order of Friendship of the Peoples by decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. When presenting the order in the Kremlin, B.A. Ashimov, Vice-President of the USSR Supreme Soviet said that the award had been made in tribute to the literary and political work done by Alex la Guma in the promotion of friendship among the peoples of Africa and Asia and in the cause of world peace.

In the penultimate passage of the novel *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, Beukes, the main

protagonist of this novel on struggle, "stood by the side of the streets in the early morning and thought, they have gone to war in the name of suffering people. What the enemy himself has created, these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime, the tortured victims of hatred and humiliation. Those who persist in hatred and humiliation must prepare. Let them prepare hard and fast — they do not have long to wait."

The unfolding scenes inside our country, the Cape Town that is being torn asunder as people move towards freedom — these are the happenings la Guma would have liked to write about. But whatever he has written has become a beacon of light for the younger writers of our country — and this, Alex's recreation and regeneration in ourselves, is an invaluable political act, and for this he will be remembered.

Alex la Guma leaves behind his wife, Comrade Blanche, and two sons, Eugene and Bartholomew.

We say, *Hamba Kahle, Alex.*



# INTERVIEW

**RIXAKA** Interview with Comrade RUTH MOMPATI, member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress.

**Q.** What are your impressions about the arts among our people and in the ranks of our movement?

**A.** The people of South Africa have always used art as a form of expression. Their joys and sorrows and their aspirations have been expressed through the arts. In a way, art has been used as a vehicle of education. It has given our people an extra weapon to use not only in analysing the problems of our people but in also combatting these problems. So that art has been used in struggle. Art has been used in the condemnation of the racist regime; it has been used to give the ideals and aspirations of our people, what the people are fighting for. Even in the olden days this is how it was used. It was through cultural activity that men were called out to war. It is through this, then, that we are informing the world today of our struggle, of the support we need from the world and what we hope to achieve for our people.

**Q.** What about in the ranks of the movement?

**A.** Here in exile, we use art to educate the people about the struggle. We have our Amandla Cultural Ensemble which has done work in a shorter time than we did in informing people through meetings, seminars and conferences. This is just one of the many such activities in the movement.



**COMRADE RUTH MOMPATI:** "People must isolate the racists."

**Q.** What do you think of the preoccupation of some of our artists inside the country with going to perform in western countries? What do you think should be the role of the cultural worker at this point of our struggle?

**A.** We want to bring about a new South Africa. And we are involved in a struggle for liberation. In trying to bring about a new South Africa, we get support from the people of the world whom we have asked to boycott South Africa, not to go to South Africa, to boycott those artists from South Africa who go out to entertain the world, falsely showing the world that South Africa is a "democratic state", as they say. We have asked for a boycott of South Africa as a whole, that people must isolate the racists. Looking at our artists against this background, we say that they have to be part of the sanctions against South Africa because we can't call upon the world to boycott South Africa and be seen to be going against the very call we're making.

That is why we say the artists have to look at the battle of boycott — the battle of sanctions against the regime — as a very important battle in which they have weapons to use against the regime for the seizure of power. We hope that in the Cultural Workers Conference which will take place this year, our cultural workers are going to look at this question so that they can come out with one unified position for the total isolation of apartheid South Africa.

**Q.** Do you think there's an emerging South African culture which transcends linguistic and racial obstacles? How does our cultural work fit into this?

**A.** Naturally, our country and everything about it is developing. We in the ANC have been involved in the struggle not only to change the life of the people, not only to institute a new social order — better health, education, working conditions, etc — but in order also to usher in a new

South African culture that will bring our people together. When the South African regime brought about the process of dividing our people into ethnic groups we who were in the struggle at the time felt that it was too late. It was a century too late. These laws came when our people were already one. Our artists have come together not as ethnic groups but as people who are writers, poets, graphic artists, etc. They have come together also to try and set out what the South Africa of tomorrow should address itself to. It is true that there is a new South Africa on the horizon, but not the type that spawns tribal culture. It heralds a culture that will bring together all the people.

**Q.** Children raised in exile are a reality of our liberation struggle. How do we educate and socialise them in the richness and diversity of our own South African culture?

**A.** The children of the movement have always been part of the programme of liberation. This has been done through the organisation of Masupatsela (Pioneers) and through the teachings of the ANC. It is very important for our children to be exposed to the arts of our people. It has been easy to do this now that we have a school, SOMAFCO. When the school first opened most of the arts were not taught as such. The school organised a number of clubs — graphic arts, dance, theatre, music clubs, and so on. It was very interesting to see that after dinner students would rest for about an hour and then they would go to their respective clubs where they would be on their own.

This can also be seen in the work of the creches where culture is a form of education and recreation. This also pertains to the cultural programmes of our students internationally. They perform for the peoples of the countries of the world. Through culture there is this vibrant exchange.

**Q.** The Freedom Charter says: "All people shall have equal rights to use their own languages and to develop their own folk cultures and customs." The architects of the bantustans have unscrupulously used this expression that Zulus,



Xhosas, Tswanas, Vendas, etc, differ culturally and that each ethnic group has a right to self-determination. What is your opinion?

**A.** In the ANC we're very clear about the programme of the racist regime. The very creation of the bantustans was to divide our people into ethnic groups with different languages. This also aimed at creating hostility among us. But there was no way they could succeed. Apartheid and exploitation are part of the content of the teachings under the bantustan structures. People should speak their own languages. But the ANC has through the years encouraged that the languages

be given a different content so that the teaching of our languages should revolutionise the people rather than allow them to fall into backward tribal traps. Languages should be wrested from the forked-tongue bantustan teachers and shaped in such a way that they inform and teach the people about the struggle, and the people's role in this struggle.

**Q.** There is a growing anti-apartheid activity among artists in Europe and in other countries of the world. What can the ANC Department of Arts and Culture do to co-ordinate all these

efforts for a maximum blow against apartheid?

**A.** Our cultural workers and our cultural department have a very important job to do. Fortunately the department has an ongoing contact with anti-apartheid activists the world over. We feel that the cultural workers and the cultural department should intensify the struggle by taking it to the world in the form of culture. In this way we can capture different audiences: youth, women, artists, poets, singers. We'll be speaking to them in a language they understand. This would be one way of mobilising them and organising them into a strong movement of anti-

apartheid supporters of the struggle for freedom in our country.

**Q. What is the role of the artist in the armed struggle. Where is his true point of combat?**

**A.** The role of the artist in the armed struggle is no different from the role of all other activists. But I think the artist has always had a special place. I remember very clearly in 1956 when 156 leaders of the ANC were arrested. It was there where the role of the artist was demonstrated. Every morning when we arrived to take our leaders breakfast, we were met by song by these comrades who were supposed to be in prison, who were living under these terrible conditions. The message of the artists came out saying, "The struggle is my life" and that everybody must join the struggle and fight for a new South Africa. The message warned the regime and said, "Strydom, be careful, you're facing a power that is the people's organisation." This was the message that we brought. Our people, through their art, were able to speak to hundreds of prisoners who were in the Fort, a lot of whom were not politically aware. In that way, a lot of people became sensitised to their role and what they could contribute. We have in mind here great men like Vuyisile Mini, who was murdered in prison.

We have our own artists playing the role of people's historians. In the olden days it was through poets, painters and writers that the heroism of our people was preserved.

This is not only in South Africa. A great cultural worker such as Victor Jara who spoke to and led his

people through his art and kept up their courage in the face of torture and fascism. We have great artists who have left an indelible mark. Benjamin Moloise, a poet, was hanged not so long ago. Thami Mnyele who was one of the victims of the Gaborone Massacre; we have people like Dikobe wa Mogale who is a poet and graphic artist — he is serving ten years on Robben Island for furthering the aims of the ANC. These cultural workers have identified themselves with the struggle of the people. It is significant that the South African regime has recognised art as a weapon of war. After the Gaborone Massacre of

**Dictator  
President**



June 14, where Thami Mnyele was one of those murdered in cold blood, Craig Williamson, the regime's policeman who's such a rabid anti-ANC running dog, who thinks he can destroy the organisation, showed as captured "weapons of war" posters depicting the struggle of our people, sufferings of our people, depicting the role that our people are playing in the struggle; paintings of men, women and children. Williamson showed these, these were on exhibition as captured "weapons of war". It is also important to note that in South Africa many of our artists have been

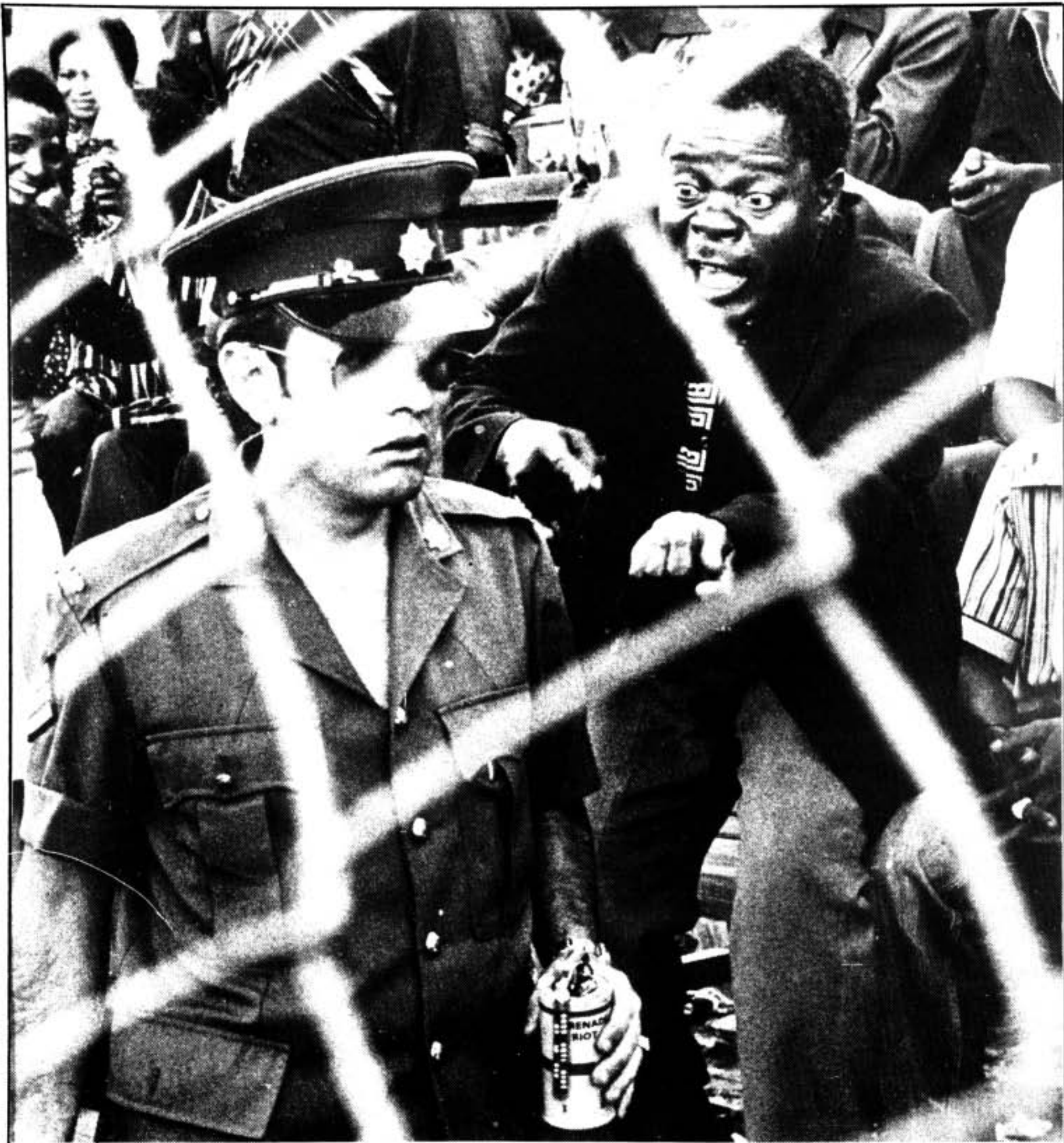
arrested not because they've committed any crimes but because of the socio-political content of their art. People playing Amandla tapes have been sent to prison; people have been arrested for painting on mugs or plates images depicting our struggle and the conditions of our people.

**Q. What is your message to the artists inside and outside South Africa about the present situation in our country?**

**A.** My message is very simple. I'd like to commend them first for their role in the struggle. During the past year, we've all seen our struggle moving from height to height.

Our people have been moving forward in force to engage the enemy in the face of death. We say to our artists, Yours is a weapon of war recognised by our people and recognised by the enemy. We say during this present turmoil, we need you to inform the people through your art, firstly, about what is happening and, secondly, what should be done. You know our ideals and expectations. To you I say this is the time to really go to battle with your pens, your books, paints, music — with your everything.

I'd also like to say that this year is of very great significance. Firstly, it is the 25th Anniversary of Umkhonto we Sizwe; the 10th Anniversary of Soweto. It is the 100th Anniversary of May Day. All these are occasions of struggle. It is MK which broke from peaceful struggle to armed struggle. It is Soweto that showed the world that our children were the future nation of South Africa and that they are the fighting force to bring about that future. May Day —



it is our workers who are the backbone of the struggle for freedom.

Therefore, we call upon all our artists through their instruments of war to see to it that these anniversaries are marked in such a way that there can be no doubt. Which means that it is through their art, at home and abroad, that we will read what MK does,

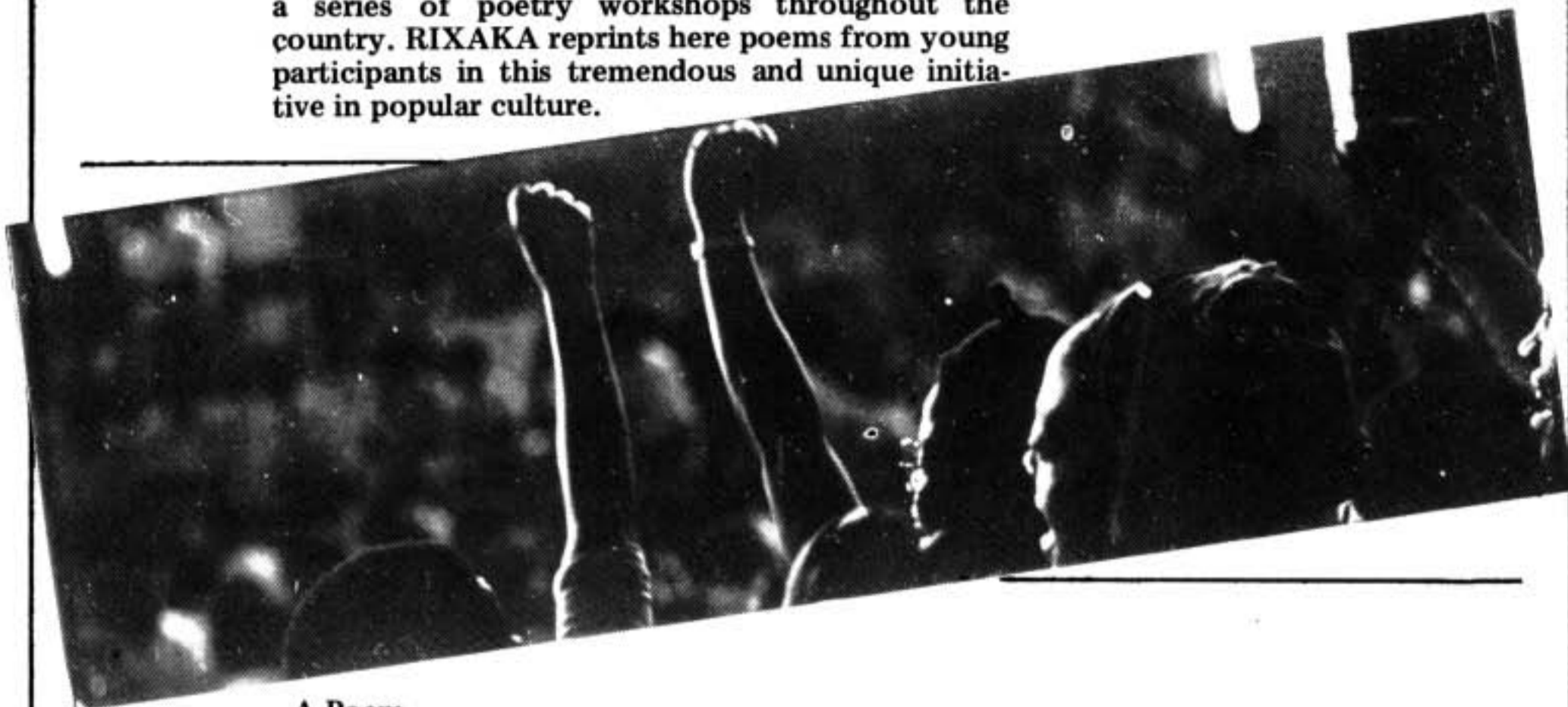
what MK is going to do, what is expected of all South Africans, young and old, in the struggle for freedom. It is through their instruments of war that

the 10th Anniversary of Soweto will be given a fitting commemoration — a commemoration that will put the name of the youth on the map. It is through

their instruments of war that the workers' Centenary will be given the place in our history, the dignity and interpretation which is expected by our people. Lastly, the place of our artists is in the ranks of MK; it is in the ranks of Soweto martyrs; it is in the ranks of martyrs of May Day not only in our country but the world over.

# NICARAGUA LIBRE!

Immediately after the triumph of the popular insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua on 19 July, 1979, the Ministry of Culture under the poet Ernesto Cardenal established a series of poetry workshops throughout the country. RIXAKA reprints here poems from young participants in this tremendous and unique initiative in popular culture.



## A Poem

I like to write about life in the Revolution,  
about love,  
about the death of literacy workers and those in charge of the  
militias,  
about the peasants organised  
in the National Union of Farmworkers and Cattlemen,  
about the dawn in the mountains with birds and butterflies  
about the sun over the sentry post where the sentry  
guards the Sandinista Air Force base,  
about Mombacho in the Lake,  
about my grandfather sowing the land  
or when I go to the runway and see the T-33 arriving,  
when I watch the happiness of the children in Berta Diaz *barrio*  
playing at guerrillas  
arguing over who will be Sandino, Carlos Fonseca or Rigoberto  
Lopez Perez,  
about the linesman on guard in his dug-out  
by the bank of the river Coco on the frontier,  
about the Security Company changing guard  
and when the soldiers march with gleaming rifles  
under the full moon  
or when listening to the speeches of Tomas Borge  
in July 19th Square  
remembering the heroes and announcing  
that the land belongs to the peasant who works it  
as though they were poems.

— Ana Sofia Martinez —



**It doesn't matter**

(For my companions maimed in the war)

**It doesn't matter**

that Mario Peralta's fingers were twisted into a claw  
by a bullet fired at him by the Guardia Nacional.

**Mario**

who was left disabled after the fighting  
is now in a wheelchair.

It doesn't matter that my left leg is withered  
from a fracture in the spine.

We made the Revolution  
and so we are going to defend it.

— Alberto Garcia —



**You told me how they killed your brother**

You told me how they killed Antonio  
your brother

and your eyes filled with tears.

— It was the Guardia who are in Honduras — you said —  
they caught hold of him  
beat him until they grew bored  
and one of them said it was better to dig spurs into him  
as though he were an animal.

When your mother arrived to claim him  
from a hospital in Tegucigalpa  
she gazed at his mangled body  
and a sign on his chest which said "Sandino-communist".

— Rosario Garcia —

# STICKER ART

## "Trust Us"

(How the SADF loves our people to death)

### An extract from a letter from Cradock

Last week the SADF, police and railway police cordoned off Cradock. They searched every home. A helicopter circled the township with a loud speaker denouncing the Cradock Residents Association and the United Democratic Front as a communist plot. They handed out little yellow stickers, the now common little yellow stickers that say: We are your friends. Trust Us.

Against this, let us look at the stickers put out by the liberation movement. The typical "bourgeois art" response is — they are also propaganda, only they take a different political perspective than the SADF stickers. As a start, they are dismissed out of hand. Propaganda, these people tell us, and Art do not mix.

We reject this analysis totally. Not simply because "our politics are correct and theirs are not". But the demands of our politics and our approach force us into a completely different attitude to the aesthetics and production of graphic work such as stickers.

Look for a moment at what the regime tries to do with its stickers, compared with what we are trying to do with ours. The regime's stickers come at the tail-end of a massive operation against the people, as part of a co-ordinated structure of lies and deception. Their purpose is only to confuse and mislead. The stickers can be read to mean the "defence" force is saying: "Residents, you must trust us, we are your friends". Despite the evidence of Casspirs patrolling the streets, of armed men with submachine guns breaking down doors. Or the stickers, meant to be worn by

residents already searched, could be seen as an ironic note to the occupying forces: "You can trust the resident wearing this, since he has already been searched and declared clean." Either way, such efforts to distort the realistics of the SADF invasion of the townships could never become a valuable addition to any culture; it could never become "Art", you might say. The person putting such a sticker together instinctively recognises this fact by giving them no more than mere technical competence, if that, to putting the lying words on paper.

But look now at our stic-

and women disapprove, the stickers land in the gutter. Therefore our images must reflect the people's understanding, must talk to them. A May Day sticker shows a Congress wheel, interlocking with a gear, in green, gold and black, with a red star: the interrelation of the workers struggle and the political struggle. Another depicts hands holding a spanner, a hammer, and a red flag, moving forward. Yet another shows a man and a woman worker striding confidently carrying their tools: the workers advance! And depicting such truths, we argue, must lie at the base of real culture.



kers.

The purpose of progressive political art is not to mislead, but to expose, to lay clear the roots of the situation, and to outline the direction of growth. True, we aim at the same audience as the SADF: the townships. But to be worthwhile our art must be taken to the people. Students or workers or women put our stickers up, not occupying forces. If the students and workers



From this base we can look for aesthetics within our sticker design. The demands of size and use require extreme simplicity and clarity. The artist who supports the status quo looks for obscurantism and mysticism as "truth", because he does not dare say, simply, this is how life is. At best he will strive to find a personal private truth. The progressive cultural worker wants a bright and shining understanding: this is how life is, truly. A personal understanding of the wider social truth.

It is not a question of abstraction versus realism either. As long as the abstractions are instantly recognisable, such as the symbol of the wheel, they can be used. Indeed, part of the cultural workers task is to find and develop such symbolism. We must search through our personal and political experiences for those unifying factors, in our own, our people's consciousness. The clenched fist is

indeed part of our reality.

More than that, we must bring our images together to enrich, to deepen understanding. It is not merely that workers hold a flag, a hammer, a flower: they hold them with strength of purpose, grace and even direction — forward! It is not merely that two workers stride towards the future. It is the texture of their clothes, the starkness of their forms. We are not just telling people something. We are bringing them a new image that should sharpen perception. The question of technique gains urgency.

And we can fail, too, sometimes. The image can be too simple, it can inspire only an insipid "oh yes, but we know that already! This is the cliché." The work can be incompetent unclear for technical reasons. We do see ineffective and downright bad progressive art on occasion.

So we say: our stickers are not so easily dismissed as "only propaganda". Like all serious cultural work, they search for a sharper understanding, a clearer perception, and they follow an aesthetic demanded by that search, within the restrictions of the medium.

We could of course make these points about posters and backdrops, about any progressive graphics. The same logic applies: the role of graphic work within the people's struggle is to find clear and vivid imagery to improve our understanding of the situation and the need to change it. But stickers are such an unacknowledged form of cultural work, summarily dismissed as propaganda. Rather this seemingly insignificant form must also be seen as a part of our flowering culture, the one we are building now, today, for our own tomorrow. We cannot neglect or dismiss any part of this as "merely propaganda". These images become our truth.

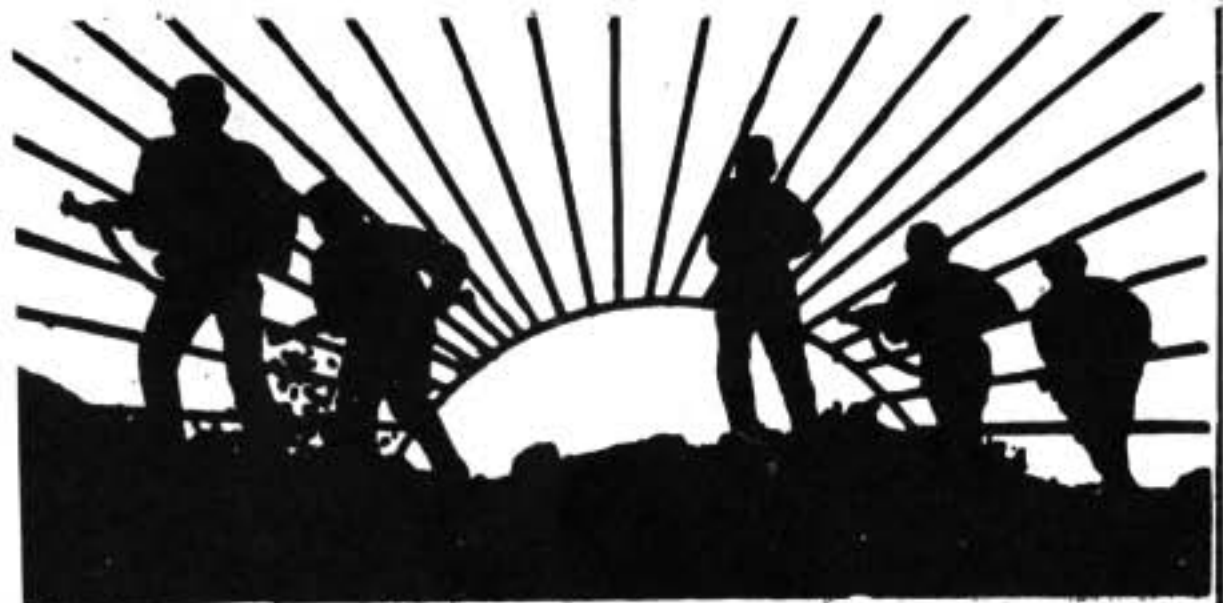
### Our Army.

In the middle of the night  
They woke us  
To move us  
As the enemy was expected.

Outside in the darkness  
I stumbled,  
Almost fell.

A comrade steadied me,  
Took the sleeping baby  
from my arms,  
and handed me his AK.

Marius Schoon.  
Lubango, Angola.  
January, 1984.





## MUSIC AND CENSORSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

This article is an edited and much shortened version of the paper by Ian Kerkhof *Music and South Africa: A Study in Censorship and Repression*. Readers interested in a copy of the full paper should write to RIXAKA Editorial.

South Africa is a country ruled by force of arms; a country where the internal order is based on exploitation and racist oppression; a country which extends state terror across international borders into neighbouring states; a country stifled by a welter of legislation inhibiting personal freedoms and denying people the most basic rights of existence. It is hardly surprising then, that South Africa enjoys one of the most draconian systems of censorship ever devised. It is the purpose of this paper to briefly explain the precise nature of censorship under apartheid and explore the implications this has for the production and consumption of music in South Africa.

### Censorship: 3 Forms

In South Africa censorship operates clearly on three levels. i) state, ie. legislation-punishment ii) capital, ie. consumerism-marketing and iii) self-censorship as a result of i) and ii). The way these general characteristics combine under apartheid give the system its particularly intense quality, so that for example, the definition between censorship by the state and by capital is blurred within the operation of state-controlled "commercial" media which act as effective agents of censorship for both interests.

### State Censorship

The law under which publications, films, records, public entertainments and other "objects" are subjected to the scrutiny of the state is the Publications Act, no. 42 of 1974, and its subsequent amendments.

The introductory paragraph of this law states that in its application "the constant endeavour of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian way of life shall be recognised". It goes on to provide for a number of committees whose function is to "decide in the first instance whether publications or objects, films or public entertainments are *undesirable* or not".

The selection of these committees is done by the Publications Board (itself selected by the State President), based on lists of nominees chosen by either the Minister of Home Affairs or the State President. The Act entitles members of the public, customs officers, police or even the State President to request the Directorate of Publications to arrange for a committee to examine any publication (or object, or record, or film, or graphic artwork, or photograph, or public entertainment) for undesirability. In practice this means that a single complaint from the most extreme right wing element necessitates the reviewing of a publication.

### Kinds of Banning

There are three different kinds of legislative banning. Firstly, the committees can declare a publication (and if it is a periodical, all future issues of it) "undesirable". This means that the publication may not be further imported into South Africa, or produced within South Africa, or brought or sold or displayed in South Africa.

Secondly, the committees can declare a publication "undesirable for possession". This goes a step further and prevents a person from retaining a publication which they had purchased or otherwise acquired before it was banned. Penalties for the transgressions of this clause are harsh.

Thirdly, the committees can prohibit the importation of all publications published by a particular firm (say all records released by Recommended) *regardless of individual merit!* Furthermore they may prohibit the importation of all publications *dealing with any special subject!*

Given the incredibly high percentage of publications banned in South Africa over the last decade (an average of 60% of publications submitted!) this law effectively means that South Africans would need to constantly read editions of the government Gazette to ensure they are not inadvertent law-breakers.

Recent legislation (Publications Amendment Act of May 1985) allows any publication seized by police or police agents to be legally "freezed" where it was found for a period of four working days, whilst it is submitted to a committee for a decision. Should the committee, within the four day period, decide that the publication is undesirable the possessor would be guilty of a crime under the Act, despite the fact that the publication was *not banned on the day of confiscation!*

### Censorship "Relaxation"

A great deal of hullabaloo and noise was made recently in the white-dominated commercial press regarding the "relaxation" of censorship and the accompanying flood of "un-bannings" of various publications. A closer look at this "liberalisation" reveals a more insidious process at work.

On the one hand this development centred around the unbanning of publications associated with the "counter-culture" of Europe and America of the sixties and seventies. Drugs and sexuality became available to the South African public as consumer subjects. The screens were suddenly filled with films like Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice, Satyricon, The Nightporter, Easy Rider, etc. Bookshops could now stock the Kama Sutra, including the illustrated edition!



STEVIE WONDER: in a move of crass stupidity, the SABC banned his music after he dedicated his award to Nelson Mandela.

On the other hand, a number of local texts, mainly by black authors, usually dating from the fifties and early sixties were unbanned. Although some of these unbanned texts have considerable cultural merit, it is very evident that only those works whose content was not considered threatening to state power were unbanned. This tactic is undoubtedly allied to the more general apartheid strategy of creating a black middle class economic and cultural zone as a buffer between white power and the impoverished black working class.

At the same time there has been no noticeable decrease in either the percentage, or the actual number of publications being banned. The claims for liberalisation serve merely to mask the changing composition of what is being regularly banned in South Africa. There has been a drastic increase in the banning and suppression of popular and democratic publications with a clear political message in the fields of books, records, film, video and even graphic art.

### Penalties

Arrests and convictions in terms of censorship legislation occur with distressing regularity. We list only a few of the more extreme cases: Jacob Mashigo received five years imprisonment in August 1983 for possessing a cassette with *one song* by Miriam Makeba and Harry Belafonte. Thabo Moloi received two years imprisonment for possessing a cassette with a speech by ANC President Oliver Tambo, interspersed with Freedom songs. Derek Tsietsi Makomoren received five years imprisonment in January this year for possessing a 60 minute cassette with the music of the ANC Cultural Ensemble Amandla on it.

In 1980 two musicians of a reggae band called Splash were sentenced to five years im-

prisonment each for singing a song by Steel Pulse called Tribute to the Martyrs wherein Nelson Mandela was mentioned.

These are just some of the cases that have reached newsprint — the daily fines and short sentences go unrecorded, but occur nonetheless.

### Radio

Before moving on to capital censorship, it is important to look at the nature of state-controlled radio in South Africa — a "grey area" where censorship is doubly enforced, both directly as a result of government policy, and indirectly as a result of capital marketing.

All in all the South African Broadcasting Company transmits 13 internal, and one external services. These are:

The English Service and the Afrikaans Service — entirely state-subsidised and non-commercial. For white listeners

The essential strategy behind this enormous, unwieldy structure is the division of black South Africans into language-based "tribal" entities. The overall policy ensures the segregation of information and culture on the airwaves. No black music is ever played on "white" radio, although the reverse is not true as the state promotes "white-culture" in the black communities.

Within the six black stations a strictly enforced language code prevails, whereby for example, a Zulu song can only be played on Radio Zulu and no music in other indigenous languages is ever played on Radio Zulu. In this manner, spurious ethnic divisions are fostered and the population is denied the common culture which is the heritage of the combination of all strands. Needless to say, iron control is exerted on news and all topical coverage.



**SPIRITS REJOICE:** groups whose stature makes it hard to ignore.

and broadcast nationwide.

Springbok Radio and Radio 5 — commercial stations, white and bi-lingual (Afrikaans and English). Also nationwide.

Radio Good Hope, Radio Highveld and Radio Port Natal — these are regional, bi-lingual, commercial white stations.

Radio Zulu, Radio Xhosa, Radio South-Sotho, Radio North-Sotho, Radio Tswana and Radio Venda-Tsonga — these are commercial, regional stations aimed at black South Africans.

Radio RSA — this is the external service of the SABC, broadcasting on short wave in 11 languages for 211 hours a week at a cost of R16 million a year, funded directly from the taxpayer and not from the general SABC coffers.

### Form

Form too is strictly controlled and incorporated into state strategy. Mbaqanga, initially a people's music spawned in the townships and ghettos was rapidly taken up by radio and record companies who robbed the form of its original meanings and associations.

It soon became clear to musicians that their music would only be recorded and played on radio if the lyrics wholly avoided community issues and social comment and conformed to the banal patterns required by the authorities. Through the sixties the Mbaqanga form came to voice the most reactionary and negative aspects of township life — tribalism, sexism, crime, etc.

In the seventies and continuing into the eighties however, the form was rescued by the wave of highly politicised music that emerged initially from black consciousness circles and which was characterised by close attention to formal innovation coupled with relevant texts. Thus a vital and exciting cultural alternative has thrived — recorded only with great difficulty and not heard at all on radio!

### Banning from Airplay

Statistics relating to the amount of music banned for airplay by the SABC are unavailable. It is conservatively estimated by sources within the radio services that these run into many hundreds of times the number banned by legislation. Decisions as to what may or may not be played on radio are made by a secret all-white panel, only one name of which has become public — Peter Human, director of the pop music programme of Radio 5.

The banning of a record from airplay effectively cuts it off from a mass audience and ensures its commercial non-viability. Thus in these cases the state is obviated from having to resort to legislation, and music taste is to a large extent controlled.

When Juluka's single *Afrika* was banned for airplay on Radio 5 an interview with the afore-mentioned Human led to a revelation that a staggering 96% of all local music was rejected for airplay on Radio 5! The most recent well-publicised instance of radio air-time banning has been complete banning on all music by Stevie Wonder following his dedication of an Oscar award to Nelson Mandela.

While these highly publicised bannings generally result in more focussing on the artist in question, it must be pointed out that these are the exceptions to the rule. Essentially the effect of the air-time bannings serve to prevent the bulk of South Africans from hearing, or even hearing about, music from within

and without South Africa which is formally or contextually progressive. Included under this air ban are virtually every single exiled South African musician, thus the situation arises today when most South Africans do not even know of the existence of such important figures as Mongezi Feza, Chris McGregor, Dudu Pukwana, Johny Dyani, Julian Bahula, Pinesse Saul ....

the two giants were overtly hostile to each other, a joint venture into ownership of the enormously popular budget-priced label Music for Pleasure resulted in much closer co-operation. The extent of their monopolisation extends to every facet of music in the consumer society from instruments, through hardware (radio, record players), software (records, tapes), distri-



People's alternative to the racist culture of death: AMANDLA!

### Capital Censorship

The history of the recording industry in South Africa is characterised by ruthless monopolisation of ownership and distribution, as well as the systematic exploitation of both musicians and workers. South Africa's R100 million a year record industry is virtually controlled by two companies, Gallo (Africa) Ltd and EMI-Brigadiers. While up to 1978

tribution, promotion, publishing, and even performance (clubs, halls, stadiums, etc) — they have always been in a position to dictate to the musicians as to the nature of their music's form and content.

A practice more the rule than the exception right into the seventies, was the denial of copyright to musicians on their own songs. Flat studio fees for song recordings were

paid, sometimes hardly covering the taxi fare to the studio. Spokes Mashiyane and Lemmy "Special" Mabaso, popular pennywhistle performers of the fifties whose singles sold in the hundreds of thousands, were paid rates of between 5/- and £5 per recording session and never saw a cent in royalties!

White performers did much to worsen the lot of the black performers when in the late fifties they formed whites-only unions and gradually put an end to what limited performing possibilities black musicians had up to then enjoyed at venues in so-called "white" areas (ie. urban areas). This racist pressure brought to bear on a whole generation of great jazz musicians was one of the major reasons for the decline of South African Jazz through the sixties, as many important figures went into exile, leaving others such as the legendary Kippie Moeketsi to languish at home until eventual poverty-stricken death.

The worker within the music industry has meanwhile suffered the standard factory floor exploitation that is part and parcel of South Africa's racist cheap labour system. Workers in the Gallo factories particularly, have been amongst the most poorly paid in any sector of the manufacturing industry — as witnessed by the long record of industrial action at the company's various plants.

### Censorship and Ideology

Given the nature of the social control provided for in South African legislation, as well as the established partnership between capital and the state, it is clear that the record com-

panies must demand of the musicians that their output be undisturbing to the regime. Anything else would risk running foul of the law and might also disrupt profits, (as well as the cosy relationship between record companies and state-controlled mass media).

This means that the companies are constantly involved in a process of censure, ensuring that what is recorded is divorced from the ugly realities of South African social conditions, divorced from the real aims and aspirations of the communities from whence the musicians come, and of course totally divorced from remotely political, let alone revolutionary, content.

At the same time, a deprecation of locally generated forms is actively enforced and the musicians are constantly pushed towards copying the prevalent European and especially American trends.

The local forms which are pressed are marketed ethnically into artificial categories such as "Zulu jive", "Sotho Soul", etc. This process is well illustrated in the work of the great blind singer Babsy Mlangeni, who like most black South Africans is conversant in many languages, and will shift comfortably from SePedi to SeTswana to English to Zulu, etc, in a day's recording session. When the tracks are released however, they have been strictly segregated and compiled on record as *Babsy Mlangeni Sings Sotho Vocal* or *Babsy Mlangeni Sings Xhosa Jive*, etc, etc. Thus the marketing principles are totally imbued with the regimes ideological instruments of national oppression.

### Self-Censorship: The Response of the Musicians

There have been three broad responses by musicians to the censorship which pervades music production in the country. The first, and most resolute, has been flagrant defiance of the state. In most cases those that have shouldered this responsibility, incumbent upon all those who live under the conditions of oppression that characterise our country, have been made to pay dearly for their stand. Exile, loss of income, state and police harassment, black-listing from the recording studios bear witness to this fact.

Of course, the second group of musicians, who have succumbed and sold out to the system, have reaped the short-term rewards. For all their silk shirts, long Cadillacs and trips to the States, their "contribution" to South African culture will be forgotten as soon as next month's transient "hit" is out.

A third group however, of political pragmatists (some would say opportunists) have chosen to compromise by recording the bland music that pays the rent while using the popular benefit concerts as a platform for demonstrating their awareness and support for the struggle for democracy in South Africa.

Despite the veritable armoury of means at its disposal, the apartheid state has never been, and will never be able to stem the ever-growing tide of resistance to it, including cultural resistance. But censorship and repression will confront South African musicians until the day that the apartheid structures are wholly dismantled.



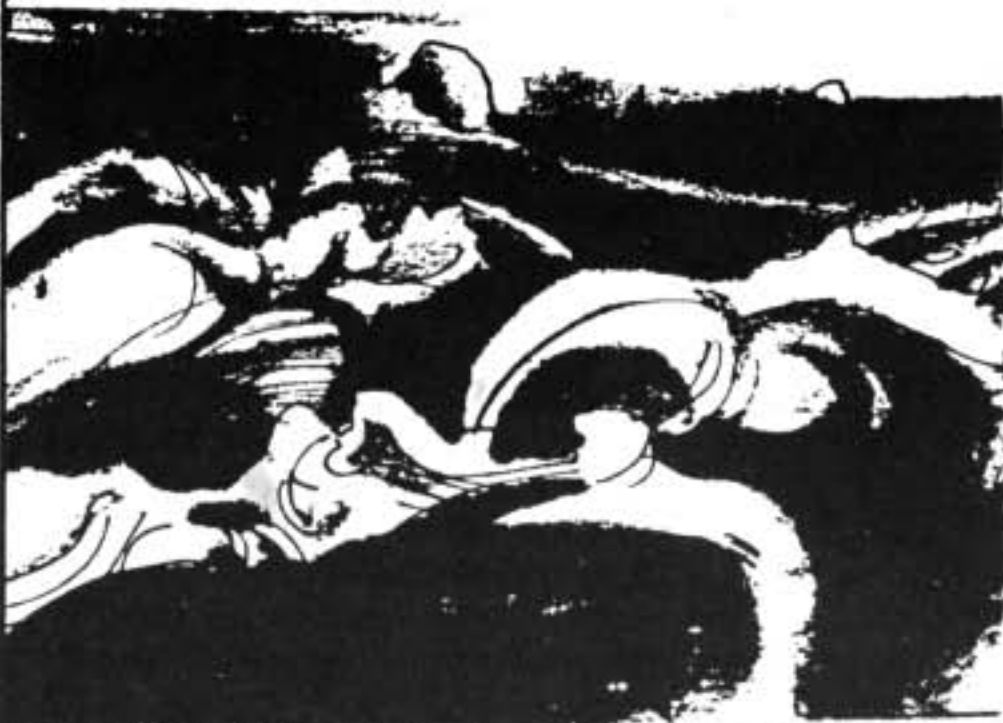


# REVIEWS

*The Wall of the Plague* by André Brink  
Summit Books, New York, 1984.

This curiously named novel has a basically simple plot. A "coloured" woman in her early thirties, Andrea Malgas, is living in Paris with Paul Joubert, an Afrikaans writer-in-exile. Andrea has turned her back on South Africa and firmly believes that her future lies in Europe. But on a trip to Provence, in the south of France, to do research for a film script Joubert is writing, she is joined by Mandla, a black activist from home. She falls in love with him and begins to change her ideas. Mandla is killed — probably by the Security Branch police — and Andrea abandons her white lover and decides to return to South Africa.

So far, so good, though women might object to the way Andrea is seen as the mere receptacle



of ideas injected into her by her various lovers. But why the curious title? Why the endless guide-book-style descriptions of Provence's ancient monuments, cities and villages? Why Provence at all? Why not set the novel in South Africa which was burning all the while that Brink was lovingly describing corniches and pediments and fountains in France?

Well, Brink has seen fit to load his story with an involved, clumsy and basically irrelevant symbolic superstructure in the form of the Black Death — the bubonic plague that swept Europe in the 14th, 16th and 18th centuries, killing millions of people. In a vague and unsatisfying way that Brink never pins down, the plague stands for all the evil inside people which alienates them from one another and is the cause of violence and repression. Brink sprinkles his narrative with excerpts from various ancient and modern books about the plague.

This sort of thing, of course, is fashionable (or was, a few years ago) in certain literary circles. But because in this novel it has no real purpose, it becomes intensely irritating.

Also pointlessly complicated and therefore

irritating is the way the story is told, through a series of multiple flashbacks, sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the first person. The flashbacks go back to previous Provencal tours Andrea has made, and beyond them to her childhood and student days in Cape Town.

The technique is somewhat similar to that used by Nadine Gordimer in *Burger's Daughter* (which also had an interlude in the south of France). Many readers complained that Gordimer's novel was hard to follow, but in my opinion the technique was justified in that, because, *Burger's Daughter* is about a change of consciousness, which involves altered ways of looking back at one's own life. Andrea also changes, but this has little to do with re-interpreting her life — it has more to do with Mandla's rippling muscles — and so one asks oneself again why Brink chose a complex mode of narration when a simpler one would have done better.

Having said this, one has to add that much of the material about Andrea's early life is striking and effective. Her childhood in District Six; her relationship with her sea-faring father; her humiliating arrest under the Immorality Act; and the conflict she faces when the SBs demand that unless she spies on her lover, they will charge her brother under the Terrorism Act (she refuses) — all these are relevant and meaningful episodes that still need to be written about. So are the flashbacks to Mandla's life as a student and trade union organiser in the Eastern Cape. The passages describing the early life of Paul Joubert are also interesting, though his Parisian soul-searching is not.

Brink will never be a first-rate writer. His handling of feeling in language is too unsubtle and his dialogue is consistently flat and unconvincing. His novels are sometimes pretentious and often cheap. But they have served to make South African realities known to a wide readership who probably would not have come across them anywhere else (including many Afrikaners). What a pity, though, that he surrenders so easily to the fickle waves of literary fashion.

— David Rabkin —





**BAPTISM OF FIRE** by Dikobe wa Mogale

Publisher: Ad Donker

The back cover of Dikobe's volume 44 short poems reads: "A political activist, he was detained following the June 16 1976 uprisings in his hometown, Alexandra Township, and again in 1982 during the funeral service of Graham Radebe. He was charged and acquitted in 1978 for producing and distributing banned Steve Biko T-shirts..." On the dedication page, we find that his collection is paying respect to the "memory of those who fell in Matola, Maseru and the living who struggle for a Freedom-Chartered society".

If Dikobe's poems had appeared today, he would probably have written about his friends and compatriots who were slain in Botswana on June 14. He certainly would have had a lot to say about a fellow graphic artist, Thami Mnyele who was one of the statistics in the bloody record of the SADF's madness. But Dikobe was sentenced to an effective ten years' imprisonment in 1983 for furthering the aims of the African National Congress. Wherever he may be, now, in the regime's dungeons, one would not be claiming too much to declare that he must be taking this temporary incarceration in his stride because all those who

worked with him maintain that he knew the price that had to be paid in our quest for national liberation. He is a physically fit man who believes in martial arts, a soldier of the people.

In the historic 12th World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow, Dikobe's artwork was prominently displayed alongside that of Thami's. This, we believe, was a fitting tribute to two artists who have worked tirelessly for liberation. Thami and Dikobe featured in the 1982 Culture and Resistance Festival whose main theme was Art Towards Social Development. The festival, which was held in Gaborone, saw thousands of artists from South Africa and outside getting together for the first time and getting into a huddle to devise ways to use their skills in the fight against apartheid fascism.

*Baptism of Fire* gives us a glimpse into Dikobe's character. It also manages to let us into the minds of younger poets of our incredible townships — poets who have stood firm and refused to be cowed down by state terror. The conclusion we draw is that this refusal is strengthened by an integration with the suffering and struggling community. That is where the artist draws his creative power. He has his finger on the pulse of the community. He is there in the day-to-day struggles against rent hikes, forced removals, passbook harassment, detention, appalling living conditions in the ghettos, etc. In *Alexandra*, Dikobe graphically takes us on a joyless ride around these condemned dwellings where we experience,

*acrid smells of shit buckets  
assailing nostrils. . .  
treeless avenues  
fringed by battalions  
of crumbling one-roomed houses. . .*

*alexandra  
the big toilet  
stuck unceremoniously  
like a black anus  
between the white buttocks  
of Johannesburg city.*

He is helplessly enraged as he exposes the terror that stalks our nights as the minions of law and order hunt "illegals", "plurals", "tsotsi elements" — in a word, the dispossessed — who dare to defy influx control legislation. In *Hour of Decision*, Dikobe observes that

*it is the hour of terror  
that wakes children  
wide-eyed and screaming  
whilst search-lights and torches  
split the flesh of night. . .*

*it is that albatross passbook  
of my life  
which turned my name  
into a cipher.*

and yields, relaxing the tension and providing  
rixaka 33

an outlet:

*dreams  
of a better tomorrow  
take root in the counsel  
of yesterday.*

We always emphasise the need for an outlet in the arts. A countless number of poets of the '70's and '80's have fallen into the trap of romanticising suffering and bask in the morbid glare of self pity. This is as a result of concentrating heavily on the *effects* of oppression at the expense of obfuscating the causes and alternatives. This then leaves us with tasteless poetry that does not give, or even suggest, strategies to resolve our situation. Dikobe might have fallen in this trap himself but only as a victim of a trend that, unfortunately, has a wide audience. In the main, though, his poetry show a mature masculinity of a person who was in the thick of things, who personally participated in bread and butter issues of the communities that honed him into a hard observer and recorder of reality. His level of political consciousness, then, cannot be doubted.

The history of the people of our country is the history of struggle. It is an account of battles and skirmishes, victories and losses. It is a history of blood. If you go to the Weenen area near the river which the Boer conquerors christened Blood River, you see all those white headstones and monuments to Piet Rietief and the rest of the bearded men who were dealt with by Dingane when our warriors were holding sway. Dikobe was influenced by this history of resistance of our people against the Boer invaders. He follows the thread to the massacres of Bulhoek, Sharpeville, Soweto, Kassinga and others. The title poem, *Baptism of Fire*, sings about all those arenas where our people fought and died to wrest from the oppressors their manhood, their dignity and their land. For us, the Battle of Isandlwana of 1879 and the consequent humiliating defeat of the British will proudly remain engraved in our monuments to honour the heroic spirit of our people.

Dikobe writes:

*Once more  
we have been to Isandlwana  
to sharpen the spear  
of the nation  
in the winds teeth  
at the altar  
of heroic sacrifice  
once more  
there is venom in the mouth  
of the oppressed  
after the terror at Bulhoek  
the horror of Sharpeville  
the genocide of June 16  
and the endless massacre diplomacy  
of Kassinga, Matola, Maseru...*

Quite a number of his poems reflect his

lonely life in detention, far from the reach of his people, his community that he works with so closely. One correct judgement is that solitary confinement failed to achieve what it was meant for — dampening and crippling the fighting spirit of a warrior. Instead it inspired him to defeat the solitude behind prison bars. Detention features in *Forces of Victory*, *Graffiti* and *Your Face*.

*in four thick walls  
in solitary confinement  
with liberty debarred by six flat iron bars  
and a steel-plated door,  
it's just another hour in detention.  
I draw strength from your face  
that rises over this dark hour  
and find solace in my aloneness  
knowing that I am not alone.*

Dikobe attempts to rally all sections of our community: the labour force, the youth, the women, the unemployed and even those among our black brothers who, as a result of the viciousness of the apartheid system, operate on the seamier side of reality. One is referring here to those who are called the "tsotsi element". Cleverly utilising the street idiom, he communicates on a subterranean level with these social outcasts in a poem called *Moegoes on Klevas*. South African townships are widely known as "South Africa's melting pots of murder, rape and robberies" that even our own newspapers carry front page headlines like:

**QUIET SOWETO: ONLY 23 MURDERS,  
7 RAPE CASES AND 5 ARMED  
ROBBERIES!**

Dikobe has therefore seen the need to address himself to this section which invariably perpetrates all these deeds against innocent people.

*gents  
ons het almal a mission  
laat ons ranks vassa  
en serious wietie  
die situation is real bad...*

*gents nooch die situation  
wie hash and rape  
siezas and tannies in die kassie?  
daai question my bra  
is 'n open secret...  
since 1652  
toe Van Riebeeck uitgesteek het  
met sy vuilbaard en discovery  
gents ons rol al lank...  
dus 'n moer se lang pad van 1652 tot 1912  
en 1912 tot vandag.*

This poem, loosely translated, reads:

*gents  
we all have a mission  
let's close ranks  
and seriously discuss  
the situation is really bad...  
gents understand the situation*

who forces and rapes  
sisters and old ladies in the townships?  
That question brother  
is an open secret...  
since 1652  
when Van Riebeeck came  
with his dirty beard and discovery  
gents we've been fighting ever since...  
that's a hell of a long time from 1652 to 1912  
and 1912 up to the present day.

This poem touches on the creation of the African National Congress in 1912. Using the authority of the longest enduring liberation movement in Africa, Dikobe exhorts the *moegoes en klevas* — city slickers and their country cousins — to refrain from ways that bring disunity and rally behind forces that seek change. One of his most lyrical poems on the aspirations, hopes and frustrations of workers should have been placed as the last poem, an intense and brooding study that would have done well to say goodbye to the reader.

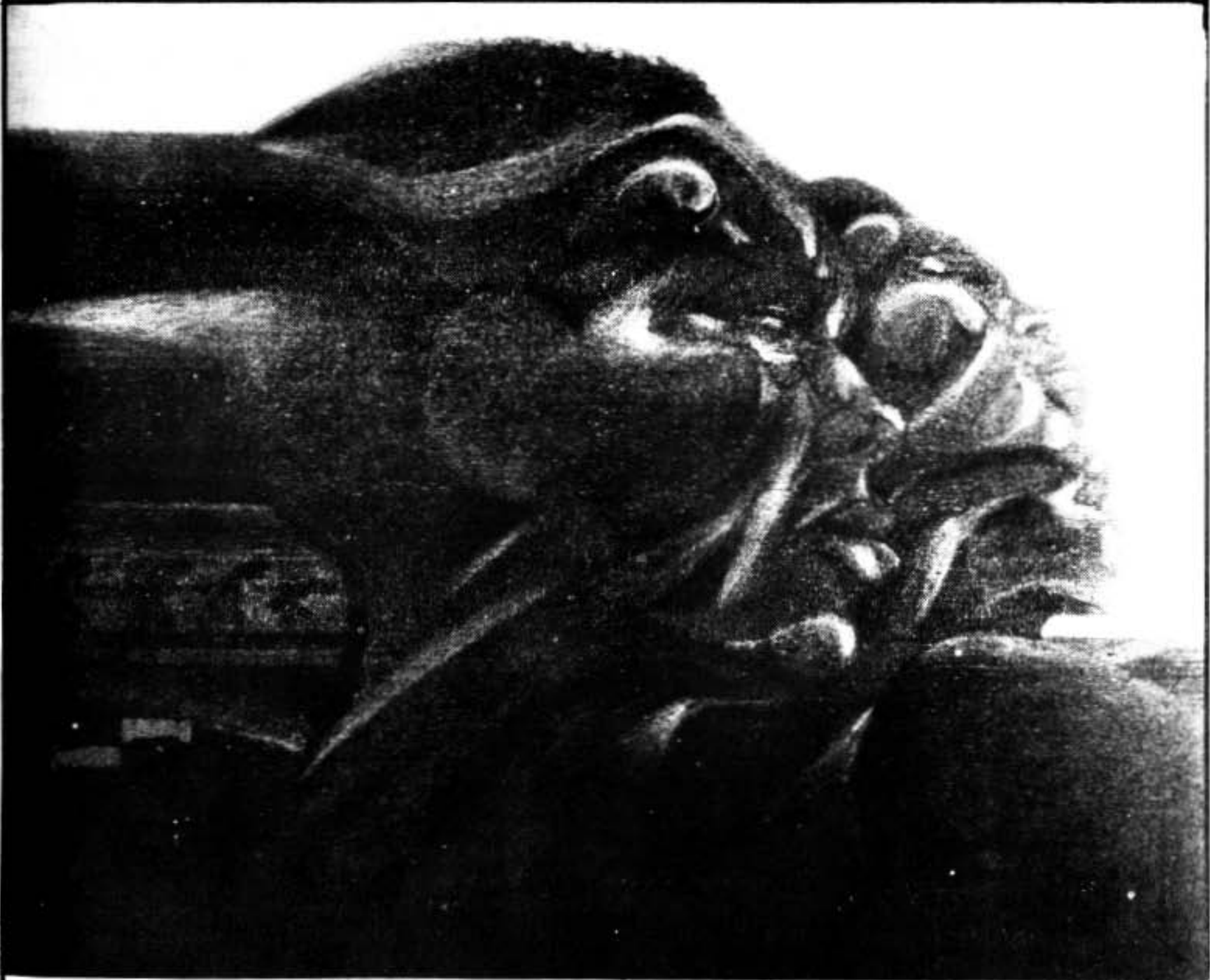
*The labour of countless seasons  
I have known*

*tapping gold  
and diamond stone  
knowing neither  
the circle of sunrise  
nor of sunset*

*The hunger of countless seasons  
I have known  
In my search,  
I have exhausted all hungers  
but one  
the hunger  
to hunger no more.*

Dikobe's *Baptism of Fire* was published in 1984, a year after his incarceration. The situation in the country, right now, the baptism of fire that our children are experiencing — and the fire that is beginning to rage in the sacred corners of the wielders of power — show that Dikobe is a poet with a vision that is at once apocalyptic and irreversibly true.

— Bachana Mokwena —



# the pain of the Singer

An excerpt from the forthcoming novel *The Tenderness of Blood* by Mandlenkosi Langa.

After some twenty minutes' drive deep into the township, they stop in front of a wrought-iron gate. It is really fast getting dark, from the chimneys smoke is billowing, families preparing the evening meal. The hibiscus hedge in front of house is trimmed — and high — partly shielding the facade of the house from view. Max gets out of the car and opens the black gate, looking uncomfortable in his suit. Mkhonto feels a surge of anger welling up in him and knows that all this anger is directed at himself for having, even unconsciously, passed judgement on his friend. I'll have to do something about this, he thinks, ashamed. Max returns and steers the car into the gravelled driveway leading to the garage which is just a rough shelter of timber and zinc. Mkhonto feels Max's eyes on him as the latter pulls the handbrake and the car finally stops.

"You've been so quiet, Mkhonto," he says. Then appropos to nothing, he adds, "and the children have grown up, and they are also tired."

When Mkhonto gets out of the car, feeling the cold winter wind blowing from the east, a massive tawny Alsatian comes bounding, dragging a length of chain fastened to a thin wire that runs the length of the yard. He looks at the dog and stands completely still, relaxing so that it shouldn't smell fear in him. Despite the fact that Max is his friend, he doesn't know how much

training the dog has got — and he has seen what these dogs can do to a man. Max goes to the growling beast which is now straining against its leash, its fangs glistening in the diffuse light of the early Friday evening. Max goes down on his haunches and allows the animal's massive head to rest on his shoulder. He strokes it, murmuring softly into the dog's cocked ears. The animal stops its growling and starts wagging its tail. Max stands up and brushes the dog's hair off his jacket.

"That's a beautiful dog," Mkhonto observes.

"Ja," Max agrees. "Some friends advised me to get a dog. I had three of these, they were brought here as puppies. Two died. Poison. A lot of unpleasant things have been said to me by the police. I think all of it stems from the fact that I handle all these political cases. Then I think of what happened to Carlson, and I certainly don't want that happening to me." He locks the door of the car, his movements swift and abrupt. "I'm only worried about Zodwa and Thembi. There is nothing I can do about their safety, really. Or even mine for that matter. When these bastards want you they get you. I'm a lawyer and I use my brains to work for the Movement. It's the only contribution I can make. Lots of people have advised me to leave the country, but then, my roots are here, my fight is here and I can only use my skills here. Outside South Africa, I'm



id, I can only function as a mere shadow of man I once was. And I don't think my family would forgive me for that."

"I can see you," Mkhonto says unkindly, holding one of those multi-dollar United Nations stamps, speaking in Geneva about the plight of Southern African refugees."

"That's your Botswana experience talking."

"Be kind to yourself," Mkhonto says.

Before Max can compose a retort, the front door bursts open and a little beautiful girl comes running and heads for Max. She grabs him around his long legs and cries, "Daddy!"

Her father picks her up, urgently, his eyes searching her face the way a diviner stares into the bottom of an empty teacup. Mkhonto watches her and daughter — and the child must be about eight years old — and he thinks about the daughter he never claimed, Thaba. He thinks of her mother. Where are they? Probably somewhere in Durban. At this moment, watching Max kiss his little daughter, that he realises that love exists after all.

Max loves his child. Max puts her down and strokes her carefully combed hair.

"Thembi," he says, "say 'Hello' to Uncle Mkhonto."

The child looks at Mkhonto with those concentrating eyes some children have. He can tell that she is a little plagued by near-sightedness. He wonders vaguely why she isn't wearing glasses.

"Hello," she says simply, offering her hand. Her hand feels very small and fragile in his and he becomes careful with his grip.

"Hello, Thembi," he says. "Hey, Max, is this part of the surprise you have for me, bro?"

"Take it all in slowly, friend," Max says, holding them to the open door. "There's still more." Impulsively, Thembi thrusts her hand into Mkhonto's and — with this child's gesture of acceptance filling him with a ringing happiness — they enter the house.

The house. The lounge is opulently but tastefully furnished, all the colours blending into a pleasing symphony, giving the room an effect that can only be acquired through a decorator's touch. Mkhonto sinks into a sofa of eiderdown softness, beige, the colour of the living room carpet. The lounge is filled with a variety of settees and chairs and a table which had been pushed into the corner to give more space to the room. The arrangement of the furniture makes the visitor realise that Max likes to entertain. There is a glistening B & O stereo set next to the bay windows that are partially obscured by heavy maroon drapes. On the corner of the room sits a television set. "Apartheid's audio-visual nightmare," Max snorts. It looks like some nightmare creature from outer space, completely dominating the lounge with its presence. On a little round table is a telephone, black, ready to shriek and blow whatever peace there is in the house into flying fragments. On the walls are two collages by Romare Bearden, a water colour painting by Walter Batiss and a haunting silk-screen print

of haunted musicians signed by Thami Mnyele's ornate scrawl. Mkhonto ogles these creations that seem very much alive until he comes to a framed dagguerrottype photograph of a man's face that looks vaguely familiar. The face is oval, uncertain light causing a shadow that runs down the bridge and the wings of the nose, effectively skewering the face into two parts, the jaw jutting in an unconscious gesture of defiance. The chiselled lips give the mouth the effect of a ready smile and, paradoxically, depthless cruelty; it is a mouth used to issuing commands. It is also a no-nonsense face and it reminds Mkhonto of his own father's face — those staring eyes, unwavering, bespeaking the silent strength of the owner behind them. As a photographer he has dealt with many, many faces and it irks him that he cannot place this one; it is like meeting a man in a train and his eyes tell you that you have no right not to remember his name.

Max appears. He has discarded his suit and is now wearing an old pair of blue jeans, tennis shoes, an open-necked shirt — and an apron. Mkhonto smiles at this transformation. Max is holding a bottle of whiskey in his right hand and two small soda bottles in his left. He places the load on a tray on the glass-topped coffee table, pushes some legal magazines, books and papers aside. He rushes back to the kitchen and returns with two ashtrays.

"Who's this, Max?" Mkhonto asks, pointing at the enigma on the wall. "I think I know most of your relatives and none look as distinguished as this man here."

Max turns to Thembi, handing her the magazines and books. "Tell Uncle who that is love."

"That's Bab' uJohannes Nkosi, *malume*," the child says, shyly, and adds the debris of paper to the bundle in her arms and heads for the study somewhere in the labyrinths of the house. Mkhonto stands there, everything coming to him, unstoppable like a river. Of course! He remembers reading about Johannes Nkosi, how he was shot dead by the police in Pietermaritzburg when addressing thousands of people who had hearkened to the Communist Party's call for the burning of pass-books. When was that? Oh, ja, Dingane's Day, December 16, 1930. He remembers feeling outraged when he read that the doctor who gave evidence at the inquest said that all the dead had been horribly mutilated. Nkosi had been struck by a single bullet in his head, but the post mortem showed that his skull had multiple fractures and he had stab wounds all over his body. There are many, many more who are dying, Mkhonto thinks, and the police and their paid agents always come out of it all absolved of any blame. An eye for an eye, a death for a death — that happened to that injunction?

"I keep that photograph there," Max says from the kitchen, "to remind myself and my family that this shit has been going on for a long time. There's no moment when we should relax

our vigilance."

"What do these guys do when they come to see you?" Mkhonto asks, going to the table and looking at the bottles. "Don't they hassle you for that picture?"

"Well," Max says, coming to the lounge and sitting on the sofa, "they come and rant and rave and make all the threatening sounds. But with me they know exactly where to stop. They know that even if I'm a kaffir, I'm that type of kaffir who can make a hell of a big noise. I get the feeling that they are a little afraid of me. That," he adds, throwing some ice cubes into the glasses, "makes me shit scared."

"Maybe they don't know who it is."

"That's a possibility," Max says. "You know there is this story of this auntie from Grahamstown who had a picture of Lenin on her bedroom wall. One day the Security Branch heavies came to do what they call routine searching. They saw this picture and asked her who it was. She told them it was the picture of her late boss who had been very good to her."

"They didn't charge her under the Communism Act?"

"Shit, no. They left it there. Furthermore Lenin is wearing a cap on that one."

"It's amazing how we can live with fear in this country. Thanks," Mkhonto says, accepting a glass of whiskey from Max. He takes a sip and the liquor burns his throat. He feels the amber liquid coursing down his stomach, filling him with a warm glow. Thembi, who has sat unobtrusively in her corner for all this time, stands up and goes to the stereo set. She gets on her knees in front of the set as though praying to the mechanical god, takes a stack of records from the rack. Her eyebrows are knitted together in an adult study of concentration. It looks funny on one so young. Now and then she raises her eloquent eyes to look at the men. Mkhonto can see that that her mind is trying to wrestle with this ritual of drinking that adults indulge in. He thinks of his own uncle, Alonzo, his nephew, Thulani. He remembers the time he visited them in the coastal town of Groutville, a stone's throw from the late Chief Albert Luthuli's home. It was a very hot Saturday and they were sitting in Alonzo's cramped sitting room, sipping vodka and orange juice from tall glasses that Mkhonto had purloined from the Holiday Inn and given to Sis' Betty on their tenth wedding anniversary.

Thulani was three years old, as sharp as a razor, talking a mile a minute. When Alonzo went to the kitchen to see to the pots — Sis' Betty was on duty at the hospital — Thulani picked up his father's empty glass and gave it to his uncle, indicating that he also wanted a shot. Let me fix this kid, Mkhonto thought evilly, never to ask for liquor again. He poured a stiff shot and gave it to his nephew. Thulani took the glass with his two hands and swallowed the scorching drink in one gulp. Mkhonto expected the

little boy to choke on the drink and splutter. But what the child did really surprised him. He gave Mkhonto the empty glass and said, "*Futhi, malume* — again, uncle!"

Thembi puts the record on the turntable. There is the crackling sound of the needle resting on the empty grooves. Then the lounge is suddenly filled with the warm throbbing sound of bass strings and horns. Then Mkhonto hears a woman's voice, like the voice he heard in the car — rasping this time, scraping his nerve ends, pain and pleasure mixed — singing a sad song that speaks of chains and men transported to the furthest corners of the earth to work in cotton plantations. She sings of lovers in that strange and distant land, of a small girl who stands on the seashore clutching a posy of withered flowers, watching boats and barges going by, waiting for strange men to come and stay with her for the shortest while and save her from a staring loneliness that is driving her out of her mind. Although the lyrics of the song are not in his language, the pain of the unknown singer is something that Mkhonto has lived with all his life. This little girl, gnawed by this yawning loneliness, is no different from the little girls he has watched being claimed by the streets on which he grew up. The singer's sorrow, then, from this great and unbridgeable distance, becomes his own. He wonders whether it is the effect of liquor that makes him feel so wretched. The voice, now, is laden with a plea for understanding a proud person is forced to make when everything is lost. Her song, in a curious way, becomes his song, the story of the women of his life.

*She makes love just like a woman*, she sings, and he is taken back to the night when his school went to attend a requiem mass at St. Peter's Cathedral on Commercial Road for nineteen people who had died in a train accident. His parents were not Catholics, but the school principal *was* and he had ordered that all the students of Thembalihle High School should be there, whether they were Protestants, Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, animists or atheists. Many a Christian boy had been brought to within an inch of knocking on the mythological Pearly Gates after disregarding the principal's injunctions. His word was law. Mkhonto did not fit in any of these categories. He had a vague notion that there was something that had caused his father's trousers to be repeatedly patched on the knees. That something was called God. Mkhonto, who had never seen this God do anything for his family, preferred not to believe in Him: at the same time he never denied his existence. Moreover, he just didn't like church services. His dislike was born of instinct. He always felt uneasy, even in his father's church, when he saw the transformation that came over people as soon as they entered the holy place. On this day they were herded into the cathedral, he watched the many people assembled there, dressed in robes of mourning, the colour of the

night. There was a hushed silence as the priest intoned the prayers of the dead in a deep, solemn voice that sounded as though it came from a deep cavern. It was this voice that caused Mkhonto and — of this he was sure — his schoolmates around him to start seeing the terror the living have of death. Death is okay, he thought, as long as it's about five miles away from us. After the mass, the priest, an ascetic looking Irishman, said that he would introduce something unusual in a catholic church service in that the evening's programme would include short speeches by people who knew some of the deceased. Mkhonto was hearing the word "deceased" for the first time and he thought that people probably got diseased before they became the deceased. Amazed at his own arcane humour, he almost broke out laughing.



He fought very hard against this laughter because he had the idea that the minute it began he would be in hysterics. A handful of speakers went to the podium and said all they knew about the ones who had been snatched from their midst with such swiftness. The common theme in all the speeches was that it was very strange that such accidents always seemed to befall black people only. It was mighty strange, praise be to God. Many speakers had tears in their eyes — and bitter gall on their tongue — by the time they left the podium. A middle-aged woman who could have been anyone's mother, had to be helped to her seat after finishing her short contribution, sobbing without control. A hush went up the church hall when a very young woman — she must have been around eighteen — went to the stand. She was dressed in a long, black dress that was a couple of sizes too large.

This accentuated her slight frame. She said something, shyly, about some of the young people who had died. Some had been her friends and, mirrored in the eyes of some of the young men, she had seen the images of the terrible things that lay athwart the path to liberation. Now they were gone, snuffed out like so many beautiful candles. *Anyway*, she said shrugging, *I want to sing a song for all those who perished in this train disaster and all those who have met their end in ever so many man-made disasters that follow our people like a tax collector.* somewhere behind him Mkhonto heard a woman moaning softly at this intense expression of private grief, so softly that he knew it needed only one more word from the girl up there in front and the woman would be completely beyond control. He heard shuffling behind him as though a thousand rats were scurrying away and the moaning became lower and lower in volume until it became totally inaudible, swallowed by a voracious silence. Then — there was the sound of the church organ, piping with the suddenness of a

bright light turned on in inky darkness; the sound was cut down like a scream of a dying person. Then the girl began to sing her sad, sad song *a cappella*. Her slender brown arms rose unexpectedly, embracing the congregation, the whole world, making it part of the grief it had tried to distance itself from. Her voice, as clear as the song of a bird that sings near a timeless river, filled the nooks and crannies of the church the way wet cement fills cracks on a concrete floor; it bounced against the pictures of Jesus on his way to Golgotha. The cross and the icons made of cheap imitation gold shook. The people shuddered. The young woman sang of a time when man would no longer rejoice at the sight of chains, a time when all the countless generations would rise as one to howl against injustice, when all the chains would shrivel into foil and drop down on their own. Her voice was laden with hundreds of years of pain. When she came to the end of her song, her arms dropped to her sides and she slowly went down, down as though her shoulders were supporting an unbearable load. Then she straightened up, her eyes as dry as parchment paper, and smiled a self-conscious smile that masked unutterable pain and said, simply, *Thank you*. When she walked down the aisle to take her place, her silky robes rustling, there was a renewed moaning in the church. Mkhonto bent his head so that his chin rested on his chest, hiding his face so that his schoolmates wouldn't see the tears that had sprung into his eyes, going down his cheeks and entering the corners of his mouth, tasting of salt and sweat, scalding.





# BRIEFS

## Magubane Shot

Veteran photographer, Peter Magubane, who has shot photographs of South African life from virtually every angle, was himself shot recently — by police with shotguns near Germiston.

"I was doing my job — I had a camera in my hands and I was using it. When they started firing at me I turned and ran, and then the first shots hit me."

This incident happened before the banning of reporters and photographers from scenes of unrest. Magubane was undeterred and eager to get back to work again.

"What is happening in this country is history in the making. I have to get out there and record what is going on."

## Fox in Apartheid Films

Film "star" Edward Fox has told the South African press that he wonders whether conditions in South Africa are as bad as they are painted. He made this observation after spending several weeks in the country filming the 10-part television series "Shaka Zulu" — during which controversy had erupted over the starvation wages paid to black extras and workers on the set.

He is soon to perform in *Wild Geese II*, which almost certainly, following in the footsteps of *Wild Geese I*, will glorify and celebrate right-wing mercenary intervention in African affairs.

## Play Restricted to Avant Garde

Playwright Moishe Maponya of Soweto has come out in firm support of the cultural boycott. "The cultural boycott of South Africa is a good thing because it will help bring about change in the country".

Recently Maponya's play *Gangsters* was restricted by the Publications Control Board in certain very specific ways. The

play may only be performed with government permission in a "small intimate four wall theatre of an experimental or avant garde type.

No such venues exist in the black townships, so the play is restricted to a few venues in white areas.

## Curfew affects Culture

The 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew imposed on most of the urban black areas has seriously affected performances of theatre. At least one venue in Johannesburg was starting plays at 6 p.m. in the evening to enable township residents to rush home before facing almost certain arrest under emergency legislation for curfew breaking, with no access to lawyers or family.

## Prophets in the Black Sky

Touring the U.K. at present is the new play *Prophets in the Black Sky* by exiled South African artist John Matshikiza. The play offers a historical perspective on South African life (how things got to where they are), seeing it through the eyes of two female characters, Makana and Ntsikana, real life nineteenth century prophets, at war for the soul of the black nation. One prophet preaches appeasement, the other total resistance.

## Amandla Art Ensemble

The ANC's national cultural ensemble, *Amandla*, has followed their recent successful tour of the U.K. with equally successful tours of Ghana and Nigeria. It seems likely they will be touring in Western Europe in the first half of 1986.

## Moscow Youth Festival

A South African cultural presence was strongly felt in the Centre for Young Artists at the 1985 World Youth Festival in Moscow as ANC cultural workers took the floor on a number of occasions to debate issues of international cultural concern. The ANC art exhibition hanging in the centre also received a special merit award.

## Workers in Cultural Action

Songs, poems, plays, dancing and other forms of culture play an important role in the workers' struggle. The last few years has seen great emphasis within the progressive trade union movement on organising festivals, workshops, performances by factory choirs and other cultural events.

Durban workers have developed plays of great quality and impact such as *Why Lord* which is about the hurt and pain of working class conditions in South Africa. A man from the Transkei decides that he has to go to Durban to look for a job even though he has no papers because his family's situation is desperate. He finds a job as a nightwatchman and finds accommodation at the shacklord's place in a black township. After ten years of not receiving any news of her husband, the wife makes her way to the city as well. She finds accommodation at the same shacklord's place whilst working day-shift at a textile factory.

But the husband and the wife never meet because of their different worktimes. They both find different lovers — he, his wife's best friend and she, the shacklord.

This "comic" situation quickly turns into a tragedy when the husband, after losing his job, meets his wife at her wedding. She has decided to marry the shacklord.

This is but one example of contemporary workers' theatre. We are confident that the recent formation of the half-a-million strong Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) will lead to even more organisation and progress in the field of workers cultural action.

## Anti-Sun City Disc Released

Bruce Springsteen, one of rock music's most popular performers today, leads an all-star line-up comprising of Pat Benatar, Jimmy Cliff, Miles Davis, David Ruffin, Bonnie Raitt,

Lou Reed, Bobby Womack and Jackson Browne, amongst others, in the recording of a song whose royalties will benefit the families of South African political prisoners.

Composed by Steve van Zandt, the song condemns the existence of Sun City, and calls upon musicians internationally not to perform there. Here are the lyrics of "Sun City" (the artists who sing the various lines are in brackets, Springsteen sings the remainder).

We're the rockers and rappers united  
and strong

We're here to talk about South Africa  
and we don't like what's going on  
It's time for some justice it's time for  
the truth

We've realised there's only one thing  
we can do

I ain't gonna play Sun City

Relocation to phony homelands (David  
Ruffin)

Separation of families I can't under-  
stand Pat Benatar)

23 million can't vote because they're  
black (Eddie Kendricks)

We're stabbing our brothers and  
sisters in the back (Bruce Spring-  
steen)

I ain't gonna play Sun City

Our Government tells us we're doing  
all we can (George Clinton)

Constructive engagement is Ronald  
Reagan's plan (Joey Ramone)

Meanwhile people are dying and giving  
up hope (Jimmy Cliff)

The quiet diplomacy ain't nothing but  
a joke (Darlene Love)

I ain't gonna play Sun City.

Bophuthatswana is far away  
But we know it's in South Africa no  
matter what they say

You can't buy me I don't care what  
you pay

Don't ask me Sun City because I ain't  
gonna play

I ain't gonna play Sun City

It's time to accept our responsibility  
(Bonnie Raitt)

Freedom is a privilege nobody rides  
for free (Ruben Blades)

Look around the world baby it can't  
be denied (Lou Reed)

Why are we always on the wrong  
side (Bobby Womack)

I ain't gonna play Sun City

Relocation to phoney homelands  
(Jackson Browne)

Separation of families I can't under-  
stand (Peter Garrett)

23 million can't vote because they're  
black (Kashif and Nona Hendryx)

We're stabbing our brothers and  
sisters in the back (Bobo)

### Zambian Artists Against Apartheid

Artists, musicians and writers should pool their resources together and help to dismantle the obnoxious policy of apartheid in South Africa, Zambian Minister of General Education and Culture, Mr. Basil Kabwe, said in Lusaka. He was speaking at Mpapa gallery during an exhibition of *Artists Against Apartheid*.

"We need more musicians, visual artists, playwrights and authors to pool their efforts together in breaking the ugly walls of apartheid. Every individual irrespective of his background, race or status must fight tooth and nail to uphold the dignity of man."

### Portraits of Women Fighters

Strong women who have not allowed circumstances to stand in their way are given homage in the portfolio of etchings and screenprints by Sue Williamson. In an exhibition entitled *Some South Africans*, shown in Johannesburg, one sees



A section of ANC participants at the 1985 Moscow Youth Festival.

the portraits of Winnie Mandela, Nokukanya Luthuli, Annie Silinga and other South African women, almost all figures of the national resistance against apartheid.

Behind the screened portrait of the particular person, are etched in very deep space, details depicting incidents from the person's life — rendered in terms of their significance in the history of struggle. The stylized borders are made out of motifs both traditional and modern, huts, bicycles, buses, handcuffs, coins, wheelbarrows, vegetables, bricks — icons of the mundane and yet infinitely suggestive of a continuity of life and purpose under extremely traumatic social conditions. Each work also comes with written biographical details of the figure portrayed.

### Afro-Asian Young Writers Workshop

The ANC Dept of Arts and Culture was represented by Rebecca Matlou at the recent Afro-Asian young writers conference held in Brazzaville. The social role of the writer was carefully considered and problems related to the publication and distribution of books in Africa and Asia was discussed at length.