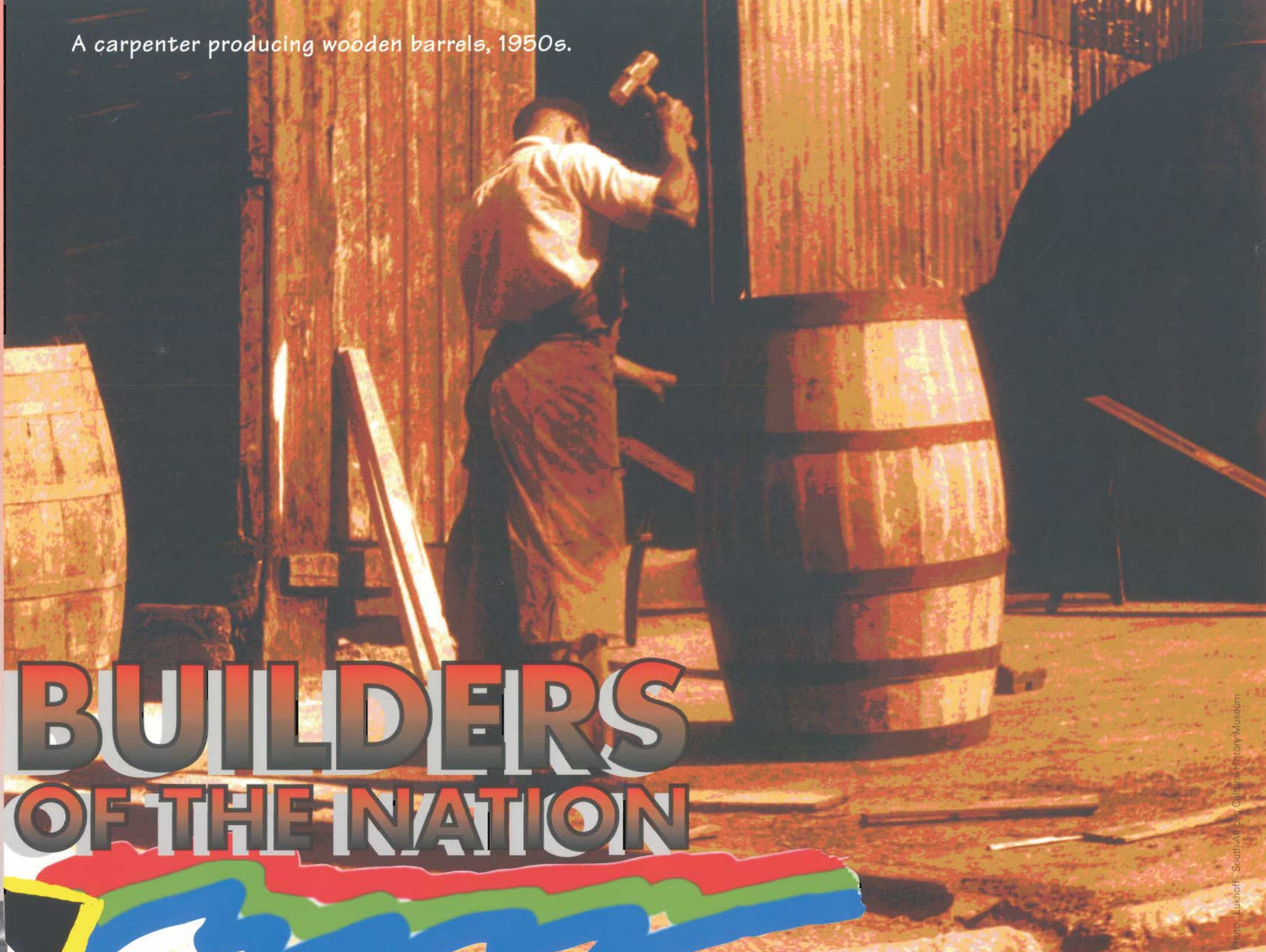


A carpenter producing wooden barrels, 1950s.

5

SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST ARTISANS

South Africa today has inherited a range of artisans skills. These skills have been passed down from generation to generation. Tailoring, printing, cabinet making, wood carving, basket making amongst other were the skills brought to the Cape by slaves, mainly from Malaysia in the 17th and 18th centuries.



BUILDERS OF THE NATION



A shoemaker in District Six, 1950s.



Basket making



The non-racial Food and Canning Workers' Union was formed in 1941 in Cape Town.

We have also inherited skills from indigenous crafters - the Khoi, the Nama, the !Kung and other tribes. The Afrikaans language owes its origins to the new culture which emerged from the interaction between Dutch settlers, the indigenous peoples and the slaves.

In the 18th century, many thousands of the local population were wiped out by smallpox, brought on shore by European sailors. Indigenous people were steadily dispossessed of their land and forced to survive in the least fertile parts of the country. Those who remained in the western Cape were driven into wage labour. Their movements were controlled by South Africa's earliest pass system. Slaves were owned by their employers and worked for no pay at all. Slavery was abolished in 1836, and was a major cause of the great trek of Boers into the interior. Freed slaves either stayed on the land with their masters, working as low-paid farmworkers, or found employment as artisans in the workshops and small factories in the bigger cities.

We salute these men and women, for we owe to them the origins of our non-racial trade unions.

Text by Luli Callinicos. Design and illustrations by Jon Berndt, MEDIWORKS

