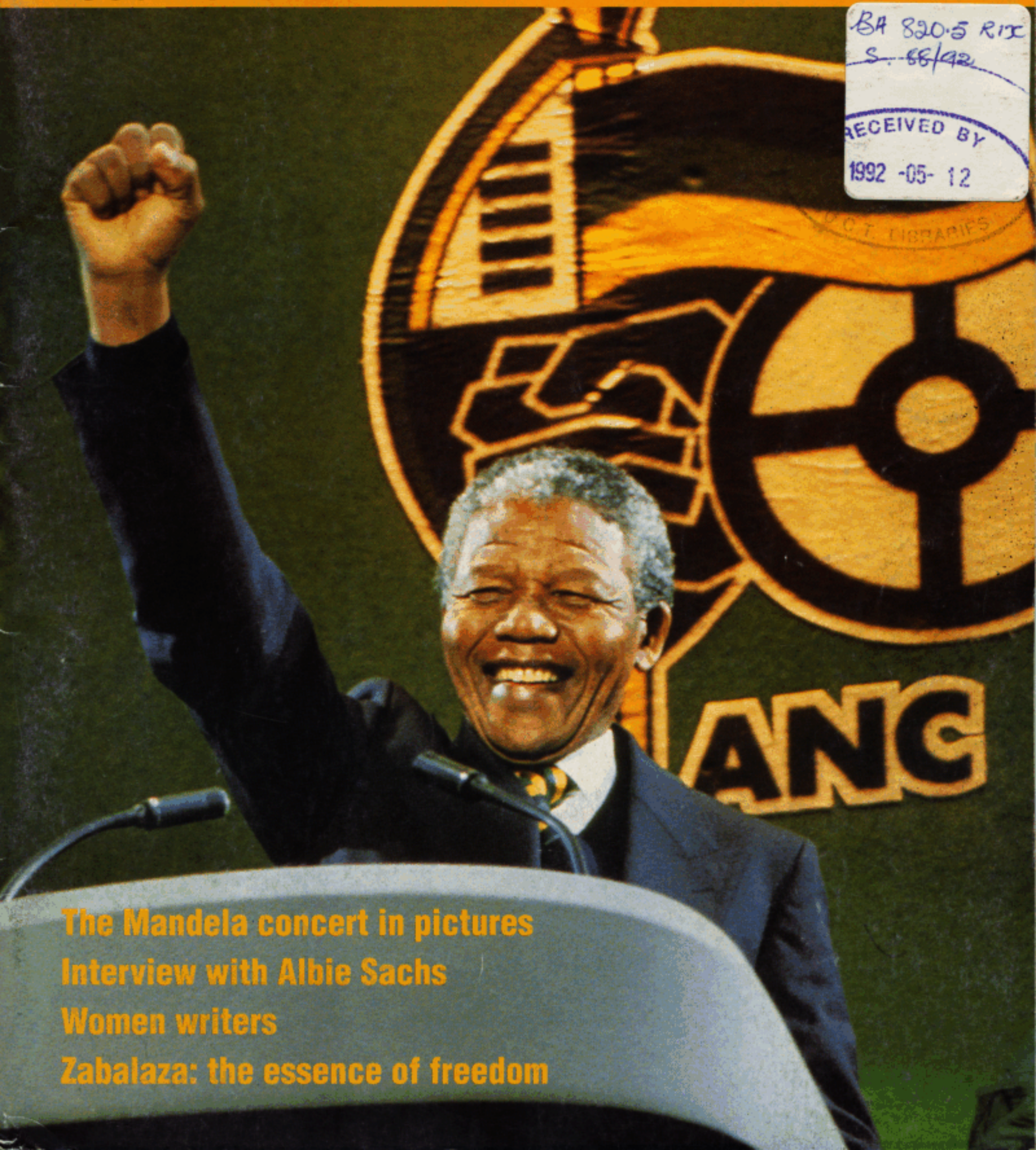
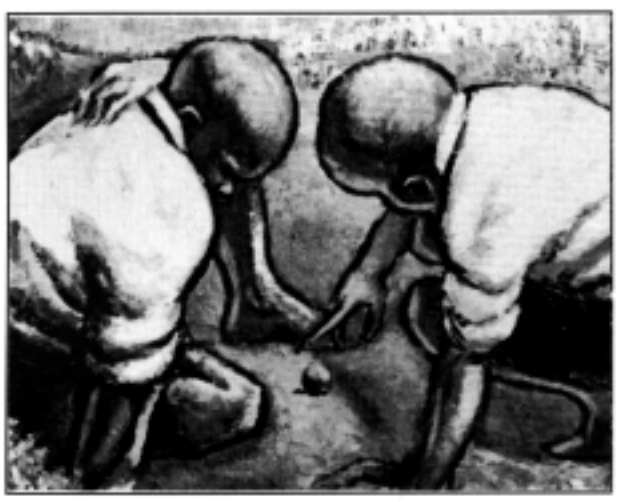
ISSUE 1, 1990

rixaka

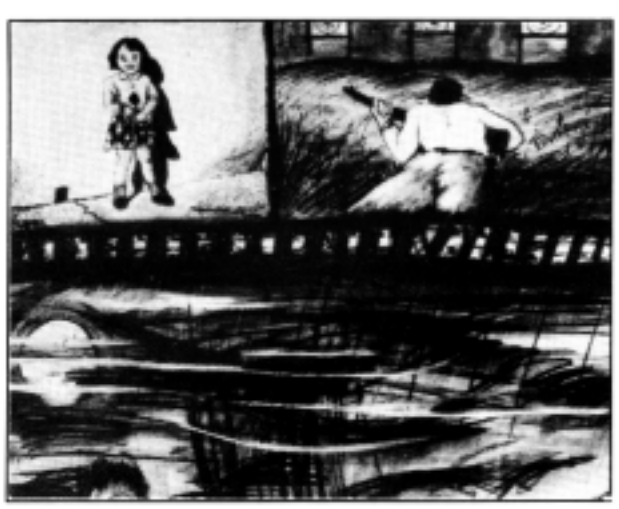
A Journal of South African Cultural Workers



The Mandela concert in pictures
Interview with Albie Sachs
Women writers
Zabalaza: the essence of freedom



Detail from a painting by Gerard Sekoto



Detail from a drawing by Leon Vermeulen

Detail from a drawing by Jason Askew

Benjamin Zephania, photo by Sandra Cumming

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To the reader

THE UNBANNING of the ANC on February 2 opened up possibilities for artists and writers to explore the reality of coming to terms with the silenced and censored decades. For ages all the people of South Africa have enjoyed the redoubtable status of being the most lied-to community in the world. White people have been weaned on the udder of supremacy while blacks have had to countenance the unimaginable in a warped attempt by a desperate regime to blaspheme the advance of history.

There is no gainsaying the fact that what has taken place inside South Africa owes its success to the struggles of the beleaguered masses of our country. But what has been significant in the past eighteen months has been the involvement of the cultural worker in the struggle for the creation of a free and democratic South Africa. There has been an emphasis in the arts making statements of commitment. This is dealt with more elaborately by discussion articles in this issue.

The role of the cultural worker for the creation of a new dispensation must not, however, rely on rhetoric and slogans alone. There must be a corresponding ascension to creative heights. Artists and writers have to move beyond the anti-apartheid themes and reflect on the beauty and ugliness – where it needs be – of the lives and loves of our people. Someone once remarked that anti-apartheid art derives its strength from a negative and outdated concept. We have to deal with positive images. This does not mean that we don't have to creatively depict all the terrible things South Africa is capable of unleashing on its black and white citizens. At the moment it is impossible to come up with accurate figures when it comes to publications that have been proscribed by Pretoria. This means that so many gaps need to be filled.

The bridging of gaps happened much more towards the end of last year. South Africans of all shades and persuasions saw the need for unity. There is still a

need for a greater unity today. All of us need to sit down and purge the country of the evils that are the direct cause of apartheid. It was therefore very enner-vating that Afrikaner writers and intellectuals could sit and discuss with their counterparts in the ANC at the Victoria Falls conference in July. RIXAKA carries two contributions from Afrikaners in the ANC.

Since Albie Sachs came with the statement that there should be a five-year moratorium on the use of the phrase "culture is a weapon of struggle", a full-scale debate has opened up in arts circles at home and abroad. It is our hope that this debate be regarded in a positive and healthy light as possible because this will finally contribute to the sharpening of our creative skills.

There has always been an unequal development in the arts. A vast section of our community – because of a historical injustice – has been deprived of skills. In South Africa, black people do not participate in cultural administration. Parks, museums and even statues say nothing about the existence of more than 25 million people. We feel that there is a need for workshops and training schemes which can redress this issue. Festivals and conferences such as ZABALAZA, scheduled for July this year will try to serve this function. It is our hope that many more people at home and abroad will find it necessary and possible to support this effort.

Nelson Mandela has been released to much acclaim and celebration. The concert at Wembley in his honour has been the subject of a lot of thinking. It is the role of the cultural worker to look at all these developments and see in them an unleashing of more creative energy. The struggle is still out there waiting to be engaged, and we shall be losers if we assume that this era simply means that we should fold our hands and conclude that the best has been achieved. Tasks ahead are more onerous.

Lastly, we should learn to approach cultural work and questions as issues that are the lifeblood of our future, something that will act as a midwife to a country bursting with beauty and optimism. In the international sphere, we must remember Nelson Mandela's words when he said that it is only those who support apartheid who argue that the steps taken by Pretoria need to be rewarded. *Amandla!*

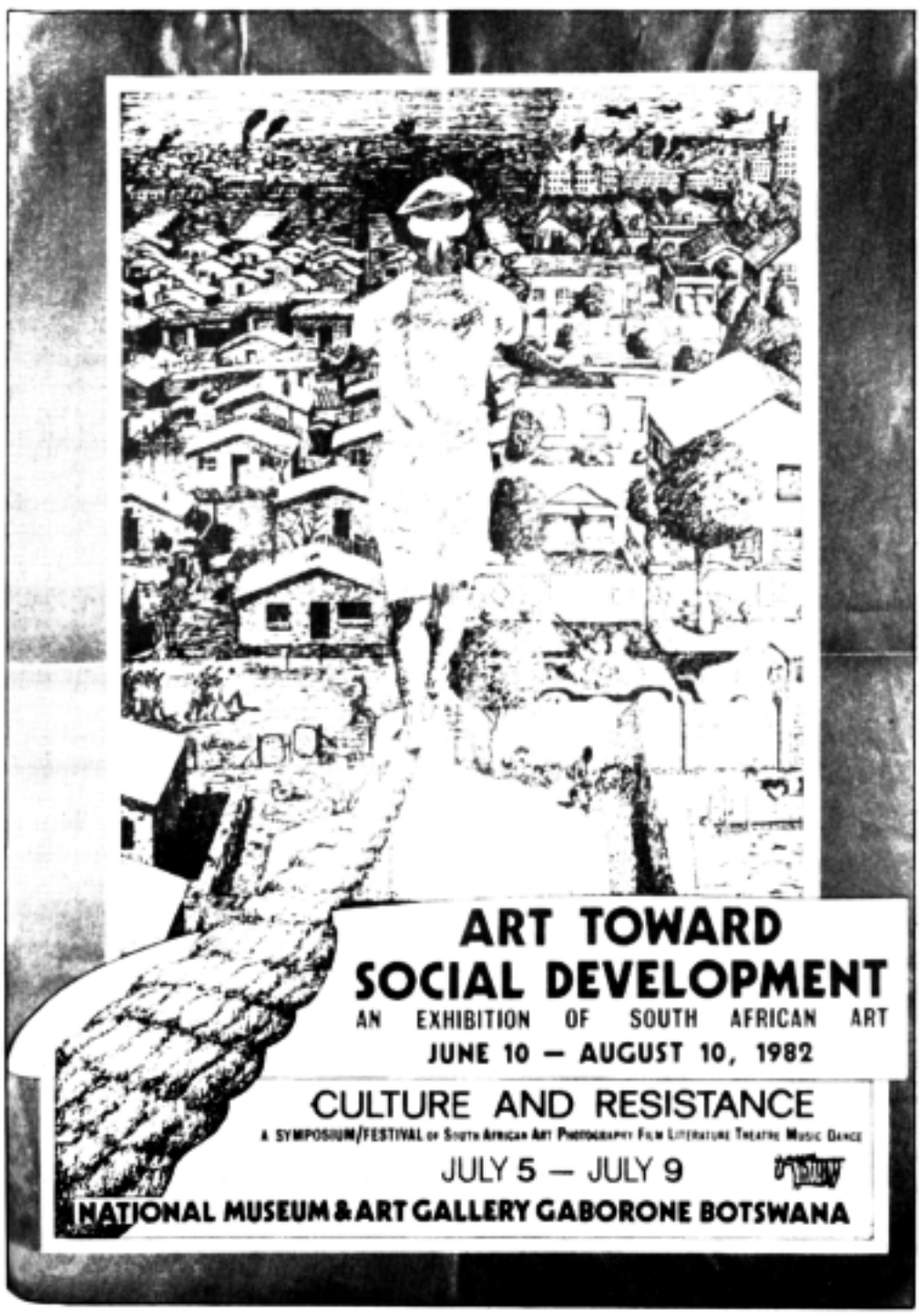
Left; The Ladder, 1968, Linocut by Azaria Mbatha
Above; Portrait sculpture of Soweto-based musician, Paul Ndlovu, enamel paint on wood, 1987, by Johannes Maswanganyi

The last decade of apartheid art

DIANA KENTON gives a personal view of art and apartheid in the 80's. She believes that the social and political crisis which erupted in South Africa in the mid-1970s, and which continued to escalate in the 1980s, has been the broad context of the current debate about the role of the artist and writer in the struggle for change

THREE MAIN ISSUES have emerged out of the debate during the past two decades. Firstly, writers and artists focused on ways in which the arts could actively engage in the struggle for change; secondly, there was a growing exploration of working class culture and the many different forms of past black resistance. This exploration was part of a new aesthetic that combined both urban and rural experience within the context of community life; thirdly, there was the need for artists to find effective ways of combating the devastating effects of censorship both on the creative and protest fronts.

The notion of the artist-as-walking-a-tightrope between the realities of black and white South Africa was aptly portrayed in the poster by Gordon Metz for the Gaborone conference in 1982. Titled *Art Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa*, this conference called for a new functionalism in the arts. The poster depicts an artist poised as a unifying figure crossing a divided landscape. On the left, a township scene of shanties and box-housing provides a view of black resistance fermenting in a school playground against a horizon of gun smoke. On the right, white existence is identified by swimming pools, two cars in every driveway, armored vehicles and police vans on patrol, and, above the distant horizon of skyscrapers, the sky is filled with war planes.



The conference was important for providing a common meeting ground for white and black cultural forces of liberation.

At the conference, Abdullah Ibrahim, explains that his position as an artist in the struggle is not one of exile but a 'voluntary strategic retreat'. In this role he does not regard himself as an artist in the commonly accepted sense of a creative 'individual', but as subservient to the need of his community to work for change. The graphic artist Thamsanqa Mnyele, said that professionals must take their place along with amateurs to create a dialogue and a message.

The conference was important for providing a common meeting ground for white and black cultural forces of liberation. Three years earlier, at the 1979 conference on *The State of Art in South Africa*, held in Cape Town, there had seemed to be no common ground. During the 1970s the belief then was that the way to political nationalism would be through cultural nationalism. While this strain of Black Consciousness was to be retained through the 1980s it became tempered by a much greater degree of co-operative solidarity between white and black artists during the decade.

At the Gaborone festival, the Junction Avenue Theater Company (JATC) demonstrated how workshops provided a meeting ground for the co-operation of black and

Left and below; pen and ink drawings by Thami Mnyele done for the Medu Arts Ensemble, Botswana

white artists. Whereas there had been disagreement during the 1970s over whether whites could express black feeling, the attitude at the Gaborone festival was more accepting of this possibility and saw it as mainly a question of talent and empathy. JATC explored aspects of the 1930s in the play *Marabi* in an attempt to shed light on events of the 1980s. In the play *Sophiatown* of 1986, the group provided an historical and social perspective about township life in the 1950s, the 'Age of Defiance'. The Company reconstructed an era that saw the changing role of the ANC, and the influence of literature, music, the New Journalism and the American lifestyles on life in Sophiatown prior to its systematic destruction by the regime.

The intentions behind this approach which has became a feature of the contemporary theater of resistance in the 1980s has been defined by RM Kavanagh who observes that: 'The new generation ... is learning the past and consciously and proudly claiming its culture and history. This is not simply a return to the past but a step forward to meet the problems of the future with the strength of the past.'

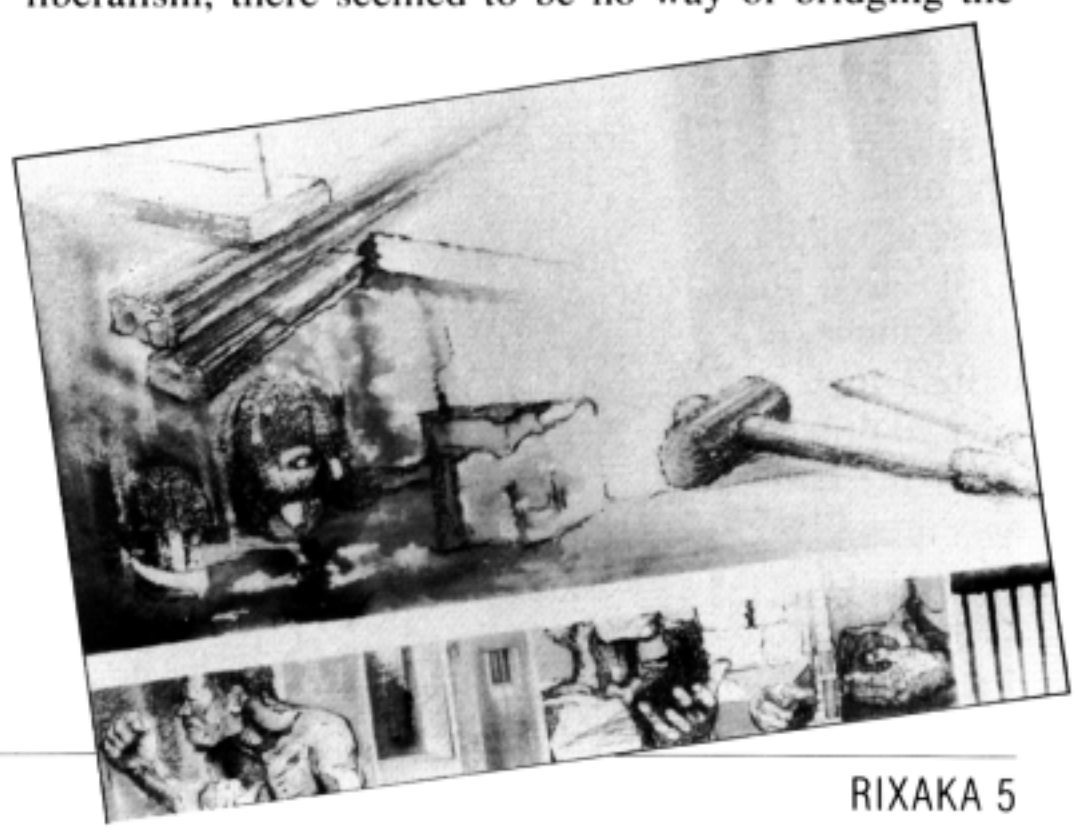
This process of relearning the past has spread across all the arts in the 1980s, shedding new lights on the depth and commitment of the black artist's struggle against oppression. From being on the fringe of white South African cultural awareness, the black artist's achievement has moved to the centre stage, recognised in the 1980s as a major force in the struggle for change. Towards the end of the 1980s a number of significant reappraisals had emerged in book and exhibition form. These included a seminal work by Piniel Shava on black South African writing titled, *A People's Voice*, an exhibition of black South African art called *The Neglected Tradition* at the Johannesburg Art Gallery; Gavin Younge's book on *Art of the South African Townships* (1988); and Sue Williamson's *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989).

Significantly, there has been a trend in the 1980s towards the exploration of new insights through formal means. Scholars have commented on this development in literature, while a similar trend in paintings such as by people like Mabaso and Koloane has roused controversy in art circles. The film *Mapantsula* likewise explores the growing political consciousness of a black gangster from a position outside black consciousness. A first of its kind, this film was banned in South Africa.

Some writers of the 1980s such as Mandla Langa, Lewis Nkosi and Njabulo Ndebele regard themselves as moving away from an overtly political and didactic mode. Mongane Serote's novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* is regarded as a significant milestone in the development of new formal means to portray the black experience. However, the urgency of the situation in South Africa, the crisis in the townships and the new state of emergency has taken its toll on the creative energies required to sustain such writing.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising to find that drama has remained the most popular mode of political expression during the eighties.

Perhaps, most significantly, the eighties will ultimately be seen as the decade of a new sense of cultural solidarity across old racial divides, united in the struggle for change. Looking back to the developments of the 1970s, with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement and the loss of faith in the intentions of white liberalism, there seemed to be no way of bridging the



Protests against removals of people from Sophiatown to Meadowlands, photo from IDAF
Above; a scene from the play 'Sophiatown', photo by Hampstead Theatre

yawning gulf. In 1983, on his his release from seven years in prison, Breyten Breytenbach reflected the views of the mid-seventies, the time of his arrest, when he said:

> 'It is an illusion to think you will be accepted by blacks as part of their struggle. That is a result of generations of apartheid. We fight out of guilt – blacks out of necessity. What ties us is the monstrous umbilical cord of apartheid.'

Ten years earlier, in 1973, Breytenbach had said that there was no hope for the survival of Afrikaans unless it was used in resistance. He explained the anomalous position of the Afrikaans writer against the turbulent era of the 1960s and the censorship laws that were being used to silence black protest. He said that it was not amazing that the

> 'the golden age of the Sixties, that time of harvesting our nice fat prizes and of wanting to fight to the bitter end about who should get the Hertzog Prize, that it coincided with a period when more and more unread, therefore non-existent, books by fellow South African authors were being banned?'

The main consequence of the bannings was an increasing sense of solidarity among all the writers in South Africa. Afrikaans is being used as part of the resistance struggle, for example, in the 1980s a new generation of Coloured writers such as Peter Snyders and Melvyn Whitebooi, have contributed major works in Afrikaans drama.

By the turn of the decade, a further spate of literary bannings – works by Gordimer, Brink, Matshoba and Leroux – caused a confrontation between writers and the authorities.

From the perspective of the 1980s it is possible to look back to the arrests, detentions and bannings of the early 1960s through the 1970s and to trace the pattern of silence, reaction and adaptation which followed in the arts. Each successive wave of detentions and bannings has forced writers and artist to adopt new tactics, shifts in content and alternative approaches in style, form and delivery. Thus at the Gaborone conference, Nadine Gordimer spoke of the artist trying to break further frontiers of what is considered appropriate in the South African context.

The effects of censorship and repression set up a chain reaction in the arts. For example, detentions and bannings sent most of the black writers of the 1950s and 1960s into exile where they turned to autobiography. They found publishers abroad but faced a new crisis in being bereft of their audience. Most noteworthy of these are Peter Abrahams, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Alex La Guma, William Keorapetse Kgositsile and Todd Matshikiza. In spite of the way some writers adapted, it was nevertheless clear that a great deal of the literary energy of the period had been lost.

The poetry of James Matthews, openly advocating the armed struggle, as appeared in *Cry Rage* was banned within a year after publication in 1972 as were his subsequent collections *Black Voices Shout* and *Pass Me the Meatballs, Jones*. As the political situation became more difficult for the less overt poets like Sanwe Nkondo, Zinjiva Nkondo, Mathe Diseko, Ilva MacKay, Serote, Langa and Ndebele, they too were forced to leave the country.In the fine arts, less vulnerable to restriction and banning, there developed in the 1960s a broad front of work concerned with the human condition. Emanating from the townships, this work broke new ground in its commitment to social issues. Louis Maqhubela emerged

'We fight out of guilt – blacks out of necessity. What ties us is the monstrous umbilical cord of apartheid.'

as one of the most sophisticated painters of this era, working in a lyrical and poetic manner. Landscape painting, in the form of township scenes, reflected conditions of squalor, overcrowding and daily life such as the soup kitchens painted by Ephraim Ngatane – a reality of poverty and despair unlike anything in the picturesque mode of white popular landscape visions. In this genre, Sekoto was followed by other township water colourists like Ngatane, Sihlali and Mogano. Together with Skotnes, Sidney Khumalo developed a sculptural approach based on African traditions. However, the decade leading up to the 1976 massacre of schoolchildren in Soweto became increasingly difficult for artists as for writers. Lionel Davis was imprisoned and Winston Saoli detained. Dumile Feni, Gavin Jantjies, Louis Maqhubela and Thamsanqa Mnyele, among the others, went into exile.

In contrast with the concerns of accademia and white establishment artists preoccupied with 'identity' and 'high art' issues in the 1960s, were the examples of Skotnes with his Polly Street Art Centre and of self-confessed outsider, Bill Ainslie. Speaking from his own experience, Ainslie demonstrated how it was not only possible but necessary to cut through absolutist ideologies about art and 'South Africanness' 'accepting the present – with all its limitations and all its possibilities – as the area of action. This means resisting the conservative notion that only the past is meaningful, and it means resisting the progressive notion that redemption is essentially of the future and that until it happens we are impotent ...' Ainslie's workshop was an early example of one of the alternative ways in which the arts developed during the seventies and eighties in South Africa and of how ordinary people, outside the establishment, used art in vital ways to fight oppression. Other examples are CAP, Fuba, Caw etc. Bill Ainslie says:

'We stand between the pole of 'high art', which challenges all taste in its quest for the unconditioned act/work, and the pole of community – or grassroots – art, which recognises that all people are capable of authentic and vital expression. These poles are in a certain way paralleled by the demands of Ad Reinhardt for a New Academy, and the demands of Josef Beuys that all men be recognised as essentially creative.

'We also stand between the poles represented by the Northern Suburbs of Johannesburg with its wealth and privilege, and Soweto – with its poverty and deprivation. Because we are essentially dependent on our paying students, we are working to help Fuba (Federated Union of Black Artists) with the establishment of its workshops in the central city and in the townships ...

'In the workshop we have people of all sorts, rich and poor, new and old, black and white, and it works. We watch people's lives changing and thereby changing ours; everybody contributes. We don't need 'political' art, or 'township' art, or 'relevant' art, or 'folk' art, or

Todd Matshikiza, photo from the Bailey Archives

Above; Gerard Sekoto with one of his works, photo IDAF
Right; Self portrait by Dikobe Ben Martins

> 'African' art, or'suburban' art, or 'township' art – it's all too self-conscious. What we need is to get on with the job of discovering ourselves, and let the labels be used by the ideologists.' (p80-87)

The newest front of action in the arts and a distinctive feature of the 1980s has been the popular resistance movement inspired by the ANC and led by the working classes inside South Africa. People's resistance was furthered in the 1980s by the grassroots community arts drive initiated by the Gaborone conference. Cultural groups proliferated, especially during 1987-88 when many organisations, including the United Democratic Front, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the Azanian People's Organisation, and the Unity Movement established cultural branches or 'desks'. At the same time non-professional drama groups were formed by workers for workers in industrial and municipal undertakings. For example, in 1988 the Unison Plays presented Peter Snyders' play *Die Drein* in public lounges and at municipal depots. Similarly, the Cape Flats Players first aimed at taking theater to the community, trying to conscientise the workers and educate them on theater. 'Now we have moved further.' From the community, these informal groups have extended their influence outwards at festivals and professional venues. Thus the Sarmcol Workers presented their play *The Long March* in England as guests of the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

> 'The workers' play *The Long March*, devised by striking union members from the Sarmcol factory at Howick (a subsidiary of the British Tyre and Rubber Company), shows through a combination of Brechtian techniques, dance, mime and much humour, the story of their eighteen-month strike over the issue of union recognition. Most of the dialogue and songs are in Zulu.' (Gunner 1988 p231)

While oratory, song and dance have long been important vehicles for political expression in black culture, the expansion in the use of the visual arts on a wide popular basis was new. Murals, peace parks, billboards, posters, graffiti, and T-shirts spread a daily message of resistance. (Williamson 1989; Sack 1989) State attempts to suppress this threat, as with the performing arts, became an ever increasing measure of its effectiveness in the struggle. In May 1988, at a state-sponsored arts conference in Stellenbosch, the then Minister of Education FW de Klerk, warned against the threat of 'peoples art' and the role of groups that propagated it in the 'total onslaught'. As the 1980s unfolded, so the content of the various arts reflected new subject matter.

> 'Underlying almost everything written in Afrikaans today ... is an intimation of violence and death.

More generally, it is expressed as an intimation of apocalypse, which implies not just death of the individual or the end of his hopes, but the destruction of the entire known world.

whether portrayed as an intensely private experience ... or directly linked to apartheid or the South African military experience ... or examined as an inescapable part of human experience ... In one form it emerges as a series of relentless explorations of war, conscription, border skirmishes, incursions into neighbouring territories, the invasion of privacy ... More generally, it is expressed as an intimation of apocalypse, which implies not just death of the individual or the end of his hopes, but the destruction of the entire known world or a way of life.' (Brink and Coetzee 1986 p13)

Since 1981 when Paul Herzberg's play *Sweet Like Suga* was first performed in London, there have been as least 20 other plays, in English and Afrikaans, both in South Africa and abroad, dealing with one or other aspect of conscription and life in the SADF (South African Defence Force).

Anthony Akerman's play *Somewhere on the Border* (1983), explores sexual and social aspects of life in the SADF as metaphors for contemporary political and cultural mores in South Africa. The play was banned in book form but not for performance. However, two of the actors were beaten up after the start of the play's run at the Alexander Theater in Johannesburg in February 1987, and performances had to be cancelled. Already, in June 1986, state attempts to silence criticism of the military in South Africa had been promulgated as part of the second phase of emergency regulations. It became an offence to make any statement that discredits or undermines the system of compulsory military service.

The destruction of a known way of life and intimations of apocalypse in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), presents JM Coetzee's deep psychological involvement with the historic landscape of civil war in South Africa. It marks for the South African novel in English, a new highpoint in the line of anti-colonial writing, established by Olive Schreiner, asserting the alien nature of European culture in the South African landscape and exploring its demise.

As South Africans enter the 1990s, it would seem that the debate on the role of the artist continues to be inextricably involved with issues of a political nature. Coetzee's intimations of an alternative consciousness rising out of the ashes of apartheid society in a landscape fraught with contradictions provides food for thought even though it cannot provide a conclusion.

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Another man is buried

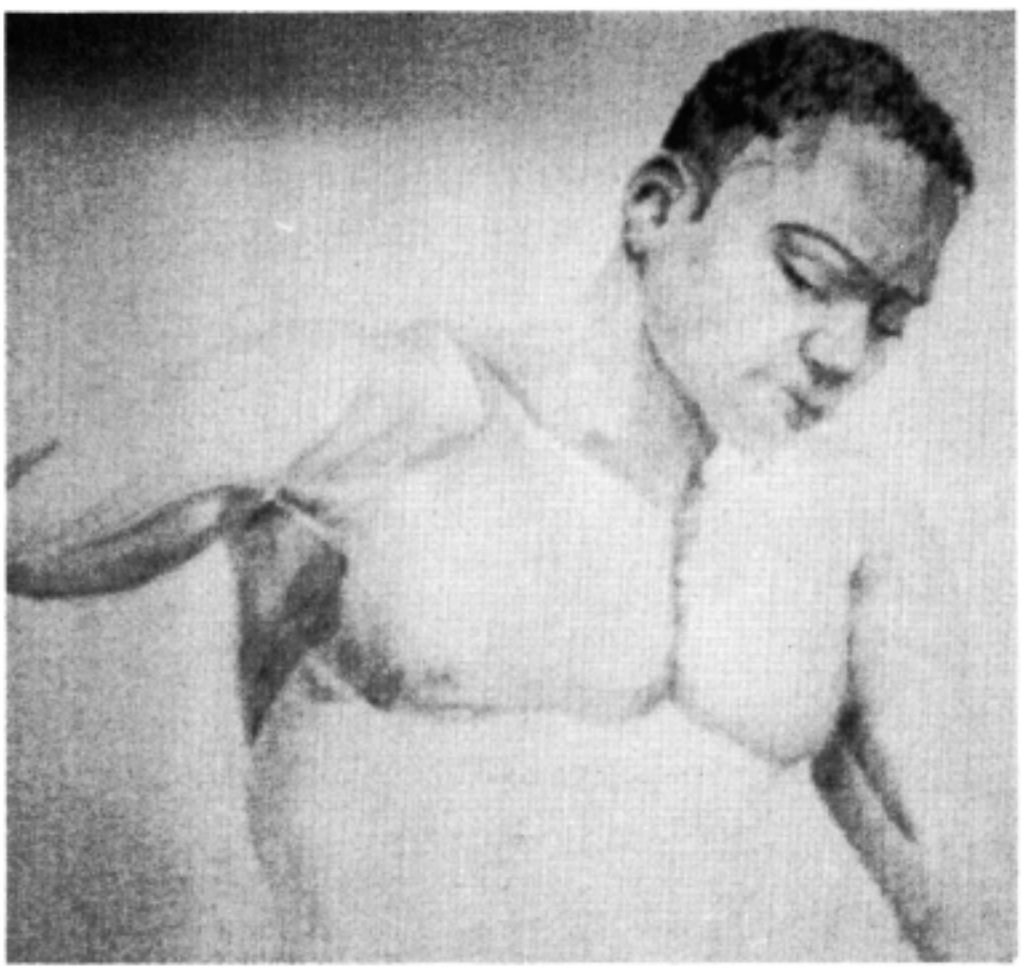


Illustration by Jason Askew

In their fearlessness
Another man is buried
In the
Red flag
Of my
Heart

In the chickenwire people
Another man is buried
Who had only his hands
and the
Hammer, the welding torch, the drill
That he laid down
For the roses
And the blue barking
of a loudspeaker
and the crowds, the bees around the beehive
of a grave
and the ink pours
from the bodies:
the poetry of newspaper reports
written with the blood
of comrades
comrades smuggled through the
roadblocks of the brain
and dissolved
in the test tubes
of
the
workers science
and the belief
in man
and released from the past
with baggage on airports
a man without fear
among fearless people
a man
with a hammer
or a man
on a tractor
or a man
underground
with a lunch box
or the man with brittle fingers
pushes the uniform lightly
under the needle of a sewing machine
the ghost in the mirror
comrade which I can see
but the eye not itself

COMRADE FELIX

Writer's agenda: the nineties

The following is an edited version of an address by WALLY MONGANE SEROTE to the Oxford Literature Conference on March 20. The full text was read on Serote's behalf by Njabulo Ndebele. Organised by the Southern African Review of Books, the March Conference included such South African writers as Njabulo Ndebele, Mafika Gwala, and Hein Willemse

TWO ISSUES COME to mind as I ponder over the given title. Firstly, how to tell the story of apartheid and still ensure that the inarticulateness which has become as South African as the word apartheid itself is overcome by knowledge, so that the battles we fought for freedom can render us free? Secondly, how can we save that noble word, *democracy*, from becoming a cliche through a greater understanding of what we, the people, think, feel, want and are supposed to be doing on this earth? How can all these elements of democracy walk, gesture and become our gait on the streets?

The terms for fighting for this possibility have been recently changed drastically, not only in South Africa but in the world as a whole. We have had to come to terms with two realities over and over again., that, while no single idea is above us as people, it is also not only the fact that our stomachs are filled that makes us content. What do these two realities mean for a writer, if, as we should know and believe, writing, no matter how mediocre or excellent, becomes a mirror reflecting the tapestry of our fibre as a people?

I wish to state two other issues which are a point of reference for writers, even if the western world pretends ignorance of this. Writing is part of culture. Culture is a product of the people, and, at the point at which it is consencrated, life must change. Secondly, that change, while it is constant, depends on the calibre of the people who must bring it about so that they would constantly improve the quality of life. Having said this, a strange revelation and reality emerges regarding apartheid and its antithesis of democracy: *What is above the people?* Also:*What is inherent in people?*

Let me get back to the original first two issues raised earlier. I pose these issues in this manner for I am aware that civilisation as we know it, has been scorched by two bloody tragedies, the Middle Passage and the Holocaust. If these tragedies were hatched and nurtured by certain sections of humanity, and if they left such an indelible mark and painful memory on the human psyche, why has apartheid survived so long? Two writers, one black and one white respectively, James Baldwin and Primo Levi, have been eloquent in their attempt to create a conscience of humanity about the Middle Passage and the holocaust. But as they so did, so also did it appear that their record was not believed. I maintain that, as these disparate writers allowed themselves to be eyeball to eyeball with the horror, torture and despicable callousness, their motives were neither vengeance or reprisal, even if their forebears suffered hideously in the tragedies cited earlier.

Baldwin and Levi believed that, as humankind came to know what had happened —what was thought and felt by the perpetrators and victims of these tragedies— that knowledge would render intolerable anything that suggested a return to that terrible past. If my observation is true, then it is not an exaggeration that the two writers believed in justice and that human beings are capable of justice, a virtue inherent in all people. The writers believed that it is possible to create a civilisation based on tolerance, on an ability to live and let live – a commitment to making any present worth living.

It cannot be said that the two writers were naive in believing that humankind is inherently just. This is not a contradiction in that humankind has also produced its share of monsters; history has, at the same time, produced people who have given water to the thirsty when it was deadly to do so; people have cuddled and given succour and comfort to the ailing and dying in the full knowledge that such gestures of compassion endanger their own lives. Even within the exclusive civilisation which has been built on colonialism, racism and exploitation, the manner in which that civilisation contradicts life is also contradicted by life itself.

If one has been a freedom fighter, which means one has done everything possible to ensure justice – and justice is not and cannot be relative in the 20th Century – life continuously articulates itself as two possibilities. On the one hand, a conviction which is informed by compassion, shaped by a deep distaste for horror experienced and guided by a vision about a possibility of a livable world, makes life a possibility. On the other hand, impediments to life always bring home the danger which stubbornly clings to life with the intention of destroying it. It is a

wise freedom fighter reads and understands these two possibilities and, while straddling them, keeps focus on nurturing and creating possibilities of a culture of live and let live.

Once humankind becomes so obsessed with riches to the point where everything becomes meaningless – life becomes extremely cheap.

Culture is a point of reference for writers. As I remarked earlier, there is pro- and anti-life culture. This is what I think is meant when terms like *third-* and *first-world* are used. Africa meets other *Third-World* countries in the Non-Aligned Movement. In the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement meets the *First World* countries. This is the theater where the saga of pro- and anti-life cultures is dramatised. The NAM and the UN represent the most developed intentions for a future which promises a bearable life. Both organisations were built on the ashes of the Middle Passage and the Holocaust. The League of Nations, the forerunner to the UN, emerged not so long ago after the jaws, vertebrae, nails, teeth and other relics which remain after life has been brutally and ruthlessly destroyed, were staring at the cabbages which were fat with the flesh they had consumed; some bodies were still, perhaps, at the bottom of rivers. And, if it is true that once flesh is burnt, its smell takes long to disappear, the stench still clung to the walls of the charnel houses. The forerunner to the NAM, the Bandung Conference of 1955 was – as was the UN – another attempt to come to terms with the fact that, once humankind becomes so obsessed with riches to the point where everything becomes meaningless – which, in essence, is the case made for embarking on the Middle Passage – life becomes extremely cheap.

On opening the Bandung Conference, President Sukarno said,"The people of Africa and Asia wield little physical power. Even their economic strength is dispersed and slight. We cannot indulge in power politics..." He had also said that no task is "more urgent than that of preserving peace." It is not only the colonial issue with which these words get into terms. They try to address the issue of the Middle Passage. But the issue which concerns me as a writer at present is that humankind consistently tries to uphold, to preserve, to institute peace. This struggle for peace in itself has become a culture living alongside what is consistently opposing it, attempting to destroy it. Another issue which concerns me here is that the latter culture seems to persevere to become a constant of life. Is this why the literature which comes from the UN and the NAM, in the forms of resolutions, reads like a tragicomic tract? That is what the resolutions from those august bodies tell me.

They read so because – if, as I do, come from South Africa – on reading them, I sense an irresolvable tension between what the words mean and what their authors do afterwards. And I must quote an old man, a tour guide at Goree Island in Senegal, to make my point clear. He said, "If there were no African collaborators, there would have been no slave trade."

For the wretched, the world remains the same as if the resolutions had not been passed. If an epidemic devastated humankind, the wretched are the first victims because they live in abject poverty; they are illiterate, are crowded and herded into small, unlivable spaces. And because they live nowhere near a clinic or hospital., the vicious cycle engulfs them. When, as they are engulfed, they appear on TV screens, devastated, helpless, homeless as they do, say, when the world is being shown the famine in Ethiopia, or the AIDS orphans in Uganda, or the large number of maimed men, women and children in Mozambique and Angola. When all this happens, I often want to know how the mind of a child works or, generally speaking, how the people of the West with their exclusive civilisation, who have been so racially socialised, think. I know what I as a black person think. At dinner tables with the civilised, I have to consciously listen to what is said. I must suspect every word, every gesture, every wink of an eye, for it may be at that moment that my friends with whom I dine, may recall one of the images they saw on TV about black people. I am my brother's keeper, as the saying goes. And in helping me carry this burden – which is not of my making – I often hear that So-an-so is so lacking of bitterness, is so brilliant. Which is what is often said also about *Third World* literature.

Third World literature is not given criteria by those about whom it is written. It is given criteria, for life or death, by those who, like the controller of the door leading into the gas chamber, can say, to the victim, "Come in, please." Why is this so? In addressing this issue, Ngugi has resorted to writing in Kikuyu. We have all attempted theater for communication in the villages. We have all been present when, in workers' meetings, translations slowed down the progress for resolutions, so that every single participant contributes to the deliberations. It is when these happen that one realises the potential inherent in humankind. For, it is such moments which give a glimpse, just a glimpse, of the wealth of culture that has been canned and buried by oppression and exploitation. If the languages which people use only among themselves were to become the languages of the world, what would be said? In other words, what is it that we have not as yet

If there was no illiteracy, what would have been written, and what would we be reading? This question devastates the mind.

heard? If there was no illiteracy, what would have been written, and what would we be reading? This question devastates the mind if one thinks that millions and millions of people are illiterate, that hundreds of languages have not been heard to describe and articulate for many, many years, what those who speak them think, feel, see, smell and want.

What then, is the writer's agenda in the 90s, given these odds?

As the 80s were shutting another decade into history, a spectre which I am certain raised all sorts of difficult issues for the wretched of the earth dominated the media. When last in history, did humankind witness streets, squares, every space, peopled by masses and masses through demonstrations and rallies as happened in the socialist countries? When last, when numerous powerful governments toppled one after the other, as if they were boulders swept aside by powerful floods? Given the history of events of this nature, one would have expected that there would be bloodletting on a scale never witnessed in the history of humankind. The Middle Passage, the Holocaust, the wars against colonialism, apartheid, exploitation and oppression are criteria used to judge what happens when a people rise and seek a better life. When they did so in Eastern Europe, we must note, as part of humankind, the smoothness with which people seized power, participated in reshaping their destinies and, most important, registered a new morality into civilisation: *It is possible for humane regimes to exist.*

The contradiction to this morality is that the regimes being swept aside earned that fate because of a history of not being humane. It is this two-fold reality brought about by the peoples of the socialist countries which must force all of humankind to re-examine and review history. The failures, distortions and crimes, both political and economic, which the different regimes perpetrated against its peoples, establish a stubborn fact which has articulated itself repeatedly in history that no system, no party, nothing, is above the people. Yet, there is another thing which some people in the socialist countries are going to learn: that the West – although now it seems to know more than anyone else about democracy – in fact knows very little about how to put that principle into action.

They will know that, in fact, millions of lives were lost when democracy was demanded in western countries. Some of those people in the socialist countries will learn very soon that the glitter and gloss that caught their eye in the West is as a result of absolute absence of what they in the socialist countries are fighting for – democracy.

It is seeing this seeming ignorance of some people in the socialist countries which bewildered us, the wretched of the earth. It is also because, somehow, we also harboured the ignorance that all was well in the socialist countries and questioned nothing, while we emulated these countries and governments and remained blind to the sufferings of the people.

All that I have said totally negates ignorance of any kind. Yet ignorance abounds in the world. What is the role of writing in negating ignorance? Put in another way, this question means that democracy – which is participation of all peoples in ensuring that the quality of life continuously improves for all – must be based on both an economic and political system which allows this phenomenon, democracy, to exist. Events of the 90s, as illustrated by the socialist countries, indicate that civilisation has not yet developed to the extent that it can allow for this to happen. Writing – a segment of culture which is life itself – cannot be divorced from politics or economics. It is how societies are organised which will determine how they can eradicate ignorance. It is for all these explorations in this paper that I can state that the first commitment of any writer is in politics; the second, which makes one a writer, is in writing.

Today, in South Africa, the oppressed people and the international support for a non-racial, democratic and united South Africa have put on the agenda the possibility for the creation of a livable country. This means a country where life can continuously improve. Among the many organisations which form the tapestry which has come to be called the Mass Democratic Movement, which is led by the ANC, is a small organisation, the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW). It has struggled for a place and role of writers in the broader struggle for justice and peace in South Africa. COSAW is young and emerged from hard and trying conditions and is faced by immense and complex issues which it has to sort out with a view of defining its role in South African life.

It is true that COSAW will be judged by how it promoted and exposed writing, as it provides conditions which will ensure that anyone, no matter what their political point of view is, will, as a writer, write and be read. But it is equally true that this can only be so if there is democracy in that country. The individuals who are members of COSAW, through COSAW, must fight for – and defend – democracy.

That is on the agenda!

Watershed at Victoria Falls

Marius Schoon and Breyten Bretyenbach are two Afrikaner writers in exile who took part in the historic meeting of the

ANC and Afrikaner writers from home. Marius writes on two of his poems that sum up the reunion at the

Victoria Falls of comrades and friends. Breyten also writes on the meaning of being an Afrikaner writer in a changing South Africa. Both contributions are characterised by a disarming honesty, a preoccupation with making sense out of a country that is built on lies and tragedy.

Photos of Marius Schoon and Breyten Breytenbach from IDAF

MY SUSTERS

Die trane prikkel teen my oë,
Afrikaans al om my.
'n Toekoms wat ons bou
uit bottende vriendskap.

Die eerste dag se opgewondenheid
word die laaste dag se
opgewondenheid
en ook die verdriet
van naderende vertrek.

Jeannette, Antjie
More kan julle sien
hoe blou Malutis
uit die vlakte rys
hoe aandwind
die suikerriet laat tiekieswaai

Kyk ook vir my,
my kamerade.

When I showed this poem to a comrade, he said, 'Yes, it's your normal style – sentimental social realism.' So there you have it: a report from a sentimental social realist, and undeconstructed at that.

The excitement starts as the plane begins the long descent to Harare. The blur of the land starts taking on the familiar form of the enchanting Zimbabwe bush.

We arrive very late in Zimbabwe and I rush for the connecting flight. Air Zimbabwe's computer has not heard of me and the flight is full. Eventually I get a special boarding pass to sit in the cockpit. Albie Sachs is not so lucky. As he is turned away he says to the Air Zimbabwe ground staff: 'Are you really letting a terrorist sit next to the pilot?'

Later I get inside the plane. I find there are ANC comrades on the flight. Not only comrades, but also close friends, people I have worked with in the past. The excitement mounts, and I savour the foretaste of that special pleasure of working in a team where shared experience means there is so much which has not got to be said.

It is three years since I have been in Zimbabwe and I realise how long that is when I hear Zimbabwean voices all around me. To my unaccustomed ear, the Zimbabwean accents sound as if they come from home. But Afrikaans is being spoken in the row behind me. I tense and bristle, as I do when I hear Afrikaans on the metro in Brussels or on a bus in London.

At Vic Falls the delegation from home is straggling in from the immigration gates. There is the immediate joy of seeing friends – Breyten, Ampie, Hein. Introductions are made, but the only names I can place are the well-known media figures – Van Zyl, Alex. The rest are a blur which the coming week will concretise.

In the bus on the way to the hotel, Afrikaans is all around me. Already I am able to enjoy the sound and not feel threatened or at risk.

There is a short introductory session that first day and I listen carefully to try to penetrate the camouflage of words coming from the podium. When I speak I am surprised at how important it is to me to be amongst Afrikaners.

As we come out of that first session, Jeannette Ferreira stops me and tells me of a project on the Cape Flats which has produced a book of poems on South Africa's women such as Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Jeannette Schoon. Not for the only time that week, my eyes are misted.

That evening, we all eat on the terrace. It is the first time I have eaten *boerewors* since leaving Botswana in 1983. The long absence has improved the flavour. A number of people living at home tell me they have never

A number of people tell me they have never before heard anyone on a public platform introduce themselves by starting, 'I am a member of the ANC.'

Washington Street, Langa, woodblock print, 1986, by Suzanne Louw

before heard anyone on a public platform introduce themselves by starting,'I am a member of the ANC.' I recall September, 1964, walking to the kwela-kwela parked in Plein Street and raising my manacled hands to shout *Amandla!*

Yet, people do not really mingle that first evening. They sit in groups with people they already know. I wonder what calf's foot magic will get it all to gell.

The catalyst came the next morning. Comrade Steve from the NEC spoke on ANC policy. I watched and saw how attentively people listened. How eager they were for what he was saying. From then on we started becoming friends.

That afternoon I made a brief contribution. Overly frank, I thought, and perhaps harsh for the people from home. I was surprised at how many people came to me afterwards to say that they thought the content timely.

That evening we joined for a poetry reading. Never before have I been anywhere where the bulk of an audience would understand my Afrikaans verses.

In a week like this, you cannot speak to everyone, cannot have all the conversations that you wish. Yet some of those meetings and conversations stand out. After the poetry reading Antjie Krog comes to our room. We drink *Jameson* and talk. From our different perspectives, we find we have so much in common. We talk as if we have to fill the evening with our intertwined lives.

The next morning, at the session on women in South African writing, Jeannette with great courage speaks of the personal trauma of growing up in the horror of white South Africa. I am allowed to make an intervention, and I speak of the comradeship and friendship I have found in our Movement – the amazing generosity which I continue to receive from what has become my real family. I can see with what hunger she listens.

The first day of the conference becomes the last. We are speaking of the essence of being a South African writer. Breyten rounds it off, poetical-

ly politically, and I wish I had spoken so well.

This leads us into a consensus on a final communique. Then we sing an 'Nkosi'; the first singing there has been. Baleka's beautiful voice carries us into the future and around me, virtually without exception, the challenging fists are raised.

Then its 'Senzeni na' and the rhythm of the toyi toyi joins us in comradeship and determination.

That last night we take over the restaurant, singing, dancing and being together. Freedom songs in Afrikaans – I would not have thought it possible.

The next morning is not good. The farewells are too protracted. People wait for the bus to take them to the airport. Will I ever see these new comrades again? I long to see what they will see (perhaps they will not even look properly) when they get home later that day. There are few dry eyes.

The beauty of the Falls has been the background to our meeting. The mighty plunge of Zambezi over the escarpment has strengthened one in quiet walks between meetings. The spray hangs over the valley and the distant roar of the water has been the counterpoint of every conversation.

Musi wa Tunya.
Ja, dit is die rook wat donder,
die dreuning van die Valle
is agterground vir elke gesprek.
Die misrook hang oor die vallei
soos onblusbare damp van vryheids vuur.
En die krag van die water.
En die krag van die water.

Ek is getrein,
as ek kamerade se lewensbeskrywings lees,
om te soek na waterkeidings –
punte waar iets gebeur het
wat hul verander het
Van jou alledaagse yuppie whitey.

As knaap van tien sien ek eers die Valle.
Ma, pa, ousus and ek,
saam in ons karavaan.

In daardie tye was daar 'n spoortjie
van die grootpad na Livingstone se standbeeld,
en 'n waentjie op die spoor,
'n hefboom of die waentjie
en swarte manlik lywe
wat die balk laat op en neer
Die lewenskrag vir die waentjie.

Ek wou so graag op die waentjie ry.
Pa, ousus en ek het opgeklim.
Maar ma wou nie.
In die oondheet van 'n Zambezi somer
het ons vir haar gewag
in die skadu by die standbeeld
tot sy opdaag,
amper so besweet
soos die knegte op die waentjie.
"Ma, hoekom het ma dan nie gery nie?"
"Boetie, ek ry in geen waentjie
Waar mense die osse is nie."

Hier by die Valle
vind ons mekaar.
Die bevrydende saamwees
ten spyte van ons hondsdolle geskiedenis.

My nuwe kamerade,
dink terug up Victoriawaterval.
Onthou die dreuning van ons toekoms
soos ons dit daar gehoor het.
Sien uit na die toyi toyi van ons vryheid
om rokende bevrydingsvure,
en die krag van ons mense.
En die krag van ons mense.

Perhaps it is too glib for this great nick point in the Zambezi valley to come to symbolise a watershed, a point of political growth and maturity. Yet, glib or not, for many of us these few days were a watershed.

I sat and marvelled at the warmth and empathy between the Afrikaners and my black comrades. Just as the bulk of the Afrikaners had never been anywhere where people were openly ANC, so many of my younger comrades had never previously mixed socially with those who speak the baas's language.

For myself, for the first time in many years, I am writing in Afrikaans.

I remember eating in the restaurant with Antjie, Jeannette and Comrade Steve. Steve telling us of the horror of his detention in the sixties, and of recently welcoming in Lusaka the ex-security policeman who had been responsible for his conditions. 'The man has changed. He is welcome to talk to us in the ANC.'

Those dreadful farewells on the last morning. Yet also memorable farewells.

Jeannette saying: 'Barbara has become the mother that is lost to me. My respect for Steve is what I am unable to have for my own father.' Antjie saying: 'I have seen the only structure that I think I could fit into.'

Tsamaya ka kagiso, my new comrades. Yet I fear for you. Writers work alone, outside the strength of a collective. Would that you find that *Amandla nga Wethu* is not just a pretty slogan but rather the only way to give one the strength and the courage to destroy that beast and realise the hope and joy of our future.

Marius Schoon

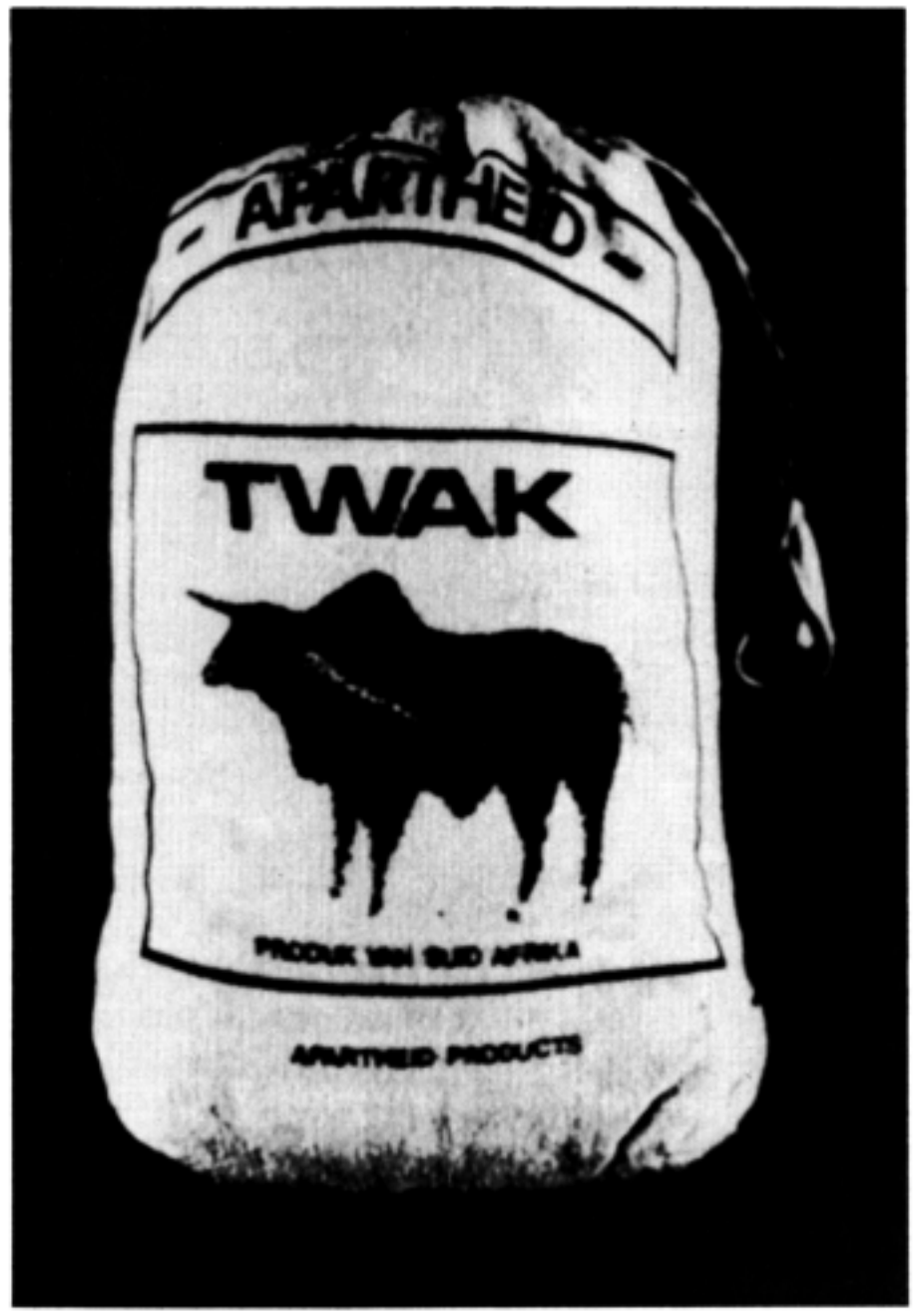
The way forward

Ek gaan onderweg probleme optel, wat ek plek-plek sal aandui en probeer omseil, miskien omdat ek paradoksaal tog nog vryer is in Afrikaans as in ander tale, of vlugtiger en vlugryker van tong.

IT IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE experience to be thus addressing a group of South Africans on my literary intentions and history. Difficult also because it could so easily degenerate into the tracing of an alienation, perhaps even a perversion. But it is important to try.

I'm the dog wanting to recognize the coded smell deposited long since to mark out the tree or the hedge or the lamp-post of its passage, or returning to the battle-ground where the bone lies buried. Can my writing be considered as part of South African literature? This is the theme I was asked to talk about. Using myself as prototype — *aan die hand van myself*, I shall attempt to say something about the specificity of the writer, his (or her) local root system or natural bent, and the universality of his (or her) craft. Put differently – I'd like to see where his (or her) lines run, both privately and publicly, the lines which on occasion will tie him (or her) onto knots — *die lyne wat by geleentheid knooploop om ooptes*.

South African literature is faced by a multitude of mirrors. It is of course an invaluable privilege to be thus obliged to measure our cultural awareness, consciously, against the demands of South African society, to move into and out of areas of expectation. Our literature, in all its articulations, mirror the community. Perhaps therefore inevitable it will show us a broken image, a partial vision: historically we are a cracked society. Since some considerable time now we live in the sign of regrouping of forces – a realignment not defined by ethnic or even cultural affinities, but by the striving for the same values. Our shared consciousness nevertheless still remains shredded, and it is only natural that we should each have our own ways of looking at reality through the cracks of our experience. Sometimes we are a part of the babbling, at other moments we may warble or mouth (or think we mouth) the intensity of South African silences.

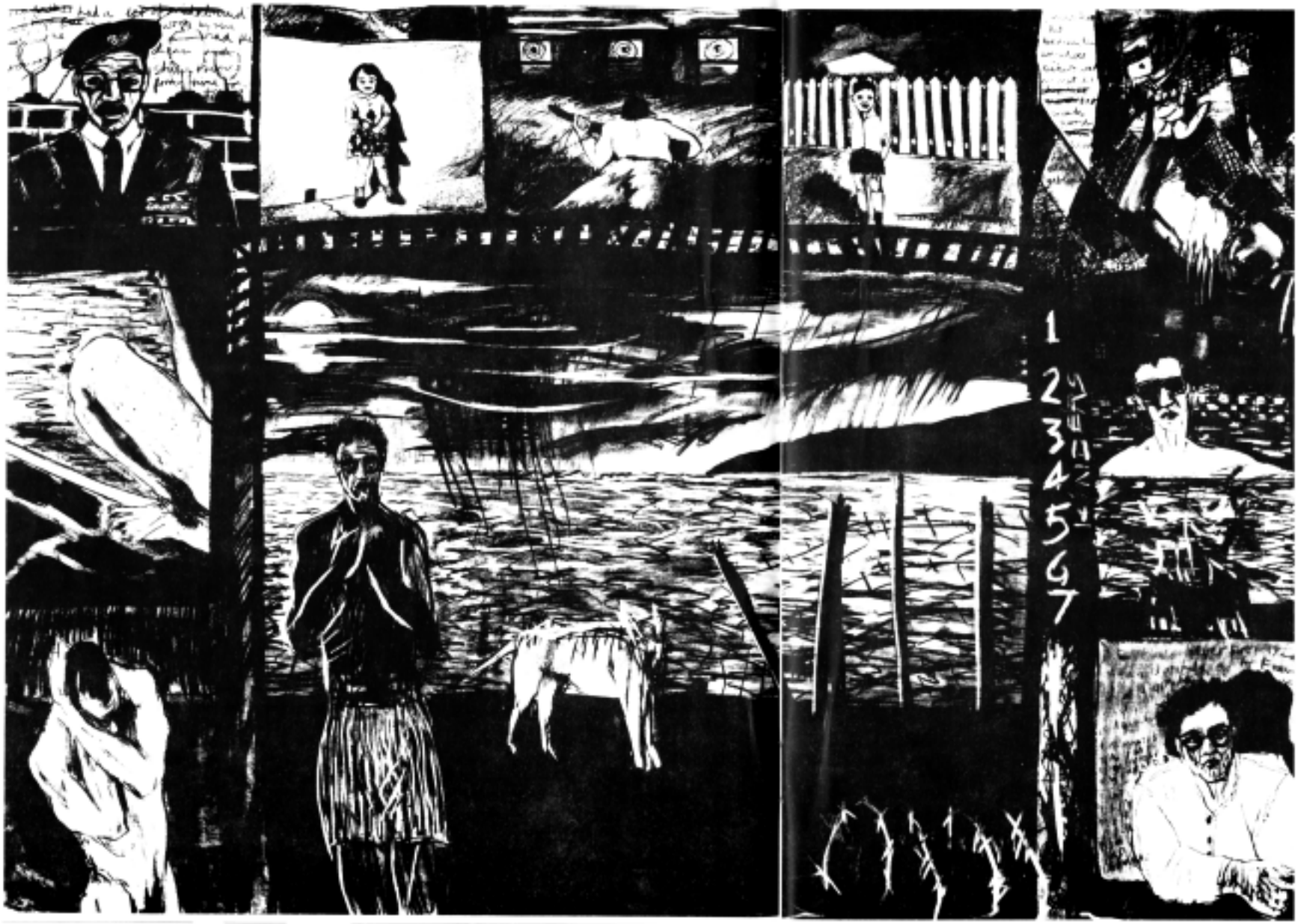


Bag of Apartheid Twak by Ben Kotzen

I am by now too old to still believe in the solution of existential questions, but along the way of searching, I have come to know a fraction more about process. And my old fractures, or cold bones, tell me that our South African culture, in its unique blend of diverse strains, carries within it the metaphors and the means of a moving forward towards true integration (*dat dit die trekkings en die meddele koester van a voorbeweeg na werklike integrasie*). That indeed need not be just the expression of morbid phenomena, of decay and estrangement. *Iewers word 'n lyk weer gesond.* The parallel fact remains, nevertheless, that Afrikaans culture – of a peculiar tradition, in terms of a certain reading thereof – is coming to an inglorious end (*dat dit aan die uitvrek is*). Some Afrikaans writers, also because they wish to be 'true to the people', actually reflect this cul-de-sac, *hierdie sakgatstraat*, this deadendstreet. What is authenticity? Surely it must be when you can sense and interpret the people of your community, when you are experienced and extrapolated by them, when you bleed the shared dreams and anxieties. In other words, when you are become a means of expression.

It must then be of the utmost importance to know which community you are from, who your readers are. Later on, I shall try to indicate that one can already now in South Africa choose the community you aspire to be identified with and which you hope will recognize and understand you. And that this community is defined by a cluster of values cutting across cultural separa-

Writing is the mould of memory, or its image. Without memory there is no possibility of imagination.



tions. In the time of surfacing the structures of our consciousness, as writers, we are dreaming the structuring of South Africa.

dit is waar dat sommige beginsels
waarop ons aktiwiteite berus
voordurend
in twyfel gebring en reggestel moet
word;
ons moet met die ore tussen die
grashalms lê
om op te vang wat miskien nog geen
uiting gevind het nie
maar reeds as 'ideologie' onder die
volk bewe;

maar in ons soeke na opregtheid
moet ons ons nie laat mislei deur
vaderlikheid
of 'n valse neerbuiging nie;

veral, evaluasie moet 'n transformasie
verwoord
en nie net 'n ligte somerjassie van
kritiek op die nasie
wees oor 'n soliede lyf van
aanvaarding nie;

die gras moet weet van gras as
grasheid,
ons moet weet watter vasteland ons
roer -

This poem was written on January 25, 1974. I just had to sneak it in.

Writing is the mould of memory, or its image. Without memory there is no possibility of imagination, not even that of an imagined memory. Without imagination there is neither space nor creativity. When we are deprived of creativity, we end up in a state of emergency, in the convolutions and convulsions of a Total Strategy, then we have stale totalitarianism. Heiner Muller quotes Brecht where he says

Beloftes, charcoal on paper, 1988, by Leon Vermeulen

that the problem with the Germans is that they have never carried through a revolution, that they never digested their history, that they started building their new superstructures without first clearing out the rubble in their cellars Muller then asks: 'Is it possible ever to forget that which you have buried?' The answer must be no.

We Afrikaans writers, aren't really there yet. *Ons wil ons rooi vlae uithang by die smal spleet-vensterjies van ons voortorings. As ek die ding so dophou, dan lyk dit vir my die Afrikaner intellektuele soek nog steeds witvoetjie by regse denkgedrogte van oorsee, hier uitgespoel – dekonstruksie (as dit maar dek-konstruksie was!) post-modernisme – met wasgoedpennetjies oor die neuse. Maar die dag kom ook; elke hond kry mos syne.* (Note: I do not depict those forms of thought-acting as decadent because they were from Europe and America, but they are the results of another terminal history, and the fact that the Boere are making pigs of themselves with a mess of lentils. This spells out intellectual flatulence, on their part in order to escape other unplacable realisations. Certain clever white tricks definitely constitute a form of moral insouciance.

So then, da donde vengo? *Waar kom ek vandaan?* I am tempted to say: '*van soentoe tot hiertoe.*' All history starts with a story. The language, of necessity, is my earth. Perhaps it would be possible to eventually use it as if it were a thing with neither breath nor flesh on its bones, *maar ek glo nie van daai nie.* The language stays with me as a shadow , a runner, a reminder, and thereby it is imagination. *Daar sit klanke en verbuiging en prente en verwysings en stomp goete in wat herlei na 'n geografiese gebied, na 'n geskiedenis van waarneming van spasie en ritme en tyd en verhoudings en natuur en klimaat, na 'n manier waarop die hond so al langs sy eie pote bly draf. Dis nie 'n opsie nie.* Then there are the people, the South Africans, with whom I am involved in ways which can never be the case with any other people. Then there is the struggle as *raison d'etre*, as the catalyst of a consciousness of life, as the way and the means of situating myself within ethical and even aesthetical dimensions. Africa made of me a South African, Europe made me an African. How can I then not see my work as that of an agent of perception. (*'n wortel van gewaarwording*) within the context of Africa? Foucault says: 'To work means to think differently from the way you thought before.' (*'Arbeiten heisgt, anderes denken als das, was man vorher dachte.'*)

I could not, cannot, not even by approximation, fit word to the suffering of my black compatriots.

A further origin, or source (*'n verdere waarvandaan*) must be the way in which you made yourself, your usefulness on the ground, how you forget yourself for the purpose, for the cause. That, for me, is an old story, prehistory, the walking tune played on the bone flute. I am the bone I lay away in the earth to ripen.

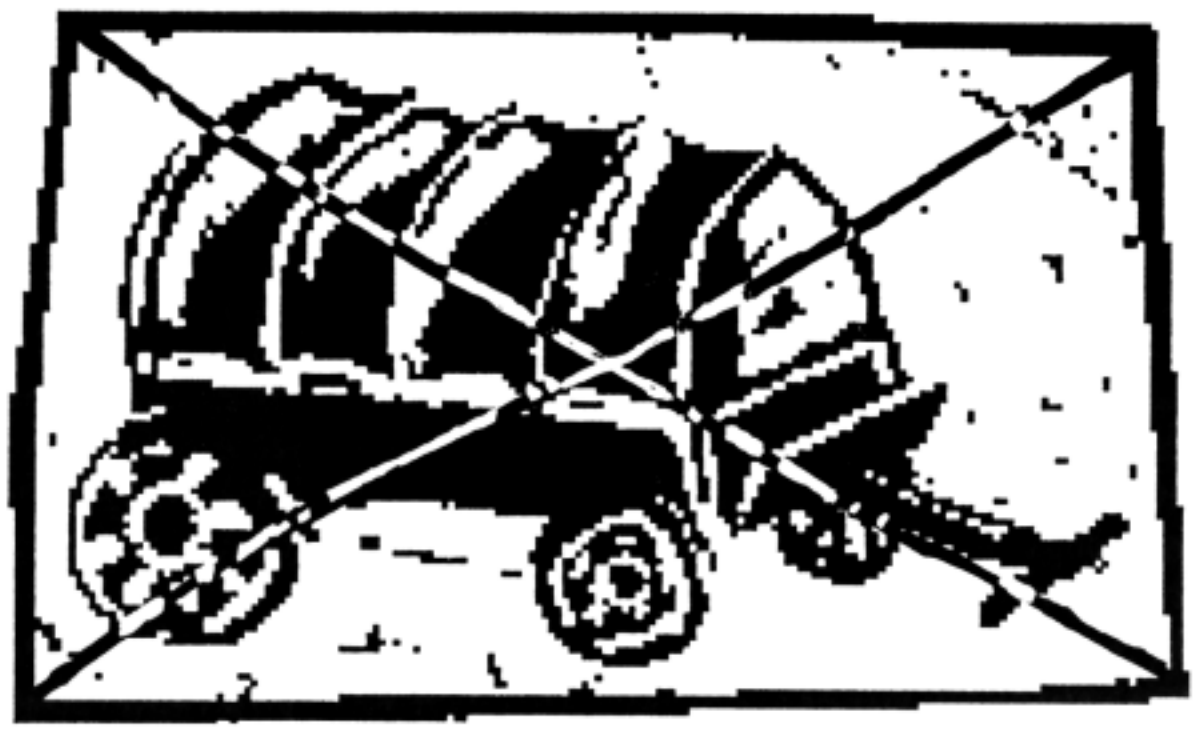
Que hacer ? Wat maak? Writing is an individual action which can only come into being fully when it is not divorced from its historical crucible. With historical context or reception zone, I am pointing at the assumed or shared ground of meaning. Borges has shown via Mesnard, in re-writing Cervantes, that no work can be autonomous and unchanging.

I tried working subversively. I could not, cannot, not even by approximation, fit word to the suffering of my black and brown compatriots (although writing is that extension of experience which allows you to be the other); and is the search for freedom and justice among whites (in general) not still too feeble to be able to speak, as a Whitey, of '*onse stryd*'? What I could and did try and do (as many of you here also), was on the one hand to undermine the petrified positions, the cultural stratagems and institutions, the retarded conceptions of the dominant Afrikaans culture, and on the other hand to sharpen the knowledge of the implications of the South African regime. At the outset of my intention was perhaps not moralistic, though implicitly it must have been a search for ethics, and I have to confess that I may be totally naive in my belief that a broader awareness must

lead to a greater sense of responsibility. Here I ought to admit to my Buddhist convictions that ignorance is a sin, and that a growing consciousness will constitute the grounds for transformation.

I attempted trespassing upon areas which may well fall outside the fields of concern of most South Africans. I am talking of Zen, surrealism, Pan-Africanism... Does that make of me a typical Western intellectual? Like bloody hell! (*Se moer, man!*) But I refuse to see my horizons shrink one single hairline, even in the name of the urgency and the specificity of the struggle. One pointedness is not contradiction with a scope of thinking. We are also univer-salists, inheritors of the cultural riches and diversity of humanity. *Mits dese trap ek maar net in die voetspore van 'n Soyinka, 'n Ngugi, 'n Achebe, 'n Laboutansi, 'n Kateb Yacine, n Sjeig Anta Diop, 'n Hambate Ba, 'n Tutuola, 'n Sembene Ousmane, om slegs enkele Afrikane te noem. Dit is 'n ander sin van skrywe,* the plural name of writing.

Dit moet seker erken word dat ek weinig interaksie het met my mede Suid-Afrikaners. Nou die dag nog het a wolf dit gestel dat ek eintlik irrelevant is, 'n soort skoenlapper anargis of 'n bourgeois libertyn, 'n literêre dandy, 'n ballas-krappende uitgewekene wat op buitelandse verhoë pronk met die geleende vere van "n volk se droefenis om sodoende die sensasie-beluste paternaliste jags te maak en natuurlik klinkende munt daaruit te slaan. Well yes, there was indeed a time when I (and others) were thought to be more disruptive. But the situation has meanwhile changed. First of all because we can no longer pretend that the longed for modifications will come about by a change in the hearts and minds of those who rule South Africa. The essential battle is not for the high ground of the Afrikaner heart – to think thus would be Afrikanocentric – although Afrikaners must, and I'm sure, will ever more, become part of the transformation, as South Africans.



As a writer I shall continue attempting to plot and chase the shifts in power and conceptions; to help keep alive the dream of a free, democratic, decent and just South Africa.

Drawings by Brett Murray

The real transformation has already taken place in attitudes, in power relationships (the state of emergency is a victory of the people), in awareness (which is why you are here today), in dimensions and modes of struggle.

How does the Afrikaner Become part of the majority? (Because there is a conscious majority, however diverse in its constituent components there is life after apartheid.) Beware of wishful thinking! We can shape our destiny as we are being shaped by historical forces. We have the chance of entering history, and not to be mere rejects, to become the subjects of history, not mere objects thereof. But to every birth its blood. Entering the struggle is the means of becoming a South African. In entering the true homeland of expanding solidarity, we may indeed write ourselves.

We are tied by the bonds of horror and the history of blood. Listening to the poetry of the other night, I was struck by the recurrence of images of blood. I then remembered the blood and the soil references of our crypto-fascist ancestors, the blood with which the pioneers claimed to have bought the land, the supposedly 'mixed blood' in the veins of those who are the offspring of our marriage with Africa, the bad blood then and now between warring factions, the red blood of suffering, sacrifice, and ultimately revolution, the thin blood of exile ... But we are also linked by the struggle and our adherence to the values crystallized in the struggle. Those constitute our specific universality, our contribution to the sum total of human aspirations. They are what make up our awareness of a South African cultural identity.

Which are these values? To name a few: anti-racism; non-racialism; one country, one land, one people –

Our contribution is our rich diversity, our recognition of the need to go beyond ourselves.

this really means the inviolability of our shared heritage; majority discipline; anti-chauvinism; the recognition of the example of workers' experience; the shift away from elitism; the road to socialism; a creative and transformative and healing view of the role of culture; third-worldism; Pan-Africanism; the practice of dialogue and tolerance and fellow-responsibility and democracy. For my part, I'd like to see more humanism, Marxism, self-reliance ... but I'm just greedy.

As a writer I shall continue attempting to plot and chase the shifts in power and conceptions; to help keep alive the dream of a free, democratic, decent and just South Africa; to help foster the notion of the ethics of resistance; of the need to build democracy, to elicit dialogue, to test ideas, to promote resilience, to nurture revolutionary patience; to ask for respect for the texture of consciousness; to shore up international solidarity; to shore up fire...

Our contribution is our rich diversity, our recognition of the need to go beyond ourselves, to enlarge, embrace; draw forward, maybe even to blend extremes whilst keeping the common good in mind.

I think I'm some way along this road. *Gee die hond nog net so n bitjie wind.* Nobody here wants to be prescriptive, but if you, my fellow Afrikaners, were to ask me for advice, I'd say – rather aphoristically and in a haphazard and incomplete fashion: He who travels alone travels fastest, but together we shall go further. You have as much cause, perhaps more, to be involved in the process of transformation as those against whom apartheid is aimed. You need nobody's permission to join the struggle. Guilt feelings and self-flagellation are self-indulgent sentiments, but an understanding of responsibilities gets you moving. It is in walking that you learn how to walk. Watch out for exultation of the hair shirt. Clear out the cellars. Watch out for the corruption of suffering, of self-pity. Don't go and sell yourselves as brave warriors.

To be against apartheid is normal, not heroic. Recognise the hidden racism of the white outside world who will carry you on the hands and sing praises to your courage, whilst conveniently forgetting your black comrades. Don't profit from anti-racism. Don't turn South Africa into an experimental terrain for your writer's fancies and fantasies. Keep moving, way beyond liberation.

Nothing is gained or established forever, no solution or form can be permanent, so remain vigilant. Probably nothing is lost forever either. It is a bastard to be a human being, but a dog doesn't even get a sip of wine. Know then that you, we, are privileged far beyond what we deserve, because we share in the writing and the struggling and in Africa. Remember that ours is the most noble cause that mankind could imagine, well worth living for. Go well.

As for me, an off-white Afrikaans-speaking South African African living temporarily abroad , I shall lift my nose to the wind: there's a smell of victory in the air. But just in case I get above my station, as a scribbler, I'd like to quote to you, finally, a rough approximation of a Brecht poem:

VRAE VAN 'N LESENDE ARBEIDER

Wie het Thebes van die sewe torings gebou?
In die boeke staan die name van konings.
Het die konings die rotsblokke nader gesleep?
En Babilon wat verskeie kere vernietig is -
wie het dit so dikwels weeropgetrek?
In watter huise
van die goudstralende Lima het die bouwerkers gewoon?
Waarheen het die messelaars saans gegaan
Wanneer 'n stuk muur van Sjina voltooi is?
Grootse Rome is vol triomfboë. Wie het dit opgerig?
Oor wie het die Cesars geseë vier?
Was daar
in die veels besonge Bisantiam dan slegs paleise
vir die inwoners? Selfs in saamgeprate Atlantis
het die besopenes snags om hulle slave gebrul.

Die jonge Alexander het Indië verower.
Hy alleen?
Cesar het die Galliers verslaan.
Was daar ten minste 'n kok saam met hom?
Flip van Spanje het gehuil toe sy vloot onder die branders verdwyn. Het niemand anders dan nie?
Frederik die Tweede was die oorwinnaar van die
Sewejarige Oorlog. Wie behalwe hy het ook gewen?

Elke bladsy 'n sege
Wie het die oorwinningsmaal gekook?

Elke tien jaar 'n heldefiguur.
Wie het die gelag betaal?

So baie berigte.
So baie vrae.

Breyten Breytenbach

A View From Within

Far from my parents' home
I dream of these men
exiled from their land of birth
politicians and thinkers who —
having conquered foreign lands
—come to rest close to home
creating a family life
which —while nursing their optimism
for tomorrow — will not erase yesterday's
hard memories

A lifestyle chosen deliberately
friends in the dozen yet friends one or two
I sit with them now in my father's house
filling up their glasses handing round snacks
and playing their favourite music
I retire for a while but
irresistibly return
to pamper and listen to these grown men
laughing over their past with boyish lights in their eyes
they stay on as the clock turns
drinking ceaselessly and soberly discussing
the day's events

how much I ask myself will their children know?
how deep will their sons read
into their fathers' lives?
will their daughters perceive them
as I see them now?
for their fears their mistakes their negligence
and — above all — their uncertainties?
will all these render them unapprehended heroes
ever-struggling men-children
whose mothers never stopped hoping
to find them alive?

Far away from home
I the daughter will remember such evenings
and carry in me as I tread through the night
into the morning
that light in your eyes
that light which took you through countless
such evenings
till you found your way back home

NATALIE AFRICA

Illustration by Kim Franklin

The triumph of peace

April 16 will remain indelibly etched into the minds of the world community. Never before has a leader been accorded such respect as Nelson Mandela when he addressed 70 000 celebrants at Wembley Stadium and billions of television viewers across the globe. The pictures speak for themselves, about the imminent destruction of apartheid ...

Clockwise from left: Natalie Cole; Celebrants at the concert; Patti Labelle; Terence Trent D'Arby;

Clockwise from top left:
Caiphus Semenya;
The Manhattans;
Tracey Chapman;
Letta Mbulu;
Sbikisha, left to right, Felicia Nkomo,
Julia Mathunjwa and Doreen Webster;
Mara Louw;
Centre: a jubilant Nelson Mandela

Of snakes and mice – iinyoka neempuku

as told by Vernie February

In the dusty old veld, where the sun shone mercilessly sometimes, there lived mother mouse with her two children. And, in that same old veld, some 1000 yards further on, in a hole, there lived mother snake with her two little snakes.

And, during the day, when mother mouse was busy, the veld mice played around, explored the veld, first timidly, then boldly. Until at last, they wandered off so far from their hole that they came upon a pool of clear crystal water, some five-hundred yards away. And when the sun shone it conjured up myriads of little diamonds on the water.

And, the snakes also explored their world, first timidly, then boldly, until they too came upon the pool of crystal clear water. The mice saw the snakes first. They turned and were about to run away. The snakes spoke to them. They stopped and listened:

'And you, what are you?
Such funny bodies.
Such funny heads
Such funny tails
Such funny noises
Peep, peep, peep
What are you?'

And the little mice answered: 'We are veld mice.'
Then, the mice asked the snakes:

'And you, what are you?
Such funny bodies
Just one long tail
No head
No body
No feet
Just one long tail
With everything on it
What are you?'

And the snakes answered: 'We are called snakes.'
And the mice answered: 'We like you.'
The veld mice and the snakes played together for the first time in the African veld. And they were happy. And the sun of Africa, as if it wanted to lend extra lustre to this wonderful moment, the sun shone so beautifully, that myriads and myriads of little diamonds were conjured up in the water. And the snakes danced with the mice and the mice with the snakes. They pirouetted, swooshed their tails, squeaked and hissed with glee, while myriads of diamonds glittered on the water.

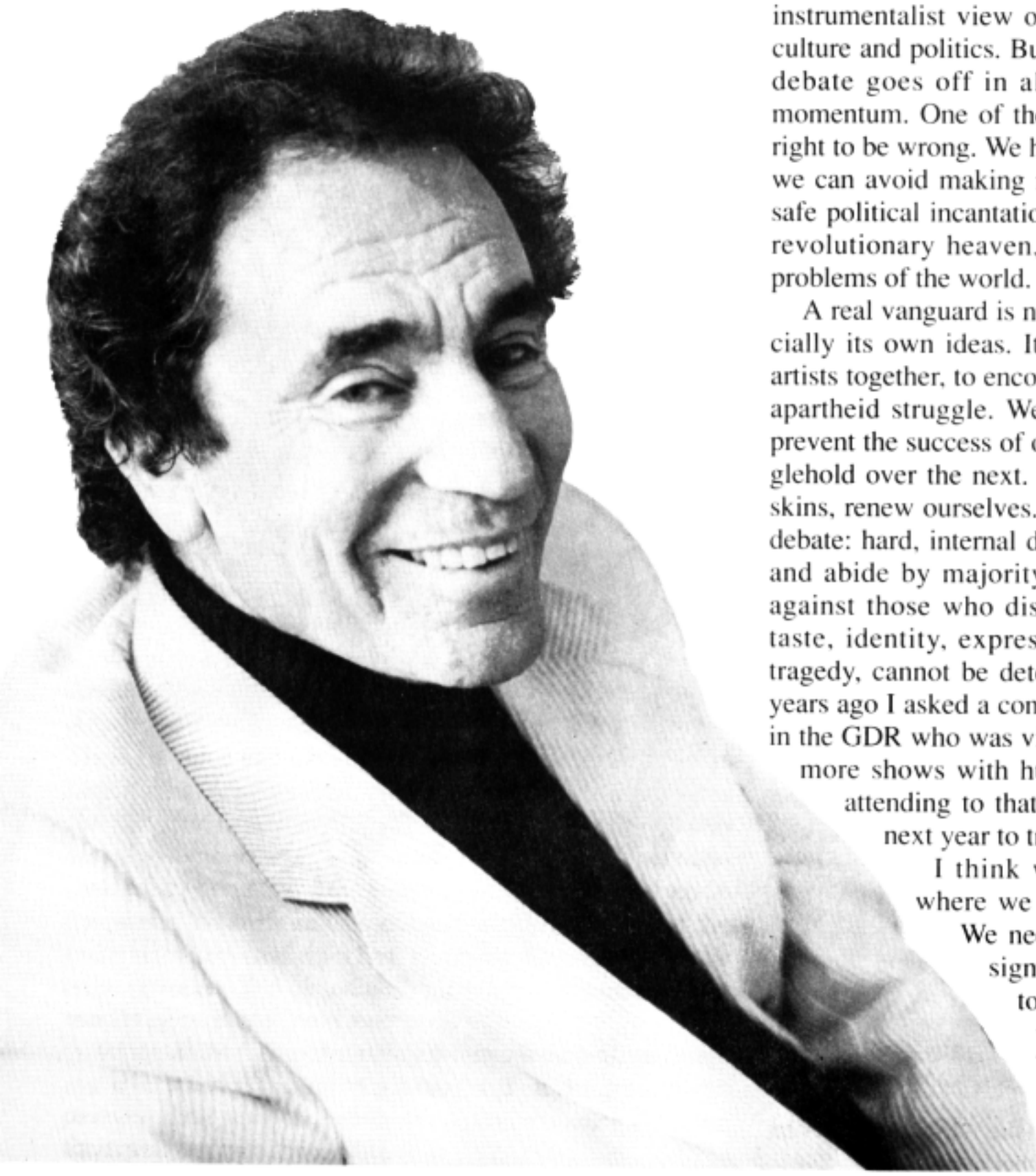
When night fell so dramatically in one swoop, enveloping everything, the mice scuttled off in a hurry, *peep, peeping* their way to their hole. And the snakes slithered their way through the veld.

Mother mouse asked her little ones:
'Where have you been? What have you done?'
The veld mice replied:
'We met these funny creatures
No body
Just one long tail
No feet
Just one long tail
And, they called themselves snakes.'
Then mother mouse shouted with fear:
'Snakes!
You played with them
Don't you know we're enemies
They eat us up
We're enemies.'
The veld mice trembled with fear for they did not know.
When the snakes came home their mother asked them:
'Where have you been? What did you do?'
The snakes answered their mother:
'We met these funny creatures
With funny bodies
And funny eyes
And funny tails
And funny sounds
They called themselves Veld Mice.'
Then mother snake shouted:
'Did you eat them up?'
The little snakes said:
'No, why should we eat them up?'
Then mother snake answered:
'Don't you know we live on mice.
We feed on them.'
The next day at the pool, the mice were there, the snakes were there. But whenever the snakes came closer, the veld mice ran away. At long last the snakes asked their friends:
'Why do you run away?
Are you afraid of us?
Yesterday, we had such fun
Yesterday, we were such friends.'
The veld mice – at a safe distance now, shouted back to the snakes:
'Yesterday, we did not know
that snakes were our enemies
Yesterday, our mother had not yet informed us.
We are *Iimpuku*
and you are *Iinyoka*.
Yesterday we did not know
that SNAKES are our ENEMIES.'
So saying the veld mice ran off into the African veld, *peep, peep, peeping* their way to their mother and to safety ...

Illustration by Jason Askew

Albie Sachs

A paper prepared by Albie Sachs for the in-house Seminar on Culture organised by the ANC in Lusaka last July provoked lively discussion. Called 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', it has since been widely reproduced and hotly debated in South Africa. MANDLA LANGA asked Albie to comment on the comments.



Rixaka: You proposed that ANC members should be banned for five years from saying that art is an instrument of struggle. Do you stand by that?

Albie: The aim was to get away from slogans and open up real debate. It was Barbara Masekela of the Cultural Department who pushed me to write the paper. She wanted to open up the discussion. She's not responsible for what I wrote, but must get the credit or blame for the fact that I put my ideas down.

I think the debate has been wonderful. Sometimes I have been praised for things I didn't say. I certainly don't believe you can ever separate art and politics, most definitely not in South Africa. What worries me is a narrow, instrumentalist view of art, that ends up denuding both culture and politics. But that's what debate is for. A good debate goes off in all directions, generates its own momentum. One of the things we are fighting for is the right to be wrong. We have to take chances. The only way we can avoid making mistakes is by endlessly repeating safe political incantations. Maybe that's the way to go to revolutionary heaven, but it doesn't always solve the problems of the world.

A real vanguard is never afraid to examine ideas, especially its own ideas. It was right in the 1980's to bring artists together, to encourage them to take part in the anti-apartheid struggle. We achieved that. Now we have to prevent the success of one decade from becoming a stranglehold over the next. Like snakes, we have to shed our skins, renew ourselves. We are only used to two kinds of debate: hard, internal debate, where we thrash things out and abide by majority decisions, and tough polemics against those who disagree with us. But questions of taste, identity, expressiveness, issues of humour and tragedy, cannot be determined by majority vote. A few years ago I asked a comrade from the Ministry of Culture in the GDR who was visiting Maputo why there were not more shows with humourists in his country. We are attending to that, he told me, it is in our Plan for next year to train five humourists.

I think we need a new kind of debate, where we share our dilemmas with others. We need a different tone. To me it is a sign of confidence, not of weakness, to be able to discuss our doubts and weaknesses in an open fashion. We don't have to hammer away at each other, just talk.

My worry is not about being dominated by the cultural desk,

which, after all, was set up to open the doors to cultural interchange as part of a move away from the total boycott; when we end apartheid, the boycott and sanctions will end quite naturally. My concern is for far deeper impediments to our creativity. We are dominated in our cultural imaginations by the image of the enemy. Apartheid camps in our heads, sets the battle-lines for our creative work. Then we are dominated by fear about what our comrades will say. No one knows better than I what a wonderful thing it is to be loved and urged to live by one's comrades. Yet comradeship and affection should not lead to timidity and fear of being criticised. We are freedom-fighters – we must feel free inside ourselves. Finally, there is a complicated form of domination which I would call the officialisation of our dreams. We take our goals and our hopes, our anger and our longings, and somehow convert them into formulae which are supposed to inspire, but which in reality hold us back, because everything has already been said in the formula, and the only purpose of artistic work is to prove the formula correct.

Rixaka: Excuse the interruption, but you haven't answered the question put to you.

Albie: Correct. The fact is that a lot has happened since I wrote those provocative words about banning us from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle. If de Klerk can announce that he has lifted banning orders, so can I. I hereby declare that my proposed banning order is invalid, and that; the only ban we should have in the ANC is a ban on banning orders.

Rixaka: Your query as to whether ANC members discussed the role of the white working class when they went to bed, caused much amusement, but was it fair?

Albie: I'm informed by a source I fully trust, that it is grossly unfair. When the male comrades are making love, she told me, they don't discuss the role of the white working class, they discuss the role of the black working class.

Rixaka: More seriously, some people see your remarks as part of a wider series of compromises by our leaders. Aren't we compromising too much?

Albie: I'm not sure that the word 'compromise' is the most appropriate. It's not just a question of how strong the two sides are, though clearly that's a major factor. Our objective is to serve the interests of the people. It might not be in the interest of the people to struggle on for another two decades, win a total victory, and inherit ruins. In addition, a whole new series of problems would begin. Samora used to say: where there's revolution, there's counter-revolution - the defeated enemy engages in civil war, internationalises the struggle, imposes boycotts and isolation on your country. The Mozambican people had fifteen years of war after achieving Independence. Hundreds of thousands died, the whole rural economy was destroyed, schools and hospitals were burnt down. Some reactionaries would like to maneouvre us into a similar position, so that having lost the political battle, they can become the contras, the Renamos of the future. We have to avoid that.

This has implications for culture, for freedom of speech and the free circulation of ideas. I think it is far better to have the opposition in Parliament than driven Underground. Mao once said: let a hundred flowers blossom, different schools of thought contend. Yet he couldn't follow through. It was impossible to have free cultural development outside of a democratic political culture, and he ended up by warning about the necessity to cut off the heads of the weeds. China is still struggling to achieve a clear political identity. I think sometimes we worry too much about the weeds and not enough about our own blossoms.

Rixaka: I thought you were against solemnity; now you're getting a bit heavy. Don't you have a new provocation for our readers?

Albie: Yes, I've got a good one, just for Rixaka. "I'm tired of being nonracial. "

Rixaka: You can't be serious.

Albie: I'm just as serious as ever I was. You remember how fed up we used to get with the terms non-European, non-white. Sylvester Stein even wrote a book about a chauffeur who claimed he came from non-Europe. Now I'm supposed to be a non-racial. Our policies, our thinking is non-racial, that's correct. The society we want will be a non-racial one, in the sense that people will be judged for who they are and not according to race. But this is only the negative aspect, the absence of racism. It doesn't tell us who we are, how we express our personality. Non-racism is just the beginning. We have to get beyond it, explore the affirmative side of our nature, and work out in positive terms what it means to be a new South African. But that can wait for another debate.

Photo by Sandra Cumming

Women writers: a separate entity

This paper was delivered by SANKIE NKONDO at the Victoria Falls Conference of ANC and Afrikaner writers. It puts into sharp focus the conundrums facing South African women writers.

THE TOPIC SUGGESTS that the woman in South Africa is a separate entity. This position attaches a false status to the woman writer because she remains part and parcel of the South African society and the community of the writers both within South Africa itself and the world. The concept of 'separate' presupposes geographic demarcation, distance in space and time, and this is not the case. What distinguishes her from the other writers in South Africa as determined by the political system is race, gender and class. Therefore, if we accept 'different' as the operative term, we allow ourselves a broader scope for interpretation. Writers within South Africa are still referred to in racial terms and their literature is black or white, simply because their conditions in life are different. Their interpretations of the apartheid experience tend to be different because they come from different milieus. It is correct then for the moment to speak of white, African, Coloured or Indian woman writers as special entities.

Apartheid discriminates against all women; in South Africa it is the black woman in particular who in addition to gender discrimination suffers from national, race and social inequalities. Because of this, black and white women writers in South Africa find themselves in a disadvantaged situation. Their life experiences are limited by racial segregation. Racism has denied women a broad life-view; they exist within an atmosphere of racial antagonism. Black and white remain strangers within a common geographic setting.

Apartheid is structured along definite lines: patriarchy is a legalised form, women and men are regarded unequal at work, in the home and in political and educational institutions. The system makes for women's subordination which provides the flesh and blood of female subjectivity and ensures male supremacy. Women as a gender group have been encouraged to pursue non-academic fields of study so as to channel their ambitions to inferior institutions. But those women who manage to disturb the patriarchal traditions by acquiring profitable standards of education which enable them to write, face yet other problems because the male-female relationship continues to maintain a hierarchical pattern. The time and atmosphere contributing towards creative writing is absent.

The South African woman writer has shown a great determination to create, despite the absence of adequate

The South African woman writer has a painful story to tell to her countrymen and women and the world at large, especially the black woman writer who has to give birth for the graveyard.

facilities and the appropriate atmosphere. The circumstances for sustaining creation are especially demanding on her if she is a mother. Motherhood means being instantly interruptible, responsible and responsive. Children need a mother and , in our volatile country, the family must often be the centre for love and health. Destruction has become a habit. There is no continuity in work started, interrupted, deferred or postponed. This makes for blockaged, and poor literary output. The result has been that what needs to be written in most times is never written. And if between breaks the black writer manages to create, then the product is doomed to become feeble or affected by her exhaustion. She is utterly devastated and only the urge to write keeps her going because she has a story to tell.

The South African woman writer has a painful story to tell to her countrymen and women and the world at large, especially the black woman writer who has to give birth for the graveyard, see men and children die in agony and pain. As hers is a life of struggle and survival, her sensitivity then becomes greater. This does not mean that she is a better writer but that her life is constantly providing themes. She lives amidst poverty, hunger, squalor, want, daily arrests, ruthlessness and death. For her to be part and parcel of the developments in that country, she sets herself the duty of exposing the flagrant injustices perpetrated by the regime and ultimately contribute towards finding solutions to the prevailing problems. The realities of the South African situation provide themes for the writers and chart out a pattern of their relevance.

What then can we say is the role of the female writer in South Africa? Can she commit herself to that particular role? The situation inside our country demands of us to be part of the coming change, to be part of the harmonious future. Our situation demands that all women writers create a literature that expresses the wishes and aspirations of the masses of the South African society. Women writers cannot be a separate entity; they ought to be part and parcel of those forces working towards a non-racial, democratic, non- sexist unitary society. These positions will enable us to write about universal human issues, particularly the inhuman conditions of apartheid colonialism. She has to commit herself to a political consciousness encompassing the understanding of the interrelatedness of colonialism, imperialism and apartheid and how these affect and determine the destinies of people. She needs to know the dialectics of human society, the role and effects of patriarchy and traditional practices against women, the effects of poverty and ignorance. The writer should understand how women, like other minority groups,

Left; Tears of Africa, charcoal and collage, 1988, by Mmakgabo Mapulo Helen Sibidi
Above; Where to Go?, linoleum relief print, 1986, by David Hlongwane

have adopted various forms of accommodation to conceal whatever power and strength they have to avoid anything that looks like a threat or competition.

The history of oppression has subjected women to feeling defenceless about their situation. The role of the concerned writer is to project women as acting and perceiving, not only as acted-upon and perceived. The woman writer has to contribute to the process of transformation and the improvement of male-female relations that are nothing but products of apartheid colonialism. This is politico-literacy choice and commitment, which should discard and displace the culture of fear, insecurity, aggression, pain, tears, discomfort, hostility and death. Her task includes correcting all those distortions identified with South African culture. The process of rebuilding through literature a truthful literary history entails reforming the women's image as portrayed in male-dominated literature.

Apartheid has limited the women's image to stereotypes, of course this is not different from the general approach by capitalist literature. The woman is always-being seen in the eyes of the men with attributes of instability, confinement, irrationality, compliancy, passivity, piety and spirituality. She is always painted as a whore and a shrew. The woman writer may want to mention female genitalia. The women's biology therefore becomes an important and necessary aspect for her but it

is not all she is and this should not be used to devalue or limit her in her everyday activities. The women's biology has been made her destiny over the ages.

The South African woman writer cannot be a separate entity, she too has been affected by apartheid. Some female writers choose the comfortable path of producing for apartheid institutions and thus contribute towards the entrenchment of the Bantu Education system. They have produced literature orientated towards shaping a racial society. The content of most of this literature is generally racist, commercial, and inferior in outlook. The literature is for primary and secondary schools and very little for university students where the market is limited. Here the reality of our racist literature of *Amakeia*, Sir Rider Haggard's *Nada the Lily* and his concept of noble savage, *King Solomon's Mines* , are part of this dehumanising literature.

There is another aspect of South African writing, and this is liberal writing. More and more writers are beginning to ask themselves what role are they to play at this historic moment. Nadine Gordimer, one of the prominent women writers, accepted the limitation of the white writer in South Africa and has in fact made the lack of communication and understanding the theme of her writing. Lewis Nkosi describes Nadine's development as that ' which was largely concerned with the need for private morality and individual choice, (*The Lying Days, A World of Strangers)* to that which developed towards the politics of public writing, liberal in outlook as in *July's People*.'

Nadine's writing, reflects her power of observation and concern for the dispossessed lot. Olive Schreiner, through her writing addresses the issue of women's oppression in a skillful manner.

Her story *Three Dreams in a Desert* (under a Mimosa tree), gives a travelogue of women's oppression through a dream. The story unfolds in three parts or phases where firstly a female beast of burden waits under the desert sun and sand. The beast has been burying its head under the sand for what seemed like centuries. But at the end the beast rises against her suffering and, despite the weaknesses caused by years of inaction, she staggers to her knees.

The second part of her author's dream portrays a woman standing on the bank of a river. The bank is steep and high. An old man meets her and asks her what she wants. She replies: 'I am a woman; I am seeking for the land of freedom.' He says to her, 'It is before you.' The woman shades her eyes, scrutinizes beyond the horizon and sees trees and hills and the sun shining on them. He says to her: 'That is the land of freedom'. The man explains to her that there is only one way of reaching that land, and the path goes down the banks of labour, through the water of suffering.

She is advised to take off the clothes she wore in the desert, remove the mantle of received opinions; the shoes of dependence. As she is about to swim across she hears the sound of thudding feet of those who would follow across the water's edge and beat the ground flat ten thousand times. The entire human race would pass across the bridge formed by those who will fall along the way. Olive Schreiner ends her story by projecting a hopeful future where men and women would march together hand in hand. She touches on women's conditions without lecturing. She is very skillful and thorough in her approach. This skill and approach is what perhaps lacks in some well- intended works of art.

Professor Nkosi, in his viewing of South African liter-

Above; Crossroads, detail of Hector Pietersen and Crying Pain, by Sydney Holo Below; Baleka Kgositsile photo by Basetsana Thokoane Right; detail from the cover of Bessie Head's 'When Rain Clouds Gather'

ature comments strongly on the subliminal nature of our literature. He observes that most of it lacks profundity. What it does, he asserts, is to repeat the everyday happenings in apartheid South Africa. He claims that most of present day writing in South Africa lacks the mediation of artistic language and form, it fails to illuminate what is going on in the dark recesses of the national psyche. He cites Miriam Tlali's *Amandla* and Lauretta Ngcobo's *Cross of Gold* as examples of superficial works of art. He goes on to describe their prose as being as dead as the tomb in which language itself is imprisoned.

Miriam Tlali, in her novel *Amandla* has taken a resolute approach to South African problems. The easy humour, the irony and the tolerance found in *Muriel at the Metropolitan* is gone. All characters in the novel know that they have to unite against apartheid. Miriam's literature reflects life and its realities. The political message is carried across, for she declares through one of her characters that '... Talking about this land is talking about ourselves.' Miriam and Lauretta and many others may not be as skillful as Olive Schreiner, they still do not have the literacy experience she had. All they are engaged in now is to present the story.

The entire human race would pass across the bridge formed by those who will fall along the way.

But Bessie Head, a much more experienced writer presented her message in a rather unique form; her stories are in fact novelettes of standard quality. In her novel *Maru* , Head shows the woman as a victim of society's prejudices, worst of all belonging to a minority group. Tribal injustices are part of Margaret's humiliating circumstances of suffering. The society and it's internal contradictions are seen in this women's loneliness. *A Question of Power*, another of Bessie's novels, sharply points at the psychological effects of apartheid politics. Elizabeth, a young girl, begins to have nightmares when the headmaster at her school tells her that her mother has been put away in an asylum because of her affair with Elizabeth's father, a black stable boy.

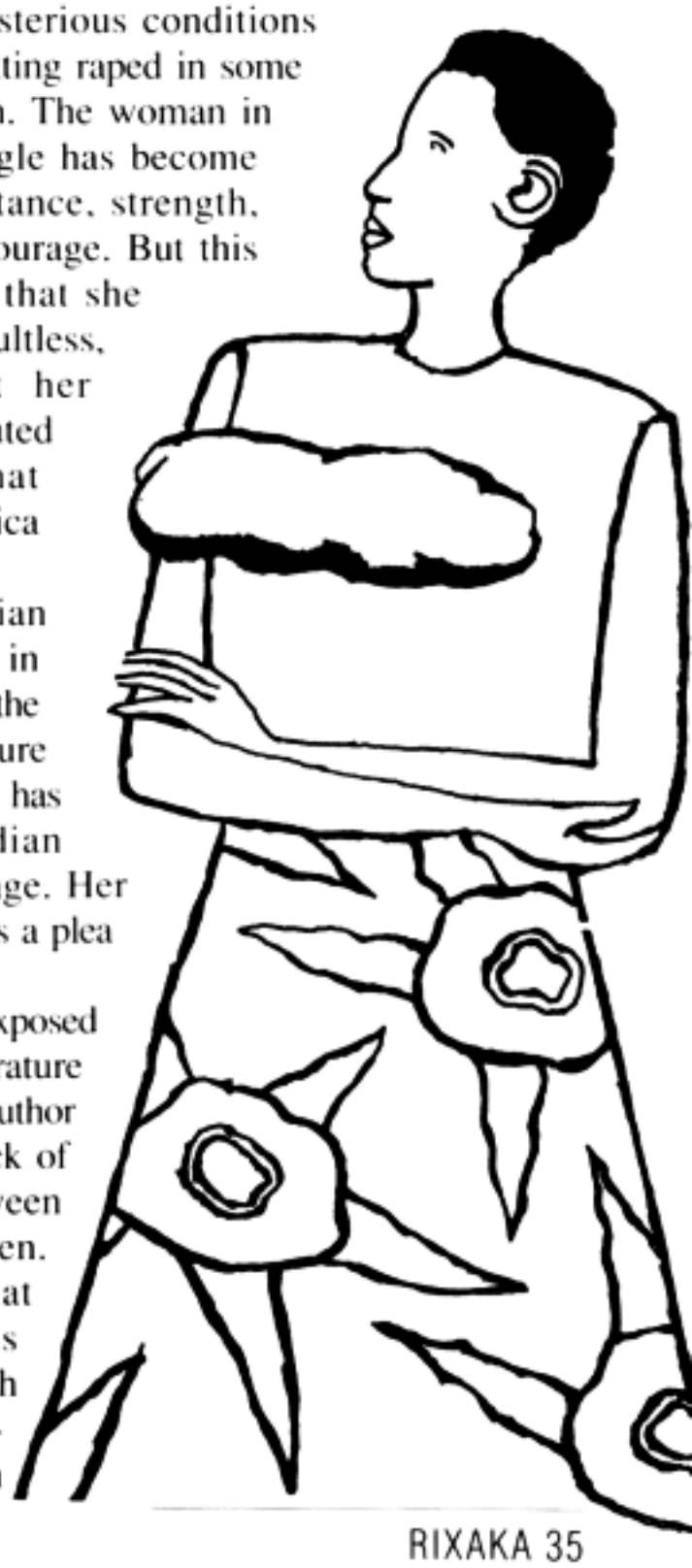
Whether or not this is Bessie's own origins, her nightmare doubtlessly began as soon as she was old enough to perceive that the country that spawned her was unbelievably insane.

Bessie Head always wrote for a hopeful future. She wrote amidst gloom, despair and death, a world created by racists. Her writing expands to the areas of literature which also interpret the history of her people. She moves from tribal manifestations as experienced by Margaret to mystical and mysterious complicated passages of dreams in *A Question of Power.*

She creates strong convincing characters and she spreads out her theme to cover everyday foibles of man. Head felt very strongly on the issue of segregation and it is understood when she says:

'If I had to write one day I would just like to say people are people and not damn white or black. Perhaps if I was a good enough writer I could still write damn black and still make people live.'

Black South African literature is dominated by the 'mother-stereotype', a figure that is a result of intense suffering of women in South Africa. If it's not their husbands who are detained under all these atrocious apartheid laws, or dying from unprovoked situations, it is their sons who disappear under mysterious conditions or their daughters getting raped in some South African prison. The woman in South African struggle has become the symbol of resistance, strength, determination and courage. But this should not suggest that she is an ideal being, faultless, but to mean that her strength has contributed immensely to what we see in South Africa today.



Amongst the Indian writers Brenda Kali, in her novels, brings out the aspect of Indian culture telling us how culture has for years kept Indian women under bondage. Her books are more or less a plea for liberation.

One has not been exposed to any Afrikaans literature written by a female author in English, due to lack of communication between South African women. But we must say that our liberation as women and South Africans lies in communication. We can

achieve self-realisation and freedom only when the fears are dispelled. Communication implies growth. Ideas and thoughts must be shared especially by those that need to create a reliable future.

The South African woman writer cannot afford to be a separate entity in conditions that so much demand of her to be the voice of the people. Literature mirrors the life of the country, its creeds and customs, the character of the people and their ideals and aspirations.

It is not surprising then that South African literature by progressive authors shares certain features and common themes. Some of the themes and subjects may sound commonplace and recurrent – the objective here is to communicate with the world.

Female writers have also expressed their views through the genre of poetry. This medium seems to have taken preference in the South African literary scene perhaps because poems can be read to large audience at a time; they are faster to create and easier to destroy when danger looms; poetry also,when read, bridges the distance between the author and the audience. The decade of the seventies gave birth to poets like Christine Douts, Thembeka Mbobo, Jennifer Davis and others. Within the liberation movement female poets have surfaced. We have names like Phyllis Altman, Dee September, Lindiwe Mabuza, Baleka Kgositsile, Susan Lamu, Gloria Mtungwa and others associated with what may be called exile. When we look into the writing of Jennifer Davis, we are engaged by themes which are usually mental experiences, though at times we get a picture of her as a teacher, factory worker and a person living in present-day South Africa. Her world view is wide and she marvels in dealing with realities.

The female writer in the liberation movement talks of hope and the future life, experiences of war, love, hate, peace, blood, the trench, heart beat, pulse, the long road, the night, dawn and sunrise.

The female writer in the liberation movement talks of hope and the future life, experiences of war, love, hate, peace, blood, the trench, heartbeat, pulse, the long road, the night, dawn and sunrise. These writers write for the perpetuation of life, the development of peoples, for the extermination and elimination of the genocidal system and racial prejudice. Female writers are part and parcel of the inevitable revolution that seeks to take the people back to their truthful history, to put it in its proper perspective and also to contribute towards the new history which the majority of the people envisage. The female writer should commit herself to correct all false images created about the woman in South Africa. The delicate, sophisticated tender city girl portrayed in some of the unrevolutionary literature from South Africa has to be regarded as literature diverting the woman from her real problems. Writing and relating to women's problems presupposes an in-depth understanding of the woman, giving her courage when her partially acquired rights are threatened. Some women have tended to withdraw to their shells when they are accused of behaving like men whenever men's positions are at stake. Molara-Ogundipe Leslie comments on this type of woman:

'Womanhood is not only gender because there are situations existing where a woman adopts other gender roles ... women who are called 'men' when they attain certain levels of economic and social independence.'

Part of the commitment in this discussion is what one can comprehend in some lines of the following poem such as Lindiwe Mabuza's 'Faces of Commitment':

'I thought of you
In the theatre of war
which all must enter
To find exits to life
Especially because when it broadcasts
And scatters us apart
It also defines precisely
To bind us closer'

In Baleka Kgositile's poetry we are confronted by a rich imagery used in describing fertility, pregnancy and the

Left; Shebeen, linoleum relief, 1982, by Tommy Motswai
Right; Woman washing dishes, enamel paint on clay, 1985, by Noria Mabasa

pangs of childbirth. She relates these experiences to the absence of justice in our country. Though in her poetry she talks of joys of motherhood, she also refers to the blood, that flows in the country; hope recurs in her poetry – growth and life too. Lindiwe Mabuza in her anger and frustration addresses us to institutionalised genocide of apartheid laws and chambers that manufacture death. The art of these writers has been put to the service of the people because it talks of the people.

Irony and satire are literary devices greatly favoured by South African writers in general. Irony has been used to depict the racially divided country and its practices. Apartheid is absurd and needs exposure for us to reveal the convulsions that have gripped the regime which is teteering on the crevices of an open grave. What can the female writer write about if not this? But this not all, it is the larger part of what makes her suffers. Satire has been used to ridicule the inhuman system. The element of urgency lingers in South African literature and most of the imagery functions in a way to search for a a solution.

The themes dominating South African literature are poverty in the slums, deaths in detention, arrests, deaths in the streets, forced removals, etc. On forced removals Ponki Khazamula, in here story 'We Will Not Be Moved', published in *Whispering Lands*, successfully portrays the doubtless, courageous African woman who dares to defy authority by refusing to leave her home. The strength of Khazamula's story is not the tale of the woman refusing to leave her place but in how she addresses the subject, the skill with which here pride and humanity is projected. The writer avoided being superficial.

Njabulo Ndebele on the question of skillful writing emphasises what Nkosi criticises and reflects as a weakness in South African literature. He elucidates:

'One major effects is that the writing's probing into the South African experience has been largely superficial. This superficiality comes from the tendency to produce fiction that is built around the interaction of surface symbols of the South African reality. These symbols can be easily characterised as one of either good or evil, or even more accurately, symbols of evil on the one hand, and symbols of the victims of evil on the other hand...'

Autobiography is also one form which women writers attempt to narrate the conditions of women.

Female writers may be encouraged to write about issues affecting women mostly, but this is not the beginning and the end of themes for them. Female writers are whole beings, women, citizens. They are part and parcel of the society and its history, they live within the socio-political-economico realities of South Africa.

Female writers are whole beings, women, citizens, they are part and parcel of the society and its history

After all, culture does not in any way consist of individual superficial aspects of human life, but also has to be understood as the total being and consciousness of people's interaction with nature as well as with other people. Within that interaction one can identify women's specific conditions that should concern all sensitive beings. Female writers will write about women's issues, but should not suggest that female characters created by women writers are automatically more superior and reflective than those formed by men. But it should be understood to mean that female writers are in a better position to address those issues that affect women as women, those issues that may miss the attention of the male writer due to patriarchal influences and orientation and attitudes that have made men take things for granted.

Achmat Dangor's observation of the woman character in his story 'Jobman' illustrates this very clearly. The dumb male character through sign language translated by his wife becomes articulate and eloquent, but the wife who is able to speak is practically dumb. Her husband's dumbness had silenced her too. 'Men writers silence their women characters.' He elaborates:'I found that the way to describe a person who is robbed of their powers of articulation is 'emasculate'.

All power of decision has been ripped off from women through subjugation of women by systems that exploit one gender as against the other. The most acceptable practice would be that which infuses women characters with the integrity that is demanded of all characters. There have been men who portray female characters positively (Tolstoy in *War and Peace*; Chinua Achebe in *Anthills of the Savanna*; Ayi Kwei Armah in his novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*) but these are in the minority.

What then would we say is the commitment of the South African female writer in view of the foregoing-problems? The female writer is to be committed in three ways: first as a writer, as a woman and as a person aspiring for a better world; her womanhood is implicated in all three. The South African woman writer has to be committed in her art; she should seek to demonstrate and do justice to her craft. She has to be committed to her vision; she should be willing to stand up and fight injustice. There is very little room or none at all for art that is

produced for art's sake. The masses are on the march, so is the writer's pen. The writer should be able to say 'I am', echo a testimony of a vital, vibrant humanity.

The censorship board is ready with sharpened fangs to pounce on such a writer but the best art is that which can subtly pass on the message, that will be read by politicians; good art should be able to survive storms. South African literature though has not been free of politics. Critics have criticised our literature for being dominated by political themes. What is politics if not life, if not the everyday bread and butter issues? Any reasonable critic or person should realise that apartheid exists and it dominates people's lives. The female writer cannot write about the social ills without situating her awareness and solutions within the broader context of colonialism and imperialism. The writer has obligations both moral and social towards her people. But the most important of obligations she must fulfil to the nation is that of a truthful, literary nature.

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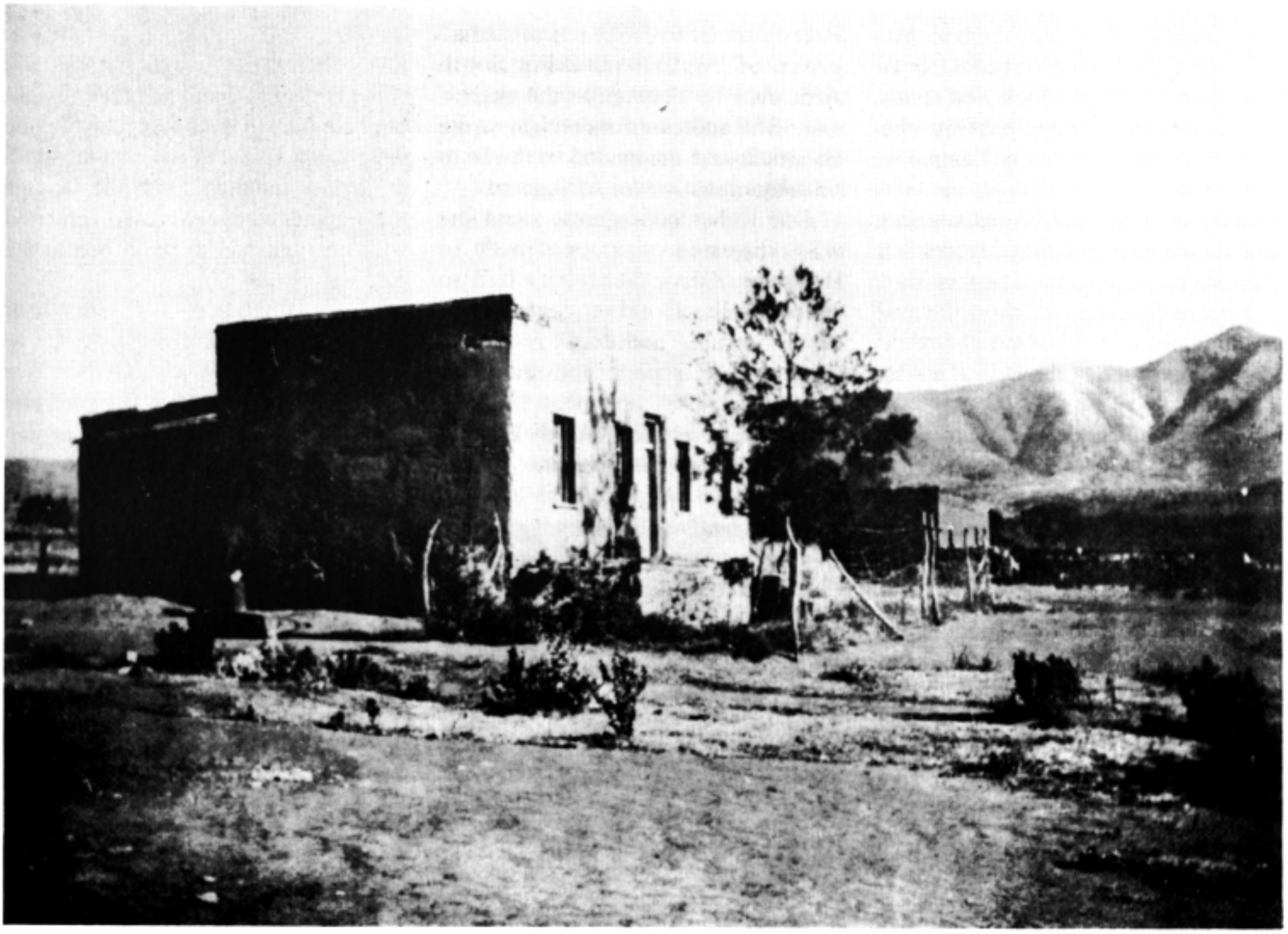
Below; one of a triptych called Mama let me go, linocut by David Hlongwane

Olive Schreiner

This article was written by RAY ALEXANDER in 1965 prior to her forced departure from South Africa, for a book edited by Zelda Friedlander entitled *Until the Heart Changes: a Garland for Olive Schreiner.*



Cawoods farm at Ganna Hoek, Cradock, where Olive Schreiner completed the first draft of 'Story of an African Farm'

OLIVE SCHREINER was born on the March 24,1855 at the Witterbergen mission station in what was to become the Herschel district of the Cape Colony.

She had a deep, compassionate sympathy with the common people. Her talents, activities and her marriage gave her entreè to the inner circles of the South African establishment. Yet, she never allowed her associations with Rhodes, Merriman, Sauer, Molteno and other leading members of the Cape Society to blunt her sense of human values or to betray her principles.

A great humanist, courageous writer and eloquent speaker, she used her charm and talent to champion the cause of the oppressed and denounced social injustice. That is why her ideas ring as true and fresh today as when she expressed them 60 years ago.

She identified herself, in particular, with three causes: the feminist movement, anti-imperialism and the protest against racial oppression.

She was drawn into the suffragette movement during her stays in England (1881-1891, 1893-4, 1913-1920) where she associated with Sylvia Pankhurst, Havelock Ellis, Bernard Shaw, the Pethick Lawrences, Edward Carpenter, M. W. Nevinson, Eleanor Marx and other leaders of advanced thought. There she broadened her vision and gained insight into the social forces that were to erupt in World War I and the Russian Revolution.

She identified at the outset with the battle of the English women for the vote and the removal of disabilities. As she observed in a letter of March 1909 to Pethick Lawrence, the importance of the movement was the work done in 'Educating women and indeed the world to know what women can do'.

She gave artistic expression to her resentment of women's disabilities and humiliation suffered at the hands of males in her book *Women and Labour* and *From Man To Man.* She

'All persons born in the country or permanently resident here should be one in the eye of the state.'

gave practical expression to her resentment and to her desire to change womens' outlook and status by taking an active part in the Womens Enfranchisement League in the Cape in 1908.

She combined her life as a writer and her activities as a public leader in a harmonious and integrated personality.

The same unity of thought and action appears in the stand she made against the attack of the British on the Boer Republic in 1899, one of a small group of English-speaking South Africans who denounced the aggression. She addressed meetings, wrote an article and demanded the right to self-determination for Afrikaners.

Due to her courageous stand she was interned and confined to Hanover. Olive Schreiner had to report to the Commander's office every morning and could not leave town without a pass. The town was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. She suffered badly from asthma and was allowed to have a light all night but had to keep the blinds closed. She went for walks into the koppies with the Visser families (from the Orange Free State who were also interned with her) but had to be in before the gate was closed (1).

Her husband, Cronwright Schreiner, was not given a permit to leave Cape Town to visit her, her home in Johannesburg was looted and her manuscript *Women and Labour* was burnt in the process.

Below: Schreiner (centre standing) at Eastbourne, April 1881, shortly after arriving in England Above right; Schreiner with Samuel Cronwright Schreiner, 1894 Right; portrait of Olive Schreiner

She hated wars against Black people as much as against Whites. The invasion of Mashonaland by Rhodes' Pioneers revolted her. She gave creative expression to her sentiment in a book *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) in which she indicted Rhodes, who had been a personal friend of hers. This work still stands as a notable exposure of colonialism and its brutalities against an innocent and defenceless African people. It was not only colonialism that she rejected. Her deep and abiding faith in humanity led her to reject any social system rooted in racial discrimination and social injustice. In her comment on *Closer Union*, written in October 1908, she proclaimed her belief in the principle of a common franchise with no restriction of race or colour for all South Africans.

> 'All persons born in the country or permanently resident here should be one in the eye of the state. Any attempt to base our national life on distinctions of race and colour, as such, will after the lapse of many years, prove fatal.'

She identified herself with the cause of the common man throughout the world. Few South Africans of her time had her understanding of the underlying causes of tension and conflict in Tzarist Russia. In 1905, on the

'Men and women are the right and left sides of humanity, capable of moving anywhere together and nowhere alone.'

occasion of the mass meeting in Cape Town, organised by the Socialist Democratic Federation to express sympathy with the Russian Revolution, Olive, unable to attend, wrote what her thoughts were:

> 'With those who in far-off Russia are today carrying on the age-long war of humanity towards a larger freedom and a higher justice, a war which has been waged through the ages, now by this people and then by that; now a small nation against one that would subjugate it; then by a class; then by a race; now for religious freedom then for the right of free thought and speech; but which when looked at from the highest, has always been essentially one battle, fought with one end, now with success and then with seeming failure; but always bringing nearer by the minute and imperceptible degrees that time in the future, when a free and united humanity, a truly human life shall be possible on earth. Today the great is passing into the hands of the most Russian people. With how much of immediate success or failure the battle will be fought, we cannot say; but that it will be with ultimate success we know and that it is a battle not fought for themselves alone, but for all the world, we know also.'

With prophetic insight, she ended her letter by expressing her belief:

> 'that this movement in Russia we are witnessing the beginning of the greatest event that has taken place in the history of humanity during the last century.' (2)

The same year, she addressed a letter to Johannesburg shop assistants which was received by the meeting with great applause. Her letter reads as follows: 'I am glad to hear of your meeting in Johannesburg for several reasons. I am glad because it shows that at last we in South Africa are, in part, waking up to take our place among other civilized nations in the great struggle for healthier and sounder conditions of labour. I am glad that in your meeting men and women are combined, because men and women are the right and left sides of humanity, capable of moving anywhere together and nowhere alone. I am specially glad that women workers are taking their place in this meeting, because, as the most poorly paid and heavily pressed section of workers - denied in all but a few enlightened societies.... even that small means of making her wants felt which the exercise of the franchise give to the other tax paying workers in free countries, it is especially necessary that women workers should learn solidly to combine.

'I hope your meeting will be large and successful. Remember it is not for yourself alone that you are working. It may seem a small thing for a shop girl in Johannesburg to be asking a few a few shillings more, or a room with decent air, but what each one is doing is really a great thing. You are taking part in a great movement that is going on in the countries all over the world, to benefit and make more fair and healthful women's conditions of life and if you should personally have to live and suffer by the part you play, remember you are not playing it for yourself alone. It seems a small part: remember it is really large.' (3)

Olive Schreiner is therefore regarded with great esteem by all progressive people in our country.

FOOTNOTES

1. Letter from Mr. Hugh Vimpany Senior. Aged 91, the oldest living resident of Hanover.
2. S.A. News 6/2/1905
3. S.A. News

Ray Alexander has written for the International Labour Organisation in Lusaka since 1968. She was the first national secretary of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and played a leading role in organising the Food & Canning Workers' Unions (FCWU) of which she was a General-Secretary until the regime banned her from trade union work in 1953.

The Shelter of Memories

The dust-coloured trucks unroll a
thousand loops of razor barbed-wire
and the men in uniform strut
gun at the hip visored cap hiding eyes behind
wraparound mirrored sunglasses

The warriors return bleeding, legs and hands
lacerated by jagged edges of sharpnesses onto
which slivers of flesh cling like skewered choice
bits of meat
But they embrace, having survived another day of
battle
to return tired and unknown to their lairs where they
sleep
and kept watch
and a silent vigil over one of theirs who has been
fatally
punctured

The children ask about the meaning of embraces
and are told that these embraces have nothing to do
with the warmth of bodies issuing through the thin
fabric of cloth
These are gestures warring men and women perform
at the end or beginning of a momentous ritual
This is a greeting to what they are going to do
if they live
and what they hope their compatriots would do in
remembrance
if they die

The embraces mean remembering the land
the forests and the foliage that hinders and shelters
and gives rise to a yawning loneliness of the caves
and a storage point for arms wrapped in oilcloth
for the sepia earth no different on the surface from
the depths of a groaning grave
the harrowing heat and the haze on the horizonless
stretch
where unknown people pass anonymously
unmourned until that day when all shall be
unearthed

The embrace means coming to terms
with the deaths that are golden days
and the earth is silent because screamers are hoarse
no child whimpers as fire consumes dwellings
and heads are splintered with axes
and young limbs are clutched and brains and gristle
and gore become the graffiti on our everyday walls
and a nation is inured to the knowledge of firing
squads
and graves like mushrooms without headstones
The embrace means a shuddering at night
women ululating in the darkness
spooking the paid assassins manning roadblocks
it means the ageless song of people
that keens and rises and drops from an unimaginable
height
and tramples on the statutes and undermines
the state of emergency and enters the pores of
bloated
red-veined faces of impotent unloved and unlovable
men
wielding temporary power
and steals the guns of policemen and frightens their
children
and explodes on May 20 and kills their dreams
and poisons their streams and galvanises everyone
into action
and organises workers and causes the rand to fall
and stops the trains from running and floods the
mines
and causes speech to stutter and radios to crackle
with static
and jails to fill up and coffins to be cheaper
and the face of Nelson Mandela to be everywhere
and the words of Oliver Tambo to reverberate in
every household
and white policemen to be transported
in body bags back to Bloemfontein

The embrace means the children singing about
tomorrow
singing and singing and singing
and singing and chanting and chanting and chanting
and embracing the idea that we are a people
fighting to be free!

MANDLA LANGA
Illustration by Jason Askew


Jason Askew

ZABALAZA: the essence of freedom

The struggle for freedom and self-determination by South Africans has always been accompanied by a recognition of the impact of culture on our everyday lives. MANDLA LANGA writes on the festival named *ZABALAZA: South Africa Speaks* which is planned for July 2 - 15, 1990.

WALLY SEROTE WAS in a reflective mood when he observed that in the days of his childhood, he had never trusted trains. This was during our short sojourn in the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe where a meeting took place between Afrikaner writers and the ANC. We could still hear the roar of the falls as we crossed a railroad track that disappeared on the hazy horizon of Zambia.

When young, Wally saw trains as vehicles of disorder. Parents used to clothe kids in the most uncomfortable garments. And there was always a sense of urgency as if the train was an enemy that needed to be caught by surprise. The kids, understandably, were always on edge beca they were being prepared for a j ney the way one prepares someo or even oneself – for an appointn with a dentist. If Wally knew on sultry Zimbabwean afternoon he'd be spending a considera chunk of his life in an office near Kentish Town underground, didn't let on.

Kentish Town Road ends at underground station on the mu maligned London Northern L The ticket attendant's cubicle is ally empty. Which might be the son for the untrammeled st swagger or sway of derelicts deadbeats who see the area as a erated zone, their hands clutch cans of *Strong Brew* or bottle *Thunderbird* wine.

The street itself is full of tra there are shops, boutiques and fl er stalls. Then there is the ubiquit McDonald's hamburger jo Housed on the same street, thou in the second-floor of a nondesc greystone building, are office Zabalaza, the South African Festival scheduled for this July.

The idea for this festival and ference was a mere grain some t years ago when South African ar decided to form Arekopaneng. is a cultural organisation that act a unifying body to harness the e gies of artists in the Uni Kingdom. At the beginning, beca artists needed the respectability has been denied them through history, there were plans to hav South African cultural centre.

ANC artists and writers were part of Arekopaneng; it happe for instance, that during the prep tions for CASA – Culture in Ano South Africa – musicians and ar

Bambi Farzerkerley at The Fridg photo by Michael Levy

Benjamin Zephaniah, opening 'Beyond the Barricades' photo exhibition, photo by Sandra Cumming

o had not performed together in decades, found in Arekopaneng orum where this was not only de possible but paved way for re collaborations. Britain has the hest number of South African sts. Many of whom have a per- al axes to grind. The only axes t came out in an unforgettable ning in Brixton were saxophones, mpets, guitars and trombones. e felt that if, in culinary matters, ny cooks spoil the broth, two ds are always better than one in tivity.

The idea of Zabalaza can also be ed to the *Culture and Resistance* tival in 1982 in Gaborone. Artists writers met to discuss the role of culture in apartheid South Africa. But it was around December 1987 through the unity-in-action of South African cultural workers that the prospect of Zabalaza became less daunting. The ambience at CASA, the spirit of unity that was accompanied by a need to solve some of the more knotty cultural questions, laid ground for an event that would not only rally artists but also offer training and skills to those disadvantaged by the racist ideology of apartheid.

In early 1988, there arose a need to set up committees in Britain which would devote as much time as possible grappling with rendering Zabalaza as functional as possible. Representatives from Arekopaneng and the ANC's Regional Cultural Committee met to work out strategies for funding and to identify artforms that needed shoring up.

They met at 1pm every Wednesday – and then, even on Sundays. This was a period of hectic journeying across the country to speak to arts councils officials to persuade them on the righteousness and desirability for Zabalaza to succeed. I remember being bundled into a car and taken to meet formidable representatives of such institutions

as the Greater London Arts (GLA) and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA).

The festival co-ordinating body which consisted of reps from different art-forms – theater, film, graphic arts, literature, music, dance and photography – found itself besieged when it came to time. The full-time co-ordinators, Linda Bernhardt and Gill Lloyd churned out so many reams of paper that one wondered whether Zabalaza wasn't contributing towards the denuding of the rain forest. But this paperwork and the buttonholing of British and South African culturati invariably paid off. Events such as *Two Dogs and Freedom* had shown that Margaret Thatcher's hostility to the anti-apartheid cause is not shared by a comfortably large section of the British public.

But why host a festival in Britain?

People came out of CASA enthused by the spirit of Amsterdam which, in 1987, was designated the European City of Culture. This mantle falls on Glasgow in 1990. For South Africans, Glasgow is a special city in that it gave a practical demonstration of its opposition to the Pretoria regime by giving Nelson Mandela the freedom of the city. This was long before other cities and their boroughs named streets and buildings after Mandela, and the Wembley Concert celebrating Mandela's 70th Birthday was still a possible dream.

Towards the end of the eighties, cultural developments inside South Africa warranted new thinking. The brutality of the regime increased in direct proportion to the mushrooming of cultural bodies in all communities. Perhaps more representative of a future reality were Umkhonto we Sizwe uniforms and plastic or wooden replicas of the AK47 in public life.

One apocryphal story is that Adriaan Vlok, the most discredited figure in South African politics, spent sleepless nights devising ways and means of banning the *toyi-toyi*. So much for Vlok whose name is a swearword, *'n vloekword*, as Breyten would say.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation started speaking of possibilities of negotiations and the people unbanned the Movement. Many more publications and newspapers were more vocal in advocating their support for the liberation struggle. Even if the armed police had declared an open season on black flesh, there were rumblings in the political horizon about a new dispensation.

Moss Ngoasheng celebrating the release of ANC leaders, London, 28 October, 1989, photo from IDAF

Lindiwe Mthembu was seconded to Zabalaza by COSATU. Debbie Serrant also came in to handle administration. Wally Serote was released from his other duties in the ANC to be the chief-co-ordinator of Zabalaza. This team is of course small, but that is the way it is. It is guided by political motivations, to see to the finish, as it were, that South African arts and culture are performed, exhibited and made known to the British and South African public in this country.

When looking at the professionally laid-out brochure, the scope of the festival seems vast. There is an

Mandla Maseko and Skin Sipoko at the poster exhibition organised by Arekopaneng and the ANC, photo by Sandra Cumming

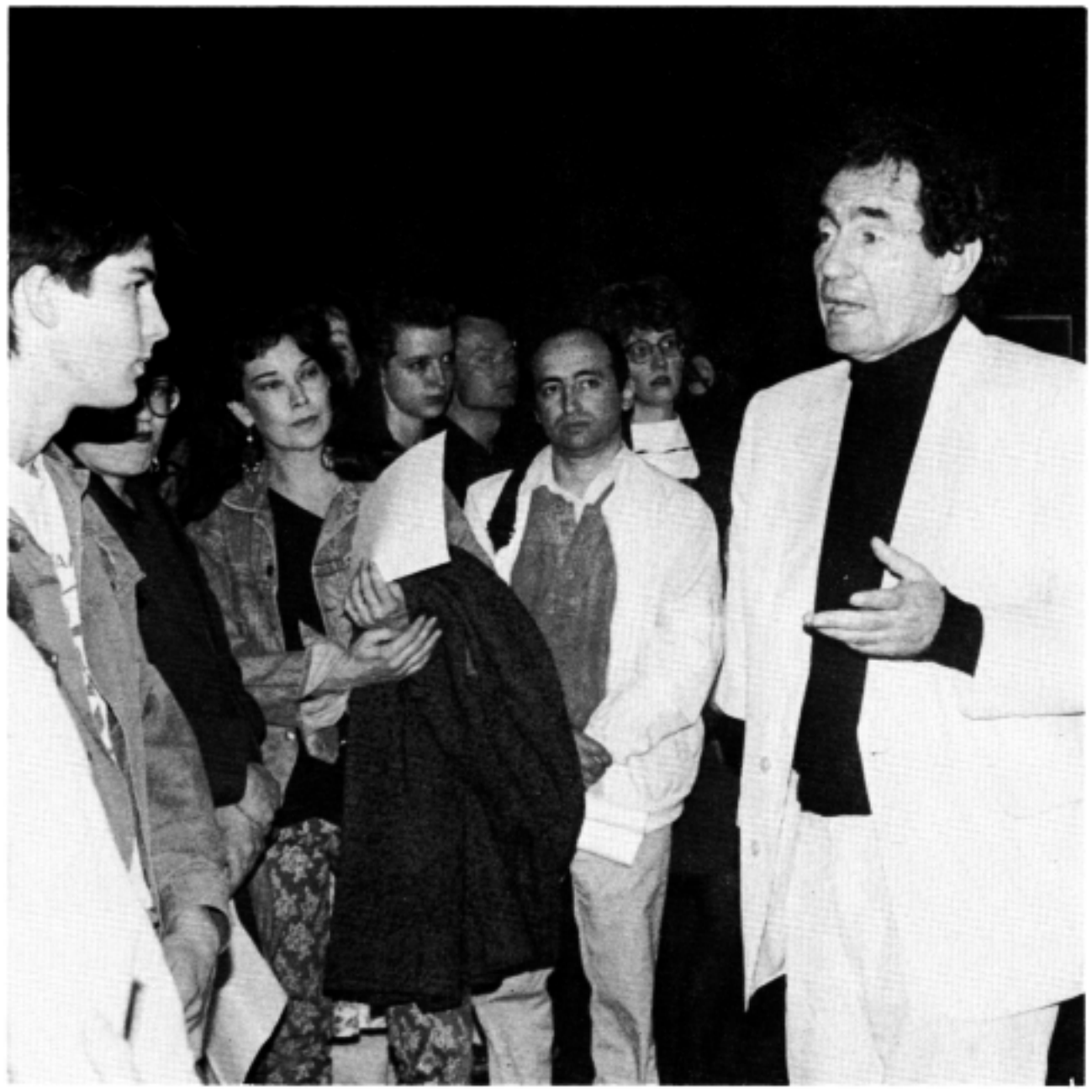
intention to bring four theater productions that 'celebrate the diversity of South African talent, some of which wouldn't normally be included on the international touring circuit.' The particular areas of concern will be a professional theater piece, a dance/performance work, community theater and a children's show.

With music, it has always been recognised that there is an 'extraordinary diversity of South African music styles, from the *mbube* groups... and the percussive rhythmic traditions of drums and *marimbas* ... to the jazz and *mbaqanga* sounds of urban townships.' Zabalaza intends to bring out all these forms to be exhibited and enjoyed in British venues.

Film and Photography have played an invaluable role in showing the world at large just how much South Africa despises her darker children. There is an 'exciting emergent film culture in South Africa. The Festival will provide a platform for these productions.' A wide range of films 'of the calibre of *Mapantsula* and *A World Apart*' will be shown. There will be video facilities to screen less mainstream cinematic work which will include experimental films and documentary work which might be banned in South Africa.

Posters have always played their role in conscientising our people; this is an art form which announces other events but is an event in itself. At the height of the State of Emergency, in 1985, posters proved very effective in alerting all people to the fact that a struggle was being waged. One remembers that even when the SADF raided on Gaborone in June 1985, Captain Craig Williamson of Pretoria's gestapo brandished the posters for a press conference, calling them 'captured weapons of war'. Zabalaza aims at showing a vast selection of posters, paintings and photographs as an indicator of what our people have been doing in all these hungry decades.

Incidentally as a run-up to Zabalaza, on April 1, Arekopaneng and ANC collaborated in a poster exhibition which was held at the Brixton Recreation Centre. While



Albie Sachs addressing the opening of the poster exhibition,
photo by Sandra Cumming

people were sweating and groaning as they played squash, Albie Sachs was taking the visitors on a guided tour of the exhibition, commenting on the strength or weakness of the posters. It was a very illuminating afternoon in that, here again, people were being asked to learn to look at artwork as critically and honestly as possible.

Other events related to Zabalaza have been the successful mini-festivals where our people performed in venues such as *The Fridge* on March 25, the *Mambo Inn* on March 11 and 16, and other smaller venues. These mini-festivals have helped create a climate favourable for the staging of Zabalaza. Many more artists have found that they have acted as a dress rehearsal for the real thing to come in July. But they have also activated people who might have felt left out of mainstream cultural events.

The literature component of the Festival will consist of poets, novelists and storytellers giving live readings, facilitating discussion and conducting workshops. Writers such as poet and novelist Don Mattera, performance poet Mzwakhe Mbuli, writer Achmat Dangor, novelist Nadine Gordimer will most likely be invited to attend together with prominent South African writers living abroad such as Arthur Maimane, Mary Benson and Wally Serote.

The conference will form an important part of Zabalaza, where there will be sessions on music, literature, art, film, photography, theater and shaping policy for the future. This will mean specialists in the different fields being invited to submit papers and speaking at the sessions. Some of the more important issues will be the role of the artist in a changing South Africa, how to grapple with the challenges that lie ahead.

The policy of the cultural boycott will be discussed at length, to see how it fits as a strategy in present-day South Africa. There are of course, guidelines and recommendations made at CASA, the issue of Language, etc – all these will be subjected to the scalpel of honest but critical appraisal.

Zabalaza differs from other festivals in that the emphasis here will be on training and workshops. During the two weeks of Zabalaza, there is an aim to present practical training sessions. Forty-eight half-day sessions over 12 days are planned. The major objective of these sessions would be to address the inter-cultural isolation created by apartheid South Africa and to find means of communication across cultural barriers.

The intention of the festival is that the South African participants in these workshops should learn skills which they will be able to pass on to others in their communities when they return home. Another task is to facilitate an exchange of skills between artists from South Africa and from community groups within the United Kingdom.

When the concert in Wembley was being organised, there arose a greater need for South African artists to respond as rapidly as possibly to the challenge that faced them insofar as participation is concerned. There is no doubting the fact that Zabalaza will go a long way in analysing such events and strive to create an unassailable corner for our artists, musicians and writers so that, when the time comes for us to make an impact within the international arena, we do this with the confidence and effectiveness that guarantee people taking us seriously.

There are many, many young people with talent who have never had the chance to show the world that they are worth their weight in gold, the same gold that will have a different meaning in world markets when our country is finally free.