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reliable information on the dayâ\200\224toâ\200\224day events taking
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tlignatitm will be amused among demoemtienlly~minded petÂ»
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NEW GROUPS ARISE

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They include such wellâ\200\224known names as Lewis Nkosi (per-
hap: the hrightest star of this constellation); 'Alex l8 Guma,
the

writer;

lizekiei Mphahlele, the father and master of this school: Can

Themlma\200\230 Arthur Maimane\200\230 Nat Nakasa. Bloke Modisane, and
:\200\230xlt\200\230tetl Hutchinson one M the greatest \200\234suul\200\235 writers S
outh
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\Ve have not here dealt with the literature oi the ruling cit?
eles. \Ve regret the lack oi time anal space, for we leel that
this literature is itself part of the story of liberation. "lhe bulk
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sions are limited by the eonepts Of baasskapimi (ixtee H.p\202-t\200\234i~
ority) and apartheid. The settlers find it hard to l'CtUnCllK\200\231
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some outstanding work 11.1\ 'tâ\200\230 been produced they,
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There are, however. it
text angry young writers like Bretton
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As our resistance growc mute pntx'erful so shall the output u;
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Published by the African National Congress of South Attica, P.O. Box 2239, Dar es Salaam,
Tanzania

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Literature and Resistance in South Africa

Paper submitted by the South African delegation to the Afroâ\200\224Asian Writers' Conference in Beirut and published in ANC's Sechaba, I, 6 IJune 1967) and I, 7 (July 1967).

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ditional African literature (which they had been trained to despise as barbaric and depraved). In all this, traditional African literature itself suffered a significant blow. The destruction of the African social and political units by colonialism meant that the very basis of our traditional literary productions was broken up. It is for that reason that though the tradition continued the literary products of our society showed neither genius nor purpose. Instead they became imitations of earlier epics and degenerated into eulogistic gimmicks in football matches. It is not unusual to hear whole chunks of plagiarized stanzas from the early epics modelled to suit the poet's needs. This is slightly misleading. Since amidst all this decay All 'this there were signs of an awakening, an attempt at creating an censorship. The whole picture idiom cannot be fully known until liberation, since literally thousands of manuscripts 'lie buried in shelves, rejected by schools. Some principled writers refused to alter their manuscripts to suit the whims of a cruel regime. and thus remain unpublished to this day.

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NUANCES TO EVADE CENSORSHIP

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Mghayi, for

Also on the traditional literary side the resistance is shown in the works already quoted. All there were harbingers of the great literary workers of Dlomo, Mghayi, Vilakazi, Mofolo. etc. These writers produced not only historical novels but also poetry of resistance. To evade censorship they used literary nuances which could only be understood by those who knew great African Xhosa poet, not only revived the traditional literary idiom but developed the structure to accommodate new literary ideas. By using double meanings he managed to compose virulent satires on the regime and the British empire. Vilakazi, the great Zulu poet, viciously attacks the cruel system of migrant labour in the mines while appearing to be concerned with the muscular beauty of the former soldiers of the Zulu empire. Using a symbolic language he draws at

tention to the rusting qualities of mine bells which, in fact, are representations of the miners who are discarded soon after contracting sillicosis. HJIL Dlomo similarly writes of the Valley of a Thousand Hills whilst, in fact, writing about the political denudations of African liberties. this period we see the re-emergence of nationally orientated literature. The literature is concerned with protest but as yet does not call the population to revolt. All the same this in itself is an achievement of great significance. For the very act of protest meant that the writers of this period were redefining once more the very ethos of the African nation.

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FURTHER RESTRICTIONS

All this does not mean that the regime had relaxed its laws. On the contrary since 1927 more laws of censorship had been passed. The 1927 Native Administration Act prohibited any matter or publication calculated to rouse hostility between races. These sweet-sounding words actually meant that the government could censor any literature or newspaper which agitated for the rights of the oppressed. The Riotous Assemblies Act of 1914, amended in 1930, prohibited publication of any words inciting public Violence. This tightening up of the law is a tribute to the very resistance which the government sought to stop. But such is the fate of all oppressive regimes that each law exposes loopholes in other spheres. The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and all its subsequent amendments not only make a definition of communism suitable to the regime's requirements, but also give power to ban any statements made by banned people. This has resulted in a large number of banned writers unable to publish anything whatsoever. So one could go on ad nauseum, dealing with all the laws of censorship, laws preventing mixed meetings, laws preventing entry into "Europeans only" theatres and places of public entertainment laws dealing with the banning of newspapers: the list is almost endless. A writer in this context finds himself not only unable to publish but also crippled spiritually by the weight of the oppressive machinery.

GOVERNMENT PRESS

in

tracts orientating the African child

The Bantu Education Act, by bringing all schools under the direct authority of a government department, gave authority to that department to prescribe set books for schools in all the provinces. This in practice has meant that books prescribed were those written by government sponsored writers who penned ideological society. Side by side with this development has been the taking over of book publication by semi-government presses like Afrikaans Pers and Bantu Press. All literature currently being published in South Africa for the African public and African schools is either the most poi-

sonous and trite, or else the innocent mutterings of a politi~
eally unsophisticated romantic. Of the 30 volumes of poetry
published. it
is difi~\20lcult to lmtl anything of merit except in
the works of such poets as â\200\230Bulima Mgiyeke' or Seth Dlamini.
The novelâ\200\230 if such a name can validly be used for these pro~
paganda pamphlets, is no mme than the structureless mmÂ»
blings of demented minds.

(continued next page)

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* manner in which the US and UK governments intervened in

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implementing the Odendaal

1964 to stop the late Dr Verwoerd from declaring a Ban-
tustan in Oâ\200\230vamboland. â\200\234I recall one classxc example which
was reported in the East African Standard on 30 April 1964
when the UK and US governments prevented Dr Verwoerd
Commission Report in
from
such implementation
South West Africa. They argued that
would cause Ethiopia and Liberia, who had put the case of
S.W.A. mandate before the International Court at the Hague,
to apply for an injunction of the Court, and that would
make it impossible for the UK and US to intervene. Dr Verv
woerd made a public statement that he had withdrawn im-
feel
plementation of
strongly that the two governments (UK and US) if they so
wish to, can make it possible for S.W.A. to attain indepenâ\200\224
dence without a bullet being fired.â\200\235

the Odendaal Commission Report. I

WE SHALL FIGHT

What will you do if these governments do not take action?

I asked.

He braced himself, sat up in bed (Brother Kuhangua is at
present an invalid), chuckled a little in his pleasant confident
manner, and replied: â\200\234We, the freedom-fighters of S.W.A.,
have made it clear unequivocally that no matter what the
price, we shall fight with or without guns until complete inâ\200\224
dependence is won. Our militants have already taken guns
and are fighting in South West Africa.â\200\235

I asked, Can you give us any information on SWAPO lead-
ers arrested under the â\200\230Suppression of Communismâ\200\231 Act?
â\200\234Yes, these arrests show that S.W.A. is now openly treated
as part of South Africa, and all the terrible tortures perpe-
trated against our brothers in South African jails are also
meted out to S.W.A. political prisoners.â\200\235
What is your reaction to the proposal to send a UN team to
carry on further investigations etc. in S.W.A.?
â\200\234My President, Mr Sam Nujoma, has already i-\202atly rejected
the American preposal to that effect. But I objeCt to certain
countries going to S.W.A. because of their attitude in the case
of our country. I am willing for a country like Tanzania,
Burma or Cuba to go to S.W.A. to examine the situation and
then report back to the UN. But before the mission goes to
S.W.A. both the UN and the US should have all the freeâ\200\224
dom-fighters taken back into S.W.A. who are abroad; release
all S.W.A. political detainees in South African jails and allow
them freedom of speech; then the UN Commissionâ\200\231s itinerary
should be arranged by the freedomâ\200\224fighters of SWA and not
by the South African Government.â\200\235

July 1967/16

(continued from page 12)

of African intellectual resisters and first President of the Al~
to establish a Ilanga Lase
rican National Congress was able
press he published a newspaper
Natal Press. Through this
resis-
which was one of the mouthpieces of the intellectual
tance movement.

EARLY AFRICAN PRESS

It

an

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established

In the Cape a more united and more vocal group of intellectuals
which included Imvo
tuals

Zabantu and other works were published. Both Ilanga Lase
Natal and Imvo Zabantu became not only the organs of
debate about methods of resistance, but also involved in these
debates the mass of the African people. They at once mo-
bilised African opinion and exposed the most brutal forms of
oppression perpetuated by the regime.

It was not only through this that political resistance of the
African people was kept alive but also through literature
is to the

produced from African-owned printing presses.

credit of these intellectuals that they not only saw their des-
tinies invariably tied up with those of their own people but
despite endless attempts by the regime and missionaries to
isolate them - but they also effected their beliefs by publish-
ing in African languages. This meant that all literary pro-
ductions were available to the general African populace.

The immediate effect then of the Land Act was that it de-
prived the Africans of the control of publication and left
them at the mercy of the mission-owned presses.

It also deprived the small landowning group of the capacity
to produce literature without too much dependence on the
meagre earnings from white men's industries and schools. The
result was a decline not only in literary output, which had
been impressive, but also a decline in content. The novelettes
produced failed to deal with social and political drama and
remained soulless material which neither challenged the regime
nor depicted the African situation. Instead the literature be-
came no more than sentimental reportage of love situations
between frozen and fleshless characters.

it dealt with

We can call

situations without drawing any conclusions about their sig-
nificance. Never in the whole period of our history has there
been so much sterile, banal and purposeless literature; The
school

writers,

market and purged their works of any slightly oppressive
(by missionary and government standards) paragraphs, words
or sentences.

Such novelettes as Nomsa and such didactic literary ome

lettes as â\200\234Umendo kadukotelaâ\200\235 vulgarised the very soul of the African peOple., No student read after completing his term of study: saturated with the infantility of these works, no student found anything to interest him in literature. Thus was born a whole generation of philistines whose only recourse was to the chapters and quotations of books long out of print.

if we can call them Such, pandered to the

â\200\230situational literatureâ\200\231 since

this

GIMMICKS AND CHUNKS

They suĩ-\201ered also because the very intellectual isolation cre~
ated a vacuum that was neither filled by European literature
(which they had not been trained to understand) nor by tra~

LITERATURE
AND RESISTANCE
IN SOUTH AFRICA

PART ONE

Paper submitted by the South
African delegation to the Afro-
Asian Writers' Conference held
in Beirut

South African literature is a vast subject covering not only the stylistics of literature in four major languages - Nguni, Sotho, English and Afrikaans - but also the very content of the history of nations that today make up the peoples of South Africa. To understand contemporary resistance writing in our country, one must know the background of traditional literature, whose grandeur and greatness can be understood only in the context of the historical processes that shaped the destinies of our peoples. That this very literature and history remains suppressed and almost unknown to the world is one of the tragedies of colonial occupation. But since the task of our revolution involves the rediscovery of our heritage, it is our mission to reveal the epics which have been left us as a record of a dynamic and creative people. In this sense our task is to define the soul of the African people, and simultaneously to expose colonialism's depredations.

South African literature dates from the late 15th century. This is of course misleading, because like everything in Africa few of our literary works were discovered until a day after independence. We can therefore accurately predict that the day of liberation will see the discovery of our literary tradition. Because African traditional literature is a product of a collective organized society its products became, in a few generations, a synthetic everyday description used in the very extension of the collective ethos.

The 15th century is outstanding in its peaceful, almost idyllic existence. This is clearly shown by the romantic quality of the dynastic poems of Ndaba, for instance. The primary occupation is to eulogise the beauty of physical features, the beauty of human relations, and satirical concern with greed and other anti-social habits. The impression one gets is of a people concerned with maintaining traditions and the integrity of a patriarchal structure.

This form of literature was to continue until the late 17th century, when the increase in population began to cause serious

upheavals. The Portuguese and British colonial incursions had begun to undermine the highly organized empires of Monomotapa and Kakongo, resulting in the shifting of populations. This period is symbolised by works whose heroic diversions surpass those of any previous or subsequent period. Most of the literary works of this period have perished with the communities that composed them. But thanks to the deep oral tradition we can piece together some of the legends and stories which form the history of the period, although more research is needed to complete the picture. We are still too involved in the actual task of liberation to study systematically the literatures not only of the Nguni but also of the Pa and the Khoilthoi. That such a task as we have before us involves the definition of our history and our literary heritage, is an indication of our deep awareness of the very problems this conference is convened for. It is for that reason that we regard the conference as a historical one, enabling both the African and Asian peoples to foster

social and political

the essential understanding of the purposes of revolution. We regard it as a great opportunity to disseminate a heritage in a world that is gradually going insane. It is insane because in its worship of the iron gods it annihilates not only people in Vietnam, in South Africa, in Mozambique and elsewhere but also what has so long been built up as part of the general heritage.

As the theme of our subject develops it will become clear that the darkest ages in our history are those periods in which by the arrogance of foreigners we have been forced to swallow their local productions, indeed as if they were the only statement of mankind. The same imperialism is fond of referring to our civilization as no more than a disorganized entity having no value and no relevance to the civilization of the world. That same imperialism has destroyed our creative instruments and products. It is for this reason that the period that follows has particular significance, not only as a refutation of their claims but also in itself as an achievement of great excellence. This was the 19th century: our golden age of literature. The disturbances in the continent of Africa produced major heroic epics which recorded the great era of resistance against the colonialist aggressor. In the Cape alone, nine major wars were fought against the invaders; while these wars were going on the Zulus in the north were creating a military machinery as had never been known before in this part of the world. Because of the closeness between life and literature in African societies, these factors in themselves produced a feverish towering of not only epic poetry but also satirical, lyrical and dramatic. The poets and storytellers not only told tales and recited poetry but also extended the scope of literature, which ceased merely to comment on everyday social events but became the true vehicle of social, political and historical analysis. Individuals ceased to project their own personal excellence but became symbols of resistance. In the case of the Zulu empire, individuals came to symbolise courage, fearlessness and prowess. This radical change in the literary idiom can be seen in the epic of Magolwane, one of the greatest traditional poets. Of Shaka's military campaigns he says:

Like piles and piles of mountain cairns
Folding like a giant wave of the sea
_ Which forever howls in the dark night
Like a vast field of poisonous millet grains
Like a chasm filled with black millipedes
Like a tiger, a leopard, a ferocious lion
Like a black mamba, a stampeding elephant.

Compare this with the earlier poems of the pre-Shaka period:

O thou whose body is beautiful
You are like an overgrown greenery
On which birds fall and die
Only the birds of paradise survive.

June 1962

South African delegates Mazizi Kunene, Lewis N/eosi and Ambrose Makiwane chat with delegates from the Middle East
dawns: il ?vveak â\200\2301! (be Writers" Conference.

Note the idea of survival, not a phenomenon related to ethos and power but to individual external qualities of beauty. Going through this whole 19th century period we come across numerous examples of the same epic quality. In the Cape for instance, the literary idiom assumes not only this epic quality but also, true to all resistance literature, uses a highly symbolic language. Its ultimate intention is not only to create a strong central authority but also to convey meanings that evoke the identity of those who constitute the resistance force.

The heights of literary genius are also reached by the Sotho people during the reign of their able monarch King Moshoeshoe I. Not only are the people called upon to resist the invader but also to sink their differences. Thus the house of Molapa becomes the subject of satire because of its divisive activities.

We must go back to Magolwane who aptly summarises the literary and political achievements of this period. He ends his epic with a philosophical statement whose significance is true for all achievements and civilizations of mankind:

cal. Since central to all African literature is a realistic approach. all symbolism and description is based on items not of fantasy and fancy but everyday experience and reality. This does not mean that African literature does not seek to convey its meanings through a mythological system. What it means is that the mythological system itself bears direct relationship to forms of reality as they are perceived in everyday existence. It also means that the embellishment of reality is achieved more through parallelization of concepts than through modeling of reality; as in the animal stories for example, which project specific recognisable parallels between man and beast. This parallelization is deepened as a technique in the 19th century, precisely because in dealing with heroic subjects the African was concerned with conflicts whose significance was universal. Thus too, the human drama found its philosophical interpretations extended beyond the hitherto narrow confines of the clan or village. As the concern for philosophical summary became more and more urgent, the poets in particular developed a stanza form which became a vehicle of thought and description, for example:

O my Lord, generations of men come and go
But our great works are indestructible
It is they that will remain eternally

Making generations of men stare and weep at ruins.

Thus did Magolwane bear witness to one of the greatest periods of our literary history.

At this point we may perhaps give a rough idea of the literary techniques used in traditional literature. Of course these differ according to period and according to the language structure. However, basic to all African traditional literature is the use of two levels of meaning. On the one level the form is descriptive and on the other symbolic and philosophical.

The prattling women of Nomgabi
Prattling they claimed that he will never rule
But alas! it was Shaka's time to fill the earth.

These techniques, of course, cover wider areas of literature: the dramatised story form, the extended satirical form. the

socially based lyric. All these can only be developed in

a

more detailed study which cannot be given in this brief summary. Suffice it to say that the techniques developed in this period have since become the most potent vehicles for conveying revolutionary thought.

(PART TWO of this paper, dealing with the modern period, will appear in the next issue of Sedyaba.)

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LITERATURE AND RESISTANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Paper submitted by the South African delegation to the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference, Beirut

PART TWO

Sometimes through the use of myths and legends the oppressor is identified with detestable characters. There is for example the workâ\200\224poem found in every labouring group in S. Africa:

The white men are scoundrels
They call us Jim boys
They the dirty swine.

They arrest us everywhere
They reap the harvest of manacled men
They arrest us everywhere.

The full dramatic meaning of these two short poems can only be conveyed in the dramatic context of the sound of picks and shovels.

The satirical form, too, has assumed new meanings relevant to the situation in South Africa. Thus the school children may be heard reciting about the tyrannical rule of the Boers. But before we go into details of the modern period, let us look into the relationship between literature and the latter period of the conquest. It was not until the late 19th century that the resistance of the African people was broken. Even after that there continued isolated but significant pockets of resistance, like the Bambatha rebellion in 1906 in which 10,000 Africans died fighting bravely against the coloniser. These were glorified in the poetry of resistance, in which poets sang:

On the Sandlwane Battle

Son of Ndaba, you beat them (the whites)
Bending down on your knee
But alas I warn you Europeans have inhuman souls
Wait until they cross the Tugela river.

On the Division of the Land

The white vermin, my Lord,
Invades the lands of our forefathers
They, the adolescents who defecate
In the house like infants

*

The white man carves the land
With blood-drenched knives
From north to south the sun bleeds .

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INTERPRETING AFRICA

The unification of the white from in 1910 resulted in the creation of a unified oppressive machinery. The literature of this period is significant for its pathos and a sense of de-

1...â\200\234 16â\200\2301119

spair mixed with a nostalgia for the days of old. The temporary defeat of the African people stimulated a philosophy of deprivation. But this was only more apparent than real. A new intellectual elite was emerging whose belief was that the white man could be beaten on his own ground by the combined forces of all the African people.

Thus we find one of the most outstanding political documents, given by Dr Seme in 1908, stressing the absolute necessity of the unity of the African people against the oppressor. The unity was not only of the local kind but encompassing the whole continent of Africa. The significance of the document, or rather the political views contained therein, lies not only in the dimensions of political interpretation of resistance, but also because such views became part of the literary mood of the period.

This was reflected in the numerous volumes of literature - translations, historical and political treatises - detecting the African intellectual resistance movement. That these works sought to interpret African political and historical

thought is seen from the very titles: 'The Origin of the Af-

rican Peoples' by Soga, 'Shaka' by Page Boy, 'All

rican Political Organizations' by Dladla, and so on.

NO LAND - NO PRESSES

To define this movement exactly, one must study the political and social factors operating at the time. The formation of the Union of South Africa signified, as stated, the unification of the oppressive forces. The immediate task of these forces was to drive the African people from the land so that they became a landless mobile labour-pool available for the newly established industries. To ensure the total and universal implementation of this programme, a tax was imposed so that every able-bodied man would be forced to seek employment in the white man's cities.

The 1913 Land Act not only deprived the Africans of the right of ownership of land but, under the Urban Areas Act, the Africans were prohibited from owning any interest in land except with the express authority of the Governor-General. The immediate result was the restriction of the African population, which outnumbered the whites four to one, to only 121/20/0 of the land area of South Africa. The position remains unchanged except for one-half percent added later as a compensation for the loss of voting rights.

In spite of all this

it took some time before the law took

effect. What is then the significance of this Act to literature?

Hitherto the African intelligentsia and others had been able to pawn their lands and buy printing

presses and locate

them on their land. Thus J.L. Dube, one of the early leaders

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