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Culture in Chains

A statement found in the ANC'S Sechaba, VII, 2, Feb. 1973.

in

tower

on
his

ivory
creation

closest and dearest

No man is on island .ond no man has
yet been found who is
content to
without
create
thought of
ever being
brought to the notice of another hu-
man being. Even the casual diarist,
who hides his inmost thoughts from
those
him.
thinks of posterity, The lover must have
a mistress or the image of o mistress
before he can dash off a sonnet. The
prisoner in solitary confinement or in
the death cell will scribble something
on the wall in the hope that someone
else will read and learn of his condi-
tion. The suicide leaves a note because
he cannot bear to be misunderstood.
The man who sings in his both hopes
that someone will overhear and know

to

Indian,

Griquo.

Chinese.

ment is given the power to proclaim
subcategories within the African and
Coloured categories. The following ca-
tegories have been proclaimed for Coâ\200\224
loured persons â\200\224â\200\224 Cope Coloured. Mo-
lay,
other
Asian and other Coloured. (For trade
purposes Japanese have been classi-
fied as honorary Whites). The Africans.
again. are classified into ten ethnic
sub-groups -- Xhosa. Zulu. Northern
Sotho.
Tswana.
Tsonga. Swazi, Vendo. Southern Ndeâ\200\224
bele and Northern Ndebele. By law the
racial identity of every person is ente-
red in a population register, and every
South African citizen must carry an
identity card stating his mcial classifi-
cation.

Southern

Sotho.

,

that he is happy.

The apartheid laws deliberately place barriers in the way of communication. and these barriers are so obstructive that it is a tribute to the human spirit that anything gets through at all. The very word "apartheid" means the condition of separateness. and in terms of the apartheid laws there is no South African people but only a number of separate racial groups whose contact with one another must be reduced to the minimum.

Under the Population Registration Act of 1950, the population is divided into three main categories - Whites, Africans and Coloureds, and the Govern-

The purpose of these racial classifications is to make communications between the various groups more difficult. so that the White racists may continue in power on the well-worn basis of "divide and rule". Politically this separation is today enshrined by the Prohibition of Political Interference Act of 1968 which prohibits any person belonging to one population group from (a) becoming a member of any political party of which any person who belongs to another population group is a member. and (b) addressing any

meeting of which all or the majority belong to another population group or to
Thus
multiracial parties are illegal. So are
multi-racial trade unions.

population

groups.

other

by

residential

occupation

Outside the political sphere separation is also enforced. Under the Group Areas Act separate areas are set aside for the
is illegal for a
various groups. and it
White to enter an African area without a special permit from a Government official. White and Black cannot sit down together in a restaurant to have a meal. Cohabitation between Black and White is a criminal offence punishable by up to seven years imprisonment. Marriage between Black and White is legally impossible. Black and

White actors cannot appear together on the stage. Black and White cannot be members of the same audience at a play or concert. Black and White sportsmen cannot belong to the same team, or even compete against one another in separate racial teams. Qualified Black nurses cannot attend White hospital patients.

Text

These are the general rules which govern social contact between the races in South Africa. There are exceptions here and there. Permission is occasionally given for a Black VIP to be allowed a meal in a White restaurant or accommodation in a White hotel. Black sportsmen are occasionally allowed to compete in White sporting fixtures so that South African official representatives can adduce arguments to facilitate the return of South Africa to the international sporting fields from which she has been barred because of her apartheid policies.

There are also illegal breaches of the rules. Some light-skinned Blacks cross the colour line whenever they can escape detection. There have been occasions when Whites have blackened their faces and worn Black attire (Such as Indian saris) in order to gain admission to segregated Black schools from which they would otherwise have been barred.

Even

barrier.

Black-White

But the exceptions merely prove the rule. Nor does the separation stop at the threshold. Whites are separated. (although not by law) with Afrikaners and English-speaking Whites belonging to separate institutions from one end of their lives to the other. At school Afrikaner-English separation is enforced by law.

M

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. White and Bladt which are accurate and valid for both parties. A Nadine Gordimer can tell the reader in delicate and precise prose how a White liberal looks at the Black world. she occwately how a can even portray Black appears in the eyes of a White inside observer. but she cannot get outwards. the Blodt body and look

like

crudely.

abruptly.

Similarly, the White characters in the novels of Peter Abrohams are corica- tures. still and unreal. They speak and puppets act lacking flesh and blood. Alan Poton's Beloved Block Country" is o sentimentalised White do-gooder with a Black habit. a sort minstrel. of religious Blodt-ond-White failures are inevitable Sudâ\200\230t in a divided society.

creative

priest

â\200\235Cry

the

in

â\200\234m.

in

their

own country

whites

a'-â\200\230

abroad. Paradoxically .the group whziw suflers most lrom apartheid in cultun~ is the Alrikaner tribe. who are tr.Â» most isolated in their own homelarnf in which they enjoy political hegemonv Afrikaans as the language of the COM queror. the administrator. the police- man, soldier ,location superintendent and pass officer is detested the nomAlriliaons majority in South Africa

by

whidw

The newspapers
are directed
even
towards the African market
those owned by supporters of the Na-
tionalist Government. -â\200\224 are written in
English. So are most of
the books
produced by nonâ\200\224Alrilxaans writers.

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Today. we notice a new phenomenon.

its

find

with

objectives-

A section of the Afrikaans intelligentâ\200\224
sia are finding it more and more dil-
licult to speak to their own people be-
cause they
themselves out of

Moral

sympathy

conï-\202ict has almost destroyed a writer
like Uys Krige. who loves his language
and its heritage. but finds himself not
only unable but possibly also unwil-
ling any longer to communicate with
his fellow-Alrikoners who are moving
in a direction where he cannot fol-
Breytenbodi.

low. The poet

because he married

a Vietnamese

woman. is unable to

in South

live

Africa where his marriage would not
be recognised. and so is today on
exile in Paris though admowledged as
" the greatest Afrikaans poet of his geâ\200\224
novelists
neration.

pa-

have adieeved publication with

rables

because

to

handle the truth is too difficult or too
dangerous. And many are reduced to
sï-\202ence.

Many Afrikaans

fantasies

Breyten

and

Johannesburg

The
"Sunday Times"
wrote on October 22.
1972 "The
completed manuscripts of several prominent Afrikaans authors are being preserved until South Africa's censorship laws are abolished or sufficiently relaxed to permit their publication. In this way a treasure house of Afrikaans literature is being built up for the enjoyment of future generations."

"The

Publications

authors. Andre Brink.

The paper quoted one of the leading as
Afrikaans
Control
saying:
the Government. which
Board
condones its operations. are strong-
are
ling
creating a desert in the development
of our culture".

literature.

Afrikaans

They

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in 202

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market for

To whom does

South

A subsidiary problem for
African writer is - for whom does he
his
write? What is
address
work?
of

himself. This is partly a question of language. The African who writes in his mother tongue, even the Alrikoner, starts with a tremendous handicap by comparison with the English-speaking South African who has a world language at his disposal. It is a question of economics. Book production for a tiny market is unprofitable.

But above all it is a question of attitudes. The political and literary lingua franca of Black South Africa is English, which enables all Africans to communicate with one another to address ethnic border. and also

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"Die Brink had had his latest novel 'Soboteurs' accepted by a British publisher for translation and publication in English. but said: 'I have withdrawn it from publication abroad because I want it first to be published in Afrikaans here. in my own country. The book has a special meaning and a message for Alrikoners who.â\200\230 I feel. should read it first".

preserve the

There were other Afrikaans writers, said Brink, who were grappling with the same problem. "They are prepared to keep their work intact for publication. I will need â\200\230be. rather than agree to deletions or censorship â\200\230in any other way. In this way, contemporary literature I will not be lost."

100 years hence

manuscripts

of

South

South

hundreds

African. Government
millions

is
The
of
spending
and every year in its bid to keep the
South African peoples apart from one
another. but stronger forces. both po-
litical and economic, are forcing them
together in a common mould. In the
ranks of the South African liberation
movement. it has been demonstrated
that
races,
creeds and colours can work together
as equals to achieve
their common
objective -â\200\224 freedom. When the apart-
heid walls have finally been broken
down, the tremendous creative forces
of the peoples of South Africa will be
unleashed. not only to create a betâ\200\224
ter material wor d. but also a ridier
and ere polound culture than was
ever dreamed of in the past.

Airicons

all

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whimâ\200\234: 5075 i-\201own that Uiiiî-\201ren must be educated in their mother tongue. Out-side at school. separation is enforced by social and politically encouraged custom whereby there are parallel inâ\200\224stitutions lor the two groups in every sphere of life â\200\224 separate chambers of students' commerce. organisations. organisations. and the like. The purpose at this sepa~ration between the two White groups is to establish the hegemony at the Alrikaners in every sphere at lite. and to ensure that Afrikaans culture is not submerged by the stronger worldâ\200\224wide English culture.

teachers' and

youth

Describing South Africa as a collective White dictatorship. a Cape Town uniâ\200\224versity professor. Jan Loubser. in a speech on October 9. 1972 said that within the White group there was a dictatorship oi the Ahilzaner over the Enghshospealring South African. "Over the past 24 years (since the first No-Party Government came to tionalist power in 1948) an Afrikaans imperia- lism has developed over the English speakers", he said. "This imperialism is evident in the police. the armed

in

the radio sewice and in forces. many other institutions", all of which are dominated by Alrikaners. Were it not tor the economic power the Eng-lish~spealting said Professor Loubser. their position today would have been very much the same as that ol the Africans.

wielded.

section

What does all this mean for the crea- tive artist in South Africa? In the most obvious sense, the cultural facilities available to the Bladr majority are lar interior to those at the Whites ~ and in some cases simply non-existent. In the giant African township ol Soweto. tram whidi Johannesburg draws most at its labour lorce, there is only one cinema tor a population at nearly one million. and the number at lilms whidâ\200\230i may be seen by audiences at that cinema is grossly restricted by a cen- sorship which places all Africans on the same level as White children under the age at 16. The best libraries in the

country are barred to Blacks. Very few Blacks have ever seen the inside of a theatre or a concert hall.

But there is an even deeper sense in it

describe

Spirit. Nobody --

which cultural deprivation cripples the artistic
literally no one knows life in South Africa well enough to adequately, let alone tell the truth about it, the whole truth. as is expected from the artistic as well
The artistic the apartheid barriers, and even the most vivid imagination is no substitute for experience.

truth and nothing

as the vision is

witness by

restricted

legal

but

his

the

in western capitalist countries there are. true. class barriers

which

divide the nation. But a writer or a

painter can cross these barriers. He can merge himself with any section of the community. and live their day to day life just as they do. The educated middle class writer can go "slumming" far

Gissing.

Kingsley. Mrs. Gaskell and others did in Victorian times when they became aware of the way in which the industrial revolution divided England into two nations. Or the poor boy can rise to the top. as Dickens did. observing and noting

the habit and condition at the various strata as he passes through.

revolution

material.

raw

had

as

But in South Africa the wall is impenetrable. No White can live in a Bantustan township, eat, drink and sleep there. make love and marry there. bring up a family there. starve and die there. He may observe a little from outside the fence. but he can never get inside a Bantustan and feel in his bones what it is like to be Black. He may imagine hunger. but it takes one who has known hunger in a certain milieu to describe the way in which hungry children, having eaten their portions but remained unsatisfied, continue to scrape their spoons round the bottom of their porridge bowls in the hope that somehow the metal may be transmuted into a further quantity of food. an image captured in all its pathos and simplicity in one of the early short stories of the African writer Alfred Hutchinson. who died recently tragically early age at 48. (See page 18).

Nigeria

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at

in

No writer in South Africa can see life steady and see it whole. Out of his own experience he can only tell what he has seen and known, and this is inevitably only part of the total picture. No White writer has yet managed to create a real and convincing Black character, and vice versa. Nor has any Black writer. White or Black, been able to describe the relations between