

MOTHER OF A SPEAR

Liberation poems by South African
students of the ANC school

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Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College.

To the African National Congress on her 70th anniversary
and in particular to the students, staff and workers of the
Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College

FOREWORD

In the summer of 1981 we paid a solidarity visit to the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College of the African National Congress in Mazimbu, Tanzania.

Deeply impressed by the creative experiences of the students, their aspirations as well as their political goals, we wanted to make their poems accessible to a wider audience. Especially to people who are actively supporting the liberation movement.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank the African National Congress for making it possible for us to visit the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the African National Congress. 70 years of struggle, 70 years of dedication to freedom. 1982, YEAR OF UNITY IN ACTION, VICTORY IS CERTAIN!

AMANDLA NGAWETHO

Sonja Boersma
Fransien Drees
Leonard van der Hout
Members of the WZA

INTRODUCTION

The African National Congress (ANC), the liberation movement of South Africa, is currently building a school in Tanzania. This is The SOLOMON MAHLANGU FREEDOM COLLEGE, named after a young freedom fighter who gave his life for the struggle. The students at this school are young South Africans who had to leave their country because of the terror of the apartheid regime. In June 1976 students in several towns in South Africa protested against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction; a protest, which in reality was against the inferior nature of Bantu-education which is only meant to keep black people in slavery. Thousands of students fled the country as a result of harassment and police intimidations.

At the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College the ANC offers these young South Africans an education for liberation. So the purpose of the school is to equip them to take their rightful place first in the struggle against apartheid and to liberate their country and later in the reconstruction of a free, democratic and non-racial South Africa.

The educational programme at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College is based on the 'Freedom Charter', the revolutionary programme of the African National Congress. On education the Freedom Charter states a.o. 'The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened' and 'The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace'. Consequently, the school provides comprehensive schooling, democratic, progressive and anti-racist in content. In addition pupils receive vocational training in the agricultural, industrial and administrative spheres. Apart from following a formal academic programme on secondary school level and taking part in several vocational training workshops, for the students of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College life also involves political discussions, sports and other recreational activities. In fact culture is an important part of their daily lives. It embraces the performance of freedom songs,

dances, plays, poetry etc. In the beginning of the school some students founded different cultural groups, such as a poetry and an art group. The art group is named the 'Raymond Mhlaba Art Committee' in honour of the ANC leader who was sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island in 1964. By choosing this name they want to make the plight of Mhlaba and other political prisoners in South Africa known to the world.

The youth in South Africa is strongly influenced by the 'oppressors' culture. They have limited opportunities to get in touch with other cultural expressions. Conditions force them to write praise about South Africa. Poetry is also heavily censored and poems and plays not aimed at glorifying and sustaining the system, circulate with difficulty. Many poems and plays are banned and writers and progressive performances are threatened with persecution, are harassed by police and they are frequently beaten up by the latter. In spite of all this, there are many creative cultural groups in South Africa. We now have the situation that both in South Africa and in the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, young South Africans are rejecting oppressive cultural symbols and they are actively engaged in building solid cultural platforms, aimed at liberation. One of the objectives of the Poetry and Art group is to mobilize people. Poetry and art are weapons in the struggle. The students want their poems to reflect the mood of the people in South Africa, their aspirations and also to reflect the struggle. They write their poems from others-revolutionary poems by other oppressed people, poems from people at home reflecting life in South Africa etc. Through their poems the students try to express their political ideas and to reach the hearts and minds of other people. By having poetry performances and exhibitions of art-works, they try to make other people aware of the struggle. The students want to reflect the issues of the revolution; it is not art for its own sake. In their poems it is clear who the enemy is: racism. But one should not fight racism with racism. The liberation struggle is against

the system of racial and economical oppression, against imperialism in general. The struggle is aimed at creating a free and democratic South Africa, without racism and exploitation of men by another. This too is reflected in their poems.

The students feel that their poems should be simple, so that they can reach the hearts of people. For them poetry is the expression of their feelings. For instance, one of the poems was written by a student after he participated in the memorial meeting for the late comrade Joe Gqabi, who was murdered by South African agents in Zimbabwe last year. At the meeting one of the speakers gave a description of life at Robben Island; Highly impressed the student thought about it and sat down to write his poem.

Some poems are about special occasions (16 June - The Soweto Revolts), some about the leaders and fallen heroes of the struggle (Solomon Mahlangu), some visualise life in jail, others are about international solidarity, daily life experiences, aspirations of the people etc. The students strongly feel that their experiences are often held in common with all oppressed people, so their poems can be used by those people as well. The cultural groups at Mazimbu -as the area on which the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College is developing, is called- are open to everybody. Yet, sometimes the number of people who can participate is limited due to circumstances such as lack of material facilities, transport to and from the college etc. They encourage everybody to take part and learn. Not all the members of the poetry group are actually writing poems; some perform, read poetry, act, sing, make music or recite.

The poetry group often gives performances, the art group sometimes has exhibitions and they produce posters on special occasions (in campaigns or for solidarity groups). In performances they like to use instrumental music to underline the meaning of poems by music.

Their poetry and art-works are produced in a highly collective

way. Poems written by one of the members are read in the group first. There is a discussion, everybody can comment and propose alterations. In the art-group they also jointly analyse their drawings etc. These discussions are important, since one of the aims of the group is to try and develop poetry and art together and to encourage each other to participate.

The poetry group regularly performs in Mazimbu itself as well as on Tanzanian schools and political seminars etc. The people of Tanzania are enthusiastic about their work, they come to listen and talk about the poems, give their appreciation or constructive criticism. Performances for outsiders are important for mobilising support and understanding between the Tanzanian people and the ANC-community at Mazimbu. Many times cultural performances are combined with political discussions and information about the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and the South African liberation struggle led by the African National Congress.

Commenting on culture, one of the students wrote in the 'Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College Journal':

'As a school of the liberation movement, culture is our sharpest weapon in creating friendship with our neighbours and in mobilising support, not only for the school, but for the movement as a whole'.

solomon
mahlangu



**freedom
college**

WE SALUTE YOU MOTHER ANC!

On the 8th January 1912 birth
They gave to you
Birth that created a nation
An indisputed leader of the
Oppressed
Birth that saw the necessity
of a political organisation to voice
The grievences and aspirations of the oppressed
Mother! you the core and heart
of the liberation movement in South Africa
We salute you mother ANC

Cadres have been produced by you
Disciplined disciples who look up
The torch left lit by Seme
I know of a cadre produced by you
With a name dear to hundreds of millions
Name known in the remotest corners of the globe
For a guiding star, he is to his people
He is known as the most unassuming
and human of man of our time
His name lives on in the hearts
And minds of all progressive peoples
His name is inspiring them to strive
Ceaselessly for peace and justice
Yes, mother a hero you produced for us
Comrade Nelson Mandela
We salute you Mother ANC

He is not the only one
You also produced a heart and soul
of our activities
Who can ever fail to recognise the
Flashes of real genius in his
spirited and encouraging speeches
Who can ever fail to respect the
Dynamic work he has done
Yeah! mother for us a president you produced
Comrade Oliver Tambo
We salute you mother ANC

Mother ANC we know
There is no struggle without sacrifices
And victims
We resolved to die in battle rather than
Submit in slavery
We started this war of liberation
Knowing there shall be no stepping back
We don't care how long it takes
or how heavy the cost may be
What we know victory is ours
We salute you mother ANC
Happy birthday!

By SELLO MAQETHUKA

SHARPVILLE

Influx control
pass laws
chains! chains in our hands!
'Die boer kan mos ook roer'
we don't want them
Rivulets of people
paving their way
in the steel sands of Sharpville
ripe spirit of revolt
exploded facist arrogance
with bonfires of dompasses

Sharpville! Sharpville!
blood, blood, blo-oo-od!
suffering!
pain!
racist troops moulding my people down
rows like cabbagges lying
rows of heads of men
maimed for their aspirations
sharp razors cutting through the truth
water falls of blood
for people's power

Sharpville! Sharpville!
blood, blood, blo-oo-od!
here we come
to avenge the forests of corpses
to avenge the streams of blood
to cure justice
to bury the dompass
and make you a living symbol
of our times







REUTERS/GETTY IMAGES



Here we come
to save the motherland
from the chains of slavery
and they shall curse the day
the drenched you with blood.

By PATRICK MCGOPODI MMUSI

3th March 1981

MOTHER OF A SPEAR

Dedicated to Mrs Martha Mahlangu, Solomon's mother

Mamma -
the gallows sucked life out of your son
like a thief that sneaked into a kraal
to milk Africa's cow into its mouth

Dark dungeons
grim moments held us with adopted bitterness
blood boiling to avenge his death
for Africa has lost

He was a son of the spear
colossal morale kept him ready for unlimited sacrifices
he was mightier than the sword on which Apartheid lives
let your eyes divorce tears - mourning for him is mockery

Mahlangu,
the loftly mountain of our nation
blasted by steel bull-dozer that keep us in bondage
your beloved son, a hero in people's war

Words do limit his description
it is on the battlefield
where Botha will tell us why
and we shall tell him what next

Now the flames are up sky
with spears ready to echo the victories of Isandhlwana*
we are tilling and ploughing the land
Mamma, we shall harvest - drought is Pretoria's misty
dream

Worry not, mother of the year
the nation is with you
dying for one's country is living forever
and so he did

Now we count him with our martyrs
Somafo is reproducing him
but I tell you mamma
In South Africa, the sun will rise!

By PATRICK MOGOPODI MMUSI

28th March 1981

*Isandhlwana is the name of a mountain where the Zulus defeated the British in the battle of 1879

'FOR THEIR DEMANDS...'

They died the death of life
died leaving behind martyrdom spirit
being hungry for justice
they surrendered their lives for worms
morally and spiritually in the street
Together they stood
the oppressor felt oppressed
They marched
They sang
They clenched their fists
Forward they went
singing with courage

'SENZENINA E - AFRICA'*

with placards umbrelling their disconsolation
being the mouth of their demands

AWAY WITH BANTU EDUCATION!

They demanded
Indeed, they moved forward
armed themselves with hope
and the hope was hopelessly shuttered
on their defiance of being fed
with crumbs jeopardising their mentality
Corpses scattered like insecticided flies
in the dusty streets of Soweto,
Langa and Mamelodi

Teargas-smoke clouded the sorrowful scene
rattling of bullets was a music for the day
and the dance was a fall forever
Cries enveloped by fury
the song 'SENZENINA'*
diminished in the clouds of teargas.

By JABU MAHLANGU

*What have we done in Africa

*What have we done

THESE ARE MY PEOPLE

These are my people
These are my ancestors
My blood! My everything!
To them
my life is dedicated

These are my people
Whose newly born babies
you are depriving of
the right to live
Depriving their children
of a free, compulsory education
Dumping them in uninhabitable
Bantustans
where Kwashiokor, malnutrition,
venereal diseases abound!
And poverty daily claims their lives
Oh no! The pain they feel I also feel
Please! Beware of the fact that
these are my people!

You will pay for all the injuries
You've caused
You will pay for all the murders
You've committed!
These, my people, together
young and old
tried to indicate to you peacefully that
Apartheid,
homelands
pass laws
group areas
influx control
are inhuman and undesirable to them

Vorster - Botha - Kruger
You, the Verkrampptes!
You, the law breakers!
Yes! you imperialists, fascists
Yes! life suckers!
let all of you know that
These are my people!
They shall be avenged.

By KENEILGE SAOHATSE

UNCLE GQABI

The fresh smell of natural humour
is blown like dried manure
in abandoned fields
where crops could no longer grow
and Uncle, your strength can no longer grow

Here gnaws the dog of devilry
biting and chewing your soul
licking the blood of my people
that its masters have spilled
on the ruins where victory has emerged

Here, the eyes of your children are glassy
Africa is angered
the wound is in Umkhonto's flesh
for Apartheid's murderers
have ripped you apart

The air has dried
leaves drop an eve's drop from annoyed branches
it is dry
there's no rain - Botha thinks himself superior

But who says no to the tom-tom beat beat
of Africa's love and fight for freedom
hail is gathering
Marie cannot swallow her 'koekies'
because Piet is sent to defend nothing
nothing, defend nothing! but just nothing

Uncle Joe
'bawuthintile Umkhonto! '*

In rhythmic expression of struggling melodies
the march treads the patched soil
In rhythmic expression of struggling melodies
we pay tribute to you man of undying calibre
In rhythmic expression of struggling melodies
we are building
the victory for which you've given your life

Here gnaws the dog of evils
but look at it!
lean with ribs showing like cotton strings
its tongue hopelessly staggering in the air
that'll blow our freedom to the south tip
and Uncle your strength is within us
with this message
'Bawuthintile Umkhonto'
rest your bones my comrade.

By PATRICK MOGOPODI MMUSI

*They have provoked the Spear of the Nation 'Umkhonto we Sizwe' (Spear of the Nation).
The military wing of ANC

GO MY SON

Go my son, go
far north the Limpopo
reach the land of your brothers
in Africa

Wipe your tears telling them
sons and daughters of Africa are
daily mowed down by fascists
their blood fuels the machinery
of exploitation of Africa
for this a brother dies

Go my son, go
to far lands across the seas
Wipe your sweat telling them
Imperialism has descended down
on Africa
The blood of your brothers
smelters gold for the few
for this a brother dies

Go my son, go
to the lands unknown to me
go learn languages of manhood
Kalash Nikov, Katushka, R.P.G., Bazooka
languages of freedom
come home and insult them
Enemies
Insult them with these languages
till they are no more in Africa
for the blood they spilled
you must avenge.

By MORETI MOTAU

THE FASCIST HAND

Muscled
Rough
and notorious

Perpetuated fascism fallacy
raining down pleasant lives of peace lovers
Squeezing to dryness
blood from the veins of the industrious
Breeding hunger and poverty
necessitating hatred and frustration
Humiliation of human dignity

Kassinga the victim
Pregnant woman made martyr with bayonets
Children deprived beauty of growth
made to owe life necessities of birth
Hitler, the old fascist giant of the past
South Africa rejuvenated his fascistic myth
and intruded in Namibia

Let us hail Umkhonto we Sizwe
for a swastika mercenary
a product of facism
was smashed in Matola
PLAN of Namibia
trembling the heart of idolized apartheid

We are an inseperable force
fighting a common monster
our cause is a sacred cause
Let the bullets keep on flying
for Africa is not yet free.

By JABU MAHLANGU

YOU CAN ' T

You can't stop me from fighting
fighting for my oppressed people
you fascists, you exploiters of my
nation

No, you can't you can't stop me

You can't stop me from freeing my land
our cause is a just one
neither persecution, prison nor death
can stop us from fighting
The struggle shall go on
despite persecution

We shall take up the spears
of those who fall and
let you feel the pain
the seeds of oppression that
You sow in my land
hatred, hatred is what we shall harvest
South Africa shall be free
No you can't stop me.

By JABULILE KUNENE

WE SHALL OVERCOME

We shall overcome
injustice upon man by man
Dispossession of man's resources by man
Unconsideration of man's aspirations by man
Demoralisation
Inhumanity
and brutality
Man the inflictor
freedom has been changed
to a burden of frustration
Equality has been robbed of dynamism
Fraternity has been diluted
to a weapon of hatred

To arms. . . to arms. . .
Lamented the fallen heroes
Lamenting for the intensification and continuation
of Africa's historical war
The bitter war of resistance and
preservation
Having 'Umkhonto nesiviko'* in hands
Warring against gunmen from the sea

Remember 'Isandhlwana'* victory
Spears and shields against
guns and cannons
Victory in Africa!
Africans embittered by foreign parasited
Exploiters of manpower.

By JABU MAHLANGU

*A spear and the shield

*Isandhlwana is the name of a mountain where the Zulus defeated the British in the battle of 1879

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