The unbearable longing of exile

Political beliefs forced thousands of South Africans into exile. But being away from home caused some unhealable rifts, writes **Hilda Bernstein**

Back in the country ... But the trauma of years of exile will have left their mark

PHOTO: STEVE HILTON-BARBER

FOUR out of the first eight names on the ANC election list for the National Assembly are those of former exiles. Out of the first 40 names on the list, 21 are those of returned exiles. Their position at the head of the list ensures their election and makes it likely that they will hold high places in the first democratically elected government of South Africa.

Yet these are people who spent up to 30 years away from their country, physically distant from the passionate and changing nature of the internal struggle.

Tens of thousands of South Africans went into exile over a period of more than three decades. They left at different times, for different reasons, and lived in a great variety of countries around the world.

Thousands lived at basic level for years in camps in Angola, or at the ANC school complex in Tanzania. Clusters of exiles set up communities in Lusaka, Harare, Maputo, Dar es Salaam. Many lived — dangerously — in the frontline states. Others went for study or for training to Europe, to north America, the Soviet Union or China. Many lived in Britain, a large community in London, separated by the size of the city and the cost of travel, but held together by common commitment, meeting regularly in small groups and at larger gatherings to commemorate important occasions.

Work, study, political involvement or even chance took many exiles to remote places, often the only South Africans living there. Babu taught on a remote Indian reservation in Canada, Cross Lake. Ossie Dennis lived for 13 years in a small town in Germany; Joe Kotane worked in Hungary for seven years; the Carim family lived in war-torn Beirut. How can one generalise from such a wide variety of experiences?

Tom Lodge has written that the environment of exile politics is usually viewed as hazardous, sterile, corrosive and demoralising; that political groups forced out of their domestic terrain are especially vulnerable. Exile is perceived to be an experience which is inherently detrimental and problematic. Unusually, the South African exiles did not succumb to this corrosion. They not only survived with a remarkable degree of unity, but built organisations in exile that fundamentally influenced international affairs.

The exodus began in the late 1950s. Anticipating illegality, the ANC had already decided to send Oliver Tambo to establish a base outside the country. It was from this fragile base that the ANC rebuilt itself, and that the anti-apartheid movement was formed.

We tend to forget — or not to have known — what it was like 20 or 30 years ago. The world then knew nothing about apartheid, and among those who did were many defenders of the system. When a motion was tabled at the United Nations condemning the massacre at Sharpeville, Britain abstained, and Prime Minister Harold MacMillan told his colleagues to avoid lending support to the view that the "recent disturbances" were the inevitable result of racial policies.

For years the politically committed exiles were unknown, unacknowledged, their message ignored. Many of those early exiles were casualties of their unrelenting life of travel, and the strains and tensions of exile politics. Heart attacks, strokes, crippled and shortened too many lives; and alcoholism was also a disease of exile.

Writers and artists too often could not overcome the severance from the basis of their creative source, the immediacy of their surroundings. Nakasa, Modisane, Matshikiza, Dumile, Hutchinson, la Guma ... the list is very long of the most gifted who died far from home, scattered across the continents. Has South Africa ever evaluated the loss?

While a steady stream reinforced the exile community over the years, it was the student uprising of 1976 that turned the stream into a flood. By the end of 1977, when the uprising was finally quelled, thousands of young activists were in prison, and 14 000 had fled, spilling over the frontiers. All they wanted to do was to get a gun, learn how to use it, and come back to free their country. Many of the students were in their early teens and had never before been separated from their families. They were too young to be independent in countries too poor to care for them.

The ANC mission gave them the choice of two roads: the army, or education. Those who joined Umkhonto weSizwe were sent for training in Africa or Europe; then they returned to the camps in Angola.

These exiles, who came from urban environments, were to spend years in remote bush country, where they endured physical hardships, shortage of food and tropical diseases from which many died. Some could not endure the life.

Yet the cohesion and dedication of the ANC in exile provided the training and logistics that enabled many to infiltrate back into South Africa and rebuild resistance from within.

The generosity of Tanzania and many other countries made it possible to build the school complex Somafco at Mazimbu, to which went many of the young people who left from 1976 onwards. Life in Mazimbu was not easy.

Many of the young exiles had endured traumatic experiences — detention, torture, living on the run. Mazimbu had to cope with breakdowns, with teenage pregnancies, with very young children separated from their parents.

As an organisation formed to fight for national liberation it was not equipped to deal with so many social and psychological problems. What is remarkable is that so many survived. They returned with military and civilian skills from which South Africa will benefit.

The small group of students who laid the basis for the anti-apartheid movement set in motion a "uniquely powerful solidarity movement in the cause of South African freedom ... that has had tremendous influence over the policies of governments and ultimately over international policy. That is one of the basic pillars that help to explain the transformation of South Africa towards the liberation of the African people." (Vella Pillay.)

As exiles continued to arrive over the years they found well-established organisations: the ANC's external mission; the Anti-Apartheid Movement; International Defence and Aid; the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee organising sports boycotts. There is no doubt that it was this symbiotic relationship between internal and exile activity that has brought us to the verge of democracy in South Africa. Without the exile movement, without international solidarity, the sports, cultural and economic boycotts, eventually South Africans would have freed themselves; but how long, and at what terrible additional cost?

That we have arrived at the transfer of power in this unique, unprecedented way is due to the courage and sacrifice of both those within the country during the long years of oppression, to the remarkable calibre of our leaders, and to the worldwide political, economic and social pressures that were built up by the exiles.

Edward Said writes that "exile is compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted."

Exiles are always strangers, however well-received, however hospitable the host country. Underlying the exile experience is this split between self and home, that over the years extends to divisions between parents and children who grow and become part of a different country.

The rift grows over the years between those who stayed and those who left. And for exiles, no return is solely a return. As L and R Grinberg have written, it is a new migration. "Those who return are not the same people they were when they left, and the place they return to is not the same place."

■Hilda Bernstein is a South African writer and artist who has lived in exile for 28 years. Her latest book is The Rift — The Exile Experience of South Africans, published by Jonathan Cape

The meaning of displacement

The experience of exile has marked the lives of many South Africans. **Mark Gevisser** discusses a new book on the topic

SOMEWHERE, buried deep in the tales of exile, of struggle and solidarity, dislocation and separation, collected in Hilda Bernstein's *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans* (Jonathan Cape), there is a quiet but astonishing rupture to the narrative. One of the hundred interview subjects, all of whom are recorded in first-person oral-history style, turns on her interviewer:

"You say the secrecy was to protect us and to protect yourselves; but there's another element — I think it's also to protect yourselves from having to deal with the consequences of your political activities on your children. I think it's much easier not to have to explain than to try to explain, isn't it?"

The challenge here is issued by Shawn Slovo, daughter of Joe Slovo and Ruth First and maker of the film *A World Apart*. Her interlocutor, the author of *The Rift*, is Hilda Bernstein, herself a political activist who took young children into exile. And it's a challenge that must have spurred Bernstein on in her project. *The Rift* is an attempt to bear witness to, and thus demystify, the condition of exile.

Bernstein has already related her own story in her autobiography, *The World That Was Ours*. Here she tells the stories of others. While *The Rift* is suffused with her personal concerns — motherhood and struggle, the effect of apartheid and exile on women and the family, the wages and rewards of commitment, fractured identity — it is only in this unexpected moment of interaction that we feel, obliquely, the author's own pain; her own role in the history she documents.

The interviews were conducted between 1989 and 1991. Many thus spoke while they were still unable to return to South Africa, and many more in that fraught time when South African exiles, still outside the country, were making difficult decisions about whether they would go home; decisions which led them to question the very meaning of "home" in the first place.

Many have since returned, and so *The Rift* exists in a curious time-warp, missing the critical Fifth Act — the homecoming, the resolution or lack thereof — to these peoples' personal dramas. Nevertheless, by interviewing them at so volatile a time in their lives, Bernstein captures an instability in her subjects that moves this book from being merely a social document of South African exile towards a meditation on exile in general.

Some of her subjects are remarkably articulate and reflective, and others shadow their re-telling with a longing so ragged and haunting that their tales become poetry. Marius Schoon, for example, lost his wife and daughter in a bomb-blast in Angola. He distills his anguish into the cry of his surviving son, who develops a phobia for Angola's onmipresent monkeys. Wherever the wandering father and son go — to Devon, to West Cork — the monkeys follow them. In Dublin the child screams, "The monkeys have followed us! The monkeys are here!" When he finally conquers the phobia, it is as if both father and son have been liberated.

But most of the testimony is the mundanity of dates and moves; a train-timetable of displacement. This in itself is immensely powerful: much as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* rendered the Holocaust translucent with its obsessive mechanical detail, *The Rift* demystifies the grand project of struggle with its ceaseless repetition of the mechanics of upheaval.

Which is not to say that this book is without an ideology of its own. Perhaps because these testaments were recorded when a culture of secrecy — a war-ethos — still pervaded the South African liberation movement, Bernstein's project often veers unfortunately towards partisan struggle-history.

Criticism of the African National Congress is carefully managed, the testaments are characterised by ellipses ("I don't want to talk about this"), and there is far too much dull lionisation of the international Anti-Apartheid Movement. No one directly challenges ANC leadership, and there are none of the horror stories of human rights abuse in the ANC's camps in Angola that have come to light through commissions established recently by the ANC itself.

Hilda Bernstein

Due to a brilliant international publicity campaign, the ANC managed to convince the world that it was a driven, organised liberation movement, and Bernstein upholds this image in her introduction. But *The Rift* reveals just how aimless and arbitrary exile really was. Many of Bernstein's subjects were — and still are — isolated and lost; in snow-bound Canada; in provincial Denmark; in lonely flats in London or New York.

Even within the ANC's own African settlements, the rigours of life imposed an intense emotional alienation. Thoko Mafaje, a lonely and disturbed widow now living in an isolated Canadian town, recalls that "in Tanzania we had so many funerals ... No, there's no longer a point of crying. And there is this thing that a soldier doesn't cry. If a soldier's gone, you don't have to cry. Which I feel it's the wrong thing."

South African exiles — numbering perhaps 100 000 — were stateless, many entirely dependent on a liberation movement that had neither the resources nor the time to look after them properly. Many of the subjects speak of the psychological fallout from this; of the stunted and destroyed lives; of the horrifically high pregnancy rates among teenage girls in ANC settlements; of alcoholism and fatalism. But many others talk of the community they found; of the solidarity, the "new families" they made among exiles; the opportunities they had that, as black people, would have been denied to them back home.

But even those who found meaning in exile acknowledge the immense personal toll on their lives. Husbands and wives forced apart by apartheid and then exile; children suddenly without parents; mothers stealing out of home, on the run, in the dark of night, without saying goodbye to their children. And among the children of exiles, such bitterness.

Gloria Nkadimeng, who went into exile to be with her father, remembers that when she asked him for gifts, he responded that he could not single her out for special attention because "all these children who are here are my children". From that day, she says, "I just closed myself up, and I told myself that I no longer have a father ... He's much more in love with his cause than with us, his children. I felt like ... some sort of hatred towards him."

Ultimately, the book does not blame Gloria Nkadimeng's father. Nor even the paternal — and often inadequate — ANC. Culpability for the tragedies of South African exile is placed squarely on the shoulders of an oppressive apartheid system which forced South Africans to leave home in the first place.

How appropriate, then, that it should come out now, at this critical juncture in South African history, at this moment of "reconciliation" where even the National Party has reconfigured itself as a non-racial organisation claiming to have "liberated" South Africa from the chains of apartheid. Upon reading the testimonies in *The Rift*, it is hard not to be shocked by the audacity and cynicism of such claims.

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Tales that can aid our healing

Business Day 2/5/94

THE RIFT — The Exile Experience of South Africans, by Hilda Bernstein (Jonathan Cape, R97,99)

HILDA Bernstein, herself a '60s generation exile, has put together accounts culled from interviews with 104 SA exiles of aspects of their lives. The accounts, each of between three and seven pages, are divided thematically into 14 sections such as Trail-Blazers (including Oliver Tambo and Frene Ginwala); The Insurrection: the 1970s; The Military Road; The Anti-Apartheid Movement; Artists in Exile; and the like. Each section is preceeded by a brief commentary.

Stated so simply, this may seem to be a simple and unremarkable book. But its message is a powerful one. It is intense and painful: it not the kind of book to be consumed in one or two sittings. To tell the truth, I have not yet had the energy to read the whole text.

It is also not necessary to read the stories in chronological order. For example, I started off by dipping into the accounts by the four or so contributors I knew before they went into exile. I then turned to those with whom I have become acquainted since their return.

The remainder are either well-known public figures (Ginwala, ANC treasurer-general Thomas Nkobi and Ronnie Kasrils, for example) and then the generally unknown representatives of the thousands of people who chose exile over the past 35 years.

The overwhelming themes are violence, deprivation, broken family relationships and, generally, the emptiness of life in exile. Given the stereotypes that many South Africans, especially whites, have been fed of exiled people as involved in an often cynical and misdirected anti-apartheid struggle, the magnitude of the sacrifices made is sobering.

There is the father who relates the psychological damage caused to his son Fritz who, at the age of two, saw his mother and six-year-old sister blown up by a parcel bomb in Angola. And there is Nelly Marwanqana who was present at the 1982 SADF raid on Maseru in which 30 ANC members and 12 Lesotho citizens died. She tells how the mildly embarrassed or "shy" SA soldier ordered her out of the room before he executed her husband and two adult children.

There are also many accounts of periods in detention which precipitated flight into exile. In line with the folklore of our times, some victims speak of the experience the way poet Rupert Brooke did of the First World War — a story of heroic and somewhat romantic resistance.

One notable exception is Horst Kleinschmidt, now Kagiso Trust director, who was detained in connection with the Breyten Breytenbach case in 1974. His account of detention is far more credible and real — a frightening and disorienting experience, even though he was one of those not subject to physical abuse.

And then there is the account of 1976-generation Jane Dumasi, for whom one passage sums it up: "My own children and the children of the ANC, as long as I live, should not live the life I experienced."

Of course it is not only the exiles who suffered. The book does not address the pain suffered by innocent victims of the armed struggle, or attempt to assess whether it was worthwhile or necessary. But that is not the purpose of this book. As South Africans learn to live with each other, it is proper that all begin at least to understand what their former enemies went through. This book assists in that process.

It would, though, have been improved if it had included interviews with some of the alleged mutineers imprisoned in ANC camps. That, after all, is part of the overall exile experience and would have made The Rift a less partisan effort.

Two other gripes. Photographs of individuals interviewed and incidents described — like the Maseru raid — would have added much.

Finally, it seems that most accounts have been transcribed almost verbatim. This is often a useful technique, adding immediacy and poignancy. But where the interviewee is uncomfortable with English, and the account comes out as the SA equivalent of pidgin English, it adds nothing to the content and is unfair to the speaker and the reader.

ALAN FINE

lover sees her sent far away from

The Rift: the exile experience of South Africans by Hilda Bernstein. Jonathan Cape, 1994, £25.00

AAM News
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South African exiles tell their stories

by †Trevor Huddleston CR

FOR anyone concerned to convey the real meaning of apartheid there is no better book than *The Rift*. I say this after having read hundreds of books and articles about apartheid, but also having enjoyed the privilege of friendship with its author, Hilda Bernstein, for over 50 years.

The Rift is a perfect title for the experience of exile, and that experience has destroyed deliberately and with appalling cruelty thousands of black South Africans. It tells their story not only in their own words but with the sound of their voices. It is the result of over five years of travelling across the world to America, Canada and elsewhere, as well as in Europe. The exiles spoken to cover, therefore, a wide range of ages and an even wider range of experience in the different places of exile. In every case the absolute tragedy is brought home to the reader, sometimes unbearably.

Many of those who have contributed to the book remain uncertain about their future and this applies most particularly to the children and grandchildren of those who left South Africa after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, and also after the Soweto uprising in 1976. What becomes luminously clear is that going into exile for South Africans differed fundamentally from the experience of many other exiles over the past decades. The difference was that South Africans (and this is not a simple generalisation, but is borne out in every single case) took with them an absolute determination to fight by every means in their power the apartheid ideology which had attempted to destroy them.

I urge everyone in the Anti-Apartheid Movement to secure a copy of *The Rift* as soon as may be because nothing in my experience conveys so marvellously the truth that apartheid is intrinsically and absolutely evil; that there can be no compromise whatever and no accommodation or excuse for its horror. Too many people in the West are determined to say that apartheid was just a major political mistake. Nothing can be further from the truth. It was a deliberately imposed ideology of evil and although, as Nelson Mandela himself pleads, reconciliation and forgiveness is the only way forward to a new South Africa, he nowhere pleads that apartheid should be forgotten.

Certainly it is open to those who have suffered so bitterly in their own or their children's lives to seek reconciliation and restoration, but let no one ever forget what a destructive force apartheid has been. Its consequences will last not for ten years but for decades. Please read this book.

Farmers (and partners) in the Transkei in 1991. In "Blue Portraits" (Cornerhouse Publications, £30), Reiner Leist matches pictures and interviews—both equally revealing—with a cross-section of South Africans, from poor workers to the likes of Tutu, Mandela and Nadine Gordimer

Broken voices

THE RIFT: THE EXILE EXPERIENCE OF SOUTH AFRICANS
Hilda Bernstein
Jonathan Cape, £25
BELOVED COUNTRY: SOUTH AFRICA'S SILENT WARS
Daniel Reed
BBC Books, £15.99

Lawrence Joffe

For Peggy Stevenson, returning to South Africa left her numb: "There was nothing I could relate to." Familiar sights had changed and the dreams she harboured for 30 years in exile bore little relation to reality. Yet as a Coloured, unwed mother of two, denied education, she remembered why she left for London. "I became a person here; I did not feel negated as a human being." Now she is prepared to return if called to do so.

Her moving personal account is just one of some hundred in *The Rift*, which Hilda Bernstein gleaned from 330 taped interviews. Here are people thrown together by virtue of being South Africans in exile, despite different backgrounds and reasons for leaving. Bernstein's excellent introduction and interlacing commentary highlights the exile's dilemma. You leave because you love your country and hate injustice. Yet the very act of leaving removes you from the fray and means you are deserting those left behind. Then the need to put down roots precludes return.

Each stage of apartheid bred a new wave of exiles in Britain, Canada, Angola, Denmark, the GDR, Nigeria and elsewhere. Refugees set up ANC schools in Tanzania or joined military bases in Angola; there are artists in exile; white conscientious objectors; dissenters like Sir Raymond Hoffenberg. Paradoxes abound. Dirk Coetzee, a former Pretoria hit-man who joined the ANC, speaks alongside his intended victims. Most poignant are the children raised in exile, voicing their bitterness at playing second fiddle to their parents' "cause".

By keeping the authentic diction of speakers, *The Rift* sometimes loses intelligibility. Yet the amazing stories of courage and commitment display the variety of talents that came out of South Africa. From this matrix of often contradictory voices, common elements emerge. Many only realised how artificial apartheid was when, in exile, they did not have to stand at the back of the bus because of their skin colour.

Some left for better education. Others feared dying in detention. Many saw their families buckle and break under the stress. Ruth Mompati yearns for the ten lost years of her children's lives. Yet many exiles grew into fuller people—and gained insight into injustice in their new homes.

Sharpeville 1960, Soweto 1976 and other dates act as defining moments for individuals and generations. Many only discovered their "South Africanness" in exile, but feel guilty for not being there. Yet there are also universal messages. The women's response is usually more candid, more willing to admit vulnerability. Frene Ginwalala, Eleanor Khanyile and others warn that unless the liberation movements wake up to women's role, there will be troubles ahead.

Exiles are prone to mood swings—from irrepressible optimism (like Hugh Masekela, who feels that South Africa will lead the world of popular music) to pessimism. Loretta Ngcobo found a cure for her bitterness through teaching in London; then returned home feeling like an outsider, "like a stream has cast me aside". For artists in exile, individual expression is often subsumed into outrage at apartheid. There is freedom of expression, but inspiration now comes exclusively from memory, says Eskia Mphahlele.

The book succeeds best on the personal level, with memories of people, places and events. Christopher Hope notes that South Africa "lurches from tragedy to farce and back again". Jonas Gwangwa, jazz musician, shows apartheid at its most idiotic. After Sharpeville, Pretoria banned gatherings of more than five Africans. As a result, his six-piece jazz band became an illegal political movement overnight.

But there is another side: the "Whites Only" ambulance that ignored a Coloured accident victim and landed Dennis September in jail for protesting against this, and the brutal torture and murder of Pretoria's foes. Apartheid reached into exile, taking its toll of sensitive souls lost to drink and sheer remorse. The banning of people and works meant that three decades of artistic genius is lost forever. Exile grows into a condition, even an affliction.

Now apartheid's demise is dismantling this unique exile community. What of the future? *Beloved Country*, Daniel Reed's book supporting a BBC TV series, is a timely portrait of a society in transition but hamstrung by past inequalities. Reed looks behind the headlines at a "schizophrenic" country on the verge of colossal change, yet still at war with itself. South Africa is awash with arms; so disputes whose origins are often trivial now threaten to overwhelm the new government. The old certainties no longer apply. To make sense of it all, he suggests, we must bypass party-political broadcasters and meet the grassroots protagonists and victims. The result is depressing but compelling.

Beloved Country's three main sections explore the township wars of the Vaal Reef, the Inkatha-ANC clashes of KwaZulu/Natal, and the Coloured gangs of Cape Town. Reed has a keen eye and mordant wit. He is good at illustrating by analogy and took risks rarely attempted by other journalists. After visiting battlescape of Transvaal's townships, he lived with Coloured gangs in the Cape, caught between white and black. Many Coloureds now fear being marginalised by a new ANC establishment. Today, they have the world's biggest per capita prison population.

Reed's most gripping passages concern the enigmatic Staggie twins, Rashad and Rashied, joint leaders of the Hard Living gang. Their fundamental ambiguity acts as a metaphor for all that is good and bad in South Africa. One minute they come across as murderous psychopaths, the next as Robin Hood figures protecting their communities, giving alienated youth dignity and hope.

The book concludes with a surprise hero: "Baas" Potgieter, an Afrikaner entrepreneur whose enlightened self-interest saw opportunities in Phola Park township, regarded as "verboten" to whites. The moral is that by dealing with blacks at face value, and not succumbing to peer-group pressure, Potgieter has succeeded. He and Jacob Modise, a young black finanical director, are new South Africans straddling worlds that have lived side by side for centuries yet never really communicated. By contrast, a well-meaning liberal social worker who devoted 20 years to helping township residents now finds himself despairing just as freedom dawns. Even the ANC, warns Reed, risks disaster unless it heeds the demands of the street.

25/7/94

LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS

Pale Ghosts

Jeremy Harding

The Electronic Elephant: A Southern African Journey
by Dan Jacobson.
Hamish Hamilton, 373 pp., £17.99, 13 June 1994, 0 241 13355 6

Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela
Little Brown, 630 pp., £20, 30 November 1994, 0 316 90965 3

None to Accompany Me
by Nadine Gordimer.
Bloomsbury, 324 pp., £15.99, 1 September 1994, 0 7475 1821 1

The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans
by Hilda Bernstein.
Cape, 516 pp., £25, 24 February 1994, 0 224 03546 0

Dan Jacobson grew up in the diamond town of Kimberley, South Africa. England was one of the places he looked to for inspiration. As it turned out, his interest in English literature and his habit of falling on copies of the *New Statesman* were ways of sending ahead. From his description of Kimberley on a Saturday afternoon in *Time and Time Again* (1985), it is obvious why he hankered for another life, the further away the better:

> Helpless with boredom, stupefied by their own nullity, town and sky yawned at one another. Old buildings two storeys high, with elaborate fronts, alternated with garish new buildings four or five storeys high. Nobody looked at the dresses or cars or electrical equipment displayed in their ground-floor windows. There were no other pedestrians to be seen and no cars on the roadway.

Jacobson bid farewell to this Nick Ray set in the mid-Fifties. Unlike so many of the tens of thousands of South Africans who would soon be exiled, and whose lives abroad would always seem to them provisional, he was able to settle pretty thoroughly in London. From here, in due course, he could look back to his country of origin without much rancour, although his dislike of apartheid is as strong as his aversion to the parched provincialism of Kimberley, which he evokes so well, not in the voice of the Jewish boy who was raised there, but in the rich, rainfed English manner acquired through years of expatriate living, reading and reflection. His stories are exquisite in the telling; the subjects sometimes harsh or poignant, but the sounds of grinding and laying on thick are absent. The axe and the trowel are not the tools of Jacobson's trade.

The Electronic Elephant is the record of a journey through Southern Africa, made at some point after Mandela's release. The title is taken from an encounter with a life-size model elephant made of wire, wood and painted plaster, mounted on a bogie, with a driver's seat inside and a steering wheel from a cannibalised tractor. It has been delivered to a little dorp in Botswana for repair by a mystified Zimbabwean trucker, who thinks that 'maybe it go to safari park. Maybe they make films.' Jacobson peers up its backside at a 'rusty collection of metal pipes, wires and wood'. He notes 'a reproachful gleam from one of its great brown eyes'. The creature is both monstrous and puzzling: how foolish can a notion get? Months later, in England, the question arises again, when a publisher wants to know if his book will lay bare 'the Soul of Africa'. 'It was as if the electronic elephant's eye was looking directly at me. "Yes," I answered.' Jacobson's journey begins in Kimberley: he goes north through the Transvaal, across Bophuthatswana – which died in a blaze of ignominy last year – up to Botswana and from there into Zimbabwe, with a brief excursion into Zambia. For much of the time, he remains unsettled; engaged, amused, alarmed, seldom at ease and never presumptuous. London is often present: a remembered preamble to departure, a source of archive material on missionary history and a useful reference point when Jacobson is talking with Africans and perhaps with himself ('More greenness. More rain. More money. More goods. More newspapers'). Above all, it is somewhere he is not.

Nor is he entirely in Africa. In Kimberley he drifts like a wraith through a remembered world, already blurred by change. He is troubled by the monstrosity (and ubiquity) of De Beers, which in his youth he had taken for granted. Before long, having explored some of the smaller towns to the west of Kimberley, he is ready to move on, 'not because of the other ghosts I encountered wherever I turned; it was my own ghostliness I had begun to find so burdensome.' He is dismayed, too, by the absence of spoken English. 'The people I knew had vanished; so had their language. That contributed to my ghostlike state. In my earliest years the whites of Kimberley spoke English only . . . Now I was addressed in Afrikaans wherever I went.'

He takes off for the margins of Bophuthatswana, following what was one of the most important routes of white penetration into Africa: 'the missionary road' – also known as 'the hunter's trail', 'the road to the north', 'the neck of the bottle'. There is no great resemblance between his own, open-ended journey and the intrusions of earlier strangers: of Robert Moffat, Livingstone and various envoys of the London Missionary Society, who thrived on scruples; of Cecil Rhodes, and an assortment of English and Boer traders, who did without them; of the Voortrekkers, who left the Cape in sombre spirits and travelled north to cultivate a useful sense of grievance. Yet in following this beaten track Jacobson implies a connection with his predecessors.

He prefers some to others. He is amused by Livingstone's antipathy to almost all forms of human life that he encounters, but relishes his writing. He is intrigued, too, by Livingstone's father-in-law, Robert Moffat, a Scots market gardener turned Congregationalist minister, who established a mission north-west of Kimberley in 1822. Moffat was an able, congenial sort, although he and his wife, Mary, fared badly in the saving of souls ('Alas! We still hang our harps on the willows, and mourn over the destiny of thousands hastening with heedless but impetuous strides to the regions of woe'). But in their very persistence they brought their wayward congregation 'new forms of agriculture, medical care and technology (guns not least – to the fury of the Boers)'. Through their diaries, they left 'a historiography which tries to look at the past from a specifically African point of view'. Jacobson sets the Moffats against more brazen scouts of empire, including their own son, John, whose work among the Ndebele, further north and somewhat later, typified the 'open alliance between the interests of the local missionaries and the colonisers' into which Robert and Mary, worried about land expropriation and enslavement, had felt unable to enter.

The Ndebele, whose chief, Mzilikaze, had befriended Robert on his travels north, scorned the Gospel. In nearly thirty years at Inyati, near Bulawayo, the mission founded by John Smith Moffat converted only two Ndebele. In 1889, Rhodes obtained a mining concession in Matabeleland from Mzilikaze's successor, Lobengula; his company was promptly endowed with a royal charter from London, which would allow him to do as he pleased with the territory and its inhabitants. Missionary hearts were lifted at the news. Within four years, having found no minerals in their push to the north-east, the Rhodes cortège struck west and crushed the Ndebele. Lobengula set fire to his kraal and fled. He dispatched a bag of sovereigns to the nearest enemy commander, with the message: 'Take this and go back. I am conquered.' It was not at odds with Rhodes's enterprise, and those who took up with him, that the gold was 'stolen by the first two soldiers to get their hands on it and never seen again'.

These stories have been told before, but they are worth hearing again from Jacobson, who sorts through the history of the region in a series of careful passages that punctuate his own journey. The effect of this extensive shuttling from past to present and back again is to show not only how violent that history has been but how bloodshed, ethnic rivalry, exploitation and superstition are still seeping down into the land; and how, as they drain into the immense table of misdemeanour, the surface moisture of bad feeling is easily replenished. Most of the white racialism that Jacobson encounters is a manner of speaking – the vestigial loyalty of rather fortunate people to the notion that they are hard done by. Yet one hesitates to call it harmless, since it neatly substitutes the idea that 'Africans' are ruinous ('That's what you get when you try to do business in a fucking Third World kaffir state') for the fact that they were, in most cases, ruined by the arrival of white people.

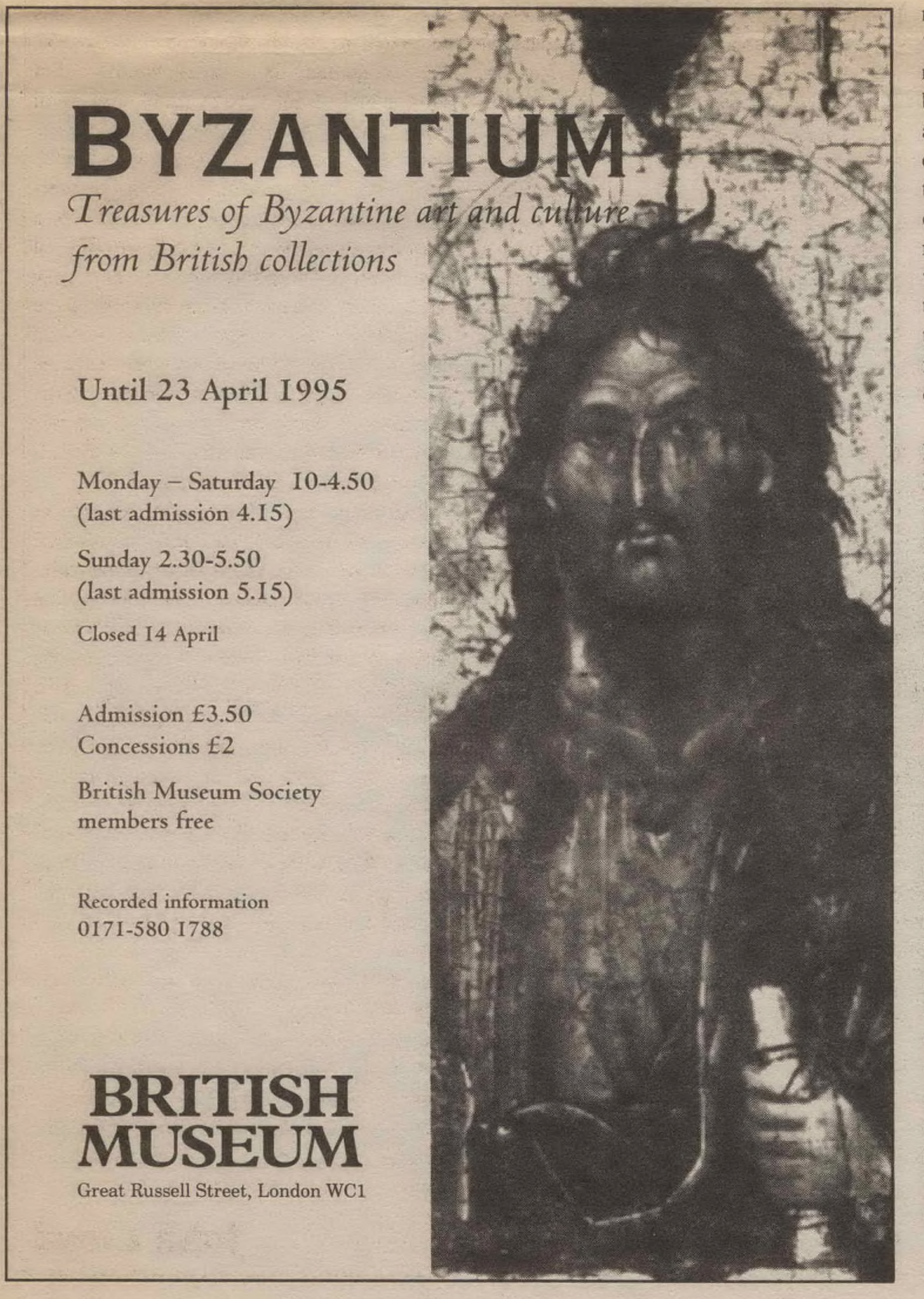
On this ruin and its continuation, Jacobson writes persuasively. Here, he is driving into an abysmal section of Bophuthatswana:

> On the eastern side of the road there appeared the largest, poorest, dirtiest area of peri-urban habitation . . . it went on for miles. There were some handkerchief-sized houses with asbestos roofs; a few bare brick schools with iron roofs; one-room shops barred like little forts. The rest was litter. There was the litter people lived in; there was the litter they had thrown away. You could hardly tell the one sort from the other, except that there were hollows in some of the heaps, for the people to come in and out of. A dead dog lay by the side of the road, its mouth open in a jubilant grin. About a mile further on, in a more advanced state of decomposition, a dead horse or mule lay in the middle of the road.

Forced removals, phoney 'republics' for blacks, division, internment, exile – all these have entailed a numbing isolation of communities and groups in South Africa, and especially of the whites in whose name such policies were mostly implemented. The failure to generate a sense of public life, to feel like a country at all, is the key to Jacobson's South Africa, 'its deepest secret'. The centre of Mafikeng embodies

> all that is most unbeautiful, unadorned, imaginatively penurious about the standard South African dorp, where people buy, sell, and huddle apart from one another. And flat, flat, flat. The boredom of it! The vacuity! . . . it is not the physical spaces of the veld that remain unfilled, but the hearts of the people. And their minds. And the place where some common notion of themselves should reside.

Yet the uneasiness of this book has to do with the similarity, not the distinction, between geographical and social space: both are disparate and cratered, full of wilderness where nothing resembling civility has taken hold for very long, or spread beyond one or another local terrain. When identity is in any way certain, it is adversarial – defined in relation to an elemental hostility ('Africa'), or to the apartheid state, or simply to 'the blacks'. Everyone, from the fiercest militant for full



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citizenship to the stoutest Orange Free State burgher, who would have preferred to restrict it, is a kind of fugitive.

The image of the captive Nelson Mandela breaking stones on Robben Island is still very powerful. But its meaning has changed. It is no longer simply about punishment and heroism, or even, by that stretch of the political imagination which kept the opposition alive through a dreary forty years and more, about chipping away at the monolithic racist state. Over the years it has come to stand for a painstaking demolition of obstacles – all political, but with the sullen aspect of geological truths – to a unitary democratic South Africa. The job, Mandela tells us in his autobiography, which is nothing if not authorised, was to smash this adamantine stuff, 'the size of volleyballs', into gravel. Later he worked a 'blinding white' lime quarry dug into a hillside on the island. The lime was a 'soft, calcified residue of seashells and coral', buried in layers of rock. At the end of a day in the quarry, Mandela and his comrades 'looked like pale ghosts', covered in chalky dust, just as he had been at his circumcision, although the one conferred ceremonial purity while the other expressed the ritual humiliation of prison life.

Long Walk to Freedom begins at the beginning, with Mandela born to Thembu nobility in Umtata on 18 July 1918, transferred to the compound of a royal guardian after his father's death, and raised on *Chambers English Reader*, doing well in school 'not so much through cleverness as through doggedness', an attribute that came in useful later. There is also a flicker of pastoral. 'When I was not in school, I was a ploughboy, a waggon guide, a shepherd. I rode horses and shot birds with slingshots and found boys to joust with, and

Diary

The war which began in early December in Chechnya, the Russian republic in the North Caucasus, was a test of many things, but of Russia's claim to be an open society in particular. Leaving aside the special case of the assault on the Russian Parliament in Moscow in October 1993, this is the first full-scale military action in which the Russian state has engaged on what it perceives to be its own territory. It justified its intervention – on Sunday, 11 December – by reference to the presence on Chechen territory of large numbers of illegal armed groups apparently loyal to the Chechen President Dzhokar Dudayev, whose election in late 1991 is itself seen by the Russian authorities as illegal: these groups, the Russians said, were threatening the civilian population. Even if one accepts that this constitutes grounds for intervention it is still necessary – and here has lain the difficulty for the Russian administration – for journalists to believe that the questions do not end, but only begin, at that point.

I was in Chechnya and its capital, Grozny, for a few days immediately after the three Russian divisions arrived in the republic, though I left shortly before the final deadline for the effective surrender of the pro-Dudayev forces ran out and attacks on the city began in earnest. It was the second Russian onslaught in two weeks. The first, on 26 November, followed an attack by the Chechen opposition,

The journalists who came and went in the first weeks of December tried to get beds in a hotel called the Fransuski Dom, or French House, which was a comfortless former apartment building which – until the attacks came closer – preserved a functioning restaurant and a few electric fires (the central heating had long since ceased to work). The unlucky found places in the nearby Neftyanik ('Oil Worker') or Grozneft ('Grozny Oil'), where they slept on beds with iron frames and dirty blankets, the toilets were holes in the floors and there was no food. Remarkably, a private restaurant called the Lasania opened every evening: its basement rooms were warm and there was a constant supply of alcohol and quite good soup. It was packed until the small hours with Russian and foreign journalists loudly releasing tensions, floating instant strategies and cursing the Russian Army.

I thought the foreign reporters who covered the war admirable. Everyone had had at least one brush with great danger, some had come very close indeed. A car with Reuters cameramen and reporters had been casually shot up by Russian troops after it had stopped at their command – the only wound was a grazed ear. Didier Lecomte of *Libération* lay beneath a bridge during a firefight near Grozny while shells landed all about him. David Hearst of the *Guardian* and David Chater of Sky News, who had gone up to the village of Pervomaisk near Grozny to observe the Russian advance, were nearly killed by a shell and sniped at when they ran for cover. Witold Laskowski of

ed simply in getting part of the Russian Army to within striking distance of Grozny. They had heard one of the divisional commanders, General Ivan Babichev, telling a crowd of mainly elderly Chechens that he did not intend to take his column into Grozny because he thought the order to do so 'criminal'. They could see – indeed, they experienced – the casual or nervous brutality of the Russian Army recruits. They could see that describing the Chechens as 'slaves' to Dudayev, as Nikolai Yegorov, the Russian Presidential plenipotentiary to Chechnya had done, was rubbish – not because Dudayev was popular, but because the idea he embodied, of the independence of his state from Russia, was.

There was, however, a group that was more important than the foreign journalists – not because they functioned better, but because of who they were. That was the Russian journalists. There were relatively few of them. Of the main papers, I believe only *Izvestiya*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and the weekly *Obshchaya Gazeta* had reporters in Grozny; the Ostankino and Russian state TV channels and the independent NTV channel all had crews. The Tass wire service had two reporters. In sum, the Russian contingent was smaller than the British – which was probably the biggest.

I spent much of two days there working with the *Izvestiya* correspondent, Nikolai Gritchin. He is a man of about my age – mid-forties – and he was immediately friendly, in part because that is his nature, in part because it helped to be working with a foreigner, if

contacts; like almost no other, he ran a risk of his contacts killing him.

Yet Gritchin was one of the most important reporters there – if not the most important. Since 1991, under its chief editor Igor Golembiovsky, *Izvestiya*, once the paper of the Soviet Government, has been more faithful to liberal ideals and open practices than any other publication. Still rather Soviet in its layout, and struggling with a circulation of 600,000 and the infrastructure for one of six million, it is the paper for the intelligent reader. For long a steady supporter of Yeltsin, it defected some months ago to assume a stance of sceptical independence. *Izvestiya* is *Le Monde*, the *New York Times*, *El Pais*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (and what the *Times* used to be): it is *the* paper which others can outshine, outscoop and outsell, but not topple.

Thus Gritchin's reports were crucial. I read them when I returned to Moscow. One was an account of the day we had travelled together, of a kind no foreign reporter could have filed. It began when we found a car and driver, and ended when we got back to Grozny. He wrote about the man who drove us out, and how he had offered his services to Dudayev's guards as a communications expert but been refused. It mentioned the driver's pay, and the difficulty of getting supplies. It gave some space to our second driver (the first refused to go past a certain point), a man of forty (he looked sixty) who had five children, and a house emptied of furniture and carpets because he had sold them. His total worldly possessions some nights I danced the evening away to the beautiful singing and clapping of Thembu maidens.'

This was an upbringing of privilege, despite his father's fall from grace and early death, from which Mandela went on, in 1941, to be articled to the Johannesburg legal firm of Witkin, Sidelsky and Eidelman.The rest may be pretty familiar and if not, can be found in the curriculum vitae at the back of Fatima Meer's worthy biography. 1944: membership of the ANC and marriage to Walter Sisulu's cousin, Evelyn; 1947: secretaryship of the ANC Youth League; 1952: presidency of the Transvaal ANC; 1956: separation from Evelyn; 1958: marriage to the mother of the nation; 1961: formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe; 1962 (a busy year): on the road in Africa, to meet the FLN, Haile Selassie and others; in Britain, to meet Gaitskell and Grimond, both in opposition; arrest, detention and banning, five-year jail sentence; 1963-4: Rivonia trial and life imprisonment; and, fast forwarding somewhat, 1990: live at Wembley.

The temptation to scoff at this tome is strong but problematic. Mandela is now an *homme d'état*, accountable largely to the business and political class. Like all grandees, he publishes with an eye to present duties (no less than to posterity). The result is too much retrospective homily and oiling, not to say greasing, of troubled waters; the reader soon feels like a gull in a tanker spillage. The resumé of the bitter antagonism, during the Seventies, between Black Consciousness and the Congress is anodyne; Buthelezi is only 'a thorn in the side of the democratic movement'; Mrs Thatcher, one of P.W. Botha's most carefree allies, is a 'considerate lady' – a more fatuous description is hard to imagine.

Politicians sit for their ghosted memoirs and authorised biographies, as they would for a portrait or a sculptor's sketches. But because Mandela's life has been almost wholly one of public service and because the account of the man and that of the statesman are not easily distinguished, there is an odd sense here that the statue might as well have sat for its subject – or that Mandela was already cast in the monumental likeness of his principles (the impeccable bearing, the refusal to budge) and that this new commission, skilfully ghosted by Robert Stengel, is tautological. But the very fact that Mandela's life has been so transparent, even behind bars, relieves him of his saintly status and turns him into an interesting strategist. As a Transkei dignitary, a militant, a convict and a President, his exemplary behaviour is a matter of political realism; coaxing the best from others and then praising precisely those virtues he elicits has remained a lifelong policy – part of the business of leading, persuading, refusing and moderating.

It worked well on the turnkeys who dealt with him in prison, and on most of the National Party with whom he dealt on his release. For many reasons, Mandela could not mitigate the violence of the transition but on the whole, in his presence, matters tend to get no worse. In his absence, they tend to fester. In detention, he was the keeper of the ANC's ideals; without him, in the world beyond the prison gates, the movement itself was captive to the chaos and cruelty of insurrection. In family matters, loyalty requires that Mandela protest Winnie's innocence in the crimes which began at 8115 Orlando West, Soweto, and continued after her move to Diepkloof, though he is rumoured to have taken a much more nuanced view in private. Here, too, his absence is an important factor. 'She married a man who soon left her . . . when your life is the struggle, as mine was, there is little room for family. That has always been my greatest regret, and the most painful aspect of the choice I made.'

Nadine Gordimer's novel is set in the period after Mandela's release. It is about homecoming and transition. The heroine, Vera Stark, who works for a progressive legal foundation, is not an exile as such, but she has lived at a distance from herself, which is slowly closed by her encounter with a black land rights spokesman, courageous, ambitious but unpretentious – virtues that are not confined to Mandela, but which try a novelist's skills, and occasionally a reader's patience. Didymus and Sibongile, old friends of Vera, have returned from Europe and Africa. Didymus, an ANC worthy, fails to land a senior post at home – his wife gets one – and it transpires that he has been involved in the persecution of ANC members (during the Eighties, both the ANC and Swapo detained and tortured their dissidents) up in some front-line state 'where the methods of extracting information by inflicting pain and humiliation learnt from white Security Police were adopted by those who had been its victims'.

This thread is spun pretty much in passing. It is taken up again at a party in Johannesburg, but here Gordimer forecloses any discussion by making the speaker a ludicrous cameo character – a young English journalist 'in a catfish-patterned dashiki', whose motives for bringing up the subject of ANC detention camps are suspect. Gordimer's books often unstitch their own politics in this way and, as derision of one thing becomes extenuation of another – or vice-versa – it does no harm, even at the risk of appearing a fool, to slip into a dashiki by about page nine and start mumbling one's objections; tricky, however, for readers who are close to Gordimer's world – everyday 'Movement' folk, of whom, and in many ways for whom, *None to Accompany Me* is an ordinary tale.

The rhythm of the novel is good. It glides easily from the inside of Vera's head, with its round-the-clock screenings – first husband, second husband, erstwhile European lover, thoughts on middle age, the struggle, children – to the outside, where events are moving almost as hectically. But the interior is always vivid while the world is sketchy, forever in draft. Being with Vera, whose sensibilities are the main thing, is like being on a ship at night in rough weather, where there is little by way of a view beyond the rise and fall of cabin furnishings. But this has its purpose. The rewards of personal freedom after years of general misery would not be grasped in a novel that divided its attention more evenly. 'Everyone ends up moving alone towards the self,' Vera reflects, in the calm at the end of the book, when she has left white suburbia. She has thrown over the old life, just as the old politics has been overthrown, and in her connection with the land rights activist, who embodies her own hopes as well as those of the people who queue outside her office at the legal foundation, she seems at last to become her own woman – '*herself* a final form of company discovered'.

Edward Said calls exile (the palpable kind) an 'unhealable rift between a human being and a native place', and Hilda Bernstein has chosen the title of her book with this in mind. It contains roughly a hundred testimonies by South African exiles. From the end of the Fifties to 1990, large numbers of people ('30,000? 60,000? – nobody knew exactly') were outside the country – in the front-line states and other parts of Africa; Western Europe, Canada and the United States; and, because of the ANC's Cold War alignment, in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, particularly East Germany. Their backgrounds differed greatly. Some were township youths who fled in the Seventies to become soldiers in Umkhonto we Sizwe, others were teachers, lawyers, business people, housewives; others still were children, caught up in events and decisions which impinged on them indirectly.

Bernstein collected these testimonies as apartheid was ending. She believes that there was not much 'sense of triumph or fulfilment' among the exiles as they prepared to go home. She seems to have felt little herself. She and her husband Rusty, both members of the Communist Party, fled the country in 1963 (she later wrote *The World That Was Ours*, a marvellous account of their own lives at that time). Rusty Bernstein – a defendant, with Mandela, in the Rivonia Trial – had been loath to leave; in family debates, he argued for the long view: 'That *some* whites stood for Africans . . . and refused to run away – that must be important to my children in the end.' Like hundreds of others, the Bernsteins had in the end to jump the country or live with one earner in jail and the other 'banned' – Hilda was not even allowed to publish advertising copy after her husband's house arrest in 1962. The changes when they came took the very people who had pressed for them by surprise. 'Nobody had envisaged that freedom would come this way,' Bernstein remarks. A second adjustment was necessary after the wrench of exile. But it is the initial shock and the lives it displaced that preoccupy her in this book.

The Rift deals entirely with individuals and families opposed to the regime. It includes anti-apartheid notables such as Oliver Tambo, the Slovo children, Trevor Huddleston, the poet Mazisi Kunene and the musician Hugh Masekela, but consists mainly of a long column of unknowns or little knowns and is in this sense a very admirable book – enviable, even: a vast, commemorative labour that explains what was difficult, sometimes horrifying, about exile, in the words of those concerned, many of them unambitious people we will never hear of again.

The most pressing problem for some was simply staying alive or learning to live with the violent death of a family member. Marius Schoon, an activist – presumably a Communist – who spent most of the Sixties and Seventies in prison in Pretoria, lost his wife, a trade-union organiser, and their young daughter, in a South African bomb blast in Angola in the early Eighties. He had been away and was flown to the scene, where he met his two-year-old son, the sole survivor. 'Our street was cordoned off, there was no traffic . . . We went up to the flat and it was terrible . . . I mean it was too ghastly.' Schoon took his son to England, then Ireland. The boy saw colonies of monkeys, of which he now had a dread, all over the roads in Devon and Cork. Within two years he appeared more settled. 'But there must be things going on inside him,' Schoon reflects. 'He's not all that well, he's got epilepsy . . . and he goes away, he just goes away. It lasts quite a long time and it's very worrying.'

There was not much solace in survival. In 1982, during the famous South African raid on Lesotho, a hit squad attacked an ANC safe house where Nelly Marwanqana and her family had fled after her husband's third stint in detention. Nelly was spared in the attack. A man with a balaclava burst into their bedroom and ordered her out with the youngest of her children ('I think he's shy to kill my husband in front of me'). She retreated to the bathroom and heard the shot. When the gunmen left and the chaos subsided, she found that her oldest daughter and her 18-year-old son had also been killed. At the funeral, Nelly wished herself dead. 'Why these Boers left me alone? It's better to kill me and all this family of Marwanqana must be finish.' Bunie Sexwale, another activist whose house was burned out in the same raid, and who lost several friends, obscenely dispatched by their killers, came to think that there was something shameful about survival; she spent years 'having to justify why I did not die'.

Most of the accounts treat directly of fear and some are, in themselves, scary. The pace and promiscuity of political redefinition is too much. Here is Dirk Coetzee, who ran death squads for Pretoria during the Seventies and Eighties and recanted shortly before Mandela's release, on his de-briefing with a senior ANC man – maybe 1989 or 1990:

> Hell, I mean I was so nervous telling Jacob Zuma about Griffith Mxenge – I was responsible for it; he was stabbed 44 times and his throat was cut and his dogs were poisoned – and he was a friend of Zuma, close friend. And Zuma didn't wink an eye. I was very well-received, very well-looked after, very well-cared for. Up till now, this day. Hell, it's just beautiful . . . So warm, so genuine, so human! 'We know, Dirk, we understand, you're a victim of the system, like thousands and millions of other South Africans, black and white.'

'Everything unlikely has become likely,' Sibongile tells Vera in Gordimer's novel, 'that's our politics these days.'

There will be no proper de-nazification of South Africa, and plenty of people, known but unpursued, neutralised by the changes, and who connived in deeds like Coetzee's, will raise their glasses to the New South Africa when protocol requires. Others, like Didymus the torturer, may or may not lose sleep about the past. Inside or outside the country, on one side or the other, the various histories have not been easy, but the resemblance between them stops there. Within the opposition, Bernstein argues, those who remained and those who left have 'different fears . . . neither can fully understand the pain of the other.' The 'common notion of themselves' whose absence so dismayed Dan Jacobson about South Africans is difficult under these circumstances and, even in the generous light of democracy, South Africa remains a place of obscure, inchoate identities – of solitude, as much as anything. It's Gordimer's skill to celebrate that quality and Bernstein's right to regret it. □

A world apart; Books

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TEXT: The Rift: The Exile Experience Of South Africans by Hilda Bernstein, Cape Pounds 25 pp516.

Every so often, an author uniquely matches a subject Carl Sandburg as the biographer of Lincoln comes to mind and here we have the subject of South African exiles dealt with by one of the finest writers of that same exile community. It is a community already rich in writers such as Breyten Breytenbach, Christopher Hope, Wally Serote, Mazizi Kune and Anthony Sher, but Hilda Bernstein brings special credentials to the task. In exile since 1964 when she crossed the border into Botswana on foot to escape arrest, she is the author of several books of rare quality on the concerns of South Africans, and The Rift, appropriately, crowns the collection.

It is a big book in more ways than one. At more than 500 pages, it chronicles the experiences of many South African exiles with total reportorial integrity, letting them speak for themselves from a variety of categories such as artists, fighters, activists, and lobbyists, all of them having in common their South African cause and their South African origins.

For me, the most moving account of all is that of Marius Schoon, whose wife and baby daughter were blown up by the South African security police death-squad in Angola. Marius and his little son, Fritzy, survived this ordeal at terrible cost to their psyches, and spent the rest of their lives in Dublin until able to return to South Africa.

Marius, a gentle and quixotic soul, had been in prison in Pretoria from 1964 to 1976 for trying to blow up a government installation to register his own protest at the iniquity of the apartheid system. The attempt had been inept enough to make Inspector Clouseau appear a model of efficiency by comparison, yet the viciousness with which Marius Schoon was pursued by the assassins of the security police bespoke the special hatred the apartheid system reserved for those they saw as renegade Afrikaners their own kind refusing to be part of their system.

After serving out his term, he had been released under strict banning and house arrest orders which had made getting a job impossible, and in order to marry Jenny Curtis, who was also banned, he had had to arrange for them to decamp to Botswana, where they worked as teachers for six years.

Regardless of the pacific nature of their work, there they were deemed by the South African security police to be a dangerous threat to the state, and orders were issued for their murder.

The ANC got wind of this and sent them to Angola for their protection. However, after they had spent six months in Angola, the South African death squad caught up with them. Marius was out of the flat when the bomb went off that killed Jenny and their daughter Katryn.

It is the account of his and Fritzy's battle to come to terms with their shock and their loss which makes this section the highlight, for me, of this extraordinary book.

Another riveting account, from a totally different point of view, is that of Captain Dirk Johannes Coetzee, former field commander in one of the South African death squads. In a chilling section of the book, Coetzee describes in matter-of-fact tones the most horrifying murders ordered by his superiors, including that of the Durban lawyer, Griffiths Mxenge, who was stabbed to death and mutilated.

After this section, readers will be in no doubt about what all the exiles were fighting against in their various ways. Most of the accounts, however, are more mundane recitals of families being forced to flee the country for political reasons, and the enormous difficulties in adjusting to new ways.

A number of the exiles whose stories Bernstein has chronicled are famous, such as Oliver Tambo, Ronald Segal and Hugh Masekela. Others are leading figures of the long, anti-apartheid campaign abroad, such as Kader Asmal, Abdul Minty, and Ronnie Kasrils. Most of the exiles reported here are otherwise ordinary people whose idealism and principles forced them to leave their homes in order to carry their own anti-apartheid struggle further.

Here then are the many and varied accounts of people ranging across a spectrum of occupations, trades, and professions, from professors to political activists, priests to carpenters, doctors to teachers men, women, and children, black and white, with stories of heartache and hope, success and failure, ruined childhoods and marriages, all resulting from the impact of the apartheid policy.

Yet, as the book establishes, the South African exile community has proved to be one of the most successful exile communities in the world in terms of achieving its goals. That is what makes this book particularly timely. Its publication coincides, appropriately, with South Africa's first-ever democratic election, the long-awaited day for which so much was sacrificed by so many.

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