

**A tribute to Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe 25 years after his death**

**INSIDE:** Contributions by Dinilesizwe Sobukwe, Es'kia Mphahlele, Joe Thloloe, Aggrey Klaaste, Phillip Kgosana, James Oguide, Neville Alexander, Njabulo Ndebele, Benjamin Pogrand, Helen Suzman and Desmond Tutu

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BANA

# The Bright Morning Star

## THE RIGHT to call our souls our own

**S**ONS and daughters of Africa, harbingers of the new world order, what can I say to you? As you see for the first time since the practice was started, we do not have the nurses with us at this completers' social.

And the reason? The battle is on. To me the struggle at the hospital is more than a question of "discipline". It is a struggle between Africa and Europe, between a 20th-century desire for self-realisation and a feudal conception of authority.

I know, of course, that because I express these sentiments, I will be accused of incendency and will be branded an agitator. People do not like the even tenor of their lives disturbed. They do not like to be told that what they believed was right is wrong. And, above all, they resent encroachment on what they regard as their special province.

But I make no apologies. It is meet that we speak the truth before we die.

The trouble at the hospital then, I say, should be viewed as part of a broader struggle and not as an isolated incident. I said last year that we should not fear victimisation. I still say so today. We must fight for freedom — for the right to call our souls our own.

A word to those who are remaining behind. You have seen by now what education means to us: the identification of ourselves with the masses. Education to us means service to Africa.

You have a mission, we all have a mission. We have a nation to build, a God to glorify, a clear contribution to make towards the blessing of mankind. We must be the embodiment of our people's aspirations. And all we are required to do is to give the light and the masses will find the way. Watch our movements keenly and if you see any signs of "broadmindedness" or "reasonableness" in us, or if you hear us talk of practical experience as a modifier of man's views, denounce us as traitors to Africa.

We will watch you too. We have been reminded time and again that

### Introduction

by Xolela Mangcu, Director, Steve Biko Foundation



**ROBERT Mangaliso Sobukwe was only 25 when he gave this speech to a jam-packed hall, rapt in attention at the University of Fort Hare six decades ago.**

Already he was the bright morning star that would illuminate the way for a generation struggling not only for freedom but for the right to call their souls their own.

There are many wonderful things about this speech, which we had to edit because of space constraints. There is the courage of his convictions or as he puts it: "It is meet that we speak the truth before we die."

There is the masterful clarity and forthrightness of language. AP Mda described Sobukwe as the standard bearer of African nationalism thus: "He went on to develop our position — mine and Anton Lembede's — to a higher level than that on which we were."

Most impressive, however, is the abiding faith in the destiny of Africa.

Through this supplement we salute a prophet of Africa's renewal, its blazing beacon of inspiration.

fellows who, while at college, were radicals, as soon as they got outside became the spineless stooges and screeching megaphones of "white Herrenvolkism" or else became disgruntled and disillusioned objects of pity.

My contention is those fellows were never radicals. They were anti-white. Moreover, a doctrine of hate can never take people

anywhere. It is too exacting. It warps the mind. That is why we preach the doctrine of love, love for Africa. We can never do enough for Africa, nor can we love her enough. The more we do for her, the more we wish to do. And I am sure that I am speaking for the whole of young Africa when I say that we are prepared to work with any man who is fighting for the liberation of Africa within our lifetime.

To the completers among whom I number myself my exaltation is: REMEMBER AFRICA. The cowards are still standing aside and the brave have made their choice.

We have chosen African nationalism because of its deep human significance; because of its inevitability and necessity to world progress. World civilisation will not be complete until the African has made his full contribution. I wish to make it clear again that we are anti-nobody. We are pro-Africa. We breathe, we dream, we live Africa; because Africa and humanity are inseparable. We want to build a new Africa and only we can build it.

Let me plead with you, lovers of my Africa, to carry with you into the world the vision of a new Africa, an Africa reborn, an Africa rejuvenated an Africa recreated, young Africa. We are the first glimmers of a new dawn. And if we are persecuted for our views, we should remember, as the African saying goes, that it is darkest before dawn, and that the dying beast kicks most violently when it is giving up the ghost, so to speak.

We are what we are because the God of Africa made us so. We dare not compromise nor dare we use moderate language in the course of freedom.

These things shall be, says the Psalmist: Africa will be free. The wheel of progress revolves relentlessly. And all the nations of the world take their turn at the field-glass of human destiny. Africa will not retreat! Africa will not compromise. Africa will not relent. Africa will not equivocate. And she will be heard!

Remember Africa.



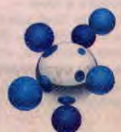
Picture: MIKE MZILENI

**'His life epitomised the cold, calculating, vindictive brutality of apartheid; his mind and heart proclaimed the abiding humanity of liberation'**

— Nelson Mandela on Sobukwe



A Special Tribute by the Steve Biko Foundation







Veronica Sobukwe — a nurse at the Johannesburg General Hospital at the time — erupts with joy in 1969 upon reading a report that her husband was to be freed from prison on Robben Island

Picture: BANA

## Tribute to Zodwa Veronica

# A Great Woman

Es'kia Mphahlele  
March 25, 2003

I see through the window of my mind  
millennia upon millennia of African women:  
droves and droves of them  
have walked this earth and toiled  
babies on their backs, clay pots, firewood  
on their heads.

And when the red and the pink locusts  
swarmed our lands savaging  
every blade and every acre and leaf of it,  
stripping us naked,  
we attacked.  
When the reds and the pinks  
gunned us down  
wrung our necks in the noose of their civilisation  
— that is when we lost our innocence.

In our time a man was born  
to this nation  
Mangaliso Sobukwe.  
He had a dream that would not let him be —  
amid so much pain, so much longing,  
so much history dripping  
centuries of blood  
the heavens themselves must have screamed:  
a dream to seek and restore  
that sense of ourselves  
that proclaims a people's selfhood  
echoing from hill to hill down the ages  
from rim to rim of this planet.  
You were there with Mangaliso,  
Mother Veronica  
ever ready for him to draw the vigour,  
succour from the family warmth that  
only one can know in his woman's  
embrace a million million times reassuring.  
You were there with him,  
Daughter of Africa,  
at the banging and clanging of prison doors  
and gates,  
there in the busy wards where your man  
lay listening to the ravaging beat of his pain.

The ebb of the flow of life  
from a body  
always waiting for someone's paper work,  
someone counting time for a man's life  
he would never grasp.

You had been there to witness it all —  
a man fixed on a course  
to set black humanity free:  
a man breasting the hills  
and breaking his feet on rocky road  
from college to stockade to the end of his life.

Then at last, daughter of Mathe,  
the sun came out for you  
and your children  
blazing from above the eastern skyline  
lighting your way  
through the darkness of your journey.  
Always you were reminded of this —  
that no-one in all of savage Christendom  
could break your man's mind or spirit,  
or trample on the sanctity of your home  
— divine gift of the Supreme One  
attended by the ancestors.

We salute you,  
daughter of Africa,  
devoted wife and mother  
who turned pain into an ever-glowing shrine  
the full shadow of your man  
on the wall above your head while you pray.  
And look, children of Africa —  
the soothing modesty of that  
Sobukwe smile leading defiant crowds:  
not riding tanks of fire but  
pushing frontiers of courage, faith,  
a people's love —  
the smile that speaks in many tongues!  
You were always there,  
Mama Sobukwe, waiting.  
The sun, our elders teach us,  
shines on all of us, Mama,  
bears no envy nor spite for anyone.

— Lebawakgomo, Limpopo



This snapshot was taken when Robert Sobukwe's wife, Veronica, and three of his children visited him on Robben Island. Standing behind their mother and father are, from left, Dalindyabo, Dinilesizwe, who wrote the article below, and Miliswa. Missing is Dedanzizwe

By Dinilesizwe Sobukwe

## 'How was utata in those days when you first met him?'

**L**AST year in November, my mother, my sister Miliswa and I travelled to Alice from Graaff-Reinet. As we approached the town, the now unused railroad tracks came up on the side winding their way into town.

The sight of the tracks sent my mother into memory lane.

She first came to Alice on the same railroad track in 1946 at the age of 19. She came to Alice to go to nursing school at Lovedale. For the rest of the day she reminisced about the friends she had made there, fellow students from all over South Africa and the neighbouring countries.

One of those friends was Thandiwe Moletsane, later Mrs Makiwane, with whom she travelled to Johannesburg in July 1949, when they were kicked out of Lovedale. They were sent by the Fort Hare Youth League to

deliver a letter to Walter Sisulu. She said the Youth League at Fort Hare had great respect for Walter Sisulu. She found Sisulu a gentle and kind man.

She talked of the good tennis players at Lovedale and the bright and rowdy Rosette Ndziba — later our neighbour in Mofolo and a leading member of the Pan Africanist Congress.

Patiently we waited for her to tell us yet again where (in the train) and how she had met our father. Miliswa could not wait any longer and asked, "How was utata those days when you first met him?"

My mother said he was a *good man*, the same way we knew him. He never changed much at all.

That was all she said about him that day. A fellow Youth League member and later detractor is quoted as having called him "starry-eyed". The implication was that he was a bumpkin who had stumbled into a world not his own and lost his way, despite having shown great promise.

He was from Graaff-Reinet and till his death had small-town ways about him. He would heartily greet friends and strangers as they still do in Graaff-Reinet. Neighbours, houses away, would be greeted resoundingly and always by their "isiduko" (clan name), be they Zulu, Sotho or Tswana, and addressed as "meneer" if they were Afrikaans-speaking.

He prayed every night as many households in his hometown still do. He prayed on Robben Island for Pokela, Mandela and Sisulu, for God to give them the strength and courage to lead the people in their charge to liberation; for the men he saw going to and from work in their "spans", to find strength to endure the cruelty they suffered on Robben Island and prisons around the country; for mothers who, left alone, had to hold the fort while husbands and sons were in prison. He prayed for all in exile — his comrades PK, ZB, Nana, TT and many others: "Unga Thixo ungabafaka phantsi kwe phiko lakho lobungwalisa".

They were moving prayers, often quite long. My younger brother, Dedani, can still — with heart-rending accuracy — recite passages from them.

Those in Graaff-Reinet who were his contemporaries refer to him as Ernest and Charles' brother, Mampondo's son, a classmate at the Methodist School, Nosango's husband.

In Mofolo, they call him Miliswa's father; in Standerton, Tishela (Teacher) and, of course, he is Prof to his comrades.

It would be for these who knew and loved him a desecration of their memories if the conventional image is of a man deemed not of them.

It is these people who helped shape his character, his faith to his party and his passionate dedication to his people, MOHALE O TSOA MAROLENG.

To my mother, who misses him still, he was a good husband. To us he was a good father, a son of the soil.



Picture: BANA (Priser Maguane)

Veronica and Robert Sobukwe, soon after his release from Robben Island



# Above all, he loved his people



By Joe Thlooe

'When we landed at Stoneyard Prison in Boksburg, the senior jailer came to where we stood and asked who Sobukwe was. He then gave Prof a long pair of trousers and shoes while the rest of us were shivering in our short canvas pants and skimpy red shirts. Prof refused to be treated differently'

**R**OBERT Mangaliso Sobukwe didn't just leave a mark on my life, he shaped it. And to make you understand why, and how, I'll have to take you to the inscription on the tombstone on his grave in Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape.

"True leadership demands complete subjugation of self, absolute honesty, integrity and uprightness of character, courage and fearlessness and, above all, a consuming love for one's people."

It's an extract from one of his speeches but also an accurate description of the man himself. He was probably around on the day I joined a crowd milling outside the Orlando Communal Hall on November 2 1958.

I didn't see him in the excitement of finally meeting the Africanists I had been reading about in the newspapers. I had been reading about Josias Madzunya and Potlako Leballo — not about Sobukwe.

Somebody thrust an ANC membership card into my hands and took two shillings and sixpence from me. It had Africanist stamped across it. The Africanists were angry, impatient young men — and their words struck a chord in my young ears. On that day the Africanists parted with the ANC and we worked day and night preparing for the inaugural congress of the Pan Africanist Congress.

On April 6 1959, Sobukwe stood tall in the same Orlando Communal Hall, giving the key address and defining what the Pan Africanists were and where they were headed: to freedom for South Africa now and tomorrow the United States of Africa. He was electric. We cheered after every sentence. I had never met a man as eloquent as he was.

In the following months I got to know him better. He was tall and had a presence that turned heads when he walked into a room with his wide smile and a chuckle from his belly. I

remember him at various meetings, inside and outside prison. He'd listen to all of us and then sum up in a way that brought us to consensus. He'd then chop one palm with the edge of his other hand and say: "*Siyevana ke madoda*" — we all agree.

That's exactly what he'd done on April 6 1959. He took the raw anger of the oppressed in this country and gave it voice and direction. He was able to translate our vague anti-white feelings, our seething anger, and harness it into a struggle for a different future.

He spoke of a free, nonracial South Africa where a person's colour was as irrelevant as the shape of his nose. This at a time when many in our country were still talking about multiracialism. He cast our eyes to a free United States of Africa. This at a time when most of Africa was in the clutches of colonialism. He spoke about the economic liberation of our continent. Forty-four years later we are now shaping the African Union and we are talking of Nepal.

An intellectual and a visionary was Sobukwe. But also a man of the people. In December 1959, after he had spoken about the plans for the anti-pass campaign, a woman stood up and challenged the men to hand over their pants to the women if they didn't have the guts to face the Boers.

As she was speaking, I saw Prof wipe tears from his eyes. He was moved by the challenge.

When we landed at Stoneyard Prison in Boksburg, the senior jailer came to where we stood and asked who Sobukwe was. He then gave Prof a long pair of trousers and shoes while the rest of us were shivering in our short canvas pants and skimpy red shirts. Prof refused to be treated differently.

Throughout his too short life, Prof put his followers first. He served, he sacrificed and he suffered so that we could be liberated. True leadership as he himself defined it.

# The definition of ubuntu



By Aggrey Klaaste

**N**INETEEN sixty-two was a vintage year for Wits University. As a bastion of liberalism, Wits, with groups like the Black Sash, took the fight against apartheid to the streets in impressive ways.

Apart from colourful street demonstrations held by academics and the Black Sash in Johannesburg, lunch-hour meetings addressed by the country's political leaders at the university were interesting and intense.

One memorable week, the university invited Robert Sobukwe. Cometh the hour, cometh the man — the cliché was apt for Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe.

To say there was just a sprinkling of black students among the hundreds of whites at Wits is to make an important point. For those were politically turbulent days during which temperatures were high and the few blacks at university had to fight political battles, physically and otherwise. Those were the last days of the so-called "mixed universities".

Sobukwe was a "lecturer" in what I seem to remember was called Bantu Languages. These people were not called lecturers even by the hyper-liberal Wits administration, but "language assistants".

Taking an African language at Wits was considered a somewhat exotic, second-rate choice, the delight of left-wing liberals. Wits University did



Pictures: BAHA (Peter Magubane)



On March 21 1960 the PAC, led by Robert Sobukwe, launched a defiance campaign against the pass laws. Men left their pass books at home and marched to various police stations to give themselves up for arrest. The **top picture** shows a

group gathering for their march in Orlando. Joe Thlooe, the writer of the story at the top of this page, is circled in yellow. The **middle picture** shows Sobukwe leading the march in Orlando. Groups of people joined along the way. At Orlando Police

Station, Sobukwe was arrested with others. He spent nine years in jail. In Sharpeville, the local march ended in a massive massacre that shocked the world. The police shot dead 69 people and wounded almost 200 in the singing and chanting crowd

that gathered around the police station. The **bottom picture** shows the aftermath, with police loading some of the victims' bodies into a van. In Langa and Nyanga in Cape Town another five people were shot dead on the same day.

not have the political will to call blacks that taught African languages lecturers working in a department.

We called Sobukwe "The Prof" — partly as a reaction to this flagrantly racist stance by the university.

Sobukwe needed no one to fight his battles for him. He was consummately equal to any task. He could best white lecturers in any faculty and most people knew that.

So when he was invited to speak in the Great Hall, it was packed. It seemed the entire white law department was there to trap and trip him. But those who came to jeer him were forced to cheer after a masterful performance.

University students make hostile audiences. In 1959 the student audience was thick with race hate and prejudice. Sobukwe faced not only tough intellectual grilling but also the taunts and jeers of the more unsavoury students, notoriously from the engineering and commerce departments.

We black students stood up to whistle and cheer after a vintage performance by this wonderful guy.

He held them in the palm of his hand and with a quiet smile fended off the more vitriolic questions about the PAC. Blacks in those days had to fight naked racism and pervasive contempt from the entire Western world.

The charisma in the leadership of, say, Mandela and Nyerere was eminently present in Robert Sobukwe's quiet, extremely courteous manner. The Prof had a demeanour that was the picture of a civilised man. He was urbane, modest and learned, with a delightful quiet sense of humour. He was never flustered and in my experience never lost his temper. He had steel under the pacific exterior.

He led from the front and after Sharpeville, when the PAC said people should take their "pass books" (identity documents) and surrender themselves for arrest at police stations, he led the first group in Orlando East.

Although he had to face the wrath of the mother body, the ANC, for the split from that organisation, he did not flinch. And senior members of the ANC respected him.

He was never afraid of the terror from the apartheid monsters. The fear that they had for him resulted in a law called the "Sobukwe Clause", which caused him to spend a lengthy period on Robben Island after the expiration of his sentence.

His fiercest opponents respected him. We loved him.

Robert Sobukwe was the perfect portrait of the manner in which an African with ubuntu responded to oppression, discrimination and evil. Leadership fell easily on his intellectual shoulders. There was no hysteria, no fear, no bluster, no boasting. In Benjamin Poggrund's words, "he was a gentle and perfect knight. And so often there was that warm smile lighting up his face, that big grin and that deep chuckle of amusement."

This was the best medicine for young blacks like me who were stripped of slavery, colonial rule and apartheid of our self-worth and dignity.

Without putting too fine a point on it, Sobukwe was the definition of ubuntu.





By Neville Alexander

## Lift the boom of language!

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who most powerfully drew our attention to the psychological and cultural devastation wrought by the dominance of the former colonial languages in the ranks of the post-colonial African middle-class elites

**A**VERAGE South African tertiary institutions produce about 1 200 graduates in the management and economic sciences faculties each year, and 10 800 graduates enter the labour market a year — this excludes graduates in biblical studies and African languages, who are hard to absorb into meaningful and gainful employment. (Mpho Makwana, Business Day August 6 2003, in his column Nation Building).

When we consider abysmal words such as these, we are inclined to ask ourselves whether we will ever succeed in our goal of creating the conditions in which the downtrodden "common people" of Africa will at last enjoy the freedom and democracy for which generations of men and women have sacrificed their lives. It is this kind of sycophantic genuflection to the icons of money and power that has led to the development of a blind spot among the potential and actual leadership cadres of the continent.

These words are a salutary reminder — if we needed any — of the fact that the language issue in Africa is fundamentally and essentially a class issue. Edward Freeman once called language a "badge of nationality" and at a superficial glance, it often has this significance.

In post-colonial Africa and also in post-apartheid South Africa, one of its significant functions is that it is a badge of social class. One way of explaining the catastrophic gulf that divides the political and much of the cultural leadership of the continent from the people on the ground is what Carol Myers-Scotton defined as elite closure, which refers to the strategy by which elites maintain power by using language understandable only to them.

There are other, even more radical, paradigms within which the language attitudes and the language practices of the African middle class are explained, notably that of Pierre Bourdieu. His concept of "cultural capital", which in the African context can be understood as proficiency in English, French or Portuguese, leads infallibly to the conclusion arrived at at the end of the 1960s already by Pierre Alexandre — that it is the degree of proficiency in the ex-colonial language that determines the class location of the individual in the post-colonial set-up.

In the final analysis, all these attempts at explaining the anomaly of neo-colonial (and neo-apartheid) language policies in modern Africa translate into a single simple fact: those who know

the languages of the colonial conquerors well, by whatever means they acquired this knowledge, benefit directly in terms of the best-paid jobs and high social status as a result of their proficiency.

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who most powerfully drew our attention to the psychological and cultural devastation wrought by the dominance and even more by the hegemony of the former colonial languages in the ranks of the post-colonial African middle class elites.

His celebrated essay on *The Language of African Literature* remains the cultural-political manifesto of language activists committed to a consistently democratic solution to the language question on the continent.

In post-apartheid South Africa, in spite of spectacular advances at the constitutional, legislative and policy levels, we continue to be plagued by the monolingual mode of life of the empowered black elite. This disposition towards establishing and entrenching a unilingual public service — most notably in the Department of Justice — and promoting the English language at the expense of African languages, insulates the black middle class in what is in effect an economically and politically gated community, which is separated from the vast majority of the population by "the language of liberation" and "the language of national unity".

Yet, I believe that it is from the vantage point of this new historical community where we are still contesting the character and the direction of the democratic transition that the signposts for "the African century" may be crafted.

It is a task that will be accomplished by those men and women who are committed to the total liberation of the hundreds of millions of African people living in peasant and working class communities.

We have at our disposal all the insights of the sociology of language and of applied language studies, we know statistically and analytically the depth of the divide between the rich and the poor, we have, fortunately, all the institutional and technical infrastructure with which to ensure that the languages of the people are used in all the powerful domains of life so that the much proclaimed participatory democracy can at last become a reality across the continent.

There is no reason to remain silent. Let us lift the boom!



By Njabulo Ndebele

**T**HE Steve Biko Memorial Lecture has become a major event on the South African national calendar. Promoted by the Steve Biko Foundation and hosted by the University of Cape Town, the memorial lecture has evolved into a model of commemorative and resuscitative collaboration between a university and a civil society organisation. The collaboration has grown stronger in the three years of the lecture's life.

This year the lecture continues to grow stronger by attracting yet another writer of distinction to deliver it. World-renowned Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, no stranger to South Africa, visits Cape Town to extend and consolidate a nascent tradition. This year, we should observe, must carry special significance for Ngugi. He visited his country for the first time after many years of exile. This visit confirmed for his many readers around the world, the triumphant return of freedom and democracy to Kenya.

It should equally be a matter of note that Ngugi visits South Africa immediately after Kenyan President Kibaki became the first Kenyan head of state to visit South Africa to strengthen ties between the two countries. The new Kenyan High Commissioner, Her Excellency Ciarungi Chefaina, presented her credentials to President Thabo Mbeki earlier this month. While there tends to exist an unpredictable relationship

## The connection between Steve Biko and Ngugi wa Thiong'o

'The central relevance of Ngugi, and writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, and Armah, is that they saw the promise of and witnessed the onset of disappointment so early in the African project reconstruction and resuscitation. They saw the value and pitfalls of the politics of over-emphasis on race may leave inherent or power and domination into

between writers (or artists in general) and their governments, it is permissible that we should draw congruencies where they may not necessarily exist in the minds of the players involved.

But what is the connection between Ngugi and Biko? It is almost certain that Ngugi inspired Biko as he inspired many of Biko's generation. That generation discovered Africa when Mandela, the Black Pimpernel, was seen travelling across the continent in the sixties, meeting such leaders as Ben Bella and Nasser. The anti-colonial struggle was well under way. It saw the anti-colonial flourishing of African literature: Soyinka, Achebe, Okara, Mazrui, Ekwensi, Mphahlele, La Guma, and Ngugi.

The debates of the time which flourished in the cultural journal "Transition" published in Uganda, covered such topics as: the language of African literature; African identity; anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism as well as the nature and form of the African novel.

In the United States, Mohammed Ali, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and others spoke the language of black self-pride,

self-assertion

In South Africa, Mandla Pityana, Mandla Mofokeng, and countless others, the same spirit in complement, simultaneous influence in and around the common pattern of oppression and

Ngugi inspired through his class and race. His artistic vision many young including Biko.

The central other African writers, Soyinka, and they saw the independence onset of disappointment so early in the reconstruction. They showed the pitfalls of an overemphasised inherited domination caught in the structures of oppress as n



By James Ogui

**'What joins these two thinkers, Ngugi and Sobukwe, are their loathing for human oppression and racism, their love for Africa and their affirmation of the dignity of black people that has been denied by centuries of European imperialism and racism'**

**T**HE visit of one of Africa's foremost writers and political activists, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, to South Africa in honour of the late PAC leader Mangaliso Sobukwe has been billed as a homecoming by the organisers.

This is apt because the Kenyan writer returns to a free South Africa in memory of a fine son of Africa who stood stoically against those forces of domination that Ngugi has written so much about. His creative writing and essays have always been about that quest for freedom for which Sobukwe laid down his life.

Ngugi has written against the repressive political structures engendered by both colonialism and neo-colonial forces in Africa.

And like Sobukwe, Ngugi is a staunch believer in the Pan-Africanist vision and a united Africa working together to rid itself of the ravages of colonialism and all anti-human ideologies such as apartheid.

What joins these two thinkers are their loathing for human oppression and racism, their love for Africa and their affirmation of the dignity of black people that has been denied by centuries of European imperialism and racism.

But they are also joined in the belief that every nation, every community, has the right to use its vernacular languages because, as Frantz Fanon would have it, whoever takes up a language assumes a culture.

To come to South Africa in honour of Sobukwe is a fitting homecoming for Ngugi for, indeed, his writing, spanning four decades, has been undergirded by the metaphor of return. It has been about a dislocated home and the desire for its restoration.

If there is one single thing that unites Ngugi's narrative with the South African experience, it is that overwhelming

## Homecoming: The motif of return

presence of homelessness. The sense of abandonment and exile which marked much of the South African experience in the recent past, and continues to haunt its nascent democracy, is most passionately rendered in Ngugi's narratives and essays.

But Ngugi's works are also defined by a desire which many South Africans share, a desire which heroes like Sobukwe fought tirelessly for, and that is the need to reconstitute a home, a nation where man and woman can experience joy and love, liberty and freedom, regardless of their race or creed. Ngugi's homecoming to South Africa should signal that undying project to restore and reconstitute a community of people that has been at the heart of his works.

Significantly, the central argument in his *Homecoming* essays is the rebuilding of a national culture and the disavowal of the liberal idea of culture which privileges bourgeois individualism over the collective consciousness and the spirit of caring for all, ubuntu, that ought to be at the heart of all humane cultures.

What made culture so central to Ngugi's liberation narrative was its close affinity to history in colonial discourses on Africa, a cultural history that had been denigrated and distorted by years of colonial miseducation. As early as 1968, in an essay called *The Writer and His Past*, Ngugi began reflecting seriously on the writer's relationship with his past, and how an engagement with this past was a precondition to a genuine nationalist literature. The writer's "encounter with history, his people's history" would inaugurate that moment of return — the

moment of reconnection. Ngugi argued that it was this return that would "restate the African character to his history" because "The African novelist has turned his back on the Christian god and resumed the broken dialogue with the gods of his people".

And yet Ngugi was acutely aware that a fixation with the past could soon become an act of amnesia that the nationalist politicians would use to steer clear of contemporary problems and concerns. He rejected any attempts to reify culture and drew attention to the dialectical and historical imperatives that defined all living cultures. Culture, he insisted, was the sum total of a people's "art, their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals", forged in their "creative struggle and progress through history". It is this wealth of cultural heritage that European colonialism had worked to deny and repress in Africa.

Yet, Ngugi was careful to add: "In our present situation we must, in fact, try to see how new aspects of life can be clarified or given expression through new art forms or a renewal of the old". He was not calling for a return to some mythical past, but a creative engagement with a complex present created out of a shared colonial experience and indigenous African practices alike.

He was calling for an engagement with that space Fanon characterised as the "zone of occult instability where the people dwell", the liminal space where Africa's modernity is shaped through dialogue with itself and other cultures.

Thus at a time when post-colonial Africa were turning the social culture into a fetish and a political control, Ngugi was representing the function of a new nation as one tied to a political agenda.

At a personal level, Ngugi, in a process of self-examination and interrogation of his Christian missionary education. That self-examination led him to Christian name, James, one a symbolic return to his heritage by reclaiming his name. Henceforth, he would be called Thiong'o, a name that has breakaway from that tortuous with colonial education.

In rejecting the Christian name had been central to his identity, Ngugi was making a homecoming and creating within which the radical M he had embraced would flourish. At the creative level, Ngugi's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* with Micere Mugo (1976) and *Blood* (1977) signalled the Ngugi's radical aesthetic.

This was followed by a series of essays, *Writers in Politics (of a Pen)* (1983) which sought to interrogate and reconfigure English literary culture in the Anglophone Africa. The literature in Kenya in the 1970s what kind of texts needed in schools after independence it was about the status of

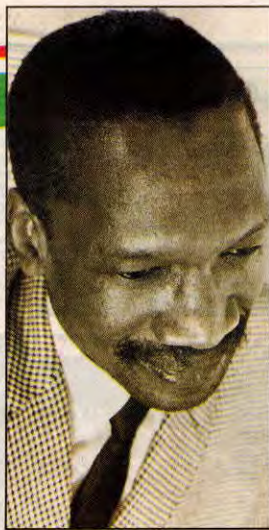


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colonialist. These writers sought to extend the meaning of freedom beyond racial solidarity.

They remind us that the nomenclature of "black this", and "black that" in a post-apartheid South Africa in which black people are in the majority and in power, is fraught with both opportunity and danger. It could be an expression of persistent, psychological vulnerability rather than strength. A freed population in power should not depend on the definitions of colour-coding to identify and assert itself. It should single-mindedly focus on a far-reaching restructuring of society in which the majoritarian character of blackness is assumed and promoted without being glorified in such terms as "black empowerment", but that if we should resort to such terms it should be on the basis of a tight time-frame after which they can be purposefully abandoned. Otherwise we will have black people in power behaving not differently from white people in the same structures of social organisation.

In simple terms: to seek to be free on the basis of blackness is to affirm the basis on which black people were oppressed. It is a condition that nurtures opportunism and entitlement rather than innovation and self-determination.

Seen in this light, the combination of Ngugi and Biko brings together identity and praxis.

## In honour of ROBERT SOBUKWE



Ngugi wa Thiong'o inspired many readers through his artistic exploration of class and racial oppression in Africa.

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Englishness in the postcolony. Ngugi was, in effect, grappling with what continued to be the hegemony of English in Kenyan schools and the continuing denigration of African literatures, even those written in English like his own.

If literature contained "people's images of themselves in history and of their place in the universe", as he observed in his *Homecoming* essays, the privileging of the English literary canon in African schools deprived the African child of the cultural representation of the collective consciousness of the people of the continent and their coming into being through struggle and creativity. He was rejecting the dominant thought that Western European experience and culture was a universal one, which all so-called "civilised" communities had to emulate. And yet even as Ngugi embarked on a cultural campaign that sought to centre African literature at the core of our literary syllabus, he had forgotten that he continued to write in English at the expense of his own mother-tongue, Gikuyu. In his words, he was merely enriching the English language and its literary heritage. Ngugi had to make another radical homecoming, this time rejecting English as the medium through which his future writing would take place and embracing Gikuyu as his new tongue of expression.

The point is that Ngugi had finally begun to address an audience of workers and peasants who had been the central subjects in his novels and plays but for whom his writing remained inaccessible for as long as he continued to address

them in English.

In an important paper called "Return to Roots", written soon after his release from detention in 1979, Ngugi set out to redefine African literature in terms of its language, echoing what in 1962 Obi Wali had characterised as the "uncritical acceptance of English and French culture as the inevitable medium for educated African writing".

This was, perhaps, not something new given the Kamiriithu experiment with a play written in Gikuyu. But the fact that it drew the ire of the authorities, leading to his detention without trial, obscured a radical cultural project that would later shape the discourses on cultural production and consumption on the continent.

In the decade that followed, Ngugi was to pursue the language agenda both in thought and practice, producing two novels in Gikuyu. They were later translated into English as *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and *Matigari* (1987).

Whatever we think of Ngugi's return to an African language — nativist or idealist as many would want to argue — and whatever its ultimate fate in the global scheme of things, Ngugi was inaugurating a new cultural aesthetics that was bound to send ripples across the continent. The return to roots, Ngugi argued, marked a moment of departure from colonial conventions of writing and signalled a libertarian discourse of decolonisation.

It is this decolonising project that Ngugi elaborates in his text most widely read in apartheid South Africa, *Decolonising the Mind*. In it he argues that

the legacy of colonialism separated Africans from their language and colonised their minds. The root to freedom lay in the articulation of a new grammar of nationalism that would liberate African identities from the prison house of European languages and cultures.

Finally, although Ngugi continued to keep Gikuyu as an important part of his intellectual and literary work through *Mutiri*, a journal he founded and edited during his tenure at New York University, he has also returned to English, particularly in his collection of essays ironically titled *Moving the Centre* and in his latest collection of essays, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, in which the politics of space and performance occupies his imagination.

It is tempting to read Ngugi's return to English as an act of political capitulation in the face of global capitalism. However, it is a statement against, rather than a fatalistic resignation to, the power and tyranny of modernity and its vicissitudes; the kind of tyranny that has managed to keep Ngugi in exile from his native country, thereby forcing him to improvise his craft and intellectual project on the uncanny stage of a globalising world. Ngugi, like the proverbial bird eneke in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, has learnt to fly without perching, just like his hunters have learnt to shoot without missing.

Like *Matigari* in his novel of the same name, Ngugi is still in search of a truly humane home in Africa. Will the new South Africa become what he is searching for?

## steve biko foundation



Umoja

## 'Homecoming'

The Steve Biko Foundation Celebrates Co-creators of the African Imagination  
**Ngugi wa Thiong'o**  
**Robert Sobukwe**

### HIGHLIGHTS

**9 September, 2.00pm:**  
Celebrating the Women of Our Struggle

**Venue:** Uncle Tom's Hall, Orlando West, Soweto

**Keynote address:** Mrs Ntsiki Biko

**9 September, 7.00pm:**  
Sonia Sanchez Birthday Celebration

**Featuring:** Gloria Bosman, Kgafela Magogodi and Sonia Sanchez, at Kippies, Newtown Precinct

**10 September:** Ngugi visits Biko's hometown

**11 September, 9.00am:**  
Conversations with Ngugi wa Thiong'o at Bisho in collaboration with Eastern Cape Department of Arts and Culture

**12 September, 6.30pm:**  
4th Steve Biko Memorial

Lecture by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Jameson Hall, University of Cape Town

**13 September, 6.30pm:**  
Gala dinner at the Sandton Convention Centre

**Featuring:** Robert Sobukwe exhibition and Robert Sobukwe stamp launch.

**Speakers:** Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Benjamin Pogrud.

**Poetry:** Sonja Sanchez  
**Entertainment:** Umoja, Ringo Madlingozi

**15 September, 6.00pm:**  
Symposium with Ngugi wa Thiong'o at Wits Great Hall, Johannesburg

**For further information and to request tables at the gala dinner in Sandton, contact Pam Mbuli, Steve Biko Foundation: 011-403-0310**



Ringo Madlingozi



Kgafela Magogodi



Gloria Bosman





Phillip Kgosana — only 18 at the time — addresses the crowd gathering on March 30 1960 for a march to Parliament in Cape Town in defiance of the pass laws. A first march to Langa Police Station on March 21 had been stopped by police, who that night shot dead five people in Langa township

It seemed obvious to Robert Sobukwe that the injustices suffered by Africans in South Africa could ultimately be overcome only by a revolution, and that a successful revolution by Africans could in turn be fuelled only by the rawer emotions of a nationalism based on race.

Strategies like the ANC's, which were based on sentimental assumptions about the desirable characteristics of a post-revolutionary society, were a luxury that the oppressed could not afford. To Sobukwe, creating the psychological preconditions of revolution seemed a far more urgent task for African leadership.

Like his ideological heirs in the Black Consciousness movement of the 1970s, Sobukwe believed that the answer to white supremacy lay in building up an assertive black nationalist counterforce — not in building symbolic but ineffective interracial united fronts against apartheid.

As the 1950s went on, the debates over strategy and ideology brought a widening of the rift between "multiracialists" and "Africanists" in the ANC. Finally an open split occurred in November 1958 when Sobukwe and Potlako Leballo led the Africanists in a walkout from a Transvaal provincial conference of the ANC.

Five months later, in April 1959, the Africanists reconstituted themselves as the Pan Africanist Congress, with Sobukwe as their president. Adopting many of the pan-Africanist ideals endorsed at the December 1958 Accra All African People's Conference, the PAC stressed its identification with the nationalist movements of black Africa and with Kwame Nkrumah's vision of a United States of Africa.

Sobukwe's stinging attacks on the leftwing white allies of the ANC earned him a reputation as an "anti-communist" — a misleading label in a situation where the antipathy of many Africans to the Communist Party of South Africa had little to do with Marxism but a great deal to do with the fact that the Communist Party of South Africa has always been perceived as white-led.

Sobukwe's own views in economic questions were distinctly socialist — he called for a planned economy and a radical equalisation of wealth — but given the choice between arousing African political consciousness around

## He knew the fuse had to be lit



By Gail Gerhart

the issues of class or race, he chose the latter as far more likely to achieve the desired effect.

Under pressure from a youthful and action-minded membership, the PAC began planning in late 1959 to test its strength in a campaign of defiance against the hated pass laws. The PAC, Sobukwe suggested in speeches leading up to the launch, would not stop with the defiance of the pass laws. "When your house is flooding," he said, "why try to throw the water outside? We aim at closing the tap from which all this vile legislation flows."

When the PAC's campaign opened on March 21 1960, a generally poor popular response showed that Sobukwe had overestimated the drawing power of his fledgling organisation. Events took a dramatic turn, however, when police shot into a crowd of demonstrators at Sharpeville township outside Vereeniging on the opening day of the campaign. Sixty-nine Africans were killed, precipitating a period of mass unrest and police repression on a scale that at that time was unprecedented.

Both the PAC and the ANC were declared illegal by the South African Parliament in early April. Sobukwe, who under the PAC slogan of "leaders in front" had offered himself for arrest at a Soweto police station the morning

# The choice to him was clear

By Phillip Kgosana

FIRST met Sobukwe at Lady Selbourne township in February 1959 when, on a visit to Pretoria, he was sending out feelers for the formation of an organisation based on Pan Africanism and African Nationalism as an alternative to the multiracial Kliptown Charter of the ANC.

He was accompanied by one of his trusted lieutenants, Peter H Molotsi. Sobukwe's thirty-minute brief in a dimly lit hall was enough to convert me to the vision of an Africa reborn.

It took another ten months before I had the chance to meet him again at the first national conference of the newly formed Pan Africanist Congress at Orlando Community Hall in December 1959. Once more, the powerful mind of Sobukwe, the first president of the PAC, was at work as he helped formulate a strategy for the total abolition of the pass laws.

The story of the Sharpeville and Langa massacres on March 21 1960, and how the tragic events of that day marked a turning point in the fortunes of our country, is well known.

Sobukwe visited Cape Town in February 1960 while campaigning for the eradication of the pass laws. I was then the regional secretary of the PAC in the Western Cape. With the painful experience of how the "good whites" had throttled and delayed the progress of the oppressed African masses towards their liberation, Sobukwe addressed a rally of about two thousand migrant workers at Bhunga Square, Langa township.

He used a number of examples to show how the "good whites" had placed themselves in the "forefront" of the struggle of the African people in South Africa since the early 1920s.

His conclusion told of the bitter truth of the time, which can best be said in the Xhosa language: "Umlungu osithandayo ungena nge nxeba njenje mpethu" ("The good white man bores



Picture: BANA

Many joined the march to Parliament — seen snaking down De Waal Drive below — but before they could enter the city, the security police, left, led Kgosana away for a "discussion". The marchers were told they could gather again later — but instead the police arrested Kgosana



Picture: Courtesy of Phillip Kgosana

his way inward like a stalk borer when it destroys the maize plant").

Sobukwe, like all great men, lived a simple life. He was a kind and compassionate family man with a deep understanding of the suffering of the oppressed African masses.

He had been brought up in the rural town of Graaff-Reinet and experienced the poverty, ignorance and illiteracy of our people.

In Johannesburg he stayed among the township folk of Mofolo in Soweto with all its poverty and crime. He had on countless occasions seen the police in action in the townships and rural areas as they literally persecuted our people with their heinous system of pass raids, midnight arrests and deaths on white farms.

He had travelled daily by train to Johannesburg where he taught at Wits as a so-called "language assistant".

He understood and lived the woes of our people and when the decisive moment came, he led the nation into action against one of the ugliest pillars of apartheid — the "dompas".

Sobukwe was arrested on March 21 1960 at Orlando Police Station and incarcerated for three years for public defiance. On his release, he was detained for a further six years on Robben Island under a special legislation to deny him his freedom until "this side of eternity".

He fell ill but was denied treatment. All offers for him to exit the country were denied.

He was eventually banished to Galeshewe township in Kimberley, where he died a lonely death in February 1978.

Sobukwe was a great lover of his people. In his speeches and writings it is clear that the liberation of the African people was non-negotiable. The choice to him was clear: we were either slaves or free men and women.

To be an African to Sobukwe meant being a free citizen of Africa from the Cape to Cairo, from Morocco to Madagascar. To him a divided Africa would never survive and an Africa united and strong would be the giant it aspires to be.

**'When your house is flooding,' he said, 'why try to throw the water outside? We aim at closing the tap from which all this vile legislation flows'**



Robert Sobukwe speaks at the founding of the Pan Africanist Congress in Johannesburg on April 6 1959

of March 21, was convicted of incitement and sentenced to three years imprisonment.

In May 1969, after six years of further detention on Robben Island, Sobukwe was released and allowed to live under conditions of severe restriction in Kimberley. As a banned person he could not leave his home at night, leave Kimberley, be in the

presence of more than one person at a time, help prepare any publication, or be quoted by anyone in South Africa. Despite these restrictions, he qualified as an attorney and at the onset of his fatal illness in 1977 he was supporting himself by practising law in Kimberley.

It must have been gratifying for Sobukwe to observe the rapid spread of the Black Consciousness movement

and its culmination in the uprising of 1976, for the movement represented a flowering of the strategy pursued with so little success by the Africanists and the PAC a decade and a half earlier. Indeed, some of the founders of the Black Consciousness movement had first entered politics via the student ranks of the PAC around the time of Sharpeville.



# The gifts Sobukwe left in our hands

By Benjamin Pogrund

**R**OBERT Mangaliso Sobukwe gave South Africa many rich gifts. One in particular is nonracism.

In the late 1950s, when Sobukwe was politically active, multiracialism was the dominant concept among those fighting the apartheid racism of the time. It meant that all colour groups worked together but did so from within their own, segregated organisations.

Sobukwe challenged this. He believed that the group-exclusiveness of multiracialism did not solve but perpetuated antagonism and conflict. Instead, he spoke about human beings: "... there is only one race to which we all belong and that is the Human Race". Skin colour was not a factor. Individuals counted, not the racial group to which they happened to belong. Everyone who accepted Africa as his/her home was an African.

In practice it wasn't as straightforward as that. Sobukwe struggled to reconcile his adherence to nonracism with the prejudices of some of his supporters and his worry that whites and Asians might exert undue influence. But the principle remained triumphant.

His vision is with us today, going beyond political parties. South African existence rests on the bedrock of nonracism. It still isn't always practised fully and consistently. Too often it receives lip service rather than sincere application. But it remains the goal to which South Africa subscribes



Benjamin Pogrund and Sobukwe in a snapshot taken by Pogrund's wife, Anne, after Sobukwe's release

and aspires. Sobukwe didn't only talk about believing in human beings. He acted it out through the politeness with which he treated each person with whom he came in contact — men, women, children, rich or poor, powerful or weak, black or white.

Was this always a strength, especially in a political leader? I saw him behave with identical courtesy towards friend and prison warden, comrade and security policeman, and I wondered. But it was beautiful to watch a humanity which had no bounds, and especially in an ugly racist era in South Africa when it stood out like a beacon, lighting up the lives of those around him.

Then his personal honesty and integrity. Had he lived, would this have carried him through the temptations of the easy life and corruption? I believe so. Those qualities were so basic in him that he would not have allowed weakness in himself or in others.

Sobukwe also set a profound personal example as a leader in asking people to do only what he was himself prepared to do. On March 21 1960, he urged people to leave their passes at home, go to the nearest police station and offer themselves for arrest. He went first.

As the sun rose that day, Sobukwe presented himself for arrest at

**'Was his sacrifice worth it? Did he waste his life in pain and desolation? How much did South Africa gain? Did it justify the suffering of his wife and children? These are far-reaching questions. Each of us has our own answer. But his legacy lives, in what South Africa is and what South African can be'**

Orlando Police Station in Soweto.

Politically, it was unwise: it robbed the then still-new Pan Africanist Congress of its leader. In his absence, and that of other leaders who went with him, the organisation was never able to rise to its potential.

But what an example of personal leadership! What an example of courage and of commitment to his people and freedom!

And all the greater because in going on his political path and walking into prison, Sobukwe deliberately turned his back on the offer of a university lectureship in a "white" university. He would have been the first black to get such a job with its financial security and status.

As we know, Sobukwe was never again free. The Nationalist government feared him. He spent the next 18 years, until he died of cancer, in imprisonment: three years for "incitement", six years without trial on Robben Island, and nine years' banishment in Kimberley.

Was his sacrifice worth it? Did he waste his life in pain and desolation? How much did South Africa gain? Did it justify the suffering of his wife and children?

These are far-reaching questions. Each of us has his/her own answer. But his legacy lives, in what South Africa is and what South African can be.



**'It was beautiful to watch a humanity which had no bounds ...'**

# Why they wrote a law to keep him in jail

By Helen Suzman

**I**DID not meet Robert Sobukwe until I visited him on Robben Island in the mid-1960s. By then he was well into an additional six-year term of imprisonment that he served over and above the three years that the courts had sentenced him to for his part in the anti-pass campaign that resulted in the Sharpeville massacre in 1960.

The Minister of Justice, John Vorster, was able to do this by virtue of Section 4 of the General Laws Amendment Act of 1963, which gave him the authority to hold people in detention without trial on an annual basis.

Vorster made it clear that the sole intention of this section was to deal with Sobukwe, who was due to be released on May 3 1963. He said in Parliament: "This clause will be used to keep him there longer — for here we are dealing with a person, let me say this, who has a strong magnetic personality, a person who can organise, a person who feels he has a vocation to perform this task, well knowing what methods will be applied."



Sobukwe, the centre of attention, commands the situation in this meeting with Members of Parliament during his term on Robben Island

**'We are dealing with a person who has a strong magnetic personality, a person who can organise, a person who feels he has a vocation to perform this task, well knowing what methods will be applied'**

— John Vorster on Sobukwe

Sobukwe was the only person the law was used against during the six years it was in operation and thus it became known as "the Sobukwe clause". When the government finally decided to release Sobukwe from Robben Island in 1972, that law was suspended.

As the sole Progressive Party representative in Parliament I was the only MP to vote against that disgraceful piece of legislation, which totally undermined the rule of law. The entire opposition voted with the government.

I followed the same procedure of voting against the continued detention of Sobukwe for every one of those six



Picture: BAAVA

years — to no avail.

When I visited him on Robben Island, I found him living in a small isolated cottage on the island in the sole company of a taciturn white warden. He told me that there was no one to talk to and he felt that he was forgetting how to express himself.

His wife and children were allowed to spend a fortnight twice a year with him on the island, which was hardly adequate compensation for the freedom to which he was entitled, having served his initial sentence of three years.

In 1972 he was finally released and was immediately banned and restricted to Kimberley, which was not

his home town. While he was there he obtained a law degree. He was not permitted to leave the district.

The next time I saw Sobukwe was at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, where he had been admitted suffering from terminal cancer. I was accompanied by my friend, Moira Henderson, a stalwart of the Black Sash, who had befriended Sobukwe and his family during those years.

That meeting at Groote Schuur Hospital was our last meeting. I was struck by his quiet dignity, his lack of bitterness about a wasted life, which he knew was nearing its end. Perhaps he also knew that although he could be banned, his ideas could not be

banned and would live on in the minds of young Africans.

He died in Kimberley a few months later.

One cannot help wondering what the situation in South Africa would have been like today if Sobukwe had been able to use his considerable talents and ability during the challenging years of the 1970s, instead of being forced into the twilight existence of a banned person.

Even after his death certain restrictions still persisted. It was forbidden to quote anything he had said or written when he was alive. The silencing of this remarkable man thus continued beyond the grave.





Milswa Sobukwe, centre, is comforted at her father's funeral in Graaff-Reinet in 1978. Next to her sits her veiled mother, Veronica, struck with grief

**I** WAS a student in the early 1950s at the Bantu Normal College near Pretoria with the likes of Mmuthanyana Stanley Mogoba who was to become president of the PAC. I used to visit my older sister in Standerton for our holidays. It was here that I first came across Robert Sobukwe.

He was on the staff of the local high school in Standerton location, one of the ghettos of squalor and poverty to which blacks were consigned.

I got to hear that Sobukwe was providing extra tuition for his students outside normal school hours, and even more unusually, during school holidays.

There was no library, cinema, no swimming pool. Perhaps there might be a dusty undulating patch of ground that passed off as an apology for a soccer field and possibly a primitive tennis court.

There was no street lighting, no water-borne sewerage — location residents used bucket latrines with the night soil being collected periodically. The buckets would line the side of the street until that happened. The stench was overpowering.

All the white children would be playing near these buckets.

Public amenities that were taken for granted in the opulent, privileged sections of our society were as

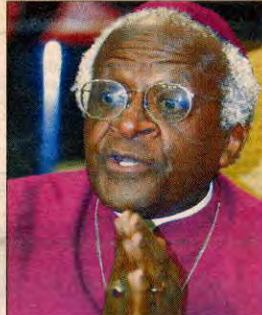
## May we seek to live up to his ideals

By Desmond Tutu  
Archbishop Emeritus

conspicuously absent as snowballs in hell.

I relate all this to remind those of us in the black community who have made it just how far we have come and in the hope that we will want to do all we can to pull up the many millions of our people still languishing in the morass of poverty, deprivation, hunger, squalor, despair and disease.

I relate these hoary details so that those of our white compatriots who claim that they derived no benefit from the foul system of injustice in our land might be shamed into silence and to stop whining when attempts are



made to redress the inequalities of the past; that they would try to respond with a modicum of generosity to the remarkable magnanimity of most of the victims and would realise that transformation of those previously disadvantaged is not altruism.

It is the best form of self-interest. The poor, the hungry, the landless, the unemployed will not remain patient and quiescent forever.

Be that as it may, I was impressed that Sobukwe fought to do his best to improve the lot of those Standerton location children. It just may be that

the conditions of his pupils helped to inspire him to want to dedicate his life to changing their lot.

This experience in Standerton may very well have influenced him in making the break with the ANC in 1959 when it was felt that a specifically black agenda dictated by the peculiar black experience was being compromised by a non-racialism that was not sufficiently nuanced.

The next time I had an opportunity to meet him was when he was a "language assistant" in the Department of Bantu (later African) Languages at Wits University. (Blacks, however well qualified, could not in those days be appointed lecturers!)

He had such an engaging smile and had such a warm and attractive personality. Everyone seemed to call him "Prof", perhaps because of his erudition. I think it was that you were aware of being in a "presence". He did have charisma.

He helped me prepare for my Unisa finals in Zulu III.

When he broke away from the ANC, his rationale may not have been expressed in explicitly Black Consciousness terms but he was raising the same issues that would resonate so well with particularly black youth — that blacks had to exorcise the demons of self-hate and enter into their glorious liberty as equally God's children as any other group.

Blacks had to set their own agenda and not let others, however sympathetic, however liberal, do that on their behalf. They were conscious selves, autonomous subjects and not objects to be decided for.

I next met him when he was seriously ill in Grootte Schuur Hospital. His endearing smile was still there and the medical and nursing staff were eating out of his hand.

His physician, the young Dr Chris Barnard, had been firm about the protocol his guards had to observe. He insisted that Sobukwe was under his sole care and that he would determine the conditions under which he was to be kept.

It was not surprising — no, it was entirely in character that when he practised as a lawyer in Kimberley he should place himself unstintingly at the service of his community, most of whom were unable to pay for his services. Long lines of clients would form outside his office.

The wheel had come full circle. The teacher who had been a spendthrift on behalf of his pupils in Standerton had become the utterly selfless lawyer in Kimberley.

We give thanks for a great South African so utterly altruistic, there as a leader for the sake of those being led, from Standerton to Kimberley.

May we celebrate his life and seek to live up to his ideals.



Far left: Desmond Tutu stands next to Sobukwe's sons Dinilesizwe, Dedanizizwe and Dalindyabo, at the funeral of their father

Left: Dinilesizwe, Dedanizizwe and Dalindyabo bear their father's coffin to the last resting place



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