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Appendix 1:

BURIAL PRACTICES, AFRICAN WOMEN, AND ISLAM
IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

S. O. Sesanti (University of Port Elizabeth)

KEY WORDS

Islam, Women, South Africa, Burial Practices

ABSTRACT

Early in 2003, African Muslims in Uitenhage’s township, Kwa-Nobuhle, learnt that Muslim women, led by Sheikh Nceba Salamntu, in South Africa’s Port Elizabeth New Brighton township, were allowed, contrary to previous practice, to follow a funeral procession right up to the graveyard. The resultant discomfort on the one hand, and excitement on the other caused by this event among Muslims in the township, forms the basis of this research. It gives focus to Muslim women, the ones most affected by their customary restriction from the gravesites.

The research exposes the basis for women’s exclusion from funeral processions in the Muslim community. It was established that many of these Muslim women who challenged the practice were converts from Christianity to Islam. One of the bases for their action was that they were passive recipients of Islam. Furthermore, it was found that the exclusion of women from the funeral procession has no basis in Islamic writings.

INTRODUCTION

While the study of the topic of Islam in North, West, and East Africa has been well documented, the topic of Islam in Southern Africa is still in its infancy (Shell,
2000:328). It should be noted that when one speaks about “South African Muslims”, we are not talking about a homogeneous community, but about people of Asiatic extract (Indians and Malays) and about indigenous Africans. In South Africa, in particular, the Muslim history referred to by Shell focuses on the Asiatic experience, and little is written about the indigenous African experience. The indigenous African experience in South Africa has been no different from that of fellow African Muslims in the rest of Africa. Bravmann (2002:489) notes that “except for the heavily Arabized northern fringe of the continent”, Africa has been a long-ignored portion of Islamic civilisation. When dealing with African Muslim women, therefore, it is significant to note that we are dealing with people who have been doubly neglected in discourse, as Africans, and as women. It is worth noting that in topics dealing with Islam, women’s views have been less visible (Dunbar, 2000:398), not because women have been reluctant to take part, but because of the control men have exercised over women. Yet it is equally important to note (Dunbar, 2000:401) that as early as 1941, there were Muslim men such as Muhammad Jumat Imam, founder of the Mahdiyyat movement in Ijebul-Ode, who held “as a principal element of his instruction that women be educated and that they should attend mosques together with men” in a world that then, and even now, uses religious justifications to bar women from the mosque and other centres of activity.

For Nothobile Maryam Mbaduli, 72, and Nokwanele Dolo, 54, conversion to Islam, “around 1977” and 1974, was not an independent choice. Both followed their husbands after leaving the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the Wesleyan Methodist Church, respectively. Their moves were inspired by a wish to maintain harmony and unity in their families. Their first problem had to do with being alienated by the Arabic language in which many Islamic texts, including the Quran, were written. For Dolo, the Arabic prayers sounded like “rumblings that did not make sense”, which she did not attempt to learn, while Mbaduli’s response was to resort to using again the Christian Lord’s Prayer, so as to maintain communication with God – and this has been the case for the past 26
years since she embraced Islam. Having belonged to an active women’s organisation in their Christian backgrounds, their second problem lay in being ‘relegated to the kitchen’, where all they did was to prepare meals for their husbands when they returned from the mosque on Fridays, since their husbands told them that Islam taught that it was better for women to pray in their homes than going to the mosque. This they could not independently verify because of the unavailability of literature in the languages they could master, and the inaccessibility to the mosque, where sermons took place on Fridays. Staying at home was a “very lonely” experience for Dolo, filling her with nostalgia for her “musical” church. Occasionally, they would be invited to the mosque when a Muslim guest arrived to teach them “how to be good wives, look after our homes and raise children properly” or during child-naming events. It took 20 years after embracing Islam for Mbaduli, and 26 years for Dolo, to set their feet in the Muslim graveyard, and for both it was a day after their husbands had been laid to rest. Before then, they had been obedient wives, who learnt from their husbands that Islam forbade women from going to the grave, and that the faith discouraged them from frequenting the mosque, saying that there were more blessings that emanated from praying at home than in the mosques.

The hoped-for harmony in the Mbaduli household was short-lived, as their elder son reverted to the African Methodist Episcopal church whence they came. Islam, according to their son, could not quench his spiritual longing. The absence of music in the house of Allah was suffocating for the son. When he left, the father was offended and furious, and wanted to disown the son, this despite the clear Quranic teachings (Quran 2:158) that there is no compulsion in religion. Reconciliation between the father and the son took place after Mbaduli reasoned with her husband to allow their son to follow his heart. Soon thereafter, their grandchild, Thandiwe, followed suit for the same reason as that of her uncle.

The encouragement of women to go to the mosque, initiated by the Muslim Youth Movement, and the possibility of women going as far as the graveyard to
accompany their dead, are changes that feel like fresh air for Mbaduli. On the few occasions when they went to the mosque, the seclusion of women, who could not even see, but only heard the voice of the man who gave the sermon, was unacceptable to her. She says that she was pained by not to seeing her beloved son and husband laid to their rest. She notes that restriction of women from following the funeral procession, coupled with the general inactivity of women, and the predominant use of Arabic, have been cited by many would-be-Muslim women as the reasons for their reluctance to embrace Islam. Mbaduli calls for the translation of the Quran into isiXhosa as a matter of urgency.

For Dolo, these moves have come a little too late. A year after her husband died, (2001) she went back to her family’s church, the Dutch Reformed Church. Not following her husband’s funeral procession and seeing him laid to rest, made her literally “sick”. She believes that seeing one’s beloved laid to rest has a therapeutic effect. What made the experience worse for Dolo was that, soon after her husband’s funeral, she was left alone and lonely, because, unlike Christians in the African townships, Muslims in the townships do not hold vigils where there is preaching and singing, that deal with the emotional loss. In the Dutch Reformed Church, she finds fulfilment because, she says, the hymn singing and dancing enable her to empty her heart of its heavy contents. Unlike in Islam, where she could not even read the Arabic Quran, the Women’s Union in the church gives her opportunities to read the Bible and to preach.

Dolo’s longing for music and the desire of some women to follow friends or relatives to the grave, are relevant for Andiswa Matshoba, 33, the chairperson of the Eastern Cape’s Muslim Youth Movement, an organisation playing a leading role in fighting for Muslim women’s rights. She asserts that women’s fragile nature should not be used to exclude them from burying their beloved, arguing that shedding tears is not necessarily wrong, and that the process has a therapeutic effect. Matshoba says that the first bond that any human being has is with the mother – through the umbilical cord – and therefore women should be
afforded the opportunity to share the final parting. Having joined Islam from the Presbyterian Church of Africa in 1994, she sometimes nurses nostalgic sentiments because of the absence of music in her new faith, whose attraction was its monotheistic teachings, and the burial practice “which is similar to the African tradition”. In African culture, she says, music or song forms the core of social, political and economic life – joy, sorrow, and success being captured in song.

When asked about the absence of women at traditional African burials, she says it was not that they were excluded, but that they did not go to the grave site only because everything was done in the yard in close proximity, the difference now being that grave sites are a number of kilometres away. Fungiwe Fatima Manziya, 62, did not receive the new and impending changes with the same enthusiasm. For her, it took thirty years to set her foot in the graveyard, when she went to the unveiling of a fellow Muslim’s tombstone this year (2003). She has a feeling that African Muslim converts want to bring into Islam their Christian background, saying that African Muslims should follow their fellow “born (Indian) Muslims, because they follow the Quran”. Though she, too, followed her husband into Islam, it was not because she was compelled by him. It was her mother who forced her to do so, insisting that it was not good for family unity to go to any church of her choice, as her husband had indicated she should, when she showed reluctance to embrace Islam. Not only can she not read the Arabic Quran, but she also finds it difficult to read the English version, because “it does not make an exciting reading” since she is always compelled to ask the meaning of many difficult English words. When asked how she knows, then, that the Indian Muslims follow the Quran, she confesses to having never considered this question. In the same way she “never questioned” why women were not allowed to go to the graveyard, and were discouraged from going to the mosque. Her acceptance of the status quo did not, however, mean that she was happy – it was the opposite, as she always asked herself who prayed for women when they could not go b the mosque, and why they were discouraged from the place of
worship, yet in the fasting month (Ramadaan), they fasted just as men did. But her questions remained locked in her heart.

Manziya is not alone in suspecting that Africans want to do their own thing, Ntombise Marambana, 45, asks, “Why us, and not Indians? Why should the initiative come from Africans?” She is against the move to get women to follow funeral processions, saying that Africans should not “change things and introduce our own ways”. Having embraced Islam independently in the year 2000, while her husband remained a Christian, “attracted by the beauty and simplicity of Islamic funerals”, she says her own feelings about women not burying their beloved “should be set aside, and the Islamic way should prevail”. She sees it as her duty to “bow down to the law and to accept things as they are”. Her thinking is the same regarding the issue of music – accepting things as they are. But if Islam were to permit music, then it would be acceptable to her, too. She admits to singing at Christian funerals - though reluctantly. Though she does not understand Arabic, she says she is not troubled by its predominance, but wishes that she could find time and opportunity to learn the language.

Like Marambana, Nomthandazo Ummali, 31, the Kwa-Nobuhle Muslim Community’s Sisters Desk chairperson, the issue of Arabic is not a problem because everything can be learnt, especially because Arabic acts as “a unifier” of all Muslims, regardless of their nationality. The wife of the Kwa-Nobuhle community’s Imam, Ummali, embraced Islam independently at the age of 12, in 1984, while she attended a Muslim school in Johannesburg, having been attracted there by the logic of Islam’s practices, unlike in her Christian family, where she was “told to do as told” and not allowed to ask questions. She says that she is prepared to change if there is any evidence that women are permitted to follow funeral positions, but wonders why this has not been an issue for such a long time before. This was said as an afterthought, after saying that “in my house no woman would be allowed to go to the graves if a member of my family were to die”. She believes that, even in the African tradition, women were not allowed to
accompany the dead to the graves, having “heard” this from her grandfather. Coming from a musical family, she says she loves music, but is adapting to the absence of music within her Muslim community. She does “not feel lonely” since she sings with her maiden family when visiting them. When asked if she does not feel that she is leading a double life when she sings Christian songs that are contradictory to the teachings of Islam, she says she does not feel that because, to her, the songs’ rhythms are more important than their lyrics. When asked how she reconciles her opposition to women following Muslim funeral processions with her position of following Christian funeral processions to the graves, she says that she does this to accommodate other members of the community who are not Muslims, so that she does not appear to be elevating herself above her fellow Xhosa community members.

If it can be proved in Islamic teaching, that women may attend funerals right to the graveyard, Fatima Marambana, 28, would not have a problem accepting the change, but personally she would find it hard to go there, and that is not because she would be against it, but because she feels that she would not be emotionally able to bear it. Having seen a video recording of the burial process of one local Muslim brother in the company of fellow Muslim sisters, she had found it unbearably saddening. She embraced Islam in 1995, after leaving the Wesleyan Methodist Church, where she felt that there was too much demand for money, failing which, a person would not be given the full burial rites owed to a member of the congregation. She also appreciated the simplicity of “Islamic wear”, where there are no requirements for “uniforms”, as is the case in the Christian churches. But the frustration for her in the new Muslim home is the absence of music, to an extent that to fill her spiritual void, she listens to gospel queen, Rebecca Malope, or quenches her longing by singing at Christian funerals. She does not know Arabic, but believes that the translation of text into other languages could lead to the corruption of the original meaning, pointing to the Bible’s different versions, such as the King James Version and others.
In the same way as Marambana, if Nosisi Kgabale, 23, (Mbaduli’s daughter), were to be given proof in the Quran that women could go to the graveyard, she would accept the change, though it would take time for her to do so, and even then, her change would only be effected if her Imam (Ummali) agreed. Nosisi does not read. She says she is “not interested in reading; even at school I read when I had to write a test”.

Her opposition to women following the funeral procession is informed by her having read once that the Prophet had turned women away from the funeral after the women answered in the negative when the Prophet asked them if they were going to assist with filling the grave with soil. Another reason for her opposition is that she does not see any role for women in the graveyard.

On what Quranic basis, sayings (ahadith) or traditions (sunnah) of the Prophet of Islam are women allowed to go to accompany their beloved to the graveyard? If it was not done in the time of the Prophet, how can it be done now? Why should there be an exception amongst African Muslims of South Africa, when most of the Muslim world is not practising this? These are the questions that haunted and raged in the mind of Kwa-Nobuhle Mosque’s Imam, Yusuf Ummali, on learning that the New Brighton township Muslims, led by their Imam, Nceba Salamntu, allowed women to the graveyard. While Ummali conceded that, in the time of the prophet, women were allowed to go to the funerals, following the funeral procession to the graves was beyond the limit. In fact, he says, there was a time, in Madina - where the Prophet had sought refuge from the persecution of Arabs - when women were proscribed even from visiting the graves, and the reason, says Ummali, was that this was a process of changing the mindset of the Arabs, whose traditions promoted worship of idols. It was a necessary exercise for the emerging Muslim community, to enable them to differentiate between praying for and praying to the deceased. When it was pointed out to him that, in many South African mosques, women are not even allowed to go to the mosque for funeral prayers, let alone the graves, Ummali pointed out that this was due to the poverty
of debate and discussion around issues of death and burials in South Africa, and he attributed this partly to the unavailability of these topics in literature, except in Arabic. Realising that learning Arabic is no prerequisite, though it is recommended, because the original Quran is in that language, Ummali recommended the establishment of an Islamic Academy of Indigenous Africans, which would draw in experts in African culture and Islam, so as to harmonise the two.

For Maulana Nazeem Khan of the Durban Street Mosque in Uitenhage, not only should women be prohibited from following the funeral procession to the graveyard, they should not even set their feet in the graveyard, even to see the grave of their beloved after funerals. This, he says, is based on the sayings of the Prophet. According to Khan, the Prophet prohibited women from going to the funerals because they tend to cause *fitna* (conflict, scandal, gossip). The second reason attributed to the Prophet by Khan is that this is due to the “fragile” nature of women, who are given to easily breaking down in cases of bereavement. Addressing women’s presence in the graveyard, Khan says that the Prophet said that women who set their feet in the graveyard would be “cursed”. Khan, like Ummali, notes that many people are ignorant of these issues, because the literature dealing with them is in Arabic.

For Salamntu, who graduated with BA (Honours) in Islamic theology at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, there is no Islamic basis for prohibiting women, noting that in the time of the Prophet, it was only those who were going to dig and cover the grave who went, meaning that if a man was not going to dig, there was no point for him to go. He further notes that the sayings of the Prophet are often taken out of context. He says the saying by the Prophet that “prayers of a woman made in the darkest corner of her home are better than those made anywhere in the world” is one statement taken out of context and used to keep women away from the mosque. The correct interpretation of this statement for Salamntu, is that, because in the early days of
Islam, Muslims were under attack, this made the practising of the religion more difficult for women, so their extra-ordinary efforts such as “praying in the darkest corner” were commended by the Prophet. He says that not only did the Prophet encourage women to pray at home, but men, too, so that they could serve as good role models to their families. Yet, this was not used to restrict men from going to the mosque. Salamntu says that a modern excuse for barring women is that they cry at the graves, “as if men do not cry”.

Salamntu’s views find resonance with the articulation of Islam by University of Natal’s lecturer of African and Islamic Studies, Tahir Sitoto. As early as ten years ago, Sitoto, who was then the Kwa-Nobuhle mosque’s Imam, and the national president of the Muslim Youth Movement, tore down the curtain that secluded women from the centre. For him, that “symbolic act of tearing the curtain was a statement” that, as the new community of African Muslims, they “should not copy traditions and customs masquerading as normative Islam – customs and traditions that have no firm textual basis in Islam”. He says that the Masjid ul Haramain, in Mecca, has no strict division of sacred space between males and females, and that the rituals of hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) are gender-neutral. He asserts that the “blurred gender division in worship” is a result of patriarchal tendencies, and that a critical study of the Prophet’s life bears testimony that women were within easy reach, or were at least sharing the same space with men. For Sitoto, the barring of women from the funerals is “an extension of their historical barring from the mosque” by patriarchal society. The move by African Muslims to begin to interpret Islam in their condition, says Sitoto, is a natural process that is not unique to Africa, but one which “has accompanied Islam wherever it went…India, East Asia, etc”.

RIGHTS AND ROLES OF WOMEN IN ISLAM.

In addressing the rights and roles of women in Islam, Wadud-Muhsin (1992:63) notes that there is no inherent value placed on man or woman – that, in fact,
there is no arbitrary, pre-ordained and eternal system of hierarchy. In understanding the Quran and women, Wadud-Muhsin further advises that it must be taken into cognisance that the book responded to particular circumstances in Arabia at the time of the revelation (1992:78), circumstances which were patriarchal (1992:80), a culture with an androcentric bias, one where the male and the male experience were looked upon as the norm, a culture where females were looked upon in terms of their utility to men, which was primarily reproductive (1992:81). That such a cultural bias was the context in which the Quran was revealed, Wadud-Muhsin further notes (1992:81), has serious implications for later communities trying to understand the social ideal which the Quran was attempting to establish in that community. Wadud-Muhsin says that, although in some instances, the Quran proposed immediate abolition of certain ill practices, most of the time it advocated gradual reform so as to allow people to adapt to the new changes. A few of the ill practices that were carried out by men against women before the arrival of Islam among the Arabs, and which had to be prohibited explicitly and immediately, were infanticide, sexual abuse of slave girls, and denial of inheritance to women (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992:9).

In the time of Prophet Muhammad, women played various and many leading roles in the Muslim community, with the support and encouragement of the prophet of Islam. His youngest wife, A’ishah, was a jurist, and a teacher of Islam (Bashier, 1990:150). In fact, the Prophet directed Muslims to “take half your religion from this Humayra’ (red-faced lady)” (Bashier, 1990:149). Not only was A’isha a teacher and a jurist, but she was a military commander as well, being known for the battle she led against one of the early rulers of the Muslim community, Ali (Bashier, 1990:159). In arguing for the right of the public role for Muslim women, Bashier (1990:159) states that such an act by A’isha would have been impossible if an absolute, hard-and-fast separation of the two sexes was the dominant norm in the formative age of Islam. A’isha was not the only woman to take part in combat. Nusaybah bint Ka’b is recorded as having fought gallantly in the Battle of Uhud, at a most critical moment of that battle (Bashier, 1990:161). She was among the less than ten of the Prophet’s companions, who managed to
hold their ground around the Prophet, who was under heavy attack from the
enemy when the Muslim army was dispersed, resulting in her suffering more than
twelve wounds, one of which was nearly fatal, being a sword-cut deep in the side
of her neck, which took more than a year to heal completely (Bashier, 1990:161).
The Prophet is recorded as having given permission to a Muslim woman who
went to him on behalf of other women who wanted to go into the battlefield, to
help the fighting Muslim forces and to treat the wounded (Bashier, 1990:168).

It was after the battle of Uhud that we learn that a woman participated in the
burial process of one of the Prophet’s soldiers – in the company of the Prophet.
Lings (1983:193) has written that one Muslim woman, Hind, brought to the burial
site three martyrs, including her son, for burial. This was after she had tried to
take them to Medina (1983:193) but turned back to the battlefield when her
camel refused to move beyond a certain point of her journey, that being God’s
will, according to the Prophet. Lings (1983:193) notes that “the Prophet who
stood beside them until they were buried” told Hind that the men had gone to
paradise. The point here is that the Prophet did not drive Hind away. In a
separate incident we learn that immediately after the death of one of the
Prophet’s companions, Uthman ibn Maz’un – before his funeral – the Prophet
went with A’isha to visit his wife, Khawlah (Lings, 1980:166) where A’isha saw
the Prophet kissing the dead man’s cheek and weeping over him. At the funeral,
Lings writes that the Prophet heard an old woman saying that the dead man
would go up to paradise, at a point which the Prophet turned to her and asked
her sharply what gave her the right to say so. This is because only God and
those to whom He reveals these things know such things. The point here is that
the woman was at a funeral, and the Prophet did not object to that, only to her
utterance. Furthermore, we learn from Lings (1980:163) that, after one of the
battles known as the battle of Badr, the Prophet “had been to visit the grave of
his daughter Ruqayya, and Fatima went with him”. Lings further notes that
Fatima wept for her sister. But Lings further notes (1980:163) that when Umar,
one of the Prophet’s companions, heard that the women were weeping for
Ruqayya and the martyrs of Badr, his voice was raised in anger against them. This, according to Lings (1980:163), was because the Prophet had “previously spoken against lamentations for the dead…this led to a misunderstanding”. When Umar spoke against them, the Prophet cleared the “misunderstanding” by telling Umar to “let them weep” because, according to the Prophet “what cometh from the heart and the eye, that is from God and His mercy, but what cometh from the hand and from the tongue, that is from Satan”. By “the hand” the Prophet meant the beating of the breast and the lacerating of the cheeks, and by “the tongue” he meant the vociferous clamour in which all the women joined as a social gesture (Lings, 1983: 163).

THE ISSUE OF LANGUAGE IN ISLAM

Since the Prophet of Islam was an Arab, and knew no other language than Arabic, the Quran was revealed in his native language. But since the Quranic message was not meant only for the Arabs, but for all humankind, this has posed some serious problems for Muslims whose native tongue is not Arabic, as shown by some interviewees’ responses. While this disadvantaged those who could not speak Arabic, it gave political power and social position to Muslim leaders who mastered the language, because of the monopoly they exercised over the Quran (Lacunza-Balda, 1997:114). The common practice on the part of non-Arabic speaking Muslims throughout the world is to recite the Quran – as expected of Muslims – without understanding. This tendency moved one of the most celebrated Muslim thinkers in East Africa, Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly al-Mazrui, in one of his writings, to note: “What kind of (religious) ignorance is this for a Muslim to pray without knowing the meaning of what he reads in his prayer, or to recite the Quran like a parrot?” (Lacunza-Balda, 1997:114). In order to overcome the “parroting” problem, African Muslims in East Africa embarked on a project to translate the Quran into Kiswahili, the lingua franca of that region. The move to translate the Quran into Kiswahili, according to Lacunza-Balda, (1997:108) “began to open the door to individual views on the Quranic text, which until then
was hidden for most Muslims on account of their unfamiliarity with Arabic”. Further, the use of Kiswahili has contributed to the popularisation of Islam, and to its spread in many parts of Africa outside the geographical limits of East Africa (Lacunza-Balda, 1993:230). In West Africa, Reichmuth (2000:430) notes that, for didactic and religious purposes, local languages, particularly Fulfulde and Hausa, were increasingly being used, further noting that translation during preaching campaigns and teaching activities within the cities and schools was becoming an integral activity. However, the translation of the Quran into African languages has not had a smooth run. Those against the move – including Africans themselves – have advanced the argument that “there is a deficiency in Kiswahili, our language, in relation to Arabic. And not only Kiswahili, however; there is no other language as extensive as the Arabic language. Therefore to translate the Quran into a foreign language has no meaning at all.” (Lacunza-Balda, 1993:235). In South Africa, with the exception of a few chapters into isiZulu in Durban, there has been no major effort to translate the Quran into African languages.

**Music in Islam**

The role of music in Islam has long been a topic of debate among Muslims, with both sides being for or against using the Quran to justify their standpoints (Charry, 2000:554). To those who argue in favour of music, pointing to the reciting of Quranic verses which sounds musical, it is pointed out that “while Quranic recitation fits a Western definition of music, most Muslims would not consider it as music” but rather as “recitation”, not “singing” or “music” (Charry, 2000:548). Those against music point out that it is associated with worldly pleasures, and diverts believers from religious life, citing music’s compelling power as a force capable of competing with Islam for human souls (Charry, 2000:555). But those in favour of music equally cite that very compelling power of music as a force which, when chanted and sung, can make people come closer to God (Charry, 2000:555). Amid the academic and intellectual debates around music in Islam, African experience in West Africa shows that music occupies a
significant role in worship. Bravmann (2000:503) notes that, during Ramadaan, youthful voices, accompanied by drum rhythms rendered on old tin cans, are heard, adding that children regale their elders with song and musical compositions. Fear of Muslims that certain forms of pre-Islamic activities such as drumming and masking, accompanied by music, would cause Muslims to slide into un-Islamic practices, inspired some Guinean Muslim women to compose and sing a song to the effect that “our dances and songs in honour of our children will not kill our faith in Islam” (Charry, 2000:560). This attitude on the part of the women is given expression by Bravmann (2000:294) who notes that “never passive recipients of Islam, African members of the community of believers (the umma) shaped the religion whenever and wherever necessary to fit local needs and circumstances. Making something of each other, a synthesis developed that has proven to be rich and enduring.” A look into historical narratives reveals that singing and drum-beating were done in the presence of the Prophet, and he did not stop the activities. In particular, it is noted (Bashier, 1990:166) that, at a wedding which the Prophet had attended, he sat in the bride’s room where the “maidens were singing and beating their drums and mentioning the names of her ancestors”. In reference to the Prophet, the song’s lyrics mentioned that they had a “Prophet amongst us who knows what is going to happen tomorrow” (Bashier, 1990:166). Significantly, it is recorded that the Prophet “interrupted them at that point and said: ‘As to this, do not say it.’” (Bashier, 1990:166). The Prophet objected because Islam teaches that only God knows of things to come, and in cases where Prophets know in advance, that happens only by the grace of God, not the wills of Prophets. In another historical narrative, it is noted that, while digging a trench around Medina in preparation for a battle against the enemies of Islam, the Prophet “started a song in which everyone joined” (Lings, 1983:217).

**CONCLUSION**

The charge by some Muslim women quoted above that the changes brought about by the likes of Sitoto and Salamntu is an attempt to the Africanise Islam, is
not false. To be sure, by “African Islam” one means establishing and promoting indigenous intellectual African leadership, and the spread of Islam through African languages (Vikor, 2000:468). It is in this context that Sitoto, as quoted above, says that African Muslims should no longer accept other people’s customs, which are paraded as normative Islam. Sitoto’s sentiments echo thoughts that were expressed by his predecessor in Islam, Hampate Ba, a Malian, who, in the belief that the meeting of Fulani traditions and Islam were not confrontational but harmonious, argued that “Islam took hold and grew in Sub-Saharan Africa upon the foundations of traditional religion” (Harrow, 2000:537). This historical reality is obviously not known to the African Muslim women who will not accept ways that do not appear to get the blessings of the Indian Muslims. They are not to blame, because that is how Islam has always been presented to them – Indian-led. It does not help, therefore, for Salamntu to see this attitude as slave mentality, as he indicated to me. By proposing that literature on Islam in African languages should be promoted, that the process of translating the Quran and the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) should be sped up, one is not suggesting that this will automatically translate into the common understanding of Islam among Africans. That would be naïve, because even the Arab Muslims, in whose language the Quran was first written, are not homogeneous in thought. Rather, the point is that even those who do not master either Arabic or English will have access to the literature, and be enabled to participate in debates in an informed fashion.

It is the humble opinion of this writer that the restriction of women from the grave has no Islamic basis, as shown by the research that indicated that a woman participated in the burial of the Prophet’s companions. It is the writer’s belief that the Prophet’s sayings have often been quoted out of context, as evidenced by Umar’s misinterpretation of the Prophet’s call upon the believers not to cry ostentatiously, a misinterpretation that was rectified by none other than the Prophet. Misinterpretation in Islam is not confined only to the Prophet’s sayings, but to the Quran itself. For instance, in the Quran (26:227) it is written: “Poets are
followed by none save erring men.” Many Muslims mistake this to mean that poetry is haraam (forbidden), and yet God at that time was referring to certain poets who were competing with the Prophet to divert the people from God’s message.

It remains to be seen if the Muslim women quoted above will maintain the same positions when it is their turn to be bereaved. For the women who had lost their beloved, not accompanying them to their resting place was traumatic. On the question of music, one finds nothing that is unIslamic about music. This should be allowed in the African communities, so as not to have this double standard on their part, in terms both of singing and attending Christian funerals right up to the grave.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY AND CONTACT DETAILS**

Simphiwe O. Sesanti, a Master’s Candidate in Media Studies at UPE, has formerly lectured at the PE Technikon and Border Technikon, and is currently lecturing in Communication at UPE. As a journalist, he has written for the Eastern Province Herald, Evening Post, the London-published New African magazine, Al Qalam, where he served as an editor for almost two years, and is currently freelancing for the City Press. He has published an autobiography, Carry On, African Child.
Methodology

In the absence of a defined population non-probability convenient sampling was used. This was combined with snowball sampling. This enabled the researcher to expand on the sample until he was of the opinion that the responses being obtained were constant.

Making use of a qualitative narrative methodology, the method selected was semi-structured interviews. This enabled the research to probe the responses received.

The responses were transcribed, categorized and analyzed.
Only an African child can talk of the pain of living in Africa

Title: Carry On, African Child
Author: Simphiwe Sesanti
Publisher: Vulindlela Publishers
Publisher's price: R50
Reviewer: Vukile Pokwana

LITERARY débutante Simphiwe Sesanti's upbringing has been fractured by intense emotional violence as he drifts in his journey to become a better person. The central theme that runs seamlessly in Carry On, African Child is one of success and failure, education and compassion, writes Vukile Pokwana.

Simphiwe Sesanti's Carry On, African Child is a chilling, gripping and heart-wrenching autobiography where fragile moments of opportunity are broken by soulless folks. From the start Sesanti heralds things to come; a troubled, drenched life in his quest to obtain quality education for his personal growth and, most importantly, as a precursor tool to help liberate his people. Born and raised in Port Elizabeth, the author has over the years had poetry published in several local magazines and in Zimbabwe, where his endeavours for a better education and quality of life were thwarted. It is the same Zimbabwe, ironically, that made him feel good about being an African, where he could walk freely and watch with glee as policemen went about their domestic chores, unlike in the country of his birth where he was harassed by the then special branch.

Sesanti's upbringing is peppered with emotional abuse as he drifts in his journey to become a better person. The central theme that runs seamlessly like a tour de force in Carry On, African Child is one of success and failure, education and compassion. Carry On, African Child is a private and personal account of an eccentric childhood. After reading the book I can declare with certainty that I know Sesanti, the writer who bares his soul for the world to examine. Sesanti drinks from the rich well of African wisdom to articulate his triumph amid a chaotic life laced with people who have made his personal struggle harder.

The PAC, in particular, is exposed in the book for its lack of vision and trust in this harmless son of Africa, whose burning ambition was wallowing in the power of education. The PAC in exile in Zimbabwe made his life and stay there unbearable. This is one of the most disturbing autobiographies by a young South African that I have read in a long time. The book is simply written but has a lot of depth and integrity.

The son of the African soil was saved in his upbringing by his unquenchable love for God, hope for a better Africa and belief in the compassion of the African people. As he unveils his hypnotic synthesis of his harsh and turbulently shattered educational opportunities, the reader learns about the importance of compassion.

In all his misadventures, Sesanti is confronted by the inescapable feeling that his openness and standing for the truth and honesty has cost him dearly and prevented him from seizing lucrative opportunities. His life is rooted in struggle. Now a journalist and lecturer at the University of Port Elizabeth's journalism department, Sesanti has become a beautiful chronicler. Sesanti presents a sharp, erudite and evocative tale about his being which makes this a fine literary piece.

But Sesanti is now working on his second book. Watch as this young man explodes into a literary giant who will make an invaluable contribution to African literature. Shibani Mazzenethole Khwalo!
African Muslims must assert their humanity

Bantu Biko once asserted that the West may have achieved wonders in giving the world an industrial and military capability, but the greatest gift it gave the world was giving the world a human face. This idea comes to mind when reflecting on the significance of the Muslim month of fast, Ramadan, especially in relation to Africa. Ramadan is more than Muslims' abstaining from pleasures such as water, food and sex. It is also about conscientisation – sensitising and deepening compassion for those who sleep without shelter on empty stomachs.

Those who are rich are required to be charitable, and those who are not are required to plan how to change humanity's miserable condition, in the words of Malcolm X: "We are Muslims because of the Arabs' money.

Spirituality requires that if and when a Muslim gives, caution should be taken to ensure the recipient does not feel belittled. This is a lesson many Muslims have failed to grasp. I recently received a call from a Muslim brother who told me there was an offer of money, which normally runs into a few thousand rand, to help poor Muslims in Kwa-Nobuhle break their first fast. When the offer was made last year, we refused to take it because the condition that went with it was that we should provide, as part of the financial report, pictures which showed the programme at work.

I felt it was both insulting and humiliating for the poor to be photographed without a name. The brother insisted the pictures were necessary to assure donors the money was well spent since in the past some recipients had abused the money.

Just a few days before Ramadan began, I received a call from Parok Sekgobela, who expressed indignation at an article which had appeared in a weekly newspaper. In the piece, Pastor Reuben Mamatsiyi of the Mabopane Central Baptist Church remarked that the increasing number of Africans converting to Islam in Pretoria was as a result of food given to them by Arab Muslims.

Sekgobela felt African Muslims should let it be known through the media, that the pastor was "misleading the public with his allegation that we are Muslims because of the Arabs' money."

"We are Muslims because in Islam we found a sense of belonging, a home, and he should know we have an organisation of black professionals, independent and business people, who do not need a hand from anyone," he said.

Well said, Sekgobela, but where was this independent voice of African Muslims when there was a critical African Muslim issue in respect of Nigeria's Amina Lawal, who was almost stoned to death for having a baby out of wedlock. While a slave, she was beaten, tortured and abused by her master because of his being an Islamic convert. When confronted on both occasions, our brothers boldly denied racism and said it was not deliberate. What a coincidence.

African Muslims in this country continue, as Biko once put it, being followers of a game they should not be playing. They continue clinging to Indian-dominated Muslim organisations where they suffer abuse, despite their brothers and sisters' claims of anti-racism.

It is 10 years now since I joined the Muslim Youth Movement, where I am the assistant-general secretary. When I joined this organisation, I admired the way in which its members showed passionate commitment against racism and economic exploitation associated with rich Indian Muslims. But often I have been disappointed by actions to the contrary.

Last year, during the national executive meeting of the Muslim Youth Movement, our Indian and Malay Muslim brothers and sisters slept in their own or friends' comfortable places while African Muslims slept at the uncomfortable University of the Western Cape's student residence.

African Muslims in this country continue to remain without a leadership. The African Muslim must act as if they do not model in Bilal, the Islamic history of Islam with the African Muslim. But Bilal, in assuming that the issue of separation of the Black from the white is a Christian issue, without a leadership. The African Muslim must act as if they do not model in Bilal, the Islamic history of Islam with the African Muslim. But Bilal, in assuming that the issue of separation of the Black from the white is a Christian issue, was a slave, should be a slave to African Muslims.

While still a slave, tortured him by beating him with a heavy stone on his head. He denounced Islam. But Bilal, in assertion of his being a Muslim, said it was not deliberate. What a coincidence.

African Muslims must assert their right to be equal to all others.
A call to make Islam relevant to Africans

Al Hajj Themba Tolal Nghona proposes an academy to make Islam more relevant to Africans, writes Simphiwe Sesanti

AFRICA is restless, her sons and daughters searching for ways to keep their sense of Africanness in the Christian and Muslim faiths.

While church leaders met at the second South African Christian Leaders' Assembly last week to explore ways to bring African culture into worship, Al Hajj Themba Tong Nghona, one of the first Africans to embrace Islam in Uitenhage, called for an African Muslim Academy.

Even though it took 32 years of his 33 years in Islam for African Muslims to make reality of his call to have a mosque in Kwa-Nobuhle township, Nghona is happy it has finally happened. In the name of “oneness in Islamic brotherhood”, his call was seen by some as separatist and unnecessary. More gratifying is that the zinc mosque came as a result of African Muslims digging deep into their own pockets, instead of relying on others. The tide has turned as Muslims of Asian descent travel across the river that divides the township from town to be hosted by Africans in prayer.

But Nghona says this is not enough: “For far too long Africans coming into Islam have continued to be sent to the Eastern countries to be trained in the teaching and interpretation of Islam. This has resulted in them looking at Africa through the cultural spectacles of the East, resulting in them having a dim and shallow view of African cultural dynamics,” says Nghona.

And though it was essential to study abroad, he says, Africans now need to stand on their own to confront the new challenges facing the African continent. Unlike the Christian leadership that engages with the African renaissance government, the same cannot be said of African Muslims because, he says, the African Muslim leadership is not asserting itself.

For Nghona, whose move into Islam was influenced by political consciousness, particularly black consciousness, the detachment of African Muslims from issues of the day worries him, especially because he and those of his generation paid the price for freedom.

He still remembers vividly how the security branch in the 1970s picked him up soon after he had given a talk one Friday to the congregation. “Whispers did the rounds, spiced with communism, meaning (it) was not pure, since communism was and continues to be seen as an anti-God.”

With the new developments of allowing Muslim women into cemeteries, Nghona has confounded many who thought he would throw his weight behind reluctant elderly Muslims.

“I have thrown my weight behind the youth who have taken the initiative. It pains me that 33 years after embracing Islam, my house is still divided religiously, with my wife attending the Christian church. My daughter, who was already a Muslim, left Islam.”

“This is because they see Islam as restricting women’s movement. And this is as a result of Asiatic Muslims’ culture that restricts their women. In my culture as an African, men interact with women. I can’t understand this gender division because when I was on pilgrimage in Mecca, men prayed next to women.”

“But because of cultural inclinations I saw uneasiness on the part of some Asiatic men as they held on to their women’s arms protectively, not wanting to let go.”

He says he has allowed his wife and daughter to have their way because, firstly, their claims are true and, secondly, Islam does not permit compulsion in religion, even on spouses and offspring.

It is for these reasons that Nghona says the African Muslim Academy should be established, so that they would be spared the alienation suffered by their pioneers of the late 1960s and early 70s.

“In our days, many fled in horror when they were either scolded or ridiculed by Indian and Malay Muslims when they performed the ablution before prayer incorrectly. Instead of being shown the proper way, in the true spirit of Islam, they were made to feel stupid.”

“Others are very cautious in relating to African culture because they do not know where and how it fits into Islam.”

The local Imam, Yusuf Ummali, who is a graduate in Islamic studies in the Middle East, recognises the importance of Nghona’s call.

He says the academy must have experts in either Islam or African culture to harmonise the two.
In the eyes of Allah, women are equal

When it comes to treating women as equals, there is little inspiration to be found in religious dogma and ideology. Simphiwe Sesanti discovers, however, that there really is no theological basis for gender oppression.

It is not only women who cry over the loss of their deceased beloved, but men too, and if this is the reason that women have been historically barred from accompanying their loved ones to their last abode, then it does not carry weight.

New Brighton's deputy imam, Noeba Salamntu, has shaken many Muslims in the Eastern Cape with this statement. In defence of his community's unusual move to let women attend funerals at the graveside in the cemetery, in many Muslim communities, women are not allowed to attend funerals beyond the home.

Salamntu is a BA (Hons) graduate in Islamic theology from the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan. He says there is no Islamic basis for preventing women from attending funerals.

Prophet Muhammad said: "It is only those who are going to dig and cover the grave who are to go to the cemetery." Meaning that if a man was not going to dig, there was no point for him to go. The Prophet's historical statements are often taken out of context.

"When the Prophet said that prayers of a woman made in the darkest corner of her home are better than those made anywhere in the world, this was misinterpreted and misunderstood to keep women out of the mosque.

"In the early days of Islam, women belonging to the religion were more difficult and, therefore, their extraordinary efforts were appreciated and commended by the Prophet," says Salamntu.

In Kwa-Nobuhle, 20 km away from New Brighton, Salamntu's move is stirring serious debate and reaction. The community's imam, Yusuf Unali, who studied in the Arab Emirates, while not outrightly rejecting Salamntu's position, wants to know why the practice is not universal if it's acceptable and why African Muslims in South Africa should practise a different type of Islam.

Salamntu's views, however, find resonance in University of Natal lecturer of African and Islamic Studies Tahir Sitoto's articulation of Islam. As early as 10 years ago, Sitoto, who was then the Kwa-Nobuhle mosque's imam, tore down the curtain that separated women from the mosque. For him, that symbolic act of "tearing the curtain" was a statement to show that as the new community of African Muslims, they "should not copy traditions and customs masquerading as normative Islam. Customs and traditions that have no firm textual basis in Islam.

"The Masjid ul-Haram in Mecca has respect for the fairer sex: Nceba Naasntu has broken with age-old discriminatory practices by allowing women to attend funerals.

"Respect for the fairer sex... Sheik Noeba Salamntu has broken with age-old discriminatory practices by allowing women to attend funerals.

The blurred gender divisions in worship are a result of patriarchal tendencies, and a critical study of the Prophet's life bears testimony that women were within easy reach or were at least sharing the same space with men. The biering of women from the funeral is an extension of their historical barring from the mosque by patriarchal society," says Sitoto.

For Nobuhle Maryam Musihi, who set foot in a male-dominated Muslim world, the experience was "terrifying". However, she says, "the grave, and the faith discouraged them from frequenting the mosque. She said there were greater blessings emanating from prayer at home than in the mosque. She was shocked to find tombstones in the graveyard because her husband had told her graveyards were not allowed in Islam.

"I had no way to independently verify these renditions in Arabic. As a result, to this day, I cannot recite a single Islamic prayer."

To maintain her contact with God, she continued using the Christian Bible and recited the Lord's Prayer. With her Christian background in the Women's Union in the African Methodist Church (AMC) - Masuhi's conversion was not satisfactory because all she did was to prepare mosque, we, as women, sat in a secluded area and we could only hear the voice of the man who gave the sermon, but had no idea what he was saying. I was not happy but stayed on to maintain harmony in the house. But even that harmony was not sustained as my son and some girls who were left behind would be silent.

"Three years later, Masuhi was able to independently verify these renditions in Arabic. As a result, to this day, I cannot recite a single Islamic prayer."

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IT was the great Dr Chancellor Williams, as early as 32 years ago, who in his book The Rebirth Of African Civilization observed that, as in all other areas of life, “men have tended to overlook the similarities in their religions and have emphasised the differences” and that “they have taken great pride in being ‘different’ Z yet “a careful study of their most fundamental beliefs reveals that they are substantially the same”.

Unlike many who turn in their graves ‘because such important lessons are ignored, Williams must be chuckling in his eternal rest house because some Afri(cjJjyouth have taken his observation to heart.”

This realisation: is, manifest in the songs of Uitenhage’s recently formed Kwa -Nob uhle Muslim Group, who in their propagation of Islam utilise music, an unusual thing in the house of Islam, where some schools of thought insist that music is “haraam” ‘ an Arabic term meaning “forbidden”.

But, for, Wandisile Gazi, Kholekile Sati, “Thamsanqa Gazl, Melisizwe Manziya, Mthetho Gazi, Thandekile Sati and Mzuvukile Gazi, their reading of history points’ them in different directions. They point out that when Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was chased out of Mecca by his fellow Arabs for propa-gating Islam, perceived by Arabs as “foreign,” to the ways of their forefathers, he was wel-
comed with a song by fellow Muslims in Medina. They fur-
ther point out that when the
dughter of the prophet’s close companion, Abu Bakr, sang revolutionary songs and their father attempted to restrain them, believing that such was unislamic, he was told by the prophet to let them go ahead.

When one pays closer atten-
tion to the titles and lyrics of their songs, such as AmagugU (aIomhIaba) and Ngezintsuku (zobutsha bakho, khumbula similarities to Christian hymns.

Responding to this - and this is what would excite Williams - the young men say that it is not their mission to emphasise differences between Muslims and Christian, and this, they maintain, is no deviation or modification of Islam. They assert that Islam teaches the oneness of God, oneness of humanity and the oneness of destiny.

“As part of our mission, we intend to show that in Islam, Christ is regarded as the brother of Muhammad, the latter having come to complete a mission that was begun by the for-
mer. So, there is an unbroken link between the two. No one is a Muslim unless and until s/he believes that Jesus Christ had a divine mission from God,” Wandisile Gazi asserts.

However, the group does not confine itself to music. They are busy rehearsing a play penned and directed by Mzuvukile Gazi, whose involvement with’ drama goes back to the 80s’when this genre was used as a weapon against apartheid. This time around, Mzuvukile’s focus is ‘a cam-
paign against alcohol abuse, which is destroying families;

While this effort is appreci-
ated, all arts groups, including this one, need to understand that simplistic preaching against alcohol abuse is not going to cut it. The approach needs to be sophisticated, as complex as the means used by those who benefit by keeping humanity drugged all the time. Africans, in particular would do well to note that his-
tory books are full’ of pages where it is stated that the FBI and the CIA, in America and outside its territories, flooded Afro-American communities with drugs.

Watching the movie Panther, which focuses on the Black Panthers, would be a wise start. Inyathi ibuzea kwabaphambili, indlela ibuzwa kwabayaziyo (if you want knowledge, ask those who
The divided Kwa-Nobuhle Muslim community has been urged to put aside their differences, writes Simphiwe Sesanti.

JUST a day before the US experienced September 11, Uitenhage's township Muslims were busy with their own jihad. Newspapers in the Eastern and Western Cape carried pictures of police reminiscent of the "good old days" in action, carrying their dally weapons.

Kwa-Nobuhle was on fire; criminal elements were amok, in guerrilla fashion, looting Somali Muslim-owned shops. What had been initially whispers about "these foreigners taking over our businesses" had crystallized into action. But in their frenzy to dispossess the ummah, the criminals went for the mosque, located near one of the shops.

That infuriated Kwa-Nobuhle Muslims. A sacred building had been desecrated. On the evening of September 10, six members of the Muslim Youth Movement stood guard outside the mosque, to kill or be killed in defense of their religion, Islam.

Nine months after being subjected to house arrest and banishment to New Brighton, a Port Elizabeth township 30 km from Kwa-Nobuhle, five of the youths were found guilty of assaulting an alleged 'invader' and one was found guilty of murder. The five were fined R150 each, and the sixth sentenced to three years correctional supervision, three years house arrest, and another three years suspended for five years.

On their return, Islam's warriors have found out the very place they assaulted and killed for, the mosque for which they were prepared to lay down their lives, was no longer theirs. Instead of going back to the building they spent one month in St Albans prison, battling to get bail, waiting for them was an open space.

Any feelings of bitterness, regrets and a sense of betrayal by fellow Muslim brothers?

"There are no regrets. We did what we had to do. It was for Islam that we fought, not a building. This is also a blessing in disguise for us. Instead of this placing a burden on us, it is freedom, in the sense that now we are going to put up something we can, as a collective, call our own, and not be indebted to an individual as has always been the case," says Kholekile Sali, one of the six.

But for Wasif Gazi, accused number one in the case, the irony of the whole issue has a ring of betrayal for him.

"I do not understand how people can turn around, look in the eye of the very man who taught them the little they know about Islam, and say they no longer recognise him as their leader and teacher, only because someone else says so."

Gazi was referring to the claim by the Shura Six that Jeeva did not recognize Imam Ummali as the leader of the township's congregation. The issue of the stoppage of Imam Ummali's salary, which was paid by Jeeva, had been a cause of tension..."
I  

A line between culture and Allah’s word

Ideological and racial issues are threatening the brotherly love of underresourced African Muslims and more well-to-do Asian Muslims.

AL HAJ is the township of Uitenhage, South Africa, where a group of African Muslims has established a mosque. The mosque was built in the 1970s and is located in a residential area. However, the mosque has been under threat due to ideological and racial differences.

One of the leaders of the African Muslim Community (Kwa-Nobuhle), Mr. Abdullah Zealand, said that the mosque was built in the 1970s and was not built for aesthetic reasons. He said that the mosque was built to provide a place for African Muslims to pray and connect with their community.

However, there have been tensions between African and Asian Muslims in the township. The African Muslims have complained that they are not being consulted on matters related to the mosque and that their wishes are not being considered.

Mr. Zealand said that the mosque has been in use for over 30 years and has been well-received by the community. He said that the mosque has provided a space for African Muslims to pray and connect with their community.

However, there have been complaints from Asian Muslims that the mosque is not being run in a way that is acceptable to them. They have complained that the mosque is not being run in an Islamic way and that the mosque is not being run in a way that is acceptable to them.

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The relationship between the media and governments the world over is complicated at the best of times. Older democracies have entrenched problems, while new democracies are still dealing with press freedom, writes Simphiwe Sesanti.

When Mazwi publisher Thami Mazwi declared last year that "objectivity is an obsolete cliché", there was a resonating reaction.

However, Mazwi was correct to point out that in many media reports objectivity is conspicuously absent. This is especially so where Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe are concerned. The media in this country, through their editorials and front-page splash, have condemned Mugabe for stifling independent voices.

They particularly single out the closure of The Daily News, the detention of its journalists and lawyers and the expulsion of foreign journalists.

Journalists are particularly incensed by South African president Thabo Mbeki's refusal to publicly condemn his liberation struggle: "We are on the other hand, we are equally guilty of the same charge we level against Mbeki, closing ranks among ourselves no matter what." Two years ago when The Daily News offices were wrecked by a bomb, foreign correspondent Mercedes Sayagues, who also wrote for the Mail and Guardian, reported that "state terrorism has escalated in Zimbabwe with Sunday's bomb attack on the independent newspaper, The Daily News". It could be that only state agents would have access to the weapons used in the attack, but that did not give Sayagues the right to pass sentence.

For instance, would it have been right if the pro-Mugabe forces in Zimbabwe had claimed the township youth who damaged copies of The Herald and the Sunday Mail were instigated by the dispossessed white farmers or the MDC?

Interestingly, in her report, Sayagues referred to the pro-Mugabe elements as "a mob", "a crowd", who "assaulted" the reporters, and when she referred to the anti-Mugabe elements who damaged The Herald, she used words like "youths in the townships" who "soaked in the rain piles of the government mouthpiece". For some reason, Sayagues also failed to state in her report that The Herald was not only soaked in the rain but that Pro-Daily News readers burnt copies of The Herald and attacked a delivery van driver, as was reported later in the Sovietian.

Sayagues was ordered to leave Zimbabwe, as was Andrew Meldrum, an American correspondent who reported last year that "Followers of Mugabe were accused this week of beheading a mother of eight, whom they suspected of being a supporter of Zimbabwe's opposition party, the MDC." When Meldrum was arrested, London's Guardian newspaper editor, Alan Rusbridger, turned a blind eye to Meldrum's journalistic misconduct and instead condemned it as outrageous that Meldrum should be the subject of criminal charges for doing his job as a reporter.

This story was carried by some British newspapers and Zimbabwe's Daily News, whose reporters, Lloyd Madza and Collin Chiwanza, were also detained for writing the same story.

While we heard Mugabe condemned by the media for not exercising the rule of law, no condemnation was levelled against the journalists when it was revealed later that Meldrum's story was false.

It emerged later that Brandon Mcrea, the woman who was allegedly beheaded, had died of AIDS several weeks before the story was published. This was revealed in court by her sister, Julia Mhango.

The journalists wrote the story after the MDC confirmed the salient facts. But the MDC later admitted it had been tricked by the woman's husband, who claimed ruling party supporters had beheaded his wife, in an attempt to get compensation and money from the party to cover her funeral expenses.

During the almost three years I spent in Zimbabwe, I spent 75 days in Zimbabwean prisons - the Harare remand prison and Grey and Plumtree prisons. I know what it is like to be hit with a baton by a power-drunk Zimbabwean warder and to be shouted at for no reason, except for the purpose of having it impressed on you who is in charge.

When The Daily News lawyer, Gugulethu Moyo, talks about how a journalist had his arm broken and another's finger was broken, I know what she is talking about.

When The Daily News lawyer, Gugulethu Moyo, talks about how a journalist had his arm broken and another's finger was broken, I know what she is talking about.

Mugabe and his lieutenants are no saints, but journalists should not tell lies so as to present him as a devil. When members of the industry lie they expose us to contempt, especially from politicians. Is it any wonder Mbeki does not take seriously these media attacks?
Thami Mazwai’s take on the role of the SABC as a news broadcaster has caused a national debate about the patriotism and/or Afrikanness (or lack of it) of the South African media. Here Mazwai explains himself – again as two other prominent media watchers, Harald Pakendorf and Simphiwe Sesanti, join in the debate.

When media ‘patriotism’ is suspect

BY SIMPHIWE SESANTI

In the past few weeks, we have witnessed intense and often heated debates around the role of the media in South Africa. These debates are often characterized by a lack of nuance and a desire to reduce complex issues to simplistic binaries. But this is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on for decades, with journalists, politicians, and academics all contributing to the conversation. In this article, I will try to provide some context and analysis to help readers understand the issues at stake.

The media needs to be held accountable for its actions, but it is also important to recognize the challenges that journalists face in a rapidly changing media landscape. The role of the media is crucial in any democracy, as it serves as a watchdog for the government and a source of information for the public. However, the media must also be careful not to become too powerful or too aligned with any particular interest group.

In order to understand the current debates around the role of the media, it is important to look at the historical context in which they are occurring. The South African media has a long and complex history, with different periods characterized by varying degrees of freedom and scrutiny. In the apartheid era, the media was tightly controlled by the government, and journalists were often subject to harassment and violence. After the fall of apartheid, there was a brief period of optimism, as the new government promised to create a free and independent media. But this optimism soon gave way to skepticism as the reality of media ownership and control became clear.

Today, the media landscape in South Africa is characterized by a mix of public and private ownership, with a growing influence from foreign media giants. This has led to concerns about the role of the media in shaping public opinion and the potential for media to be used for political gain. It is against this backdrop that the current debates around the role of the media have emerged.

As readers, we must approach these debates with a critical eye, and recognize that the media is not a monolithic entity. There are different perspectives within the media, and it is important to consider these when evaluating the role of the media in society. We must also recognize the challenges that journalists face in a rapidly changing media landscape, and support those who are working to ensure that the media remains a force for good in South Africa.

BY HARALD PAKENDORF

The SABC, or South African Broadcasting Corporation, is a state-owned public service broadcaster that has been in operation since 1926. It is one of the largest media organizations in Africa, and it plays a major role in shaping public opinion and providing information to the general public. However, the SABC has been the subject of intense controversy in recent years, particularly around issues of patriotism and Afrikanness.

The debate around the role of the media has been ongoing for decades, with different perspectives on what it means to be a “patriotic” or “Afrikan” media. While some argue that the media should be unbiased and objective, others believe that the media should take a more active role in shaping public opinion and promoting the values of the country. In recent years, there have been concerns about the extent to which the SABC is biased and has a tendency to promote a narrow and sometimes problematic perspective on the world.

There are also concerns about the extent to which the SABC has been used as a tool by the government to promote its own agenda. This has led to calls for greater transparency and accountability in the media, as well as for independent regulation of the media to ensure that it remains a force for good in South Africa.

In conclusion, the current debates around the role of the media in South Africa are complex and multifaceted. It is important that we approach these debates with a critical eye, and recognize the challenges that the media faces in a rapidly changing media landscape. By doing so, we can help ensure that the media remains a force for good in South Africa and continues to provide valuable information to the general public.
ATTACK: COPS GIVEN 'GREEN LIGHT'
SA blacks show their hypocrisy

A FEW weeks ago, South Africa was rudely awoken by the cruel ill-treatment of Mozambicans by white South African policemen who set their dogs on them.

The brutality and racism of the police was so naked and barbaric that it is beyond my ability to describe in words.

Subsequent to the screening of the uncivilised police behaviour, a number of black people were seen on television and heard over the rioting the brutality in the strongest possible terms.

That was black South Africa's hypocrisy at its worst. Just as the police dogs' teeth were "dripping with blood", so are many black people's hands.

Derogatory terms such as "voetsek" are not used by whites in reference to our African brothers and sisters from outside South Africa's borders.

I t is black South Africans who insult our own people with such words.

The white policemen acted with such vigour only because they knew the Mozambicans were vulnerable and that the green light was given by black South Africans who not only treat these people contemptuously in word but in deed too.

I remember a piece written by Nigerian journalist Dapo Oyewole in the October issue of the BBC on Africa magazine. Recalling his unhappy experiences in South Africa, Oyewole wrote:

"Reluctant to endure yet another anti-foreigner tirade, I got out and walked to the bus stop. Uttering a string of unprintable insults, he informed me that all foreigners were useless and should all be kicked out of the country...I must have said "sorry" seven times." Oyewole wrote.

"In response he poked his finger in my face and dared me to retaliate, promising to destroy me on the spot if I did.

"Eventually, the passengers began to protest. Do you know about what? About being kept waiting. Not a word about the behaviour of the driver." The taxi driver was black and so were the passengers - not white! Why cry then when the white policemen did what they did when our words and actions, as black people, told them it was all right?

Black policemen are just as guilty. Sowetan journalist Russel Molefe, while on his way to work recently, was stopped by two policemen who demanded to know: "Hey wena, umhlobo bani?" (to which ethnic group do you belong?). On learning that he had a Sotho surname, they said: "Molefe thinks he is clever." After accusing him of having forged his ID document, they "violently" mistreated him and led me to John Vorster Square. The insults they uttered on the way cannot be printed in this newspaper. After further humiliating, and on hearing that he was a Sowetan journalist, they let him go.

"With the brutality of the police, it is black South Africans who not only think he is clever, but also think that they own the country supposedly run by blacks."

My heart bleeds when I recall that Mozambique is in a state of poverty. Her people lost life and limb through raids and bombings carried out by white South Africa only because they harboured black South African refugees and freedom fighters.

The same fate was suffered by citizens of Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana - and our sense of "gratitude" is displayed by insulting them and exposing them to mauling by dogs.
RECENTLY there was a newspaper article headlined: "Journalists ambush Mbeki - president faces grilling on AIDS policy."

The occasion was a briefing in Pretoria at the Union Buildings on Africa's revival plan following a meeting between President Thabo Mbeki and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

Despite Mbeki's insistence to foreign journalists at the briefing that he was not a scientist and that the question of a causal relationship between HIV and AIDS should be directed at scientists, the journalists pursued him relentlessly.

One would have thought the response would satisfy the journalists who had been questioning his qualification for commenting on the issue.

The journalists' dissatisfaction is best captured in a recent South African Sunday Times editorial stance noting that "it is difficult to draw any comfort from the cruel and arrogant stupidity of his denigration position on HIV/AIDS'.

Mbeki's "cruelty" was further entrenched in the reader's mind by a recent screaming local daily front-page lead demanding to know how many of his workers, the ANC, "more babies should die before Mbeki comes to his senses".

It further pointed out that had the government implemented the High Court ruling in December last year and expanded its nevirapine programme to reach only one in every four HIV-positive mothers, it would have saved more than 900 babies from becoming infected with HIV.

But due to Mbeki's stance, these "babies will nearly almost certainly die in their infancy".

No wonder then, as the monotonous weekly publication dutifully reported, that the ANC's membership has dropped to less than a third of what it was three years ago due to "disgruntlement with the ANC-led government's HIV/AIDS policy."

Based on many media reports, a reader might think Mbeki's raising of the question of a causal link between HIV/AIDS is personal. The truth is Mbeki, a voracious reader, had learnt that there were scientists, such as the award-winning University of California's molecular biologist Professor Peter Duesberg, recipient of a US$350,000 "outstanding investigator" award from the National Institutes of Health, who questioned the causal link between HIV and AIDS.

Unlike the orthodox establishment, who, when questioned by Duesberg, retorted that everything possible to silence the views of a tiny scientific fringe over those of the eminent orthodox scientist who outnumber them".

Since when did science become reduced to the majority rule law? How can it ever be that those who share the dissidents' views could form the majority, considering that those controlling financial resources shun them?

Six years ago the London-published New African magazine reported that when two French researchers reported that they had found a whole village in Tanzania dying of AIDS, funds came pouring in to the extent that they could employ 230 full time Tanzanian staff.

But later when the French researchers Phillippe and Evelyne Krynen tested their 230 workers, they found that only five percent were HIV positive, and when they later tested 850 people they found out, and were shocked, that only 13.7 percent were HIV positive.

The Krynen's confessed that they mistook people dying of other diseases to be dying of AIDS.

Their assessment was based on the World Health Organisation's definition of AIDS in developing countries known as the Bangui Definition, emanating from a conference held in Niger in 1985, which declared Africans to be dying of AIDS if they have, for example, diarrhoea for more than one month, 10 percent weight loss and cough for one month. An HIV/AIDS test is declared not necessary here.

Aware that questionable and paralysing AIDS figures were being declared in Africa because of the Bangui Definition, Mbeki called for scrutinisation.

But what we are not told by Mbeki's assailants in the media is that the Bangui Definition was attacked by a group of Western doctors in 1991, who noted that unless the results of HIV tests are known, because of the similarity of symptoms, "many patients with TB who have no HIV infection might be reported as having AIDS".

The foreign journalists, who have been scraping around looking for a story on Mbeki, are not interested in this.

Accepting Mbeki's stance, that unless the results of HIV tests are known, many patients with TB who have no HIV infection might be reported as having AIDS, could have a real impact on the spread of the disease.

"Whose interest does the obsession with HIV/AIDS serve, the world's dying or the interests of politicians with a vested interest in the disease?"
Brother Leader Muammar Gaddafi was in Mozambique recently, where he displayed not only his flamboyance but also a commitment to helping poorer countries. Simphiwe Sesanti gives a first-hand account.

**New hope for Mozambicans from brother in arms**

A shy smile was registered on the face of Mozambican President Joachim Chissano as he led Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi into the dining hall of the State House dining hall, where Chissano hosted a banquet for Gaddafi.

Chissano’s steps were steady and calculated as he slowed down to accommodate his guest, who was busy greeting Muslims.

The occasion was for Chissano, an emotional one. Gaddafi’s visit brought back memories of departed souls, particularly of the late Mozambican president, Samora Machel, who, Chissano recalled, had visited Libya in 1982 - 20 years ago.

For Chissano the banquet was not a common gesture extended by presidents when receiving heads of state, but a token of gratitude “for the distinct care and affection accorded to us” when Mozambicans were invited to Libya in 1982 and 1986 to celebrate, respectively, the 20th and 30th anniversary of “the Great Revolution of September.”

Chissano’s shy smile was meaningful as he acknowledged to his guest that “we are aware that we cannot reciprocate with the same glamour that exceptional hospitality” extended by Gaddafi in his oil-rich country.

This was because, as Chissano humbly explained, “Mozambicans are living in absolute poverty.”

Having stated the picture of poverty, Chissano revealed to Gaddafi that the Mozambican government was trying its best to reverse their misfortune through its five-year programme, known as the Programme of Action for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (Parpa).

He took the opportunity to reiterate the request he had made earlier during the day to the Libyan leader for debt collection.

“One of our constraints is the external debt, probably the most important one, which must be overcome as a matter of urgency,” he said.

Its total cancellation will ensure the release of the most needed financial resources for the ongoing social projects and those in the pipeline.

The banquet was an opportunity for Chissano to openly acknowledge the ties that bind Mozambique and Libya.

“I would be remiss in my welcome if I were to conclude without mentioning some concrete gestures of friendship and solidarity by the Libyan people which justify the admiration we harbour for them.

The first one consisted in the support and solidarity extended by Libya to the struggle for national liberation waged by Frelimo as part of the overall African solidarity.

The second gesture was that “during the war of destabilisation, Libya was one of our main oil suppliers on a concessional credit basis, thus ensuring the sustainability of our economic activity.”

“It was this country that provided ships for the transportation of passengers and humanitarian assistance from Maputo to the centre and northern parts of the country, when the war of destabilisation had rendered our roads unviable.

Moreover, during the floods of 2000 and 2001, Libya’s assistance was of great value and included more than 550 000 tons of cereals, rescue of persons, medicines and medical personnel, and financing of construction of houses for the resettlement of displaced families.

As president, the Mozambicans did not fall short in expressing their gratitude to Gaddafi.

About 2 000 citizens gathered at Heroes’ Acre and saluted for Gaddafi as he performed the slow military march to the accompaniment of drum majorettes and as he moved on to pay his respects to the liberation heroes and heroines by laying wreaths.

They lined up the street and cheered him on as his convoy drove at high speed about 10 km to an area known as Mantenteini, so called because of the tents that were erected there to house flood victims. In a show of gratitude, the Mozambicans stamped the sand and danced for the “leader of the revolution”, as Chissano introduced Gaddafi.

Adults and children competed for space in the tops, each wanting to catch a glimpse of this man who helped them secure brick shelters.

There and then the “leader” promised to help them get water facilities, after hearing that they were struggling to get water.

“This gesture must have made Chissano feel vindicated in what he had said the previous night when he noted that “we should not be detracted by scepticism voiced in some circles about the creation of the African Union” because it is “our belief that the union will grow sound and strong, as it is fuelled by our firm determination to make it function with efficiency and dynamism”.

The move by the Brother Leader showed he was not giving lip service to his commitment to see Africa one, as he puts it, without borders.

His clear message in a meeting with Muslim leaders a day before leaving for Malawi was that they should do everything to make Mozambique a success. He gave the same message to SA Muslim leaders at his residence in Durban.

The banquet was an opportunity for Chissano to openly acknowledge the ties that bind Mozambique and Libya.
The poverty and bleakness that characterise Maputo belies the resilient and triumphant spirit of people who are rebuilding their country, writes Simphiwe Sesanti.

As I walked up Julius Nyerere Av, I experienced the guilt associated with South African white liberal guilt. As you get out of the comfort of the first-class Polana Hotel and move out into areas, particularly in Mahotse, you begin to see the shameful, poor living conditions of people: zinc houses and storied, dusty African children with cupped hands, hoping for a few crumbs to fall from the seemingly hopeless situations. You will find tattered, dusty African children outside Mozambique’s international airport, masquerading as they exit to the airport. Mozambicans: their spirit of resistance, resilience, and self-empathising with the poor of our societies when they vent their anger and triumphant characterise Maputo. Indeed, the resilient spirit of people who were desperately denied education by the Portuguese, As if that was not enough, they were subjected to a protracted Imr between the ruling Frelimo government, and Renamo, the leaders of Renamo, government and Anlonsito Nhieu. It was in an opposite manner, as they exit to the airport. Maputo lies, write and triumphant Africa where you find blacks preferred - the Mozambican brothers and sisters whom I saw how cheated our people have been. This is not what our combatants died for. No, not at all. As you get out of the comfort, the Mozambicans pitifully wait for someone to help them, you’ll find them on the move, helping themselves.

But after stepping out of my plush room at the Polana Hotel and into the real world of Mozambique, I realised that the Mozambicans were in no need of my sympathy. There are young men like Antonio Fussane, Saul Jorge and Candido Ambriz, all working in the hotel’s reception, to whom the future of Mozambique belongs. And I fervently believe they have the will and ability to change things around. Unlike in hotel receptions in South Africa, where you find blacks prefer serving to whites than their own people - a recipe for failure and disaster - the Mozambican brothers served everyone alike, as long as they put US dollars on the table. Every man is called “Sir” and every women “Madam”, and always with a smile. When you make a switchboard inquiry, they listen to you without interruption. And when they have finished attending to your needs, they do not place down the receiver until you say “thank you.”

They are as easy in both English and Portuguese. But really, that is neither here nor there. It is the attitude that counts, and with this type of attitude, the Mozambicans are going to far. They will succeed, no matter how long it takes.

Afro pessimists, take note!
Let's celebrate what we had in the Post

JUST a day before South Africa celebrated Press Freedom Day, the Evening Post's readers were dealt a heavy blow by the shattering news that the Post was closing in six weeks' time.

That was, as Times Media Eastern Cape editor-in-chief Ric Wilson said, "an intensely sad occasion". But, at the same time, Wilson has assured the Post's readers that its "spirit will live on in its sister publication, the Eastern Province Herald".

While the assurance by Wilson is still to be tested by time, what is certain is that the Post's spirit will live on in ordinary readers of this province. It will live on in those men and women living in the townships of Uitenhage who stopped me in the streets of our town just to say "thank you" for the issues covered in this newspaper.

These people were not referring to those "intellectual" Brainwaves pieces that were both hailed and hurled at by people assuming themselves to be intellectuals. I had been writing for Brainwaves for a long time but the ordinary people, who regard politics - my favourite meal - as tiring, kept quiet.

But when I wrote about the good done by adult learners at Phaphani Adult Centre, commending their singing, dancing and cooking skills, the people were moved. When the Post wrote about young township poet Ayanda Billie, who did not allow his hardships to push him down but made poetry out of his suffering, and got the poems published, the people responded.

When in the Post Leisure's jazz review of the Four by Four show held in Uitenhage, the people saw familiar names of domestic workers and township dwellers, in print, celebrating their understanding and interpretation of jazz, the people were excited.

That is because deep down they felt that "this is our story, this is our beautiful image".

For a change, black people were not being depicted as hopeless drunkards, rapists and murderers. The other side, that of good, hard-working and decent people was being told. The Post was telling stories of black role models like Es'kia Mphahlele, who, brought up on shebeen money and violent conditions, rose to become a professor whose intellectual guidance was put to use in many countries outside South Africa, including America.

The Post told the people that Mphahlele was not the only one.

There is the case of Sindiwe Magona, now working at the United Nations offices in New York, who at the age of 23 was ditched by her husband and compelled to raise three children on money received from selling sheep heads while at the same time studying to complete matric. This is the spirit that will live on in the minds and hearts of the people, and I hope that this is the spirit that will live on in its sister publication, the Herald.
 order. Many, including Kashema, believed that the expulsion order had nothing to do with falsification of documents, but everything to do with the exposure of corruption, while everywhere in the ANC, he would hammer them.

Mandela singled out the Star political editor Kaya Nytambe, City Press managing editor Bheki Simelane and the Sunday Times editor Roy Geiger for courage in ‘campaigning against the ANC and the democratic forces in this country’. Mandela told them that as long as they continued to publish, he would continue to support them. His public attacks resulted in a meeting between himself and 22 senior black journalists "in a bid to resolve the tensions", which the ANC agreed to. But the bids to resolve the tensions were not taken kindly by some senior South African journalists.

Mandela’s reaction to black journalists’ criticism of a black government is not unique. South African behaviour and utterances of blacks have had newsprint written in them for over a quarter of a century. The South African newspaper industry has been passed a requirement imposed on blacks at the time. Many, including Kanhema, believed that the newspaper industry was strongly opposed to the ANC and the democratic forces in this country. Behaviour and utterances of blacks have had newsprint written in them for over a quarter of a century. The South African newspaper industry has been passed a requirement imposed on blacks at the time. Many, including Kanhema, believed that the newspaper industry was strongly opposed to the ANC and the democratic forces in this country.

In 1997, he had uncovered a secret $1,5bn (R5,7bn) sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, and reported on a wave of foreign investment in South African intelligence of Mobutu generals. In 1997 Kanhema investigated and questioned the rationale behind the granting of blanket amnesty to 37 ANC leaders who had fled to South Africa after the Pretoria bombing in 1993. He had uncovered a secret $1,5bn (R5,7bn) sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, and reported on a wave of foreign investment in South African intelligence of Mobutu generals. In 1997 Kanhema investigated and questioned the rationale behind the granting of blanket amnesty to 37 ANC leaders who had fled to South Africa after the Pretoria bombing in 1993. He had uncovered a secret $1,5bn (R5,7bn) sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, and reported on a wave of foreign investment in South African intelligence of Mobutu generals. In 1997 Kanhema investigated and questioned the rationale behind the granting of blanket amnesty to 37 ANC leaders who had fled to South Africa after the Pretoria bombing in 1993. 

In Zambia, a month later, The Post managing editor Fred M’membe and editor-in-chief Masautso Phiri were arrested and charged under Section 69 of the Penal Code for defaming President Frederick Chiluba. Following publication of the story, leaders and editors of Chiluba’s Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) were arrested and charged under Section 69 of the Penal Code for defaming President Frederick Chiluba. Following publication of the story, leaders and editors of Chiluba’s Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) were arrested and charged under Section 69 of the Penal Code for defaming President Frederick Chiluba. Following publication of the story, leaders and editors of Chiluba’s Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) were arrested and charged under Section 69 of the Penal Code for defaming President Frederick Chiluba.

For an article criticising Malawian president Bakili Muluzi, just two days after he assumed office, there was a strong reaction of a black government is not unique. South African behaviour and utterances of blacks have had newsprint written in them for over a quarter of a century. The South African newspaper industry has been passed a requirement imposed on blacks at the time. Many, including Kanhema, believed that the newspaper industry was strongly opposed to the ANC and the democratic forces in this country. Behaviour and utterances of blacks have had newsprint written in them for over a quarter of a century. The South African newspaper industry has been passed a requirement imposed on blacks at the time. Many, including Kanhema, believed that the newspaper industry was strongly opposed to the ANC and the democratic forces in this country. Behaviour and utterances of blacks have had newsprint written in them for over a quarter of a century. 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AC secretary-general Thami K. Plaatje, commenting on the recent conference on racism, noted that now was the time for "conference, not confrontations.

In his words to me, he received an invitation to a conference on "Islam and African Renaissance" organised by the Southern African Islamic Movement in Durban, K. Plaatje's words resonated more on hearing also that on the very day the conference will be concluding, the Islamic Youth Movement will be hosting the African Youth Summit to be attended by Muslim youth from all over Southern Africa.

I hope that these conferences will confront thorny issues facing the Muslim community in Africa. A year ago, when I stepped down as the editor of Southern African Muslims' newspaper, Al Qalam, a spirit of frankness was lacking.

In fact, efforts were made to suppress the debate I raised about the claims of slavery and Arabisation of Africans by Arab Muslims in Sudan.

Considering that the African Youth Summit has the financial backing of Libya, I fear that frankness may be lacking at the summit and my fears are confirmed, both the conferences will be a waste of time.

The commitment to African unity in the continent in the name of Islam, spearheaded by Sudan's Hassan al-Tabi, as quoted in last year's February issue of African Today magazine, and the utterances of Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi in a book, The Leader's Islamic Journey to Africa - Speeches and Talks by the Islamic World Society, have been a cause of hostility and suspicion on the part of many Africans towards Islam.

This is understandably so, because Africans, once having been colonised by whites using Christianity, do not want to be colonised by Arabs using Islam.

For instance, Gaddafi said: "All the Muslims are in fact Arabs. There is no race other than Africans who embraced Islam.

Gaddafi's stand led to the rejection of his offer to host the eighth PAC (not the PAC of Azania) in Tripoli.

In his book, Beyond The Colour Line, Prof. Kwesi Kwaa Prah noted that "Col Gaddafi may be renowned for claims of chauvinism of the Arab nation, but certainly not of the African continent."

The mistake of accepting Gaddafi's offer of hosting the next PAC, we will be submitting a vital interest to interests more immediately faithful to the Arab League.

Can't think this should happen. We should not play into the hands of groups whose primary focus is not African unity, but Arab unity."

Prof. Kwesi Prah was the Egyptian newspaper, Al Ahram Weekly, of October 22-28, 1998 reported that Gaddafi had decided to abandon his stand on the financial backing of Libya. It was stated that his move was made after Foreign Ministry in Tripoli that the Arab League in September 1998 had turned Libya's request to defy the UN's embargo. The Organisation of African Unity's meeting in Burkina Faso in June 1998, decided to defy the ban, resulting in nine

PTH FOR TODAY

Afghanistan president fly for "Islam and African Renaissance," says SIMPHIWE

Gaddafi renamed the State-owned radio from Voice of Africa to Voice of Africa, cancelled the Ministry of Arab Unity Affairs and replaced the map of the Arab world, hanging in the background of the daily television news bulletin, with the map of Africa.

However, African intellects were disappointed that it took Gaddafi to be disappointed by the Arabs first to realise that Libya was an African country.

Would he turn his back on Pan Africanism as well when Africans hit him down? The possibility of being professed by a Pan Africanist has a history in that area.

It is extremely in the light of the statements attributed to him in the above quoted piece in which he said: "I would like Libya to become a black country."

"Hence, I recommend to Libyan men to marry only black women, and to Libyan women to marry black men.

While it is understood that his statements were made out of anger, it still needs to be reiterated that Pan Africanism is about love for Africa and Africans, and not about hatred for anyone.

As for Egyptian politicians, notably Prof. Howedi's claim made in Al Ahram Weekly, that "poor African countries see that their backing of Gaddafi will bring future (financial) aid and the voices of the "they also believe that they do not have anything to lose by defying the UN," I believe that he needs to be told in no uncertain terms that Africans are capable of taking principled positions.

Howedi should have been courageous enough to say the reasons, as he put it, that Arabs "do not want to prepare for sacrifice for principle."

There is no way that we can discuss Islam and the Renaissance in the African context without relating to the Africans as well as the Arabs.
THERE is something very sad happening in South Africa, and that is the giving up of the struggle to improve the condition of black children's education.

Many black professionals and former anti-apartheid activists have opted to send their children to former exclusively white schools, arguing that these schools are better equipped with physical science and computer laboratories.

The painful reality is that the children of poor black parents who cannot afford these schools' fees will continue to get a third-rate education.

The other thing is that these children who are fed with white values view their heritage with scorn.

It therefore came as no surprise to when a Uitenhage doctor told me that hundreds of black patients who had consulted him over the past two years had told him that they considered whites superior to blacks.

These two maintained that blacks could not do better than whites.

Recently a black former Vista University student, told me that there was no black heritage of which to be proud, a statement that moved me to ask her to read a passage from Dr Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.

"Through North Africa, Europeans became familiar with a superior brand of leather from Africa which was termed 'Moroccan leather.'

In fact, it was tanned and dyed by Hausa and Mandinga specialists in Northern Nigeria and Mali.

"When direct contact was established between Europeans and Africans on the east and west coasts, many more impressive items were displayed."

Rodney states that as soon as the Portuguese reached the old kingdom of Kongo, "they sent back word on the superb local cloth made from bark and palm fibre – and having a finish comparable to velvet".

Rodney asserts that "Africa had even better to offer in the form of cloth, which was widely manufactured before the coming of the Europeans."

While the attitude of black South Africans hurts me, I am inspired by the move of the descendants of African slaves in the Americas. I read in the September issue of the New African magazine that, faced with the same situation where more affluent black parents send their children to white schools, an NGO called De Aiyie group set up a school "targeting poor (mainly black) children", where teachers do not "only teach traditional subjects such as geography, mathematics and science", but also teach "African history, a subject never taught in mainstream public schools in Brazil".

That is an excellent move which requires emulation by black South Africans because teaching of true African history, as opposed to the mere history of the European presence in Africa, links Africans to their heritage.

When this is done, our children will know, as the African-American author of They Came Before Columbus, Prof Ivan van Sertima, points out in African Renaissance, edited by Prof Malekgapuru Makgoba, that Africans not only excelled in music, dance and cloth-making, but in telecommunications, astronomy and medicine.

He says Europeans often told stories of arrivals in a place after many days' journey to find that people there already knew the details of an event which had occurred in a part of the country from where they had just come.

"This was before the telegraphic Morse-code or the radio. We know, today, of the finely-tuned ... instruments Africans devised to relay messages over distances, sometimes with drum-scripts so ingenious they came close to rhythmic mimicking of the human voice. Some of their communication devices still baffle us," Van Sertima writes.

He goes on to quote Charles Breasted, who, in the biography of his Egyptianologist father, James Henry Breasted, writes of his father's admiration of Nubian Africans and how he "never ceased marveling at their ability to converse with one another across great stretches of water".

Breasted notes that his father's party would watch a man address another over a distance of about 3km across the Nile: "He would stand at the very edges of the river, perhaps ten feet (3m) above its surface, and, cupping his hands, would shout in front of his lips, would talk into the water at an angle of about 45 degrees, in a loud voice without shouting."

"At intervals he would stop and listen while the distant man would repeat in kind. But we who stood close by heard no sound."

Van Sertima asserts that the astronomer-priests of the Dogon people living in Mali "had for centuries, it seems, a very modern view of our solar system and of the universe – the rings of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter, the spiral of the Milky Way Galaxy, in which our planet lies."

"They knew that the moon was a barren world. They said it was 'dry and dead, like dried blood'."

"They knew also of things far in advance of their time, intricate details about a star which no one can see except with the most powerful of telescopes. They not only saw it."

"They observed or intuited its mass and its nature. They plotted its orbit almost until the year 2000. And they did all this between 500 and 700 years ago." This is African history and heritage, things that should be taught to African children so that they can confidently endeavour to be scientists, doctors and astronauts just like their ancestors before them!

This is the message many of us will be celebrating on September 24.

African children should be learning about their people's rich culture and so remembering their heritage on Heritage Day, writes SIMPHWE SESANTI.
THE role of African journalists in society has been an issue raised from time to time.

Black journalists have had to work under changing circumstances. In colonial days they were required to support the liberation movement and then the liberation movement's cadres became State officials. Evening Post Political Reporter Mawande Jack's reflection on the role of African journalists (Evening Post, August 18) is a contribution to this continually recurring debate. Jack's piece follows the London-published New African magazine, which, in its July-August issue, dedicated 18 pages to dealing with this question.

Like the New African, Jack expressed concern about African journalists "mimicking" Western journalists in describing Africa in a bad light. As the New African pointed out, this is done in the name of "investigative journalism".

In as much as I am for investigative journalism, I would like to make it clear that I am against any journalist whose sole purpose is deliberately to ignore the spiritually uplifting good news about Africa and vigorously portray Africa as "the hopeless continent". That hopelessness was depicted on the front cover of the May 13-19 edition of The Economist.

But how can it be otherwise, when African journalists, whose training is based on Western texts, are taught that the "true professional journalist anywhere in the world will tell you that the relationship between government and the press should be adversarial"?

Concise Oxford Dictionary's ninth edition defines "adversarial" as "involving conflict, opposition, hostile" and "adversary" is defined as "an enemy, an antagonist", among other things. An enemy or hostile person is one whose purpose is to destroy his opponent, and if this is what journalists are trained to be, it should be no wonder that some journalists appear to be malicious in the way they report things. It is therefore comforting and commendable to note that African journalists are engaged in exercises to define their role and are setting up their agendas instead of letting others do it for them.

The organisers of the African Renaissance Conference, held in September 1998, dedicated time to deliberations on media and telecommunications in the African context and later published the papers in a book, African Renaissance, edited by Prof Malekgapuru Makgoba. I recommend it to every journalism student and everyone else interested in media issues.

In that book, the ANC's Joel Netshitenze, who is also chief executive of the Government Communication and Information System, notes that "the media fraternity should have a discussion on this issue, and this should include harmonising the training of cadet journalists to appreciate the interests of the continent and how to promote them".

Netshitenze's statement reminded me that Zimbawwe's Polytech Journalism Department prescribed Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa as a textbook. That was necessary so as to give the students a historical perspective of Africa for years after that move, former CNN regional director for Africa Edward Boateng, in his paper at the Renaissance Conference noted: "Information that effectively explains our past to us in positive, African terms, will give us the necessary insight and inspiration to tackle pressing challenges of our times with confidence. That is what is currently lacking in news and other information-processing systems in Africa. "Our past and present identity as Africans is being defined and reinforced in our minds by non-Africans. News pertaining to Africa's history and development or the lack of it is reported to Africans by the Western media. Given the dominating culture of news processing in the Western media, in which good news has very little commercial value, only negative images of Africa are ever reported. "Inevitably, the news which makes major headlines in Africa and elsewhere is that of famine, hunger, tribal wars, corruption and military dictatorships."

Boateng's analysis explains why many people say they no longer want to read newspapers, listen to radio or watch television, because news emanating from these media is depressing. The challenge facing conscientious African journalists is to research the contribution made by indigenous African intellectuals years after that move, former CNN regional director for Africa Edward Boateng, in his paper at the Renaissance Conference noted: "Information that effectively explains our past to us in positive, African terms, will give us the necessary insight and inspiration to tackle pressing challenges of our times with confidence. That is what is currently lacking in news and other information-processing systems in Africa. "Our past and present identity as Africans is being defined and reinforced in our minds by non-Africans. News pertaining to Africa's history and development or the lack of it is reported to Africans by the Western media. Given the dominating culture of news processing in the Western media, in which good news has very little commercial value, only negative images of Africa are ever reported. "Inevitably, the news which makes major headlines in Africa and elsewhere is that of famine, hunger, tribal wars, corruption and military dictatorships."

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Africa refuses to die. Hundreds of years after African culture had been subjected to a denigrating onslaught by both Western and Eastern influences, Africa's spirit is demonstrating a sense of resilience.

These thoughts struck me when I was invited as a guest speaker by the Phaphani Adult Centre, a school for adult learners, to speak on African culture and again when the Episcopal Ethiopian Church Youth Association (Eecya) invited me to speak on “Mixed Culture”.

It was fascinating that the school and the church, the two main instruments that were used to obliterate African culture, were the very platforms now being used for Africa's revival.

What was even more fascinating was the fact that spearheading these events were young people, the so-called lost generation.

Phaphani principal Nomaziwe Keleketle, teacher Lizwiwe Festile and Thembisa Ngantweni, one of the organisers of Eecya’s event, had, by their action, heeded Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s warning that the educated ones in Africa should not be like the village’s children, who, sent to the bush to collect wood for the villagers, ended up using it to make fire to warm themselves.

It was beautiful to see the teachers freely participating in traditional dance and song in the midst of the lesser educated senior citizens.

I was moving when one teacher, Mandisa January, pleasantly surprised one old woman and man by awarding them prizes for the best African traditional wear, a move that had not been announced beforehand.

But more than anything else, I was glad to note that both the teachers and the youth did not reduce culture to mere dance and music.

They seemed to be aware of revolutionary scholar Walter Rodney’s definition of culture “as a total way of life” embracing “what people ate and what they wore; the way they walked and the way they talked; the manner in which they treated death and greeted the newborn”. This was demonstrated through the exhibition of the African industry – the handwork of clothes specifically worn by unmarried girls and those specifically worn by married women.

This was significant in that it gave children a glance into our history by showing us the cooking utensils that our forebears made themselves.

This was proof of how better equipped and independent our “uneducated” ancestors were, compared with their present “educated” descendants, who depend on employment to survive.

They must surely have felt good when they ate their own baked bread. It was no wonder then to hear that after the event many more adult students came to register in that school.

It is because our people felt a sense of acknowledgement and a token of recognition for their efforts! At the Ethiopian Church, we discussed the works of African writers, like poet Sek McShayi’s Inyuthi LamaWele, who, through his book, demonstrates that long before the Arabs and Europeans came to Africa, Africans knew of the existence of God and that it was a distortion to claim that Africans worshipped their ancestors.

We talked about Chancellor Williams’s book, The Destruction of Black Civilisation, in which he argues that European historians confused “ancestor reverence” with “ancestor worship”.

We spoke about Credo Mutwa’s work, Isithwane, in which Mutwa states clearly that Africa’s lohelo system should not be confused with what is known by the Europeans as “bride price” because in Africa it is believed that “a woman is not an animal and therefore cannot be sold or bought”.

We left the church with an understanding that in order to be able to fight scourges like HIV/ Aids, we must revisit our history, examine why our forebears taught unmarried youth (both male and female) against consuming eggs, failing which they would become thieves!

And those who did not understand the rich African idiom dismissed this as ludicrous, but, of course, Africa’s old and wise were referring to “theft of sex” – premarital sex – which has been one of the major contributors to unplanned-for babies and unprotected sex, resulting in diseases.

We parted with an understanding that events alone were not enough for the revival of African culture and the redemption of our soul, but that our salvation lies in these processes.

We agreed that just like Irani an Muslim intellectual Ali Sharani had told his compatriots that those who say the “time for talking is over” are wrong, because all along we have not been talking, but complaining.

Now is the time to talk! Africa refuses to die.
T
HE great martyr, Bantu Biko, once observed that “it is better to die for an idea that will live than to live for an idea that will die”. I was reminded of his words when I heard that the Technikon’s Journalism Department has decided to use Can Themba’s book, The Will to Die, as one of its pre-scribed books in English II. The move is a great honour for the late Themba, 31 years after his death. Like his fellow journalist, Nat Nakasa, who committed suicide in New York, painter Gerhard Sekoto, who died in France, and Bloke Modimo, Blame Me On History’s author, who died in Germany, Themba chose to leave South Africa, to live in Swaziland, when he felt he could not take oppression any more. The honour is also a guilty verdict on the architects of apartheid, whose policies forced sons and daughters of the soil to die in foreign lands. The Will to Die is a collection of short stories depicting black people’s lives in the townships. Stories like Ten to Ten celebrate the commitment to do good on the part of an African policeman even though he was in the employ of an evil system.

But, true to his craft, Themba simultaneously criticises black people’s conduct, especially their leadership, for manipulating people’s tribal sentiments by inciting them to engage in bloody and deathly battles. Themha empathised with the young men’s frustrations and knew that their miserable condition had been decided by Verwoerd, who had decided that a black child had no right to dream of becoming a pilot or an engineer, even if he or she had the intellectual ability.

A Fort Hare graduate, Themha knew what it was like in SA to be young, gifted and black, driving him to note that “we were those sensitive might-have-beens who had knocked on the door of white civilization (at the highest doors that SA could offer) and had heard a gruff ‘No’ or a ‘Yes’ so daft and insincere that we withdrew our small horns at once.”

The reading of African literature in institutions of learning offers black people a chance to mirror their lives. It is also an opportunity for those whites, who “did not know” what happened, to catch up with history and the present because little has changed in the lives of black people since Themba died in 1968.

Themha stands out as a figure to...
ON May 3, the world observed International Press Freedom Day by highlighting the harassment of the media and journalists in different countries.

I heard no mention of award-winning radio journalist and author Mumia Abu-Jamal, who has been languishing in jail in America for the past 19 years and is on death row for murder.

Jamal’s case goes back to December 9, 1981, when he and his brother were involved in an argument with a white policeman, Daniel Faulkner. Amid the confrontation, a shot rang out and killed the policeman.

Jamal was found on the scene, wounded by a bullet from Faulkner’s gun, and was subsequently charged with the policeman’s murder.

Throughout the trial and after his conviction, Jamal has maintained he is innocent.

It has been reported that four witnesses have claimed that they saw another man shooting the policeman and then running away.

The bullet that killed the policeman was a .44 calibre, while Jamal’s gun was a .38 revolver.

As a boxer he supported blacks to life.

As a child, Carter had been sent to reform school for hitting, with a bottle, a white man for fondling his friends.

As a boxer he supported the black nationalists’ call for the need for blacks to use guns to protect themselves from bigoted policemen and judges.

Throughout, initially, evidence did not point to Carter and his co-accused, John Artis, the police later claimed to have turned up two petty thieves, whose testimony against Carter and Artis were held from prosecution for burglary.

On the basis of petty thieves’ testimony, an all-white jury saw fit to sentence two black men to life.

But in 1980, thanks to a black 17-year-old student, Lesra Martin, who, inspired and moved by Carter’s biography, The Sixteenth Round, made it his life mission to set Carter free. His and friends’ investigations set Carter free, in 1985, after 19 years in prison.

Carter’s and Porter’s cases are no different from Jamal’s, and so, all women and men of conscience should call on America to set Jamal free, now.

This, his 19th year in prison, should be the last.

A nother witness, Pamela Jenkins, revealed that her boyfriend, police officer Thomas Ryan, offered her money to testify against Jamal and identify him as the “shooter”, even though she was not at the scene.

Jenkins also testified that another woman, Cynthia White, accepted a “deal” from the police and was subsequently able to work freely as a prostitute with police protection.

Yet, another witness, Robert Chobert, who was said to be on probation for arson and was driving a cab without a driver’s licence, was “remarkably, following his false testimony against Mumia…able to continue driving uninterrupted for years without consequence”, Jamal’s supporters have noted.

Why all these efforts against Jamal?

Jamal, who was the president of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists at the time of his arrest, had made it his habit to expose police brutality and racism, resulting in him being marked for surveillance and harassment throughout the 60s and 70s as shown by 900 pages of FBI files uncovered by Jamal’s legal team. Jamal was repeatedly arrested on charges that could not be substantiated until that fateful day, December 9, 1981.

However, despite this imposed suffering, Jamal continues challenging the racist American system. In the 90’s he wrote a book, Live from Death Row, in which he exposes America’s racism.

For writing that book, he was sentenced to 90 days’ solitary confinement, barred from receiving telephone calls from his family and his rights for visits reduced from once a week to once a month.

Whatever the cost to me, I knew I had to offer to the world a window into the souls of those who, like me, suffer barbaric conditions on America’s death row,” explained Jamal on why he wrote the book, fully aware of the consequences of his act.

Jamal has since published a second book, Death Blossoms.

Some recent events have served as an inspiration that efforts to call for Jamal’s release could bear fruit.

A Mail & Guardian report in the issue of February 25-March 2 this year said an African-American, Anthony Porter, who had spent 16 years on death row, was
A month ago, former Dinara High School pupils requested me to give a motivational talk to the school's present matric.

These former pupils, who had invited me to be a guest speaker to their matric farewell in 1995, told me even the teachers were frustrated about the low morale among their current pupils. What difference would I make?

While self-interrogating questions were raging in my mind, it occurred that our black youngsters have few black role models consciously presented to them. Consider, for example, how the recent International Book Day was treated as a non-event compared to the commercial Valentine's Day - yet books are so essential, especially in Africa, for our growth.

Any wonder our children are so uninspired?

My own life is an example of what books can do to kill despair and replace it not only with hope, but with resolve to change your life for the better.

Were it not for Peter Abrahams' Tell Freedom, I would not be the journalist that I am today.

Abrahams's biographical story of a poor black boy, who after learning to read and write at the age of 11, vowed to become a writer, and actually becoming an internationally acclaimed writer, rekindled in me the fire to write.

This had died after various newspapers and magazines had turned down my poetry.

But after finishing Tell Freedom, I was so inspired that I sent in a poem to Zimbabwe's People's Voice newspaper and it was published.

Was it not for Sindiswa Magona's biography, Forced To Grow, in which she relates how she had to raise five children, alone and yet resolving to continue studying for her matric. I would have never gone back to school after losing many precious years not studying.

You see, through perseverance, Magona is now working at the United Nations in New York. In America African-Americans annually celebrate Kwanzaa, instead of Christmas, and speak about black history and achievements on that day. Blacks in Britain hold a black heritage day annually, but Africans at home do little or nothing to celebrate Africa Day on May 25.

No wonder our children are so uninspired. They know nothing about the great efforts of African heroes like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, who strove for the unity and true independence of Africa!

Is it not interesting, as the London-published New African magazine reported in its April issue, that a new textbook, Black Scientists and Inventors Book One, aimed at children aged seven to 16, has been written and published by Ava Henry and Michael Williams?

They, through their effort "hope that parents and teachers will help the children on this journey of

Africans should proudly celebrate Africa Day today, writes SIMPHWE SESANTI.

How many children, as well as adults, know as Ankomah quotes from Gerald Messy's Ancient Egypt the Light of the World, that it was Imhotep, the "black multi-genius" who was the "real father of medicine", not the Greek physician, Hippocrates, now commonly regarded as the father of medicine?

How many Africans know, as Chancellor Williams wrote in his book Destruction of Black Civilization, that 1,362 years before Christ was born, almost 2,000 years before Muhammad became the messenger of Islam, a black monarch, by the name of Akhnaton taught about the concept of one God?

Records show Ankomah contended in his piece that the "very first university in Europe, Salamanka in Spain, was founded after the fashion of the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, whose professors were all Africans".

The reason that African children's self-esteem is so low is that they do not know these things.

They do not know, as Senegal's scholar Cheikh Anta Diop puts it in his book, Civilization or Barbarism - An Authentic Anthropology that the theorem called Pythagoras, was not invented by Pythagoras, the Greek, but that he took it from the ancient black Egyptians, whose student he was in Egypt for 22 years.

So let this year's Africa Day be celebrated with a difference. Let our young black people know these things, not for merely romanticising the past, but to prepare them for the future. This should instil them with confidence to face the future.

This should make them believe that the present generation of Africans can, just like their ancestors, become great scientists, doctors, mathematicians and inventors, as well as artists, writers and philosophers. Do not let this year's Africa Day be celebrated with a difference. Let our young black people know these things, not for merely romanticising the past, but to prepare them for the future. This should instil them with confidence to face the future.
Hunt for men's pride

These are sad times we are living in, when role models are extinguished, hardly before realising their significance among us. In mind I have Majwarandile Jack, who was laid to rest on November 14 in Uitenhage.

Jack was stabbed to death, reportedly for calling a meeting to address means of dealing with criminal elements whom he had identified in our community. At the time of his death, the 32-year-old Jack, who worked at the Goodyear factory and was a part-time student at the PE Technikon, had recently got married and was preparing to perform a ceremony to honour his late father.

But he did not live to fulfil that aim and died before seeing his wife, Ntombi, achieve the honour degree for which he had encouraged her to study.

An intense feeling of sorrow and anger filled the Bahs Madlakane Hall at a memorial service two days before his funeral.

Political activists vowed that "there is no way we can be defeated by petty criminals when we could not be defeated by apartheid".

This sentiment had the backing of the SANDF and the SAPS. People cheered when they were called on to root out criminal elements and form street committees.

Amid these cheers, some images were conjured up in my mind.

The African American Rev Jesse Jackson's words, expressing pain about the same situation in America, echoed in my mind: "There is nothing more painful to me than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery. Black men need to start looking within themselves to find solutions to the crisis of hopelessness in which they find themselves," argues Simphiwe Sesantibery, then to look around and see someone white and feel relieved."

His words give an accurate expression of this country's black people. We are made to feel unsafe among our own.

The sameness of the experiences between African Americans and black South Africans should come as no surprise since we all went through racial discrimination and exploitation.

What became of African Americans, a large proportion of whose male population is said to be languishing in prison, and what is becoming of black South African males, is a result of years of dehumanisation and degradation.

Many black men are now reduced to envious and resentful monsters who vent their anger on those blacks whom they see as gaining upward social mobility and on the poor defenceless people.

However, this article is not aimed at lamenting the effects of colonialism or apartheid, but rather to reflect on the way to our salvation as a people.

In the past few years I have been inspired by the steps taken by African Americans, who organised the Million Man March in 1995, when black men were called to re-examine their souls and atone for failing black women and children.

Every year in the US, from December 26 to January 1, since the mid-1960s, some African Americans, instead of celebrating Christmas, celebrate Kwanzaa, a Kiswahili word meaning "first fruit". They light candles, exchange gifts, speak about their values, recount their history of struggles to one another and their children in order to instil and maintain respect for themselves and other human beings.

What has this got to do with blacks and crime? I believe we need our own million man gathering, where men must be told that their failure is historical, not biological.

We need a gathering where a sense of compassion and empathy must be shown to black men who have gone astray.

They must be told that killing and robbing will not make them better human beings, but worse.

They must be told that their feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and uselessness in the eyes of their wives and children is understood, but that their aggressive actions are not the way to reclaim lost authority.

We need a million man gathering where we will dig deep into our vulnerable hearts and talk.

When we begin to talk about ourselves, we will realise that our hatred and anger are rooted in the hatred and anger we harboured for our oppression and oppression. We will see that, consciously or unconsciously, we allowed ourselves to concentrate more on being united than those feelings than on being united by our love for one another.

We missed an important point -- love for one another! And now is the time to make up for that mistake!

If black people could find it in themselves to forgive whites, I don't see why we cannot make a plan to forgive one another. Talking will only be a starting point, but from there on other concrete ideas will develop.

For instance, I was impressed by a move by Lawrence Mavundla, who set up an organisation called the African Council of Hawkers and Informal Business, which made it possible for people accessing...
Understanding how blacks feel

On October 19 – Press Freedom Day I watched a documentary on one of South Africa's gifted journalists, Nat Nakasa, who committed suicide in America. Nakasa reluctantly took a permanent exit permit, whose condition was that he would not be allowed to return to the land of his birth – South Africa. Painful as that decision was for him, he took it, to take up a Nieman Fellowship. He was a man who refused to be compartmentalised, freely socialising with all South Africans, irrespective of colour!

But it is said that one day in the States, he burst into a meeting where he launched a tirade against whites, saying they would never be able to understand how blacks felt. His statement brought to mind the recent incident of the Tempe military base where a former Mandela cadre integrated into the SANDF, Lt Sibusiso Madubela, shot dead white colleagues before he, himself was shot dead.

The SABC reported that Madubela was driven to anger at his salary was frozen following being declared Awol (absent without leave). We also heard reports that Madubela was an irresponsible drunk who behaved in an unwelcome manner in the army.

"The shock dallying of seven people at Tempe military base in Bloemfontein last week by a renegade officer has outraged the nation. "While all are horrified by the cold-blooded killings of white officers and non-commissioned officers, the only conclusion that can be drawn from the former freedom fighter vented his rage selectively against white personnel before his savage rampage was terminated", screamed a newspaper editorial on September 20.

That, coming from a newspaper which is made up of predominantly white journalists, was unexpected. What was the black journalists' reaction? Instead of simply echoing the chorus condemning Madubela, two City Press journalists, Morupane Komana and Elias Maluleke, did what all professional journalists are supposed to do – investigate.

In their September 19 front page lead they wrote that a "serious mistake by army authorities in which Madubela was wrongly charged. . . . could have precipitated the grisly multiple murder of his colleagues."

The newspaper had established that, contrary to official reports that Madubela had gone AWOL, the soldier had in fact been granted leave. The paper also established that contrary to mid-week reports that Madubela was an "irresponsible drunk" who had been sent back home during last year's military intervention in Lesotho, he had not been in Lesotho at that time.

The investigation also found that Madubela neither smoked nor drank alcohol. How is it then that living men can tell lies about the dead because dead men can tell no tales! Despite this report, three days later, a newspaper editorial continued to rubbish Mandela's memory, mercilessly charging that it is "alleged that the murderer has a record of bad discipline and was sent home from Operation Boleas in Lesotho last year for stealing and crashing an armoured car after getting drunk."

Does the editor only read his own newspaper? Even if that were the case, did he not read his own newspaper's report on the same day he made the above remark, where it was reported that "Mr Lekangase dismissed reports that Lt Madubela was a drunkard or had been sent back from Lesotho because of bad behaviour."

Considering the influence of the media, if journalists are to act in such an irresponsible manner, the sought-after reconciliation will be impossible.

Madubela's action is a signal of frustrations of black people who see no change in their lives. It is also an indication that like in the past, when black men, frustrated by the white hogs, used to take out their anger on their wives, children or themselves by committing suicide, as Nat Nakasa did, they now prefer, like the biblical Samson, to go down with their enemies.

No, South Africa cannot afford that. We don't need a bloodbath. But in order to avoid that we must begin to talk and listen to one another. Whites, who all along have been doing the talking, must begin to learn to listen.

For white journalists to simply condemn the victims of oppression without making any attempt to understand where they come from is not going to help us get any closer to one another.

That is going to make blacks more hostile and deny whites the necessary opportunity to know their compatriots. Nat Nakasa tried, was frustrated and he died, but black journalists have not given up.

Their presence in bodies like the non-racial South African National Editors Forum, despite calls from some black journalists that black editors maintain their separate black organisations, is a sign of this commitment.

* The documentary on the life of Nat Nakasa will be screened at 8.30 this evening on CBO.
Africanise our education in SA

WORLD-renowned writer and academic, Prof Es'kia Mphahlele, was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Arts and Culture Trust of the President held in Cape Town during the Heritage weekend.

This follows soon after his novel, The Wanderers, won first prize at the African Arts Awards in 1997.

While this is exciting and commendable, the worrying aspect is that five years after the democratic elections, Mphahlele's call in his book, Afrika My Music, for the Africanisation of our education, has not yet been heeded.

Once, addressing students and lecturers at the University of Transkei, he said: "I tell them something about African humanism."

"I suggest how, if our education system is based on this philosophy, it will truly express our independence of mind, a decolonised mind. I sketch out a plan whereby we should get to know ourselves, our continent, through a study of African history, religion, cosmology, literature and the arts."

"I try as best as I can to explain that we can still find our way to the ancestors who are a vital part of our humanism. That this is a state of mind, which is why it can work in urban areas as well as in those rural areas where the traditional institutions no longer exist."

"But we should not regard culture as a museum artefact. It should continue to absorb and redefine the technological, economic and political systems, which we must master if we are to participate effectively in international business and politics."

"I continue to drive home the point that right from primary school we need to devise projects that will send pupils into the community to discover their own folklore, heroes, geography and so on."

A true homage to Mphahlele's efforts will be when the democratic government puts the above recommendations into practice.

South African children should be exposed to indigenous literature at an early age, argues SIMPHIWE SESANTI

our literature in our education system? A Russian child grows under the influence of his native literature, a Chinese, Frenchman or Englishman first imbibes his national literature before attempting to take in other worlds.

"Not so in Africa, despite the crucial role the twin fields of literature and culture play in making a child aware of his environment."

Despite the conference and other meetings for the next three years, which produced detailed recommendations on the subject, the government failed the nation!

"The government went through all the necessary administrative organs, often meeting with enthusiastic approval, until the time of implementation. "They have now been shelved. Jane Austen is deemed more relevant to Kenya than Chinua Achebe", wrote Prof wa Thiong'o.

Failure to expose African children to literature critically looking at our experiences, denies children inspirational role models and adults the opportunity to see the effect of their conduct on children's minds.

In Down Second Avenue, for instance, Mphahlele shows how his bullying and drinking father alienated his children and made their lives miserable.

At the same time, he honours their mother who was their refuge and tower of strength.

During these times when women are regarded as mere punch bags and sex objects, the desirability of such books written by Africans cannot be overemphasised. To combat disrespect for women, manifested in rapes, we need to seriously consider our education system.

We need a kind of system, which, according to Nigeria's Dr Chikwunyere Kamalu, in his book, Foundations of African Thought, "should be such that the children are taught that the natural line of descent is through the mother. This can be demonstrated beyond doubt once it is understood that all human beings are conceived by woman."

"Within every man there is a woman and within every woman, a man. Therefore any man who hates women is a man who hates an aspect of himself which he cannot come to terms with. His hatred for women is his own self-hatred."

In Kenya, it took 10 years before teachers in 1973 felt they had to make a move, inspiring Prof Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his book, Writers In Politics, to note: "The subject of our three days gathering and discussion is the place and teaching of African literature in our schools."

"Nothing that we talk about will make a difference unless we teach our children our language, our literature, our culture."

"We must teach our children the language of the culture they belong to. We must start teaching them the language of our culture at a very early age.

"The government failed to implement the recommendations of the conference chaired by Prof wa Thiong'o."

In Zimbabwe, out of three textbooks we used for our "O" levels, only one was by an African.

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WESTERN WAY OF LIFE HAS FAILED

The quest for true humanity

"THAT we, the black people, are one people we know. Destroyers will travel long distances in their minds and out to deny you this truth. We do not argue with them, the fools. Let them presume to instruct us about ourselves. That too is in their nature."

These lines by Ayi Kwei Armaah's from his book, The Second Session, echo our teachings of Black Consciousness, the philosophy which taught that "black is beautiful" and that "we are black and proud".

It is a belief for which I lived and a cause for which I was brutally killed, a legacy that makes me proud. Yet, it is with a sense of sadness to note that in South Africa, blackness has become a curse because of whites this time, but because of blacks themselves.

It is incredible that during these times when there are talks about the African Renaissance, the blacker you are, the more vulnerable you are to the South African police hunting for "black aliens," otherwise called "anarchist.

But such tendencies are to be expected because despite this talk of the renaissance, Africans have not yet reached education. And children are still bombarded with European literature by William Shakespeare and others as if there are no African writers of substance.

Were Africa's children exposed to books like Don Mattera's Five Magic Pebbles, they would know that long, long ago, long before the people of Europe set foot in Africa, there were no borders, no fences and no guards. People lived where they pleased, respecting one another and sharing what they had. That was how it was among the people, long before the Arabs and the Romans and other Europeans came to Africa.

However, whatever problems Africa more, is the mere discussion of the African Renaissance. So is Kwame Nkrumah, who wrote about that concept as early as 1964 in his book Consociation, and so is Amilcar Cabral, who wrote about re-Africanisation in his book, Unity and the Struggle, before Africa's enemies gunned him down in 1973. It is a vindication of my claim made in my essay, Some African Cultural Concepts, now anthologised in I Write What I Like, that we believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships.

The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa—giving the world a more human face.

The truth of this assertion has been realised even by Africa's children transported as slaves to America.

Listen to our prolific African American sister, Maya Angelou, in her book, Even the Stars Look Lonesome, putting it thus: "In these bloody days and frightful nights when an urban warrior can find no face more despicable than his own, no ammunition more deadly than self-love, and no target more deserving than his brother... this terrifying and murderous season, when young women achieve adulthood before puberty and become mothers before learning how to be daughters, we should stop the rhetoric and high-sounding phrases, stop the posing and preening and begin fiercely to look to our own welfare.

"We need to haunt the walls of history and listen anew to the ancestors' wisdom. We must ask questions and find answers that will help us to avoid dissolving into the merciless maw of history.

How were our forefathers able to support their weakest when they themselves were at their weakest? How were they able to surround the errant leader and prevent him from being co-opted by forces that would destroy him and them?"

Maya is right. Our looking into the past for solutions has nothing to do with being nostalgic or romanticising our past.

"It's just that the imposed Western way of life has failed humankind. I still maintain, as I wrote in I Write What I Like, that, in rejecting Western values, therefore, we are rejecting those things that are not only foreign to us, but that seek to destroy the most cherished of our beliefs—that the cornerstone of society is man himself."

We reject the power-based society of the Westerner that seems to be ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing on the spiritual dimension. When emphasising African values, we are speaking of those that even impressed European historians, as recorded in Michael Attwell's South Africa. Background to the Crisis.

Writing of the San Africans, he noted: "It is almost impossible to establish with any certainty the precise nature of their society, but many believe that crimes like theft and murder were virtually unknown, and many Europeans, Lourens van der Post being the most notable, see it in Romantic terms as an almost ideal kind of existence.

"One archaeologist, Professor Ray Inskeep, of the Pittsburgh Museum, Oxford, describes it as 'a way of life perfected'."

"It is that 'way of life perfected' that Africans must rediscover. That's what I lived and died for—Black Consciousness and the quest for a true humanity."
most sacred of duties.

The women militarists referred to were such women as Nehanda, of Zimbabwe, who danced even on the verge of her murder by colonialists, Queen Nzingha, of Angola, who led resistance against Portuguese colonialists.

Her story inspired Van Sertima to note: “She fought the Portuguese all her life, Angola, who led resistance against Portuguese colonialists. Her story inspired Van Sertima to note: “Her sister was beheaded, her body thrown into a river. Yet this did not break Nzingha’s spirit.”

There is the story of Queen Yaa Asantewaa, (among many others) who, noting that Ghanaian men were reluctant to confront colonialism, said: “We the women will. We will fight till the last one of us falls in the battlefields.”

Women have played a crucial role in history and their role in the present and future should also be fully recognised, writes SIMPHIWE SESANTI

orders and not question anything,” Magwaca wrote. Truly, that’s sad, because the oppression of African women by their men, who beat up female partners, arrogantly and ignorantly claiming that African culture condones such cruelty, is wrong and ‘unAfrican’, just as it false to claim that our culture does not allow women to take leadership positions. In the Journal of African Civilisations (Vol 6 No 1, April 1984), edited by Ivan Van Sertima, dealing with Black Women in Antiquity, professors John Henrik Clarke and Sonia Sanchez, share with us interesting insights.

“...In Africa the woman’s ‘place’ was not only with her family, she often ruled nations with unquestionable authority. Many African women were great militarists and on occasion led the armies in battle. Long before they knew of Europe the Africans had produced a way of life where women were secure enough to let women advance as far as their talent would take them.”

It is written that during the entire period of Egypt of the Pharaohs, African women enjoyed complete freedom, as opposed to the condition of segregation experienced by European women of the classical periods, whether she was Greek or Roman.

It is also noted that no evidence can be found either in literature or in historical records – Egyptian or otherwise – relating to the systematic ill-treatment of African women by their men. They were respected and went about unveiled unlike certain Asian women. Affection for one’s mother and especially the respect with which it was necessary to surround her were the ancient black civilisation, another was emerging, one which considered man primarily a material entity, whose happiness was measured by his ability to acquire and maintain material heaven (wealth and pleasure).

In that heaven, women were not principals that predicted or participated in social policy but were objects to be used by men. Moreover, it was held that women were to be kept from principal positions because they would be luxuries acquired by men…”, Prof Sanchez wrote.

To combat male chauvinism, powerful positions held by women like Kaunda in Sanef and Lizeka Mda in the Forum for Black Journalists should be used to make sure that our African renaissance deals with gender issues as well.
SELECTIVE AMNESIA IS A PROBLEM
Don't forget your mandate!

THE people have spoken— but will the politicians remember the mandate, asks freelance journalist SIMPHWE SESI in the launch of this new post-election debate slot. Brainwaves replaces the extremely popular Election slot which ended on June 2. We thank all our energetic Election 99 regulars for an exciting election intelligence engagement in the Post. The regulars, plus newcomers invited to contribute to Brainwaves on any subject, bi-social, economic, political, women, youth or cultural affairs. Fax contributions to the editor on 585 4966. We hand deliver them to: Editor, Evening Post, Newmarket House, 19 Backsens Street.

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"The family into which Thabo Mbeki was born was torn apart and scattered to the winds during the course of the struggle against apartheid.

"Thabo's father, Govan, was imprisoned for almost three decades, his sister was detained for something she had no knowledge of, his youngest brother was missing, presumed killed, his only child, a son, has also disappeared and is presumed dead.

"Mbeki himself, after spending much of his childhood in boarding schools and away from home, spent almost 30 years living in exile.

"This is the gospel about Thabo Mbeki, according to his biographers, Adrian Hadland and Jovial Rantao. This book will in many ways answer the question for those who have been asking who Thabo Mbeki is. It traces Thabo's origins to Transkei, where he was born in 1942.

"He appears by many standards to be an ordinary rural African child, who grew up an introvert, devouring Marxist literature, as an angel. However, his father and mother, Ma Mofokeng, having belonged to the Communist Party of SA, Thabo is not painted as an angel, however. His mother reportedly caught him out dodging school on the pretext of an aching stomach, while in fact running away from mathematics.

"In his teens, he impregnated a girl who bore his only son, Kwanda, who disappeared and is believed to be dead, which caused his father a lot of pain.

"At 13 and 14 years, Thabo joined the Society of Young Africans and the ANC Youth League.

"His involvement in launching mass action opposing Bantu education led to his expulsion from school, leading him to complete matric by correspondence.

"From then on it was politics throughout, which saw him joining the ANC in exile, studying economics in London, being appointed as ANC's political secretary, and director of information in Lusaka.

"In 1975, Thabo was appointed acting chief of the ANC in Swaziland, three years later being appointed Tambo's political secretary and director of information in Lusaka.

"However, the "Africanist" label associated with Thabo, will find out that Thabo is a friend, not an enemy.

"Following the Kabwe decision to begin attacking "soft targets" such as white areas and homes, Thabo backed popular party opinion in 1985, saying he was concerned about the impact on white South Africans of attacks against whites. Our aim is to win them away from apartheid even if they don't come to us. So attacks hurt us."

"As a result of his position in the ANC and his attitude to whites, it was Thabo who held successful talks as early as 1985 with South African whites in Zambia and New York.

"These were men like Anglo American chairman, Gavin Reilly, the Progressive Federal Party's Frederik van Zyl Slabbert and Breederbond chairman Pieter de Lange.

"In fact, Thabo was reportedly angry when the ANC's Seretse Khama opposed his efforts to kill De Lange at the New York conference. None of them had been caught out De Lange and shared drinks and a chat with him till the early hours of the following day. While his popularity with the white community grew, Thabo also gained the tag "spy" with the ANC, but that did not really stick.

"He rose to the ANC's presidency and will become South Africa's on Wednesday.

"The only disappointing aspect of the book is the mention - only in passing - of Thabo's membership of the Pan Africanist Student Organisation and Pan Africanist Youth Movement while in Nigeria.

"Had the authors expanded a bit on this, it might have afforded the readers more understanding of Thabo's background as far as his African renaissance is concerned. However, I recommend the book to every concerned South African, especially students of history and politics.
ANGALISO SOBUKWE, first president of the PAC, was born in Graaff-Reinet in 1924 and died in 1978.

He and other Africanists in the ANC, broke away, objecting to what they perceived as white domination in the ANC.

They objected strongly to the Kliptown Charter of 1955, whose preamble declared that South Africa belonged to all those who lived in it and that “we are opposed by a form of government based on injustice.”

They regarded the charter as a sell-out document that denied the indigenous Africans’ inheritance to their forebears’ land, saying that it also poured scorn on the struggles of Moshoeshoe, Hintsa and Schbuchuken against land dispossession by whites.

When the PAC was formed, it was made up of only indigenous Africans, rejecting white and Indian membership.

This resulted in observers claiming that the PAC was racist, but, responding to the allegations, Sobukwe stated: “Our contention is that Africans are the only people who, because of their material position, can be interested in the complete overhaul of the present structure.”

We have admitted that there are Europeans who are intellectual converts to the African’s cause, but as South African history ably illustrates, whenever Europeans ‘co-operate’ with African movements, they keep on demanding checks and counter-checks.

“Of the Indian minority, we say that they are in a hopeless position.”

“We want to make the African people conscious of the fact that they have to win their own liberation, rely on themselves to carry on a relentless and determined struggle.”

Sobukwe was a rare kind of a leader, who, in 1980, led the Action Campaign, which resulted in the Sharpeville massacre on March 21, under the slogan “No bail, no defence, no fine...”

He must be remembered as that young man who, in 1960, led the PAC in its positive Action Campaign, which resulted in the Sharpeville massacre on March 21, under the slogan “No bail, no defence, no fine...”

From heaven’s window view, Sobukwe must be disappointed to see his PAC doing the same thing that they rejected in 1959 when today’s PAC can hardly organise the indigenous, whom Sobukwe regarded as the key and the cornerstone of the African revolution.

At heaven’s gates, Sobukwe must have wept, when on the eve of the 21st anniversary of his death this year, the University of Port Elizabeth’s Pan Africanist Student Movement (PASMA) hosted a bash where “admission was free and boozed cheap,” meaning that on February 27, Sobukwe’s followers were drunk - what a way to remember a hero!

Pasma must beware of the ancestors’ wrath!

Though he recognises that it is the work of the agents of imperialism infiltrated into the PAC, Sobukwe must be dissappointed to see his organisation that was aimed at “Uniting Africans under the banner of African nationalism,” disintegrated, led by discredited former leaders, who served under the NP government, ANC rejects and former homeland leaders, as if the PAC has no revolutionary leadership.

However, Sobukwe must not be remembered in a sad way, but rather as a rare kind of a leader, who, in 1960, led the PAC in its Positive Action Campaign.

Today is the 40th anniversary of the PAC. Freelance journalist SIMPHWE SESANTU pays tribute to its founding president, Mangaliso Sobukwe, and argues that he would not be impressed by the PAC of today.

“Above all, Sobukwe must be remembered as a man who loved Africans and humanity truly, who recognised only one race, the human race.”

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However, Sobukwe must not be remembered in a sad way, but rather as a rare kind of a leader, who, in 1960, led the PAC in its Positive Action Campaign.

Today is the 40th anniversary of the PAC. Freelance journalist SIMPHWE SESANTU pays tribute to its founding president, Mangaliso Sobukwe, and argues that he would not be impressed by the PAC of today.

“He must be remembered as that young man who, in 1960, led the PAC in its Positive Action Campaign, which resulted in the Sharpeville massacre on March 21, under the slogan “No bail, no defence, no fine...”

He must be remembered as that young man whom the NP regime feared so much that it introduced a special clause (Sobukwe Clause) under which he was detained for a further six years on Robben Island.

But, above all, Sobukwe must be remembered as a man who loved Africans and humanity truly, who recognised only one race, the human race.

It is my belief that were Sobukwe alive, he would not agree with the current PAC’s president Stanley Mogoza’s position that our people, criminalised by the NP’s programme of deliberate impoverishment, should have their limbs amputated.

The Pef, as Sobukwe was affectionately known, would argue that our people are victims who need compassion and support, not further victimisation. Sobukwe, a true follower of the African revolution, would not agree with the current PAC’s leadership’s position that our people, criminalised by the NP’s programme of deliberate impoverishment, should have their limbs amputated.
Celebrating black heritage

A FEW months ago, I read an article in another newspaper by journalist Charles Mogale. The story goes that he bought a dog for his son, who had been asking for it for ages. To his disbelief and dismay, the boy would not have it.

After rearing and making threats, writes Mogale, he calmed down and took a different route. The dog, he says, was black - and because of the foolishness that befalls some men's minds, he was inclined to change it and give myself some foreign name that would fit any meaning.

--Legson Kayira

I was born a proud African and was given a proud African name, but because of the foolishness that befalls some men's minds, I was inclined to change it and give myself some foreign name that would fit any meaning.

REMINISCING... Internationally known author Prof Esskie Imrahamle, of the University of the Witwatersrand and the African Literature Department.

"Pretty soon we saw a dark cloudy on the horizon, and it slowly spread all over the sky,"

"The lightning flashed and the thunder rolled and the mountains echoed."

"Was that rain as a result of our prayers, or was it natural?"

"I think there may be a reason for this,"

"The dog..."

"I'm not black!"

"He used to tell us that he was equal to any white man that be was equal to."

"He used to tell us that he was equal to any white man that be was equal to."

"I'm black-and-proud of it."

"Le Kosovo is big, he said."

"He used to tell us that he was equal to any white man that be was equal to."

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