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" LET THEIR EYES TESTIFY "

AN INTERVIEW WITH NANA MAHOMO

by

Teshome H. Gabriel

SOWETO. ORLANDO. ATTERIDGEVILLE. LANGA. GUGULETHU. NEW BRIGHTON. MDANTSANE. ATHLONE... The list of black locations in South Africa could go on and on. Over the last quarter century, these locations have been a cornerstone of the South African system of apartheid, the results of a calculated policy designed to separate, isolate and control blacks in segregated areas. But ironically, in the last six months, these locations, which were built to perpetuate black passivity, have become the principal battlegrounds of black protest and struggle. They have become familiar names to the world community and have provided concrete evidence that while the South African government has gone to great lengths to construct an awesome machine of repression, it still has not been able to extinguish or diminish the unceasing struggle of black people to win their freedom.

Fortress South Africa was thought by many to be an invincible redoubt, but since the Portuguese coup in April 1974, the situation has become very fluid and volatile and many chinks--such as South Africa's ill-conceived intervention in Angola--have appeared in South Africa's armor. What avenues the struggle will take in South Africa are not easy to forecast, but our understanding of why the struggle is taking place has been enhanced through the efforts of filmmakers like Nana Mahomo, whose films, *Last Grave at Dimbaza* and *Phela Ndaba (The End of the Dialogue)*, have given us graphic accounts of what the system of apartheid is and how it affects the daily lives of black people.

Both films were made at great risk for much of the footage was shot illegally and smuggled out of the country. Both have won critical international acclaim and have been shown to audiences all over the world. But perhaps the best testimonial to their effectiveness comes from the South African government itself, which has mounted a major propaganda campaign (including making a filmed reply to *Last Grave at Dimbaza* a year later) in order to blunt the effect of Mahomo's exposes. Thus far the campaign has been unsuccessful.

Nana Mahomo was born in the Orange Free State in South Africa. He studied law at the University of Cape Town, but his studies were cut short because of his political activities. He was a political organizer for the Pan-Africanist Congress and, in 1960, was a key organizer of the massive march of Africans on Cape Town. Shortly thereafter, he was asked by his organization to leave the country and organize support externally. As he explains in his interview, he became a film maker in the late 1960's as a result of his political activities. Recognizing that film was a powerful tool, a sharp scalpel for cutting through the myths shrouding apartheid and for winning support for his cause, he and others started a group, Morena Films, to further his organization's goals.

This interview was recorded in February, 1976, when Mahomo spoke at UCLA at a class on "Film and Social Change" during which he showed Last Grave at Dimbaza. Individuals who wish to buy the film should write to Tricontinental Film Center, 333 Sixth Ave., NYC 10014 or P.O. Box 4430, Berkeley, Ca. 94704, (415) 548-3204; 1034 Lake Street, Oak Park, Ill. 60301 (312) 386-5909; 333 Sixth Avenue, N.Y. N.Y. 10014 (212) 989-3330.

Question: What was your reason for making this film?

Mahomo: I was sent out of South Africa by the Pan-Africanist Congress to explain the conditions under which black people live in South Africa and to solicit support for their struggle of liberation. During the process of my work I discovered that the more I tried to explain the situation in South Africa the less it seemed people believed me. There was a tendency to say you exaggerate, the conditions in South Africa are not as repressive or as brutal as you state them to be. Over the years I decided that the time had come when perhaps I should try other forms of communication, other than just telling people about South Africa. It seemed to me that if you presented the public with something visual, something which at least their eyes can testify to, you are half-way home. So we, a group of South Africans, without the necessary resources, without even the formal training, embarked on this task of communicating the problem of black South Africans in terms of visual images. That is how I was thrust into this complicated frustrating media of filmmaking. I think that essentially what we had in mind (and I do not know whether this applies to other film makers in the Third World) was to communicate something in as simple a fashion as possible. We realized that in terms of communications you can reach a stage where the human mind refuses to accept even what it sees. That is the point perhaps when the human brain will not take anymore

pain. I think for a long time there were people in key positions in Europe, people who knew what was happening in Hitler's Germany. These people were trying to communicate what Hitler was doing to the Jews of Europe, but because the pain was beyond what the human mind wanted to take, people refused to accept it. So when you are making a film you have to accept that there are limits to what people can take comfortably. When what they see becomes too much, they turn off. This is the kind of balance you have to strive for. You have to make sure that your audience stays with you because there is no point in making a film nobody wants to look at. This film *Last Grave at Dimbaza* was awarded two prizes at Grenoble for its social commitment and political message.

Q. Is your film concerned with the racial issue only as it applies to South Africa?

M. Racism is the theme, but if you look at this film only in terms of South Africa, you are missing the essential point we are trying to make. While we have racism in South Africa (and the whole structure of South Africa is based on *racism*) unfortunately, it is not confined to that part of the world. It is a problem which is everywhere. Now if you come to me and ask: "What can we do about South Africa?" Well, I may say, you can help the liberation movement, you can help the people who are fighting there. But basically I would like you to feel that you have to make a commitment that racism is something you will fight against. You have to make a commitment that the kind of obscenity we see in South Africa is never allowed to develop anywhere else in the world. You have to make a commitment to fight against racism anywhere and in any form. Now, that essentially is the point we are trying to make in *Last Grave at Dimbaza*.

Q. Was the film shot legally? I was wondering if anybody ever came up to you and asked what you were doing; were the camera men and crew, black?

M. I have to explain that this is the second film we have made in South Africa. The first film was shot by a black crew. But there was such an uproar when the South African government learned about our activities that a special group of South African intelligence men were asked to find out all about these black film-makers operating inside South Africa. We decided that for our second try, we would have to use some diversionary tactics. We worked on this for a year, and decided at the last moment that we were going to let the South African government know that we were shooting a film. Immediately, of course, they increased their vigilance. They were

South Africa, I think more or less, we covered most of the points we wanted to cover in this particular film. I think it would have been more dramatic if we could have shown the prison conditions. In South Africa, prisoners are segregated, as you can well imagine and the blacks still get a heavier dose of whatever punishment there is.

Q. I have a couple of questions. First I am assuming you had some problems with distributing this film and I wonder if you would say a little about how the film is being distributed.

M. On the question of distribution, we still do have a problem. We are an independent small group of South Africans trying to make a film and we never really break even. We thought that when we broke even, we would arrange for a distributor here. The purpose of the film was that it should be seen as widely as possible, but we still have to meet production costs.

We had several problems in that some groups used the film before we ever gave them permission to do so. The film has been videotaped by certain groups. Such groups have been using the film for their own purposes. We have not unfortunately gotten any remuneration for that kind of use. It would take a brilliant detective to trace all those videotape copies of *Last Grave at Dimbaza*. We want as many people as possible to see the film, but unless we can keep going, keep going in terms of selling film, there is no possibility of our continuing our work. It means the operation has to fold.

Q. I would like to know how much the film cost.

M. The cost of the film, I am talking in English terms, came to about 35,000 pounds. It would be about \$70,000. Of course you will have to take into consideration that this price was slightly inflated because of all the losses we suffered. So I think we could have made it for between 50 to 60,000 dollars. We were forced to have very low budgets for our film out of sheer necessity. I have been told that under normal circumstances a film of this nature in this country will cost about twice that amount. Of course, another thing is that none of us gets paid. We are supposed to do this for the cause. That takes me back to my remarks about the commitment of a film maker in the Third World, particularly in Africa.

Q. You made reference to a previous film that you made, the first film, and I was wondering if that film has ever been released and circulated?

M. The first film we made was *Phela Ndaba*. I have to pause because Americans got into the habit of calling it "Pellandaba"

looking for the black camera crew, while this time we sent two of our colleagues from England--English camera men--to do part of the shooting inside South Africa.

Q. I notice in your film that you do not mention any sort of resistance movement in South Africa. I was wondering why you chose to concentrate on just describing the conditions.

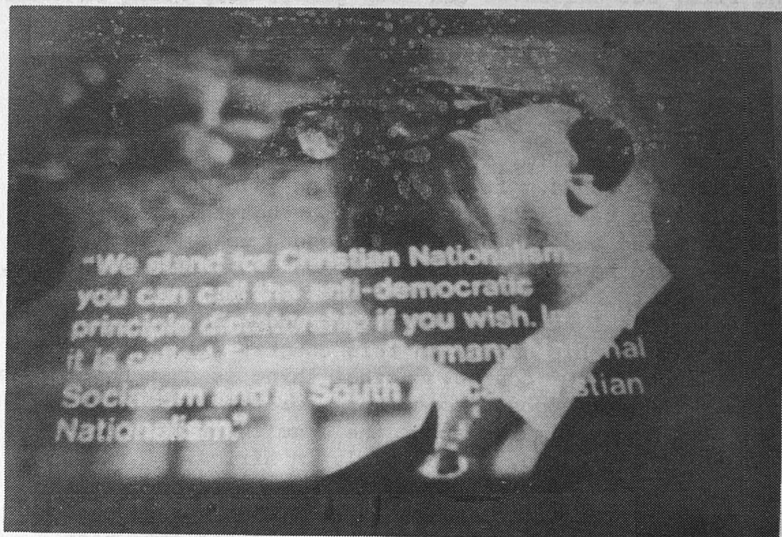
M. You have to realize that if you are making a film which touches on an underground movement, then there is no longer an underground movement. It is a sensitive area, and while we were making this film, a lot of people spent a long time trying to make sure we were not jeopardizing the safety of anybody inside South Africa. We had to cut out many parts of which were dramatic, essentially of cinematic value, because we felt that this would compromise people who are inside South Africa. If you are going to do a film on the guerilla movement, you have to get the cooperation of the organizations and I think at the right time they will want to let the outside world know what they are doing. But, I think, at this particular moment--unless I want to give you a slogan, a rhetoric--this is not the right time to pull that kind of thing in a film of this nature. We are essentially trying to show you, to show the outside world, that when, not *if*, a confrontation does take place in South Africa, when the slaughter begins in South Africa, the world should know *why* it is taking place. And it will take place because it is impossible for people to take that kind of treatment indefinitely.

Q. Is it true that you lost 5 hours of film in London due to sabotage or something? And do you think that as the film stands it covers everything you want to say?

M. About the sabotage, when our crew came back from South Africa, we were in a state of excitement. Immediately, once the film got back into England we thought it was safe, and as we really had to count our pennies, we cancelled the insurance. After they developed the film for two hours they phoned to say that there had been a disaster--5 hours of film had been destroyed in the lab. We suspected sabotage, but of course we could not prove it. We wanted to abandon the project because for us this was a major disaster, but we had put so much money in it that if we had abandoned it then, our creditors would have called in on us to pay up. As long as we could say, well we are doing something, they could not really call on us. So we reluctantly made the decision to send the crew back to do some of the filming all over again. The risks, of course, were doubled and so were the costs. We had to do a round-about trip to cover the tracks. Fortunately, we did cover most of the 5 hours we had lost. As far as additional material about



"African males from the homelands have no rights whatsoever in South Africa, they are only in South Africa to sell their labour." - Dr. Koonhoff, former Minister of Bantu Affairs, now in charge of Sport Policy.



"Prime Minister Vorster was in prison during WWII for his pro-Nazi sympathies."

and over the four years I have been handling this film, I have gotten mixed up over which is the correct pronunciation. It means *End of the Dialogue*. It was released in 1970. CBS got interested in the film. They wanted to do a shorter version of it which they put on as a special show under the title, "Black view of South Africa." It was awarded an Emmy in 1970. The film is still circulating in some of the schools, particularly in the New York area. It is still available and copies of that film sell at \$525. I think it is an interesting film. It is an experimental film. It is in a sense very crude. We had mixed it because of sheer necessity. We used black and white and color and some critics thought that this was a clever way of heightening the dramatic impact of the film, but the truth of the matter was that we were forced to do it that way because we could not do otherwise. I see it as a good example of how one should edit a film. I was trying to sell it through you to use it as a medium of instruction for film making and I hope I will still get away with a sale here.

Q. What is your own personal status regarding a return to South Africa now?

M. I think they would welcome my going back to South Africa under certain conditions, of course. Since I went out of South Africa without their permission, I am on their banned list. I proposed to go back to South Africa without asking for their permission, and of course as I am a disciplined member of the Pan-Africanist Congress I meet the orders of my organization.

Q. Is there any white organization in South Africa that is fighting against the racial situation in the country or are all the whites completely against any change?

M. There has not been any significant number of whites involved in the black struggle to make it a broad struggle for racial equality, justice, etc. However, there is a Communist party in South Africa which has white membership. There have been other white people who have been involved in the black struggle. Some have gone to prison, more have also been hanged for their activities. Bram Fisher was the most noted member of the white community who was sent to life imprisonment on a charge of leading and organizing a branch of the African National Congress. He was one of the leading activists in South Africa. He made a total commitment to be part and parcel of the liberation movement. There are others; unfortunately, the numbers are so small that their impact is insignificant in terms of avoiding the inevitable, which in South Africa is a confrontation along racial lines. When you look at how the situation stands now, I do not think we have the time to avoid that confrontation.

When the conflict occurs, it will be in terms of *black vs. white*, and those few whites who are committed, will either have to leave South Africa or be lumped with the general white population.

The trade union movement in South Africa has been predominantly white, and predominantly anti-black. The Mine Workers Union which has worked constantly for the South African Government is very powerful. It has influence and it has categorically refused to admit that blacks can even qualify for the so-called grading of skilled worker. They have opposed any organized trade union for blacks. A compromise has been suggested by certain American companies operating in South Africa, that workers committees should be established to care for the needs of the black workers in a particular factory or in a particular industry. But these are really diversionary tactics to keep black workers from being an organized mass. It has been very difficult to organize black workers. They receive very small wages so there is not much that they can allocate in terms of members' fees. Also as you know, there is a general employment rate of 22% in South Africa. When you are offered a job, you cannot really negotiate what kind of wage you want. You take whatever is offered and usually it is far below what would give you a comfortable livelihood.

Q. I would like to know what kind of commitment you are requesting. How can we let the brothers know we are in the struggle with them in order to prevent the spreading of this apartheid ideology?

M. One can give assistance to the Liberation Movement in South Africa by making a direct donation through the Organization of African Unity or through the respective organizations which are now given observer status at the United Nations. It is not difficult to look up their addresses. It is also important to carry on activities in terms of the American involvement in South Africa. There are many corporations dealing directly with South Africa that channel a lot of money into South Africa to the extent that South Africa now manufactures their own armament. There is a United Nations embargo on supplying arms to South Africa; but this embargo has been ineffective because South Africa now manufactures those arms themselves under license and all this is made possible by American corporate investments. Many universities, and I would be surprised if this University is an exception, invest heavily in those companies which have South African connections, simply because the dividend from South African investment is very high, it ranges from 17 to 16%. If you receive that kind of dividend it is very attractive indeed. You can also make sure that if you are a school teacher, your pension fund is not invested in South

African gold mines, shares or diamonds or any of those multiple mineral resources in South Africa.¹

Q. You seem to be concentrating your visits in the Western countries. Does that mean you will not accept assistance from the Soviet Union?

M. The Pan African Congress follows the policy of non-alignment which has been repeatedly enunciated by the OAU. As of now the people of South Africa would look poorly on any representative who would not accept assistance on their behalf from anybody who is interested in helping them. Anybody who is in the gutter, who is trying to survive does not question who is giving him assistance. Your head, your neck is right there in the gutter and you are trying to survive, to breathe in that cesspool. If someone extends his hand to you and says, "Here, how can we help you?" you don't say to him, "Who are you and what are your intentions?" You grab that hand, you get out of the gutter, and maybe you can have a dialogue afterwards. And that is exactly the situation of the black people in South Africa. They are fighting for survival. They are fighting for time, and ultimately I am confident that they will win their battle.

Q. Has this film been shown to government officials and if so what has been their response?

M. Well, it has been very difficult to reach the higher levels of the government in this country, the people who make the decisions. It is very difficult to talk to them, and it is because we realize the importance of making them listen, making them take heed, that we want more people to see what is happening in South Africa, so that they can affect pressure and as you say there should be demonstrations. There has not been any demonstration against the South African involvement in Angola in conjunction with American involvement on the same side. Some people alleged that the planes South Africa is using in Angola are supplied by the American government. Now it is this kind of problem that can only be alleviated by more people knowing what the truth is, and having them apply pressure directly to Mr. Kissinger. I think it is important that Kissinger or whoever will take his place be approached because I mean, I'm an outsider, I can show him the film and he would probably say, "Well, what a miserable situation." But it will stop there. However, if he is aware that more of your congressmen and senators are against U.S. involvement in South Africa, perhaps something can ultimately be done.

But more important I think we have seen that America has been forced to take a position in Angola as a reaction to the

sure that the percentage of your takings there (and they have heavy takings!) goes to the Liberation Movement." That's a way in which they can participate in the future of South Africa.

Q. Are black tourists and dignitaries subjected to the same type of laws as the actual individuals of South Africa?

M. Black visitors receive a different treatment. They are taken on a diplomatic level, I believe--I just have this from hearsay, I have not experienced this myself, obviously--but black dignitaries and others are given a sort of different treatment and South Africa is able to do this kind of thing. We have heard that with Japanese business men they just receive them as "honorary whites" so they can transact their business comfortably. But with a black visitor it is up to you if you go around without the proper escort, because if you mix with other blacks, you are liable to be treated in the same way as any other black. They have in South Africa, what they call a "pass". This is a document you must carry on your person from the time you are sixteen until you die. You cannot be buried unless you show that you have the right to be where you are. It is a very important document. It creates great difficulties for you if you do not have it on your person. For instance, you cannot get married; you will not be buried; you cannot withdraw your savings nor can you get work unless this document is in proper order. This is how the government controls black people. But in order to release some of the frustrations from the blacks, they say there are certain blacks who are exempted from carrying this document. If you are a citizen of South Africa, if you have lived or worked for one white person for over 15 years without any interruption you can apply for this document. But you have to carry it on your person to prove that you are exempted to carry it. So you cannot win!

Q. What is the status of white women in South Africa?

M. I always try to confine myself to the black question. However, I can say as an outsider that the status of white women in South Africa is a very difficult one. They have passed a law in South Africa regarding relations between white and black. It forbids the "immorality act," and is supposed to prevent what is called carnal intercourse between black and white. The "immoral" there has nothing to do with the morality of the situation. It is just a law applicable to intercourse between blacks and whites and they extended it because it is not often practicable to catch people in the act. So if say they find a white with a black of different sex, sitting side by side, they are arrested for attempting to contravene the immorality act. If you are seated in a car and

Soviet Union's presence there. The rationale is based on the fear of communism. Now let us use a hypothetical case. The Liberation Movement in South Africa has asked for and received assistance from the Soviet Union in fighting against white South Africans. It seems logical to me that America will then intervene on the side of white South Africa to fight Communism there. It is this kind of situation that we are trying to avoid by informing the American people about the issues that are involved in South Africa. We are fighting to reestablish the position of the black man there in terms of his human work, in terms of his dignity. We are trying to make sure that the inhumanity which is being paraded under the cloak of apartheid is absolutely understood by each and everyone so that the issues are clear and it can only be done through more and more people knowing what the issues are in Southern Africa. This is why we would like this film to be seen by as many people as possible.

Q. Have the black congressmen, black representatives, done anything? Have they been able to see films like these? Have you been in contact with these people, like Tom Bradley?

M. So far the congressmen and the senators have been pretty occupied *with other matters*. I think only one congressman could have seen it, others have been preoccupied. No senators have seen it, unfortunately. I have no way in which I can force them to see it. I am an outsider. The film was shown on the Education Channel, the Public Broadcast System in New York, the WNET. I believe they have the right to repeat the program if there is a public demand for it. But the thing is this, when one is an outsider you can only use T.V. to build up so much pressure and beyond that you cannot go. It is left to people here who are committed, who are interested enough to feel strongly about it, to do something about it.

Q. Is there any black American tourism in South Africa?

M. There is not any organized tourism by involving Black Americans in South Africa. There are artists who go to South Africa, like the Supremes who went last summer, and occasionally black sportsmen. But as long as these artists go to South Africa, they legitimize the system there. I believe that at a certain stage, it would be possible to tell these artists not to go to South Africa. I made a distinction between asking them and telling them not to go. At the moment, there is no threat to them so they can go whenever they like, but I believe there will come a time when it would be possible to say to them, "Don't go, otherwise the consequences really will be heavy on you." Or, we could say to them, "Go to South Africa but make



"These blacks collect garbage in the back alleys of the white suburbs - They start chasing the truck at 6 every morning. The white driver never stops."

both of you are in the front seat, you are in trouble in South Africa. So usually, you will see a white man driving the car with a black female sitting in the back. So in certain situations you might think that the white man is a chauffeur for the black lady.

Reading the South African papers, you get the impression that if it were not for these laws the whole white women populations would go screaming in search of black males for the purpose of intercourse. This is the way the government treats white women in South Africa. Up to now, it seems that white women in South Africa have not been active in the women's movement. Perhaps it will happen at some future date.

Q. I've heard today that South Africa is applying for membership in the OAU. As ludicrous as this may sound, what possible concessions, if any, do you think South Africa may be willing to make towards their possible membership? What are some of the motives behind such a move?

M. Unfortunately, South Africa has an on-going dialogue with certain African countries. A few years ago, it would be unthinkable that South Africa would even be attempting to apply for membership of the OAU, but in today's situation in Southern Africa where other countries have already been receiving financial assistance from the South African government, where it is known that the South African government and representatives and even the Prime Minister of South African have even paid secret visits to some African countries, really nothing is surprising to me. I think that the entry of South Africa into the organization of African Unity would spell the doom of that organization, because it would be the betrayal of the interests of the peoples of South Africa.

Q. What measures is your organization taking to educate the average man in South Africa to gain equality or independence for himself? And if so, is the average black man in South Africa ripe for such movements that give him equal rights as whites? Has he gotten his nerves together to win independence?

M. The black people of South Africa have been fighting the longest of all the blacks. They have been fighting the white men forever--from the time they landed on the tip of Southern Africa in 1652. The blacks of South Africa are one of the few blacks who were never involved in the slave trade. They have been fighting the white man completely and the struggle continues. Their political consciousness requires no educating. Our main problem in South Africa today is the question of weaponry. We are facing a highly-skilled enemy equipped with highly-developed weapons, and the only thing we have at the

nately without their acting in one way or the other.

Q. If you are going to educate people to make a change, you must be thinking of focusing some place to try and make a change by letting the people see the weaknesses in the structure of the white ruling class. Where would you try to focus the effort of change?

M. This is obviously not an easy question to answer. I would not want to give a simplistic answer. I believe that basic to the South African situation is the impossibility of the maintenance of the white establishment. In trying to industrialize at the current rate, and considering the fall in immigration and their policy of keeping the blacks from participating fully in that industrial development, the white establishment will find that they have a highly-industrialized society which they are not able to keep up. There was a time, when the operating of lifts (elevators, you call them in this country) and other jobs like that were reserved for whites. Certain categories of vehicles could only be driven by whites. But as the culture has demanded more and more manpower they have had to modify their stance, their posture on these questions. And I believe this is the weak point of the whole structure and it can be exposed with the development of the Black Trade Union movement.

Q. From what countries are the white South Africans getting the majority of their weapons?

M. I can not really specify because most of the weapons now are manufactured in South Africa on license. As a result of the vast investments which have poured into South Africa, South Africa is self-sufficient. The United Nations passed a resolution saying that member countries should not supply arms to South Africa, and this resolution was circumvented by the device of investing heavily in South Africa. One of the subsidiary companies of Mr. Oppenheimer, which is involved in the manufacture of arms in South Africa accelerated their production. South Africa gets the right to manufacture new weapons on license from the Belgians, the Italians and the British, so they don't really need to buy arms from outside. For example, the aeroplanes you saw in the film were produced in South Africa on license. They have got permission from the British to produce certain parts of the engines, or rather the engines are produced by British companies. The new rifles are Italian introductions although it was invented in Belgium. So it goes. And it is no longer a question of which country supplies the most! However, the country that does it in a very defiant manner is France. The French government really spat in the face of the United Nations and the African countries, and continues openly to supply South Africa with arms. And there has not been the normal reaction from African countries

moment are spears and stones. Our people are dying every year in South Africa as a result of the spontaneous reaction towards that oppression. And the time has come when our leaders in South Africa say, black people must not be provoked to a premature uprising. They should wait until the time is ripe, until the weaponry is there, and that will surely come. It is not a question of their not understanding their situation, their political destiny. The myth the white man wants to perpetuate in South Africa about the inferiority of the black man is something they will fight until their last breath. We are waiting. We are anxious, and we are making sure that those children you saw in the film are not going to be poisoned by the propaganda that black children are inferior. So the point here is we are faced with the question of weaponry in South Africa. The day we are able to overcome the logistics in terms of the delivery of necessary arms, a new dawn will have arrived in South Africa.

Q. I would like to know in view of what has happened in Angola and is happening in Zimbabwe and Namibia, what types of changes are going on in South Africa?

A. I have to emphasize that there has been for a long time and there is still now an active underground movement in South Africa. There are two organizations--the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress which are defined to organize underground resistance. But you have to recall that in South Africa, there are no blacks in the armed forces, so that every time we have to train a guerilla fighter it has to be done outside South Africa and the cost of training a freedom fighter in Africa has gone up considerably. But you will recall that you have to transport somebody outside the country, train him for six months or a year, and then bring him inside. So it has been slow and the movement towards an active guerilla movement has been rather hampered by lack of money. But since Angola and Mozambique have achieved independence, the whole frontier between Mozambique and South Africa has become open, and it will take a lot of man power to defend it. There is the possibility that with the Angola situation developing favorably, the whole border between South Africa and Angola will be open and possibly the one between Zimbabwe and South Africa too. We hope ultimately that South Africa will be over-stretched in terms of man power that they will have to pull soldiers from the Atlantic Coast to the Indian Ocean coast. This way their man power will be tied down to particular spots and with a bit of luck the internal situation will develop. In Namibia there is already something happening. There is active guerilla work going on there, but it is inconceivable that the black people of South Africa will allow the kind of conditions that you have seen on the film to continue indefi-

that you would expect for that kind of activity. We have fortunately had some success in France in widely distributing the film. We hope that the working people in France, would take some action in the near future, since their reaction to the film has been very encouraging. Thank you very much indeed.

Footnote

1. See *Ufahamu*, Vol. III, No. 2, Fall 1972 pp. 117-150 for a detailed breakdown of US investments in South Africa, and in particular the extent of the state of California's involvement with Southern African racism.

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Teshome H. Gabriel, former editor-in-chief of UFAHAMU (1972-73) is a Faculty Development Scholar and doctoral student in Film/TV Criticism in the Theater Arts Department, UCLA.



"The graves have been dug in preparation for the next month's toll"

attempted such a work elsewhere,¹ and there is no need to attempt a poor summary here. Suffice it to limit ourselves to our modest objective.

I have argued elsewhere² that one cannot understand Fanon's thought without understanding the material conditions in which it emerged. We need to know something about his life and personality and the incidents which shaped his life and thought. Fanon was very much unlike the so-called dispassionate intellectual who shuts himself in his study in a distance from the object of his study. On the contrary, he was a man who closely identified with what he studied and a man who lived his thoughts. His life and thought were closely intertwined.

A study of his life as a background to this thought cannot therefore be overemphasized. However, I do not intend to undertake this task in any detail here for the reason that standard biographies³ on Fanon now exist and there is no need to restate what has already been done. It will suffice to give here a brief summary of his life paying close attention to the incidents which shaped his life and thought.

I

As is well known, Fanon was born on the island of Martinique of an upper middle class family, on July 20, 1925. It was a society known for its rigid social structure and social relations. Status depended largely on colour. Like other Black families, he was a descendant of slaves shipped to the island in the 17th century. Though freed at the time of the French Revolution, the Martinicans were, however, dominated in all aspects of social, political and economic life by the descendants of the slave masters who were the leading property owners on the island. As in all colonial territories education was structured in such a way as to produce willing agents for the regime. So in Martinique Black children were subjected to French education, the end result of which was to assimilate them into French culture, and to become Black Frenchmen though of subordinate status.

In Fanon's case the demands of assimilation, vigorously pursued by the school, and the family were countered by one other factor, the influence of Aime Cesaire, who as Fanon's teacher at the *lycee* was propounding the philosophy of negritude in which he was telling his countrymen that not only was there nothing wrong in being Black, but it was indeed good to be so. For most middle class Martinicans at the time, this was a shock. Thus, while the influence of the family and the school were moving the young Fanon in one direction, that is,