

WHAT did Dakar mean to me? The richest and most educative experience of my life. If one could live many lives in one week, I certainly did. These are some of my impressions of the meeting and of private conversations with members of the cultural delegation of the ANC.

Maybe some of my colleagues won't like being called "cultural workers". Maybe they do not feel the need to become part of alternative artistic structures. Maybe they do not feel ready to commit themselves politically.

Maybe some of them do.

As for me, I came away with the firm conviction that we in South Africa will have to come to terms with the realities of the cultural boycott and understand the reasons behind it. Thabo Mbeki, Barbara Masekela and Manala Manzini put their case eloquently.

The ANC is wary of people jumping onto the anti-apartheid bandwagon to further their individual careers. (What Barbara called the "Ipi Tombi syndrome"). They receive appeals from hundreds of people who want special consideration for their work. The ANC feels that it cannot verify the integrity of these individuals and that it would be counter-productive to appoint some kind of selection committee in South Africa.

However, the ANC after much agonised debate, decided to reconsider its stance on the cultural boycott. They stressed that this was an ongoing debate. It was felt that genuine alternative democratic structures were being formed inside South Africa "through struggle and sacrifice" and that

Dakar — Talking About Culture

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these structures should not be penalised, but encouraged. The ANC clearly approved of the recently formed alternative structures by musicians and writers and urged actors and film makers to do the same. (Similar structures have been formed by alternative film makers and actors.)

It seemed to me that the ANC preferred to deal with clearly identifiable organisations whose political integrity had been established. They emphasised the need for broader based decision making and participation to provide a democratic alternative to the present elitist structures in the arts. The alternative organisations should commit themselves to training programmes to promote further democratization.

I can imagine the uneasiness of some of my colleagues who might feel that their work would only be acceptable if it had a strong political message. I can only answer that this was not the impression I gained from the ANC. Barbara Masekela was emphatic that they did not see art in terms of political pamphleteering.

As I see it, this does not mean that all our work has to be politicised, but rather that artists can make a valuable contribution to the

struggle in their personal capacity.

How does the Dakar experience affect me and my work? I have been propelled in a new direction and maybe I can find a wider audience which will appreciate me for what I am and respect my beliefs, even if they do not necessarily agree with them. Van Zyl Slabbert spoke of our need as South Africans to break out of the cocoon of isolation that has been imposed on us. I believe this applies especially to artists who tend to isolate themselves in the belief that this is necessary for creativity. No artist in South Africa can afford the luxury of a career that ignores the political realities of our country: the State of Emergency; the thousands in detention; the murder of activists by death squads; the increasingly sinister press curbs and all other impediments to freedom of expression. Actors, who are visible people in our society must speak out against these abuses, as they could be a powerful influence for change.

Barbara Masekela emphasised the importance of women in a future South Africa and the need to change the hearts and minds of South African women. They must be encouraged to break out of their domestic bondage and play an active part in the destiny of their country. White South African women should consider carefully the implications of their husbands and sons doing duty in the townships.

We had come a long way to find something so close to home. It seemed that I had to journey to Africa, to feel first-hand the impact of the banner carried by the young children in Ouagadougou: "Apartheid is a crime against humanity." The obscenity of apartheid and the slave trade were inextricably linked in my mind after a visit to Gorée island. The words of Du Bois's poem carried a special significance. I was moved to tears when a young Ghanaian read the final words of this poem by the black American writer who spent his last years in Ghana:

"I felt the blazing glory of the sun;
I heard the song of children crying "Free!"
I saw the face of freedom . . .
And I died —"

Grethe Fox



Ms. Lindiwe Mabuze (ANC chief representative in the Nordic countries) with Ms. Barbara Masekela (ANC Secretary for Arts and Culture) with Trudie de Ridder and Grethe Fox of the South African delegation. Excerpts from Ms. Fox's response to Dakar appear on this page.