



## Mzwakhe on culture

**Mzwakhe Mbuli of the UDF Cultural Desk was interviewed in a weekly newspaper about struggle, the role of culture and the cultural boycott. Here we reprint the article.**

**QUESTION:** Do you find any need to embark on a cultural boycott, especially since there are issues which need more urgent attention in this country? Is it not going to have an effect on the expansion of our artist's talents?

**MZWAKHE'S ANSWER:** There is a dire need to start implementing such tactics in an unchangeable country such as ours.

The boycott is being used to blockade apartheid culture, so as to allow space for a true people's culture to emerge.

We are going to have to promote our own culture, which for some time has been suppressed by those who regard it as primitive and barbaric.

We should use it as a tool to raise people's awareness of their living conditions and the reasons for their sufferings.

It must be remembered that culture permeates all aspects of the people's national struggle - be it workers demanding better conditions and a living wage, be it students demanding democratically elected SRCs or that the doors of

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education and culture be flung wide open, or be it communities fighting against high rents.

**Who are cultural workers and what do you think their role is in society?**

Mz: By cultural workers, I mean all writers, poets, musicians, playwright, actors and those involved in other art forms. They all have a special duty to struggle in the field of ideas and become inventive and make discoveries. In this way there is no need to start borrowing ideas from outside.

**Do you support the idea of a blanket ban as far as cultural activities are concerned?**

Mz: I strongly believe that a total cultural boycott will weaken our struggle against apartheid. I think even the African National Congress (ANC) does not support that idea.

But I want to quote something General Jannie Geldenhuis, chief of the South African Defence Force, said at a braai for the rebel Australian cricket team.

He said: 'The arms boycott and the sport boycott have been the most damaging of our enemies' weapons - that is why the army is so concerned that teams from overseas keep coming here.'

I still insist that it is important that the apartheid regime and all its supporting forces be isolated from all foreign assistance - technical, scientific and cultural.

**How are you going to screen artists to ensure that the boycott is not abused?**

Mz: Firstly, the democratic movement needs to discuss this. Furthermore, we need to be sure that the artists are not leaving the country on money-making missions and other such projects.

They must be committed to informing the international community about our plight and struggle in South Africa.

Before thinking of any overseas trip, artists should answer this question: Are we as cultural workers, responsible and disciplined enough to become the voice of

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the oppressed people?

And that is not enough. The trip should also have the approval of overseas solidarity groups.

If all these factors are taken into account, such overseas trips should not be affected by the cultural boycott.

**What do you think can be done to liberate our own culture?**

Mz: Cultural liberation cannot take place outside the broader struggle for a democratic society in South Africa.

**Do you have any reasons to support this statement?**

Mz: Yes, art does not exist in a vacuum - in fact, art is produced by artists, and artists, in turn, are products of the community.

In fact, all cultural workers should come under the discipline of the mass democratic movement. Their objectives amongst others, should be to reclaim people's rights, their cultural heritage and values, their dignity, which have all been usurped by imperialist domination.

**How can this be achieved?**

Mz: It can be done by simply defending, consolidating and advancing our struggle, on both the political and cultural fronts.

We have to act against forces that seek to destroy, directly or indirectly, our cultural values, history, achievements and our resistance.

**What effect does apartheid have on culture?**

Mz: The system of apartheid has resulted in two forms of culture - the culture of the dominant and the culture of the dominated.

**Can you draw the line between the culture of the 'dominated' and that of the 'dominant'?**

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**Mz:** The dominant culture is characterised by total control of the means of production, and the creation of the massive political and military apparatus by the apartheid regime.

In fact, apartheid culture means a state of emergency, the evictions of families, soldiers in the townships, forced removals, breathing teargas, hunger in the land of plenty, lack of housing for blacks while white houses remain empty, the reinforcement of the Group Areas Act, restricted funerals, which undermine people's tradition.

**Did the colonisers dilute the people's culture?**

**Mz:** History teaches us that the colonial kingdoms and totalitarian regimes were established, with all the crimes and exploitation that characterise them.

However, the cultural resistance of the people was never destroyed. Our culture has survived all colonial and imperial exploitation.

**Do you have any message for committed cultural workers?**

**Mz:** I want to repeat that all cultural workers have a special role to play, be they musicians, actors, poets, film-makers, playwrights or sculptors.

**How do you feel after your tape 'Change is Pain' was banned?**

**Mz:** That was an experiment. This is a sick society. How foolish is the government to decide to ban an experiment before the actual product. I am going ahead with my next album which will be titled 'Likely To Be Banned'.

The banning of 'Change is Pain' has served to motivate and inspire me. They haven't banned my mind yet. I can still produce plays, poetry, dance and music.

I am joining the masses black and white, as well as the international community, in calling for the unbanning of the outlawed organisations.

If that happens maybe my tape and other people's works could be unbanned.

**What is it that you dislike about high profile musicians?**

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Mz: Most of the local artists are 'owned' by managers. they are being controlled and directed by capitalists instead of being in control of what they are doing.

**You said the last time that you were concerned about the effect state propaganda has on people. Can you tell us more?**

Mz: The television and radio stations bombard people with a whole lot of ideas that neutralise them. Their intelligence is manipulated. People are manipulated to a point where they can see Western civilisation without seeing oppression.

The propaganda is used in subtle ways, to bolster the cracking pillars of apartheid. Remember the Info song, but that was so blatant nobody really swallowed it.

**Can you give us an example?**

Mz: Lets look at churches for instance. People are urged to wear jackets and ties, as though God only approves them if they are 'suitably' clothed.

Has it been taken into consideration that the majority of our people are either unemployed or do not have enough money to buy such fancy clothes?

I mean, this idea of dressing up to go to church contradicts with the belief that God always sides with the poor and the oppressed.

Think of a classroom situation. Students are discouraged to participate in politics whereas the officials of the Department of Education and Training are members of the ruling National Party. It's a clear case of double standards.

**What is your advice to cultural workers?**

MZ: We need to be careful of attempts to divide us.

History teaches us that imperialists over the years have strived to divide oppressed people from each other.

They established social gaps and culturally alienated groups and individuals. They create a middle class which gets a stake in the unjust system and acts as a buffer between the oppressed and the oppressor.

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**What effect does this have on the community?**

Mz: One lot start seeing itself as culturally superior, because they have nice houses, lots of clothes and money - they have become westernised.

They undermine the majority of the people and their struggle for freedom. But this is not the only way the majority of people are undermined. Even the usage of different languages on radio and TV is geared to divide us.

Look, I do not have problems with different languages being used. After all any language is part of the people's culture in any society.

But in South Africa today language is being used to make people feel they belong to different tribal homelands instead of to one country and one nation.

The government has also used traditional chiefs, who are to some degree acceptable to the masses, to do their dirty work.

The late Dr Verwoerd used traditional chiefs to pave the way for the Bantustan system.

**Is that tactic also applied in sport?**

For sure it is. One must look very closely at the concept of multiracial sport.

The South African government is using multiracial sport to lie to the International community. I am against mixing blacks and whites on a soccerfield for 60 minutes without mixing taking place in all parts of life to the level of parliament.

Sport, like anything else, cannot be normal under apartheid.

**Lots of money is being pumped into sports like soccer. How do you feel about this?**

Mz: Sport in this country is influenced by commercialism and profit-making, instead of being orientated to the needs of the working population of this country. Soccer teams should be taking the people's concern to heart. At the very least we should have people's soccer teams, like 'Walter Sisulu United' or the 'Cosatu Eleven'.

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**What is really important to you?**

Mz: That South African culture should always be inspired by the ideals of the Freedom Charter - that the doors of learning and culture shall be opened. The government should be discovering, developing and encouraging national talent to benefit cultural life for everybody in this country. It should be a challenge to all of us in the progressive movement to start promoting these ideals.



DOLLAR BRAND – Strandfontein – 1972

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