

THE WORLD OF NAT NAKASA



Selected writings of the late Nat Nakasa Ravan Press/Bateleur Press

Nat Nakasa was born in Durban. He worked as a journalist in Johannesburg writing for Drum and Golden City Post. He eventually became the first black journalist on the Rand Daily Mail. In 1964 he left South Africa on an exit permit, after being refused a passport, to take up a Niemann Scholarship to study journalism at Harvard University in the U.S.A. On the 14th July 1965 he committed suicide at the age of twenty-eight in New York City.

This book, containing 39 of Nat Nakasa's writings, is edited by Essop Patel with an introduction by Nadine Gordimer, who says of him "... he was a new kind of man in South Africa—he accepted without question and with easy dignity and natural pride his Africanness, and he took equally for granted that his identity as a man among men, a human among fellow humans, could not be legislated out of existence even by all the apartheid laws in the statute book."

We have decided to show our appreciation of this book by publishing an extract from it.

From cover of the book.

A NATIVE OF NOWHERE

Some time next week, with my exit permit in my bag, I shall cross the borders of the Republic and immediately part company with my South African citizenship. I shall be doing what some of my friends have called, 'taking a grave step.'

For my part, there is nothing grave about it. You needn't even be brave to take the 'step'. It is enough to be young, reckless and ready to squander and gamble your youth away. You may, I dare say, even find the whole business exciting.

According to reliable sources, I shall be classed as a prohibited immigrant if I ever try to return to South Africa. What this means is that self-confessed Europeans are in a position to declare me, an African, a prohibited immigrant, bang on African soil. Nothing intrigues me more.

And the story does not end there. Once out I shall apparently become a stateless person, a wanderer, unless I can find a country to take me in. And that is what I have been trying to achieve in the past few days. I cannot enter America on an exit permit even though I have a scholarship to take up in that country. The Americans will let me in only on a valid passport from a country that is prepared to have me when I leave America.

Apparently, there can be no question of getting the Americans to depart from this, their official policy, unless, perhaps, I moved into the US as a Cuban refugee. For I have read about many Cuban citizens who left their country for the US in that way. But I have ruled this out as something too involved to try. Meanwhile, I have thought of becoming a Zambian, a Nigerian, or a Malawian. But these countries have no embassies in South Africa, so getting their travel documents would take ages.

My best bet may well be to embrace the Jewish faith and procure Israeli citizenship. But again that has its own complications. As an Israeli I may automatically be prohibited entry into Egypt. I may be barred from going to report on any Pan-African conferences that may be held in Cairo in the future.

On the other hand, should I become an Egyptian, I may be expected to declare war on all my Jewish friends—and, Heaven knows, there are many of them. Besides, I don't think I have ever seen an Egyptian, and I have no idea of Egyptian life.

There is some hope, however, that my problems may be solved by the good old Scandinavian countries. I may become the first Scandinavian Pondo in history.

A Black viking! Imagine it!

Finally, if all this doesn't work out, I may be compelled to become a Russian. In this way I might even crash into the limelight as an international statesman. After all, the Russians are known to be very keen on backing an African as the next President of the United Nations. Instead of scouring Africa for a candidate, the Russians might start backing their own African—me.

Having achieved that status, there would be nothing to stop me from rising to the highest office in Russia itself. Who knows? I may wind up as the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union. After all, Dr Verwoerd was born in Holland and he became the Prime Minister of **die Republiek van Suid-Afrika**.

If I should feel homesick while ruling Russia, I could pass a few laws to South-Africanise Russia a little. The first step would be to introduce influx control in Moscow. Get all the native Russians to carry passes and start endorsing them in and out of town. There are enough African and Indian students studying in Russia nowadays to help me carry out

my plan. Apartheid all over again! This time with the Russians at the receiving end. Admittedly, this may be described as Afro-Asian minority rule. Others will call it **baaskap**. But we would call it parallel development, or black leadership with justice.

We could introduce the exit-permit system to cut down on the numbers of Russians in the place. At the same time we could bring in millions of Indians and Africans from Bombay, Calcutta, Umtata and Zululand on an immigration scheme—just as South Africa brings in white immigrants by the thousand every month.

We would have to scrap Communism from the start. In fact, I would import South Africa's Suppression of Communism Act lock, stock and barrel. Communism would be an enemy number one. Anybody who opposed my apartheid policies too much would wind up banned or detained.

Unfortunately, all these are mere dreams. For the time being, my future lies in a number of diplomatic bags. Various consuls are trying to see what can be done for me. I hope, when I write next week, it will be as a former South African. As far as I can, I shall try not to interfere with your domestic affairs, let alone meddle with your white or non-white politics. □

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