

NOTES

Michael Kitso Dingake and the Association of South Africans Living in Botswana

*Douglas Tsiako**

Introduction

Speaking as a representative of the Association of South Africans in Botswana (ASABO) at the funeral of the African National Congress (ANC) stalwart Dr Michael Kitso Dingake in Gaborone on 14 April 2024, editorial consultant Douglas Tsiako took a sweeping view of Botswana as the most frontline of the Frontline States during South Africa's tortured struggle for freedom and democracy and cast a harsh light on what he calls 'eclipses of history over interstices of time' to find much in the shadows behind the scenes.

Ties that Bind

Early in his life, the man whom we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to was convinced of the rectitude of resistance to the monstrosity that apartheid was and acted in accordance with his convictions. As a child, Michael Kitso Dingake grew up against the background of the Second World War in which Africans, including Batswana and South Africans, had fought to stop the onslaught of Nazism, mainly in Europe, and to liberate those parts of Europe that had come under the clutches of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, among them Poland and France. Situated in the valley of the Motloutse River that flows into the mighty Limpopo, Bobonong has the environment of Nature's gift of scenic beauty and is redolent of Eden's plenitude of flora and fauna, hence the nearby Mashatu Game Reserve at the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers. But the village is also close to Beit Bridge, which Mike Dingake must have been aware of even in his childhood, as it connected the minority white regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa over land across the crocodile-infested waters of the Limpopo.

Permit me to call him Bra Mike because his generosity of spirit and mild manner allowed him that kind of bonding with people much younger than him. Ecclesiastes 7:9 seems to reflect the kind of gentleman that he was as it says, 'Do not be quick to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools'. He was nearly 10 years old when the National Party rose to power in South Africa and when the State of Israel was established inside Palestine, both in May 1948. South Africa's DF Malan's regime was thus bristling with confidence when it made two demands on Britain and the United States that directly impacted Botswana. One was the renewal of an old demand of the incorporation of the High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland (colonial Botswana), Basutoland (colonial Lesotho), and Swaziland (colonial Eswatini) into the apartheid state. Mercifully, this never came to pass, thanks to the independence movement that was gaining momentum across the African continent.

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The other was bizarre and notable for its opprobrium for human interaction and racial integration: newlyweds Seretse and Ruth Khama must be jettisoned out of Botswana, then a British protectorate, because their presence here was too close for the comfort of the Verwoerdian doctrine of apartheid and sacrilege of (assumed) Calvinist morality of racial separation and order of white supremacy.

But extraordinary as it was, this demand was framed as an ultimatum that must be met if the Manhattan Project, America's top-secret scheme where German nuclear physicists escaped from the terror of the 'herenvolk' (master race) of Nazi Germany, was to supervise the production of more atomic and nuclear bombs to ensure America's supremacy in a world that was becoming increasingly divided between East and West. Continued production depended on an uninterrupted supply of uranium, whose only two known sources at the time were South Africa and the Soviet Union. However, the ideological divide meant that the United States would have no truck with the Soviets, while the heresy of apartheid presented no such barrier to a country of Jim Crow laws and lynchings. And so America prevailed upon Britain to have Seretse and his family banished from the land of his birth to live in exile in the North Atlantic island state, thus securing the flow of uranium to the Manhattan Project for the production of more bombs. Two had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to (from the perspective of the Allied Powers) expedite the surrender of Japan in the Second World War and bring the conflagration to an end.

Kgosi Mokgosi III

However, being not one to miss an opportunity to cock a snook at racist bigots, Seretse first took his small family into internal exile in Ramotswa, the principal town of Balete in the southeast of the protectorate that sits right on the border with the apartheid state just east of Ngotwane River. The couple and their two children, Jacqueline and Ian, were received at the residence of Kgosi Mokgosi III, where they lived for some time. The reverberations of the rigmarole between Seretse and Kgosi Tshekedi (his uncle and regent of Bangwato) in Serowe over the same issue must have reached Bra Mike, then a youth in the prime of his intellect and physique, in Bobonong and probably helped to crystallise for him the import of racial bigotry, if it could be used by chauvinists to infiltrate the sanctity of marriage and seek to rend it asunder.

Rre Dingake clearly drew lessons from the rancour because in conversations with him many long years later, he told me how the regent, Kgosi Tshekedi Khama, was a highly progressive man but one massively misunderstood and unfairly demonised. But he also respected Seretse for having stood his ground when he was vilified and derided on all sides for having taken the honourable step of taking the hand of a woman he loved in marriage because he could not understand how the extraneous issue of race and colour - if it was an issue at all - should be a barrier to romance.

He was only 24 when he left Bob City - as the locals of the village where people venerate the Nare call Bobonong - for South Africa, setting the stage for joining the ANC in 1965. Thankfully, much has been said and written about his illustrious work in the liberation movement, which obviates the need for me to repeat it here. I will therefore attempt to briefly describe the world that he found when he stepped out of the penal colony of Robben Island on 5 May 1981 and made his subsequent return to Botswana via the Tlokweng border post.

For Botswana and other members of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), the 1980s was a time of heightened discord between the Soviet Bloc and the West that was aggravated by the rise of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States, who together pushed the political spectrum further to the Right in what were arguably the two centres of influence that mattered the most in the Western world. But while this benefitted apartheid South Africa, it also galvanised SADCC and the Frontline States, both of whose members were also part of the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations, to drive a dual agenda of isolation of the apartheid regime and imposition of economic sanctions on it.

Thankfully, Zimbabwe had gained independence at the turn of the decade and added its clout to the campaign and fortress of resistance to apartheid. However, South Africa had invaded Angola at the very hour of that country's independence in November 1975 in an attempt to overthrow, or at least destabilise, the pro-Soviet MPLA government of Agostinho Neto, who had just been sworn into office. The arrival of Cuban forces and an upsurge in the supply of American weapons to the rebel UNITA bases, notably Stinger surface-to-air missiles and artillery spotter planes flown by American pilots, turned southern Angola into a fierce battleground of East and West.

Across the sub-continent in Mozambique, apartheid South Africa, alongside Rhodesian forces until April 1980, was leading intensified Western efforts to dislodge the socialist government of FRELIMO through Alfonso Dlakama's Renamo. The death of Mozambican president Samora Machel when his plane crashed into a hillside just inside South Africa at night on 19 October 1986, reportedly by means of a decoy used by South African forces, is another illustration of how the Cold War had become very hot in Southern Africa. One of nine survivors of the crash, Fernando Manuel João, reported finding elite units of the South African Defence Force when he returned to the crash site after seeking help. The Mozambican leader was returning from a meeting of the Frontline States in Zambia, where the key agenda item was what to do with the continued support for Jonas Savimbi's UNITA by the governments of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire and Kamuzu Banda in Malawi, who were surrogates of apartheid South Africa.

The 1980s were also characterised by increased military incursions into the Frontline States and raids on alleged bases of the liberation movement operatives in these countries where the abomination of apartheid had compelled an increasing number of citizens to respond to the position of the United Nations – and the League of Nations before it – that third countries and their citizens had an obligation to extend support in men, money, and material to recognised liberation movements.

Stewardship

This is the subcontinent that Bra Mike found when he joined his fellow Batswana as a free man in 1981. I benefitted from him when he joined the Board of Mmegi, for which I worked as deputy editor, combining with another stalwart of the liberation movement, Patrick van Rensburg, to offer a stewardship that added to the newspaper's efforts as a platform for change and a part of Southern Africa's small alternative press. It was in this climate that we forged links with Anton Harber at *The Weekly Mail* (now *The Mail & Guardian*) in Johannesburg, thanks especially to Methaetsile Leepile and Titus Mbuya

after he came on board, as well as to Gwen Ansel, Keto Segwai, Judy Apsler, Clifford Meyer, and my friend and colleague, the late Rampholo Molefhe. We made a good team, *Ek se!* The purpose of our relationship with *The Weekly Mail* was very clear - we needed to be in touch with the rising wave of the liberation movement inside, as led by the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), because the irreversible surge for freedom and determination to obtain it had links to the ANC in exile.

It was in this powerful moment of solidarity in the liberation movement that I received a letter from the mother of Robert McBride, a brave uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) cadre who was arrested after a daring operation, asking us to join the campaign for her son's reprieve from death row and release from prison. (With letter bombs and other concealed explosives killing people at the time, and the handwriting on the envelope of the registered letter looking like a white woman's, I took no chances and had the police open it for me).

It was also during this time that two officers of Military Intelligence at the Botswana Defence Force (BDF), Moth and Vic, asked me to inform Patrick van Rensburg and Michael Dingake that agents of the apartheid regime may be after them (again). Both men took it in stride. An important man whom I expected to be present in this audience today may remember that it was during this time that a conference was held in Arusha, Tanzania where - among other things - an organisation called the Federation of Southern African Journalists (FSAJ) was formed, and he put his immense diplomatic skills to great use to overcome resistance from the Tanzanian delegation - presumably over Botswana's poor record at the Liberation Committee of the OAU - to my being on the founding committee of the FSAJ. Comrade Thabo Mbeki - now former president of South Africa and midwife, alongside President Cyril Ramaphosa, at the difficult birth of the new South Africa - became the chairman of that committee, Charles Chikerema of *The Herald* newspaper in Zimbabwe the secretary general, and me the deputy secretary general of FSAJ. Raborifi of the ANC was also on the committee.

To illustrate the value of solidarity and, therefore, like Nelson Mandela, to never forget our obligations to others, the liberation movements of Southern Africa present at that conference - namely the ANC, the PAC, SWAPO, FRELIMO, and ZANU-PF (yes, some of the organisations were evidently finding it difficult to completely exfoliate the hard flakes of the struggle) - were joined by fraternal organisations from abroad, including and especially the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) of Yasser Arafat that was with us throughout the difficult terrain in many other aspects of the struggle. The objectives of FSAJ were clear - to put the liberation struggle and its leaders on the offensive in the dissemination of information and propaganda and the enemies of the people, the apartheid regime and its Western allies, on the defensive. We had no illusions about the task before us in the ubiquitous presence of pro-apartheid publications and Western media hollering from the mountaintops, notably the BBC, the VOA, and Reuters, for whom those in quest of freedom and racial harmony were simply terrorists. Even so, we were undaunted because, like the man whom we are gathered to salute and bid farewell to, Rre Dingake here, we were driven by the force of our convictions.

The great man that I earlier said I had expected would be here with us - an eminent personage in the ANC in exile - may also remember how he, a few years after Arusha and in spite of his eminence, had me lead a delegation of FSAJ on a courtesy call

on President Joaquim Chissano in Maputo, Mozambique. (I do not mind telling this gracious audience that one of my most cherished memories from that day is being served tea - personally - by none other than Graca Machel before we left for State House!) President Chissano appealed to us to raise the clarion call by rallying everyone in newsrooms across the sub-continent and beyond to the cause of the liberation movement, which call fell squarely within the remit of FSAJ. Years before, the country that forms the southeastern coast of Africa had been on the verge of economic success and was edging towards Botswana's achievement as Southern Africa's best in primary health care, a prospect that apartheid South Africa found intolerable under a Marxist government in its neighbourhood.

Ahmed Ben Bella

But if anyone was ever in doubt of Botswana's contribution to the liberation struggle and is consequently doubtful of this nation's credentials and role in it, it can only be because of the ignorance of such people regarding this matter and the sheer geography of this republic that dictated the location of routes of infiltration of MK cadres through it. Beginning in the 1960s when Nelson Mandela passed through Lobatse en route to Algeria for a critical meeting with Ahmed Ben Bella, after which MK was formed; the historic PW Botha meeting with Kenneth Kaunda in a specially built mobile home just across the border from Tlokweng in Botswana in April 1982; the arrest and imprisonment of the hero that we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to; as well as the exploratory conference of the youth wings of the ANC and the PAC with Jeugkrug of Mathinus 'Kort Broek' van Schalkwyk in Gaborone in the late 1980s, Botswana was the most frontline of the Frontline States. But as we all know, these were but mere indexes of much more serious work - a considerable amount of it planned and executed from the high-density neighbourhood of Bontleng in Gaborone - that was always in progress to advance the attainment of freedom for all.

We at ASABO are aware of these things and are custodians of a great deal of information and knowledge about them throughout what many may see as eclipses of history across interstices of time during which the world's largest liberation movement prosecuted a just struggle against one of the world's most profane and violent heretical doctrines that had elements of Nazism, a distorted understanding of Calvinism, fraudulent influences of Sigmund Freud's theory of race - itself proven a falsehood and a heresy - and Zionism. But this is not due to any special genius that we are gifted with but is simply because if we were ourselves not present when the instances of malevolence that were concomitant to apartheid and the spirited resistance to them occurred - both spontaneous and organised - our predecessors were. For instance, I was only 13 years old when my father entrusted me with smuggling the portrait of Patrice Lumumba from our humble township home at 1053 Mokhesi Street in Dobsonville in Soweto, then in the West Rand, to my maternal grandmother's homestead at Goo-Ra-Keebine (wa Moloinyana ex-Difetlhamollo in Molepolole) in Ramotswa, Botswana, after the popular picture of the first Prime Minister of the Congo Republic (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was suddenly declared a prohibited publication by the apartheid regime. It had commanded a pride of place on the dining room wall next to the wedding portrait of my parents in the standard oblong wooden frame that was in almost every home in Soweto and other townships of urban South Africa at the time.

My father's explanation of why the apartheid regime and the CIA had featured the most in the cruel assassination of the Congolese leader and of the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld in the 1960s formed an early part of my political consciousness and nascent impetus to resist apartheid, whose vicious nature was portrayed by the propensity for violence in the conduct of the South African Police (SAP), to whom everyone in the townships aptly referred to as Satan After People.

As an organisation, the poorly styled Association of South Africans Living in Botswana, better known as ASABO, came into existence in 1995 when we enjoyed the limelight of the presence of Presidents Sir Ketumile Masire and Nelson Mandela at our launch in Gaborone. As the founding chairman of ASABO, France Pale will agree with me that we are custodians of much also because some of us were also members of Medu Art Ensemble, the cultural wing of the ANC that turned Gaborone into a citadel of cultural resistance in its own right, which also served as a decoy to throw the scent off MK cadres awaiting a signal to set off on their mission. This is the Medu that counts among its achievements the campaign against attempts by PW Botha's apartheid regime to scupper SADCC by means of what the apartheid regime proposed to call by the telling, if also singularly cumbersome, name of Constellation of Southern African States as a Bulwark Against Communism, which fell flat before it could take off.

However, we discovered quite late that we had been infiltrated after the mole was arrested in Zimbabwe. While we remain to be corrected here, we believe Billy van Zyl was exchanged for high-value prisoners on death row, among them Robert McBride, in the course of CODESA. But he had caused irreparable damage to the struggle and to the families of those who perished in the dead-of-night 14 June 1985 raid on Gaborone in which some in the Botswana command of MK perished in an overkill that only Hosts of Hell can visit upon people dedicated to the execution of a just cause. Before then, one morning we had woken up to find an article in the *Rand Daily Mail* that had details of the registration number plates of the vehicles we used, including the finer detail that each vehicle had a set of two registration number plates (by arrangement with the Special Branch) that were regularly changed in order to confuse the enemy, as well as the location - by street and number - of the house in Bontleng that we operated from.

As is now well known, the toll of the dead in the 14 June 1985 raid includes George 'The Big George' Phahle and his wife Ous Lindie, who had done much to grow and raise the level of social work in Botswana when she worked for the Ministry of Local Government and Lands, and outstanding artist Thami Mnyele. The remains of these individuals have been exhumed and reburied in South Africa in befitting ceremonies at which ASABO was represented by Rhoda Sekgororoane. The hero whom we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to, Rre Michael Kitso Dingake, who was an outstanding member of ASABO in his own right, had been present at the exhumations.

'Further Evidence: Hit Squads'

Other notable members of Medu were Wally Serote, who in 2003 motivated for the formation of a special committee for formally paying tribute to Botswana for having welcomed refugees and the country's role in the liberation struggle. But in my view, nobody was more dedicated to the work of Medu than my good friend, the late Bachana Mokwena, who was in the 'advance guard' that returned to South Africa early in the negotiations but sadly died in a car crash while driving back from the funeral of ANC

lawyer, Bheki Mlangeni. Bheki had died when he tried to listen to a cassette on a tape recorder labelled 'Further Evidence: Hit Squads' that he had received in the mail, while subsequent investigations pointed to Bachana's car having been tampered with by loosening the nuts on its wheels by agents of the apartheid regime, even as the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations were underway. His dear spouse, Myriam, survived but was seriously maimed. The sensational songbird beloved by Batswana, Sonti Mndebele, whose father was South African and mother Motswana, was another member of the Medu Art Ensemble, along with Ruth Moore and Sinah Molefi. It is difficult not to remember, albeit only in passing, that Medu had a music band in which Sonti sang soprano, Ous Lindie (Phahle) alto, Bachana Mokwena second tenor, and I first tenor, while Bra Jonas Gwangwa was on trombone (of course!) and Kush on congas. At one time, Radio Botswana extended to us the largesse of use of its Green Studio for practice because we were due to record master tapes of a set of freedom songs there.

My apologies for the little digression, but the recollection was a little too *lekker* (nice) to ignore because there were occasional moments of sunshine that lifted the senses and would stay to rekindle the spirit of the comrades in the umbral climate of the struggle in those difficult times for Southern Africa. After he successfully motivated for thanking Botswana and Batswana for their role in the struggle, Bra Wally was joined by others on a committee formed for that purpose, which he chaired. These included Baleka Mbete, Leloba Molema, Thandi Lejwabe, Urel, Nathaniel 'Bra Nat' Serache, Motsei Rapelana, and Rhoda Sekgororoane, along with the man we are gathered here to salute and bid farewell to. The inaugural ceremony of 'Ditebogo', or 'Ties that Bind', took place in 2003, the same year that Bra Wally had begun to organise for the objective. He and Bra Nat - who had survived an attack on his Gaborone home on 13 February 1985 - travelled from South Africa to join everyone in events that included the slaughtering of an ox for cleansing the graves of the 14 June 1985 raid at the city's Extension 14 Cemetery.

The naming of the library at Moeding College in Otse after an academic of note and early ANC leader, Kimberley-born ZK Matthews, in 2015 stands out among significant projects undertaken by Medu. This is the towering intellectual who was named by Botswana's first president, Seretse Khama, as the country's first Ambassador to the United Nations and the United States in 1966, doubtless aware of the man's pedigree. The Matthews straddle Botswana and South Africa like a colossus. Zachariah Keodirelang Matthews - better known as ZK - was the son of a native of the principal town of Bangwato, Serowe, who had left Bechuanaland to work on South African mines at the diamond fields of Kimberley. There, Peter Motsiela Matthews met his dear wife who would become ZK's mother, Martha Matthews (née Mooketsi), and never looked back. The son of ZK, Joe Matthews, himself a soaring figure and political leader, was the father of South Africa's crusading foreign affairs minister from 2019 to 2024, Naledi Pandor, who has taught at secondary schools in Botswana. And, as if eager to buttress her 'provenance' in Botswana and emphasise the 'Ties that Bind', Naledi's husband is Sharif Joseph of Lobatse, whom she met when she was a student at the University of Botswana during her years in exile.

ASABO is the custodian of these things and much more. A key date on our calendar is a visit to the graves of the fallen heroes of the liberation struggle buried in Gaborone where Duke Machobane's remains still lie. Significantly, when we

commemorate the June 14 Raid, we also remember the 1978 Lesoma tragedy when 15 members of the Botswana Defence Force - then a fledgling less than a year old - were mowed down in an ambush set by Rhodesian forces in the vicinity of the village of Lesoma near Kasane in the Chobe District. We do this because the Lesoma 15 were also victims of the brutal forces of the white minority regimes that formed Botswana's hostile neighbours on almost all sides. But if former South African president Thabo Mbeki could defer to lesser mortals, so could the man whom we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to. In 2014, Comrade Michael Dingake was a part of an ASABO delegation that I was elected to lead on a mission to the law firm of George Bizos - the famous advocate who helped Nelson Mandela escape the death sentence at the Rivonia Trial in 1963/1964 - to present the matter of the quandary in which we and other veterans of the liberation struggle in Botswana find ourselves. Our predicament consists in how we were offered a 'reward' by South Africa's Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) and then uniformly spurned for what has struck us as the most bogus of reasons. A most strange excuse - that we were never permanent members of the ANC - was put forward as the basis for our rejection. Needless to say, this is completely barren because working in stealth was of the essence in everything that we did. As a matter of fact, we were often unaware of one another's involvement and/or the extent of it and only came into the open to embrace each other after the goal was achieved with the onset of the 'new South Africa' in 1994.

It is important to state that the offer of the 'honorarium' was made to us unsolicited because not a single person that we know joined the liberation struggle with an eye on reward. However, news of the offer was received with much delight, not least because many of us currently live in conditions of want. Besides, it is rude and crude to make an offer of anything that can improve the material condition of the intended recipient and then withdraw the offer after all the required steps have been taken. We were provided with forms in which we filled in details of personal information that included bank accounts to which the so-called honorarium would be sent, as well as details of our spouses who would become the beneficiaries in the event of death.

Captain Patrick 'Blah' Ricketts

Indeed, during the long period since the rejection, some of our group have transferred to the Concourse on High, including Kopano Lekoma. Captain Patrick 'Blah' Ricketts of the South African National Defence Force, who was a tireless campaigner for the funds to be unlocked and the offer honoured, has also joined them. The ex-MK soldier, who passed away in February this year (2024), was a frequent visitor to Botswana (and other countries in the region) and worked harmoniously with us and the South African High Commission to repatriate the remains of fallen heroes for reburial in South Africa.

But it is our visit to George Bizos' offices that I was talking about: alongside Frazer Kowa, Modikwagae 'Scara' Aphiri and Connie Rathedi, Comrade Lekoma was present in Johannesburg when the man whom we are gathered here to salute and bid farewell to insisted that I lead the presentation and then went on to make cogent contributions in the discussion that followed. That is the humility of this gentle giant who did not hesitate to act on his convictions of the rectitude of resistance to the abomination of apartheid. A man of a robust constitution of body, mind and soul, Comrade Mike Dingake went to commiserate with the family and Bakgatla in Mochudi after Scara

Aphiri passed away, also in February. We are gathered here today to commiserate with Bra Mike's family - the family of the man who did not hesitate to act in accordance with his convictions of the rectitude of resistance to apartheid. As we do so, we take the opportunity to remember the believers of St Engenas ZCC who recently met with death in a manner most gruesome and grim in freefall from a bridge on a mountain pass an estimated 50 metres high at Mmamatlakala in South Africa. As is written in the Books of Baha, we hope and believe that God has granted them admission within the precincts of His transcendent mercy that was before the foundation of earth and heaven. We petition the Almighty to ensure that the miracle that saved young Lorraine Siako will be with her at all times to ensure that her escape from certain death may become a truly enriched survival when the lass blossoms into a Woman of Faith in addition to whatever means of livelihood she will have chosen for herself. We take the opportunity to acknowledge what seems a restoration of the amity that has characterised relations between Botswana and South Africa as exemplified by the goodwill that was clear for everyone to see on the faces of President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana and President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa each time they met in the instance of this tragedy.

It is a chemistry that was, we can dare to say, aided by a reported removal - or sudden absence - of something that has impeded it in spite of the timeless interaction between Botswana and South Africans due to the existence of one another's kith and kin across the two nations that we at ASABO recognise as the 'Ties that Bind'. It would indeed be disappointing if the camaraderie between Presidents Masisi and Ramaphosa and the fellowship among their attendants was merely showmanship for the cameras because aiding and abetting people inimical to Botswana is the least expected response to the role that the country and its people played in the liberation of South Africa.

An episode illustrates the intrusive nature of apartheid and the world that Botswana had become as the most frontline of the Frontline States, ten years after Comrade Mike Dingake was released from the penal colony of Robben Island. Its capital, Gaborone, is a relatively small town teeming with spies from the East and West, with the laid-back façade of its citizens masking the Cold War beneath the surface, which often erupted into hellfire in the dead of night. It is about something that made me wonder when, in the coexistence of Henry Kissinger's 'invincibility of the white redoubt' and the indefensibility of the heretical doctrine of apartheid, the pendulum upon which the apartheid regime once sat began to weigh more heavily on the side of 'apostasy'. What prompted this curiosity is that as the South African delegation filed into the hall earlier today, in addition to Comrade Penuell Maduna and Comrade Mac Maharaj, I noticed the lanky figure of Comrade William Oupa Mokou, the man who became South Africa's first High Commissioner to Botswana in the new dispensation who had lived for many years in Gaborone before as the representative of the ANC in exile. He was the first person to impress upon me the need to keep an even more vigilant eye open at *Newslink Africa*, where I was editor, because the newspaper seemed to be an enterprise of espionage for the apartheid regime. That was in late 1990. As it turned out, Oupa had been right because I received a call from *The Weekly Mail* in Johannesburg informing me that *Newslink Africa* was certainly a hearts-and-minds project of the apartheid regime.

The Weekly Mail had been investigating the newspaper for the previous six months during which it had gathered foolproof evidence that *Newslink* was a project of apartheid propaganda run directly from the South African Defence Force and would start publishing a series of exposés to that effect in the next three or so weeks. Having been personally detailed by Anton Harber to inform me of the terrible state of affairs, the man in Johannesburg (whose name I cannot remember) then - rather unnecessarily, I thought - said I was being brought into the loop in order that I might clear the decks before the exposés began to roll off the press. Significantly for me, I was informed that the investigations had established that I was not aware of myself or anyone else on my editorial team - which included my friends and colleagues Rampholo Molefe and Eddie Khulmann - being in the belly of the beast. According to the man on the other end of the line, the army general responsible for the *Newslink* project was at a safe house obtained for him by *The Weekly Mail* after he declared himself grown tired of the apartheid regime and its crimes and endless deception projects that harked back to the Muldergate scandal of 1977. Accordingly, the general was waiting to be sprung out of the country to join the ANC in exile. *The Weekly Mail* could arrange for me to speak with him if I so wished. I shared the entire low-down with Rampholo as soon as I hung up the phone, and together we confronted management, who, needless to say, tried to deny everything with blank expressions. But we knew better than to be fooled; thus, we called a staff meeting at which the white managers of *Newslink* were present.

After Mphola helped me to fully inform everyone about the devastating call from Johannesburg, I announced my resignation with immediate effect, doing this because of the need to lead by example and under compulsion of principle. That was in August 1991, exactly one year after the first edition of *Newslink* had hit the streets. It would be a few months before a little drama at the Tlokweng border post allowed the hopeless rogues and their massive printing press to exit Botswana in December 1991. It was a few months during which *The Weekly Mail* in Johannesburg and *Mmegi* in Gaborone carried a coordinated cascade of articles revealing how a secret spool of misinformation and propaganda would spin from a nerve centre at the headquarters of the South African Defence Force to reverse the unavoidably negative image of the apartheid regime that had become a veritable groundswell of pong in the aftermath of the Soweto student riots of 1976, the ruthless attempt to suppress the uprising, and the swelling of ANC and MK ranks by thousands of youths fleeing the terror.

Bra Mike's 62nd Birthday

The timing of the campaign in August 1990 - with plans to expand first to Namibia and then to Zimbabwe - was interesting in that the world's most famous political prisoner, Nelson Mandela, had been released from 27 years of imprisonment earlier that year (incidentally on Bra Mike's 62nd birthday), 11 February. CODESA began on 4 May of the same year, while a man emerging as a key figure of principled resistance to the duplicitous approach of white partners in the negotiations was assassinated by a right-wing gunman ominously named Janusz Walus on 10 April 1993. But I must say that the masters of deception were not so masterful after all because they failed to achieve their objective of giving apartheid a human face, whatever that may mean. However,

unbeknownst to me, I achieved two goals with one action by insisting on the age-old principle of keeping management out of the newsroom to prevent commercial considerations, a concern of management, from interfering with decisions on content and what is newsworthy, which is the exclusive domain of the editor and their newsroom.

The serendipity that accompanied enforcing this tried and tested principle of journalism became an ally as I navigated the uncertainty surrounding South Africa's difficult transition to democracy, which was understandable given the preceding 400 years of colonialism, dispossession and racial bigotry. Importantly, being in the leadership of the FSAJ meant that I often turned to Lusaka when unsure how to angle stories related to the liberation movement. Even so, I must acknowledge the increasingly complicated organisational structures of the media today that deny this separation of powers and infringe on editorial independence because publishers and editors are often the same person, which tends to give quite a dramatic meaning to the notion of conflict of interest.

But if we care about the memory of the man whom we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to, we ought to protect the gains from his struggles and make them flourish while guarding against abusing them with the cursing and coarse utterances that have become a distinctive feature of our political discourse in the name of criticism. What is troubling is that we do this even as we know that profanity has been a deliberate tool of the right and the extreme right to obtain provocation to confrontation and violence, thus raising the question of whether that is the goal we actually have in mind.

When he spoke at the National Stadium on the occasion of the memorial service of this nation's founding president, Sir Seretse Khama - in that crisp and a tad wintry morning of 24 July 1980 - Bishop Walter Makhulu, then Bishop of Botswana and Archbishop of Central Africa, kept returning to a reprise that I think is apt to repeat here today. That straddling 'secret agent' of the liberation struggle, intoned: 'The Souls of the Just are in the Hands of God'. I remember those words distinctly because, in the course of the days preceding the memorial service at the National Stadium, I had been a part of a small team of Baha'is selected to say prayers on Radio Botswana alongside people of other religions in what was a truly ecumenical and inter-faith approach to bidding farewell to the founding president of Botswana.

As we salute and bid farewell to Comrade Mike Dingake from this temporal plane, we know that he will not be denied his share of the banquet of God's grace and the favour of the Almighty's bounty. And although we cannot be so arrogant as to presume to know how the Almighty God works, we believe we can safely say it is a favour that Bra Mike deserves and even intercede for it to be increased many times over.

We can also state with absolute certainty that unlike most post-independence governments across the African continent from which the liberation movement of southern Africa had ample opportunity to learn, God does not abandon those who follow the straight and narrow path in accordance or treat ordinary decent people with contempt. I say this because many of us cannot rid ourselves of the agony that envelops us for the reason that it flows directly from the betrayal of the masses by the post-apartheid government that is leaving more and more people in conditions that are increasingly worse than apartheid.

It is a betrayal that became 'normal' when the post-apartheid government turned into a vicious cabal of compradores focused on self-aggrandisement in partnership with

forces of neo-apartheid to ensure that economic transformation is unattainable. It is a treachery that explains how post-apartheid South Africa, Brazil and Botswana dominate the list of the world's most unequal societies in which race - more specifically, white supremacy and domination - determines socio-economic success. Sadly, Bra Mike has left at a time when the perpetrators of this betrayal are becoming ever more consolidated in their grip on power and better-organised in their solidarity with forces of neo-apartheid to ensure that nothing more than bread-crumbling reaches the Black masses.

Comrades, ladies and gentlemen, but I am here today - on behalf of ASABO - to say to you about the man whom we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to, 'The Souls of the Just are in the Hands of God'. We mourn but will not dwell on the pain of death because we know that the man whom we are here gathered to salute and bid farewell to has found his place in the Concourse of God and left us a legacy to protect and expand for our enrichment.

Bra Mike acted in accordance with his convictions regarding the rectitude of resisting the monstrosity of apartheid. If we share his convictions, we have a duty to continue the struggle to dismantle apartheid wherever it emerges, including in Zionist Israel which employs the ruthless efficiency of Nazism to exterminate Palestinians in their own homeland. 'The Souls of the Just are in the Hands of God, Bra Mike'.

Allah'u'Abhá! Amandla!



Mike Dingake receiving Honorary DLitt from the University of Botswana in October 2022 (courtesy of University of Botswana)