HILDA BERNSTEIN

THE

RIFT

THE EXILE EXPERIENCE OF SOUTH AFRICANS
HILDA BERNSTEIN

THE

RIFT

THE EXILE EXPERIENCE OF SOUTH AFRICANS
EXILE: THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE.

The book is intended to be in the nature of oral history of the experiences of exile (of South Africans) told in their own words.

This is being done by recording, grouping, editing and explaining the personal experiences of many of the people in our numerous and scattered exile community. It is essentially a 'human interest' book, not based on statistical research, but substantially on interviews with exiles, which is not simply a case of collecting a random group of statements from exiles and putting them together. It is necessary to research to obtain the most apposite and revealing experiences, to select and edit; to obtain the right approach and background material to explain the political and historical context in which the experiences take place.

South African exiles are distinguished by their range across the spectrum of origins, race, colour, social and cultural, economic and educational backgrounds; they are peasants and professors; they are young people, the products of Bantu education, who fled Soweto in 1976 and the Vaal triangle in the 1980s; they are women and men from commerce and industry; they are writers, poets, musicians, actors, artists, journalists, athletes, trade union organisers, labourers, lawyers, doctors, priests. They are black Africans, 'Coloureds' Indians, and Whites of Afrikaans or European origins. They are Anglicans, Jews, Methodists, Catholics, Muslims, atheists. And what distinguishes them is that despite this variety of backgrounds and believes, they all have one thing in common:

Whether they became exiles through a personal or organisational decision or through the intense pressure of events, whether they are self-imposed or involuntary exiles, they are all exiles because of apartheid. They have taken to their countries of refuge their abiding, bitter concern about the racial laws and living conditions that dominated their lives, black and white. They are not exiles from South Africa, but exiles from apartheid.

How do I define an exile? Some of my South African exiles were not born in South Africa, but still feel themselves as having been exiled from there. My exiles are any people who left South Africa because of apartheid, whether they were politically involved or not, and left without the intention of settling permanently as immigrants; and who still feel themselves to be South Africans, even if now they do not intend to return home; (much ambivalence has now opened up about this - that does not invalidate their experience of exile.)

Certain areas of special interest have opened up during the course of interviewing exiles:

Culture in exile. How do painters, writers, musicians, photographers, carry on their professions when cut off from the roots of their inspiration? (Many of them don't, but some do remarkably.) What is the influence of the culture of the host country?

Children of exiles, born or brought up outside SA - how do they identify themselves? Why does their parents' home country exert so much influence?

Women in exile. "Women, above all, are the guardians of continuity: if the hearth moves, they move with it." What have been the special problems of the movers of the hearth?
The politics of exile. Those who have involved themselves in boycotts (sports, cultural, economic) in sanctions and disinvestment campaigns.

There are many other categories: those involved in the underground, in the forward areas; the experience of those in the Umpos; families who have been victims of death squads and raids outside SA; war resisters; education (Mazimbu and beyond); and others.

The value of the interviews depends to a large extent on the ability of those being interviewed to articulate their experiences. Many tend to reduce them to a chronological sequence of places and dates; most—nearly all—avoid speaking of the painful and negative things, except in the most general terms. There can be no true picture of the experience of exile without the suffering, deprivation and breakdowns that are only the other side of the positive experiences.

I have interviewed exiles in Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe; in Britain; and in Germany. I will be visiting Denmark, Holland, Sweden, France; and also the USA and Canada. I have a contract for the book, and I have the whole-hearted support of the ANC, although it is not intended to be only about ANC members.
EXILE - THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE.

The book is to be the experience of exile (of South Africans) told in their own words. My first intention was that these would be grouped together in different sections without any authorial intervention (except editing, of course.)

In the course of interviewing people, it became clear that there must be contemporary/historical/political material 

- explanations of organisations, events - why does Mazimbu exist? and then, what was the Soweto uprising? the Silvertown siege? The Wankie incursion) and so on. But the intention is still that the bulk of the book will be the exiles' own stories, as they tell them.

Exiles, as opposed to immigrants. Anyone who left SA because of apartheid, whether or not they were politically involved; who still feel themselves to be South Africans, even if now they do not intend to return - much ambivalence has opened up about this; that does not invalidate their own experience of exile.

Which exiles? As wide a range as possible, young and old, in every type of job or profession. But areas of special interest are emerging:

- Children of exile, born or brought up outside SA - how do they identify themselves? Why does SA exert such an influence?
- Culture in exile: how do painters, writers, musicians, photographers, carry on their professions when cut off from the roots of their inspiration? (Many of them don't, of course, but some do remarkably)
- What is the influence of the culture of the host country?
- Those who participated in the underground; and families who have been the victims of death squads and raids outside SA (Maseru, Matole, Gaberone, etc.) Experience of the camps, as well.
- Those actively involved in boycott and sanctions campaigns.

Many other categories: war resisters, specifically the experience of women, and so on.

I have interviewed exiles in Mazimbu (too many, the 76 generation); Lusaka; Harare; many here; and in Germany. I intend to do Denmark, Sweden, Holland, France, Canada and the USA. It's a question of money, of course. I received a donation of £5000 from AIC in Sweden, and an advance from the publishers, who kept raising their offer until I succumbed. The ABC has given its moral support - but I desperately need to raise some more money from somewhere.

The value of the interviews hangs a lot on the ability of the interviewees to articulate their experiences. Large numbers tend to reduce them to a chronological sequence of places and dates; most - nearly all - avoid speaking of the painful and negative things, except in the most general terms. But I have some marvellous stories, and if it ever gets finished I believe it could be a fascinating book and a record of a unique time.
The problem with this is that it is incorrect: Rusty was not released on bail after being arrested at Rivonia, he was the only one found not guilty, he was immediately re-arrested on other charges (never specified) and only after that released on bail. Also we didn't live in Zambia and Tanzania - went there on the way through Africa.

But all this is too complicated to explain and makes it too lengthy. Attached is an alternative suggestion, but I am not deeply wedded to it so that if you want to change it, we can discuss this again.

MAPS

I've had second thoughts about the Peter's projection - maybe this is too unfamiliar to most people; perhaps it would be better to leave the Southern Africa map as in map 2; although the map of South Africa itself (map 4) looks quite good.

On map 1, I can't see the point of putting in dates - it is confusing - and if we want to give the former names (eg Formerly Bechuanaland Protectorate, etc) wouldn't it be better to make a list by the side?

On Map 1 (or 2) Ilazimbu is much closer to Dar-es-Salaam, inland and slightly south.

The point about 'over two hundred South Africans' (incidentally, shouldn't it be 'interviewed' not 'talked to'? is that it is stated quite clearly in the introduction, and again made clear at the end with the list of names of those not included that not all those interviewed could be included. Otherwise it must state that 'some 200 (or whatever the number is) of over 300 interviewed are included .....

Wouldn't it be easier if we could meet and talk about these things? I know, it's my fault, living in Hereford. (Incidentally I think that is of no importance whatsoever to state on the blurb.)
Hilda Bernstein is a writer and artist and a well-known public speaker on behalf of the African National Congress and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Her books include a study of the conditions and struggles of South African women, *For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears*; *Steve Biko*; and a prize-winning novel *Death is Part of the Process*. She left South Africa illegally in 1964 and crossed the frontier on foot into Botswana after her husband had been acquitted in the Rivonia trial where Nelson Mandela and others were sentenced to life imprisonment, and to escape arrest herself. The story of these events is told in her recently republished book *The World That Was Ours*. She has lived a life in exile in Britain for the past 27 years.
Hilda Bernstein, an exile herself, was subjected to constant harassment, bans and imprisonment when she was working as a journalist in South Africa. In 1964, her husband, Rusty Bernstein, was arrested in Rivonia and charged with Nelson Mandela and others. As he was released on bail and she was on the point of being rearrested, they fled illegally to Botswana. They lived in Zambia and Tanzania before settling in London where they were joined by their four children. Hilda Bernstein's books include *Steve Biko, For Their Triumphs and Their Tears*, *The World That Was Ours* and the prize-winning novel, *Death is Part of the Process*. She now lives in Herefordshire.
THE RIFT - The Exile Experience of South Africans, will be published in June by Jonathan Cape. £25. 600 pp

The title is taken from an article on exile by Edward Said:

"Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted."

877 words
songs to political gatherings. All of us in the liberation movement knew James and loved to hear him sing. His voice was as deep and as powerful as Paul Robeson's. He was our Robeson.

Only in exile did his singing become more important. He became known in progressive political circles and was in great demand at many functions. When Paul Robeson came to England James met him, and Robeson gave him the only professional training — or advice — that James ever had.

He trained choirs in Wales, in the United States, Holland and Germany. The choirs learned to sing South African songs — freedom songs — with much of the harmony and joy that comes naturally to black South Africans.

In December 1987 Amsterdam was host to 300 South African artists, participants in the CASA festival — Culture in Another South Africa. For two weeks Amsterdam was the podium of a free South Africa. A 300-strong Dutch choir brought the conference to an end singing South African freedom songs in the New Church in Amsterdam. James should have been present to conduct this choir that he had trained. He had died not long before CASA took place. He was 66.

Like all the exiles who left South Africa over more than three decades from the late 50's to the 1990's, James Phillips was removed from history. The continuity of their lives had been broken; they had left the history of their own country, but they did not become part of the history of their host countries. And if memory is the continuity principle for persons, then history is the continuity principle for nations. I wanted to reclaim the right of the exiles to a place in South African history, a right they themselves had earned by their rejection of and resistance to the laws of apartheid; and in the case of white exiles, their rejection of the social values of their class and race. "Police files are our only claim to immortality," wrote Kundera. I would interview exiles so that they could claim an immortality other than that which lay in their police files.
The exact number of our exiles was not known, but was estimated to be around 60,000 - it was impossible to assess with any accuracy. And often the distinction between an exile and an emigre was blurred. They had left by different routes, crossing borders, they had entered countries without passports or papers; or sometimes had left with exit permits, which denied them the right to return to their own country. They were scattered throughout the world. Tanzania was perhaps the first and most generous of countries in giving home to exiles, and provided facilities for the ANC's mission in exile. Many lived in Dar es Salaam, while hundreds of exiles sheltered temporarily or permanently at Mazimbu where the ANC built a school for students who had fled South Africa after the 1976 uprising in Soweto. Later Lusaka in Zambia became the headquarters with a considerable community of South Africans; a smaller community grew in Mozambique (from which they were ousted by the Nkomati Accord). The biggest concentrations of exiles was in Angola, at camps established by Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC. Outside these clusters lay the diaspora.

Thousands of exiles went to English-speaking countries; others were scattered throughout Europe, east and west, learning new languages and how to live in new and alien cultures. The Scandinavian countries were generous in offering asylum and scholarships. As part of the war to win hearts and minds the socialist countries of Eastern Europe offered education and scholarships, as did the USA and West Germany. Many stayed in the countries of Southern Africa in which they began their journey into exile, or went on to study or to work in African countries - to Nigeria, Mozambique, Ghana, Ethiopia. There were exiles in Australia, New Zealand and a scattering in South America and on the Indian sub-continent.

The host country conditioned the exile experience. To obtain a cross-section of that experience would mean seeking exiles in many different countries. Time and money imposed its own restrictions. I began by targeting certain people in different countries. I ended by drift-net trawling, a wasteful method that necessitated discarding the larger part of the catch; in my case, about two-thirds of the 332 people I eventually interviewed. But the result of this was that I obtained extraordinary stories from people I had not known; just by listening to
these people—particularly the women (but I will come back to the women)—I began to discover what it meant to be an exile from apartheid. And, ultimately, the meaning of exile.

The South African experience of exile was both universal and unique. It was universal in the disruption, the loss and loneliness, the alienation, the restlessness and the sense of lives fractured. It was unique in that we were not, like many others, exiles from war or famine or religious persecution, but exiles from apartheid. The politics of apartheid are the essential core of the South African exiles' experience, something they could not leave behind and from which they were never free. Thus in some cases the exiles' stories are more about the traumas prior to leaving the country than of exile itself. But these experiences are a component of exile, essential to explicating their lives. Emigres leave voluntarily, but no one goes into exile by choice, only under the compulsion of situations that have become intolerable, that endanger both living and life.

And many exiles were totally severed from their families. They left alone, usually without telling anyone, even parents. And even if they joined with others who were crossing the border, they were among strangers. The ANC instructed those who joined it and particularly those in MK not to try and communicate with their families back home. It was dangerous both for themselves and for the families, many of whom were continuously persecuted and blackmailed by the Security Police. This total severance bitterly exacerbated the fragmentation of their lives. Lulu Mabena movingly described her loss of contact with her family: "The first time I tried to contact my family after I left was in 1977 when I was in Nigeria. I felt, now I can't take it any more." She wrote. But they wrote back, 'It's better you don't write any more because of the harrassment that we received from the police immediately after your letter arrived.' "Then I never wrote again. Until 1983, when I felt I would break now. I was so far away, in Germany. I didn't know if my parents were still alive. I was just lost. I felt: So this is how it is when one is dead. They don't know anything about you. All they know is that you are no more."
Some way had to be found to reassemble those fragmented lives, to compensate for the loss of home, family, community; and for many the ANC became the surrogate. "The ANC is my family now," some—perhaps defiantly—proclaimed. It became more than a political commitment; it was an emotional necessity. The new rituals that substituted for those they could no longer partake in—marriage, birth, death—were the commemoration of dates: January 8 (foundation of ANC, 1912), June 16 (Soweto uprising), June 26th (Freedom Day), August 8 (Women’s Day), December 16 (Africa day). Wherever they were the exiles came together, chanted the slogans, sang the freedom songs, rose with clenched fists and full hearts to the harmony of Nkosi Sikelele. These were the rituals that held them together, no longer strangers in a strange land. We belong! It is you, our hosts, our sympathisers, who are the outsiders.

But many were dispersed outside the exile circles, alone or with a few others, across the cities and towns, even the remote rural areas, of the continents. They had set out on unmapped journeys, travelled with the uncertainty of unknown destinations; found a way to exist among the confused streets of anonymous cities; mastered difficult, often obscure languages; tasted a variety of cultures; learned to modulate their voices to a European pitch, to adjust their eyes to the foreshortened landscapes, the diminished skies. And knew they were never again situated in the normal.

Babu, later to be the head of the primary school at Mazimbu, lived "on a Godforsaken little place called Cross Lake"—an Indian reservation in the far north of Canada, where he taught among a demoralised and dispossessed community. Ossie Dennis spent thirteen years as the only South African in a small German town; "I tried hard not to integrate, because I knew that if I integrate it’s going to be difficult to uproot and go back." Even so, he started as a brick-layer and ended as a civil engineer. Hajoo Carim drove her sons to and from school through war-torn Beirut. Gloria Nkadimeng, separated from her home and mother when she was fourteen, grew up studying on an island in Cuba. Terry Bell and his wife taught in New Zealand. A small colony ended in Arhus, halfway up the coast of Jutland, where the Beck family—parents with eleven children—were taken by the Danish refugee organisation when they were
threatened with deportation back to South Africa from Botswana. And it was from Arhus that Godfrey Beck, before he died, persuaded the Danish parliament to adopt the first resolution boycotting South African goods.

The strangeness - sometimes almost unreality - of the exiles’ experiences was often locked within themselves and difficult to release. After relating their story some would say "I’ve never spoken about that before." There were things too painful for them to express. There was also fear for the safety of those left behind, and even fear of what could happen to them in exile - the death squads reached to Europe. Grace Cele was kidnapped from Swaziland by South African commandoes and taken on a gruesome, bizarre, nightmare journey in a van with a dead man; left suffering for months in a pointless and unexplained detention; then warned on her release never to tell anyone what had happened. She was so fearful for her children that she told no one, until when she was in exile in Canada she was persuaded that they would be safer if her story were told.

The drama and diversity of the exiles’ lives was epitomised in two related interviews: in Canada I interviewed Joyce Diphale through her husband, Rola, because a stroke had robbed her of the power of speech. In Lesotho she had been targetted by a South African police death squad who shot her in the neck but failed to kill her. In Britain I interviewed Dirk Coetzee, the head of that death squad who had crossed the border into Botswana that night to assassinate Joyce and Rola. Later Dirk had defected, and was now also an exile. The two stories of that night sit side by side.

The South African death squads and commandoes operated with arrogant disregard for frontiers in Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and in Zambia and Mozambique. There were 11,500 South Africans who had sought refuge in Lesotho, a tiny country of 1.3 million people. In one horrific night in December 1982 South African commandos surged through the sleeping streets of Maseru and assassinated 42 people, 30 South Africans and 12 Basotho. Ma-Mia, whose husband, daughter and son were murdered that night, recounts how she wished they had killed her too; but she survived to care for her dead daughter’s child and other children as a matron in Mazimbu. Steve Batji who washed the bodies of murdered comrades on the
mortuary slabs and prepared them for the funeral tells how for weeks after he could not eat meat. Bunie Sexwale lay in a ditch with her daughters, watching her house being bombed and burned. Two weeks after I had interviewed Father Lapsley in Zimbabwe he suffered horrific injuries from a letter bomb, losing both hands and an eye.

A raid in Botswana in 1986 killed 12, including a talented artist; the raiders shot over and over into a pile of his drawings to kill them too; and the raid also destroyed a flourishing experiment in arts organisation, the Medu Arts Ensemble, an association set up by the exiles embracing theatre, music, poetry, the graphic arts, and through its activities joined the exiles with Botswana citizens. After the raid the exiles had to move on, scattered into other countries.

Zambia, too, was an unsafe haven, but the exile experience in places like Lusaka was totally different from that further north in Africa or in Europe and America. For all the difficulties of life in Lusaka the South Africans were a large community still within the ambience of Southern Africa. While some married Zambians, there was never any attempt to adjust to the life and culture of another country. In these border lands, the Front Line states, the exiles were not so much strangers in a strange country, but part of a cohesive community in which their own customs and traditions were firmly maintained, and held together by their organised opposition to apartheid.

Further north, the strangeness began to grow. In many ways it was harder for black South Africans to adjust to living in 'black' countries - Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Ghana - than it was for them in Europe. In Europe they knew - and were so often reminded - that they did not belong, and did not try to assimilate. Being in a black majority country, on the other hand, deceived them into thinking that they shared a common culture or outlook. They found this was not so. The experience of some South African students in Nigeria was a particularly bitter one.

Mazimbu, the site of the ANC school in Tanzania, was another enclosed community. I began my interviews in Mazimbu, where everyone was an exile. Many of the Soweto generation for whom the school had been started ten years earlier had returned as adults with degrees in
philosophy, economics, international affairs after further education in
Europe; while what Mazimbu really needed was typists, administrators,
skilled organisers, social workers and counsellors. There were problems
at Mazimbu with which the ANC could not cope: a national liberation
organisation is not equipped to deal with the psychological traumas
suffered by young people torn from their families, to handle teenage
pregnancies, to give children separated from their parents the love,
attention and comfort that so many of them needed. And too many of those
in charge were themselves burdened with the prejudices and the
limitations of their own lives under apartheid. For many of these exile
was a cruel experience; and the toll from malaria, especially among
children, was tragically high. Yet many others survived the problems,
obtained good educations and have now returned to contribute to
rebuilding the country that sent them into exile. Mazimbu with all its
buildings and facilities and Dakawa with its small industries have been
given to Tanzania.

The Umkhonto camps in Angola, site of the largest concentration of
exiles, were being dismantled by the time I wished to visit them. I
interviewed exiles who had been in the camps; but this was a particular,
specific experience of exile that must be the subject for a separate
study.

Many exiles had a remarkable memory for details of day, date, time,
place; but not all were able to describe the small illuminating details
that brought an experience to life. In this there was a marked
difference between men and women. The men would tend to speak of their
travels, their changes of countries, by simply cataloguing where they
had been, how long they stayed. They were the products of the macho
traditions of a chauvinist society, culturally indoctrinated not to
flinch, to show pain, to cry. They would tell nothing of their emotions.
To do so might seem a betrayal not only of their own manhood, but also
disloyalty to their organisation. They wanted to retain in exile
everything that they had been, everything that they had believed in.
Threatened by the loss of identity and faced with insecurity, social
customs became 'traditions' to which, in their longing for what they had
left, they must obstinately cling.
There were of course others who, influenced by their contact with different societies, moved on. Peter Mhlangu speaks of what he has learned. "I'm very much conscious that there should be equality. It should start in the house. We cannot talk about it at the level of politics when in the house women are still made to be subservient to men. But I never thought like that when I was in South Africa, and I left when I was more than thirty years old. Never, ever. I thought of women as being good to sleep with, to entertain you...." And because he has changed, he knows that much as he wants to go home it will be difficult. "I cannot live in a township where by six o'clock I must be in bed because there are no lights, I can't read; that I have to drink bottles of spirits as entertainment. I cannot bear people beating up women on the streets ... It's a daunting task for me to be able to integrate myself, because I've outgrown those things now."

There were other differences in the manner of telling. Many of the whites, coming from a privileged section of society that had access to higher education and the availability of books, were introspective, psycho-analysing, delving into the personal contradictions and doubts that governed their decisions. For many blacks the telling was less introspective, a more straightforward historical story; the events themselves without the analysis of motives.

The women, who did not have to cling to a status they never possessed, who were deprived of the whole of their family support system, dealt with the emotions, spoke of the pains of parting, the loss of children, the discomfort they endured, the difficulties of adjusting their domestic lives in unfamiliar circumstances. Many young women - still schoolgirls - who, like the young men, left without telling their families, were sexually ignorant. When they became pregnant, isolated from the extended family and with no means to study or work and bring up a child in exile, they sent their babies back home to be cared for by the grandparents. Mothers who had left without their children believed they would be returning soon. "Everyone thinks the same when they leave," said Eleanor Khanyiile, "that they will come back." She went over the border just for a short while, until things had settled down, leaving her small son with her sister and her mother. He was an adult before they met again.
In the tradition of African families, the children were loved and cared for. But the sorrows of that separation were never overcome. The mothers live forever with the pains of parting, the regrets; the children with the feeling that - whatever the reason - they were abandoned.

Exile forced the women to discard their accustomed roles, to assume the responsibility of making their own lives - something so many of them had not done when they were 'at home'. They had to remake themselves, become independent, take decisions that once they had left to others. The men were more likely to be the political activists, training in Angola or posted to distant places, leaving wives charged with the total economic and emotional care of bringing up their families. The women emerge with an underlying strength that enables them to change and survive. Men who already had families when they left, could leave - as so many of them did - without telling their wives; and they would not even mention that they had left a wife and children unless I asked them. When they left, they closed the door behind them and went out into their new lives unencumbered. The women, even those without children, were severed from a family support system that had been the essential core of their lives. They were 'the guardians of continuity' that gave coherence to the incoherence of lives in exile.

The children are the unconsidered victims of their parents' exile, even those brought into exile as babies, even those born in exile. Left or taken, the children bear burdens of resentment that are difficult to resolve. In the Western world they struggled with the split between home and society; outside the home the need to integrate, to be the same as, accepted by, their peer group in school in the country where they now lived; and returning to that other country, left physically but always there in their parents' talk, friends, social customs. Some black children showed a stronger sense of their own identity, because, defined by skin colour, they knew they did not belong and did not seek to integrate. Only when they return to South Africa - if they return - will they discover how different they have become from those at home, and how impossible it is ever again to slot completely into the society their parents left.
'In home sickness you must keep moving – it is the only disease that does not require rest,' wrote H. de Vere StacPoole. And a feature of many of the exiles' lives was the extent to which they kept moving from country to country. There were always, of course, legitimate reasons – the chance of furthering their education, the need to accept a job somewhere else; or sometimes the inability to obtain work or residents' permits. But underlying it was the feeling of not belonging, wherever they were. They became contemporary nomads.

Mac Carim, who worked in 33 different countries for Pepsi Cola, said 'We've never been able to settle. We're always temporary wherever we go.' Alpheus Mangezi left Alexandra Township for Scotland; then, in pursuit of furthering his education and accepting new jobs, lived and worked in London, Brighton, Nigeria, Tower Hamlets, Mozambique, Tanzania. Es'kia Mphahlehle, denied of the right to teach in his own country, taught in Nigeria for 4 years; went to Paris and worked there for 2 years; became restless, and went to Nairobi to teach. Left there for Zambia; another 4 years in Denver, USA, then to Philadelphia, and finally, determined to return to South Africa, sought a way back through the 'homeland' of Lebowa before he could obtain the right to return as a South African and be granted citizenship in his own country. He himself felt he had gained much from his time in exile, but it cost him his children, four sons and a daughter, who grew up outside South Africa. The sons will not return. The daughter has not decided.

Eve and Tony Hall, when they arrived at their last stop in Zimbabwe before coming back after a quarter of a century in exile reckoned: total house moves, 23 times in 26 years; total moves from one country to another, 12 or 15 times in 26 years . . complete gypsies. Their nomadic life took them to countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe . . .

'But the thing is,' Eve said, 'that you know that in all these countries that you've been in, you might have taken them on board, but they're not taking you on board. You're getting involved; you're getting emotionally attached. But you don't belong. You're outsiders, no matter how much you give, no matter how much you love, no matter how many friends you have, you don't belong and you're even a little ashamed to have a slightly proprietorial feeling. Because you don't own it at all.'
Many exiles, black and white, made their homes in European countries. Here, middleclass whites moved more easily than black South Africans, particularly in Britain, Canada and America where the language erected no barriers, and where they could not be class-defined by their accent. A 'colonial' accent was acceptable. But some white exiles strove to conceal both their accent and their South African identity; the problems of explaining that you are white but do not support apartheid were complicated.

Acceptability, however, did not lessen the loss of home. Nothing could replace the end of inheritance, the arrest of their lives, the pain of separation from families, the discontinuity. Living was within the stasis of an eternal present, among people with whom they had no shared experience of the past, and with whom they did not wish to share the future. The past was elsewhere; the future would be elsewhere. 'You are engaged with an elsewhere that cannot be reached; isn't it the defining characteristic of exile?' (Breytenbach.)

Exiles in Britain became the motivating force that set in motion an exceptional anti-apartheid movement; it spread to other countries, and played a vital role in educating the world to the meaning of apartheid, in organising sports, cultural and consumer boycotts and sanctions, and ultimately in isolating South Africa and bringing pressure for change from outside as well as from within. The story is quite remarkable. The British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) grew from the activities of a small group of students who had come to Britain to study. When Oliver Tambo was sent out by the ANC in anticipation of its banning, to establish a base outside the country he was unknown, unregarded, unreceived. He and a handful of exiles battled against total indifference to the meaning of apartheid. At the time of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 (67 killed, 187 injured) the British Prime Minister Macmillan warned colleagues to avoid lending support to the view that the recent disturbances were the inevitable result of the racial policies of the government; and when a motion was tabled in the UN Security Council condemning the massacre, Britain abstained. It was the dedication and spirit of the exiles that gave tremendous momentum to the
AAM and the International Defence and Aid Fund and that linked the growing resistance within South Africa to an increased enlightenment and activity outside.

The exiles adapted to the long dark days, the cold and the stiff formalities of Sweden; shared in and learned from the generous educational and welfare advantages of Denmark; adjusted to the divisiveness of the Netherlands, to the British evasive suspicion of strangers, to the rigid protocol of the Germans; mastered the obscure languages of eastern Europe; observed, but did not approve of, the cult of individualism and rampant consumerism of north America. And in all these and other countries learned a bitter lesson - that racialism is endemic in all societies, although it is only in South Africa that it is embodied in laws, and has developed its most extreme and exploitive form. So the black exiles, impelled by the vector of their implacable opposition to racialism, had to confront it once again - and in exile. "I now realise," said Nancy Moatlhodi, "there's nowhere in the world you feel at home except in your own country . . . the colour of one's skin, it's worse. You are always a stranger and you are always stupid."

Katleho Moloi, in Canada, felt all Africans were regarded as being from a backward, uncultured continent. After speaking at a meeting, a woman came and praised her speech, adding, 'And good grammar, too.' Katleho speaks six languages. Even African-Americans tended to regard African exiles as backward. Nigerians looked down on South Africans for not having overturned apartheid.

But for all races and both genders, apartheid exercised a potent power on their experience of exile and in most cases continued to determine their lives. And this was true not only of those for whom the anti-apartheid struggle was a full-time or part-time activity. It was as though a fierce spotlight focussed on everything South African, reducing the authority of anything not related to it. "South Africa came with me and will be with me for the rest of my life," said Esau de Plessis in Leyden. And Bishop Huddleston - not born in South Africa, but nevertheless exiled from there: "Though I left South Africa long ago, South Africa never left me. Never left me, no; not for a moment."
In the mind exile is always temporary, you will always return however many years have passed. But eventually, however much they resisted, the exiles put down roots. You have to live somewhere, find work, communicate; your children have to go to school, have friends. You have to construct a new, a separate, but a present life. In learning to adapt, inevitably you must become, at least in part, attached to the society in which you live, whatever your intentions and desires. "It wasn't meant to be exile," said Hugh Masekela.

I learned a great deal from interviewing so many people. I learned about the importance of ritual, something which had no meaning to me in the past. The deepest hurt, the most profound sorrow was felt by those who were unable to take part in the rituals of birth, marriage and death in the families that they had left behind. Speaking of the death of her mother an exile in Canada says "You see they had a chance to mourn and then get on with their lives. But I did not and it is an open sore with me." Father Cas relates how a requiem mass for a relative of the family of Stan Mabizela became a ceremony of remembrance for all those who had died while they were in exile. "Stan's wife Dixie said, I'd like to remember my mother, because I wasn't there when she died. And Stan, both his mother and his father, he wasn't able to be there when they died . . . and so it went on, and you thought how painful that is. Somebody as close as your own mother, in African society - in any funeral - but your mother, and you can't be there because of that system. That's too painful even to imagine."

I learned that once you have become an exile, no matter how well you adjust to your host country, no matter how successful your new life has become, you are never again situated in the normal - not in exile nor in return. "To be away from your natural environment is to be deprived of ever again functioning completely and fitting in instinctively," writes Breytenbach. "No other surroundings can replace the shared and unquestioned and thereby indigenous feeling of belonging made up of smells, sounds, gestures and natural mimicry . . . Henceforth you are at home nowhere, and by that token everywhere." It is not that they do not recognise the advantages derived from their experiences (education, growth in political perspectives and understanding, cultural enrichment); and say that they now consider themselves citizens of the world
and at home anywhere. But that is a kind of shout of defiance that never conceals their underlying loss, never compensates for the uprooting from that one country, above all, to which they still irrefutably belong.

I always knew - but learned again and again - how we each take with us the baggage from our past wherever we go: the moral attitudes, the social customs, the type of upbringing and the wounds and scars of bodily assault that living under apartheid inflicted on the psyche of all, black and white. It took a long while for some exiles to shed this heavy baggage. Some never did.

I began interviewing exiles in 1989, eight months before the de Klerk declaration of February 2, 1990, that radically altered the situation. Going home was still a distant prospect, a dream deferred. By the time I finished I was talking to exiles confronted with the realisation of what return meant to them and their families - not so much the dreamed of reunion with those they had left behind as the pain and destruction of families that would be divided once more; the loss of new friends, the splitting of communities, for the returnees would again be scattered across vast areas; and learning how to live again in a society that despite the removal of racial barriers in certain areas of life was fundamentally the same in its racist structures as the one they had left. "You can't just pack a suitcase," said Edith Yengwa, whose husband died in exile.

But they also knew that the country they would be returning to would never be the same as the one they had left, and that they themselves were not the same people. There had been three decades of resistance and struggle from which their exile had excluded them. They had made a new history for themselves at the expense of losing that which should have been theirs.

For three decades apartheid South Africa sent into jail, to exile and often to death its most gifted, resolute and creative citizens. The loss, incalculable, was not only to those individuals but to the whole nation, in every field; and continues to be a loss to the generation of today which, in politics, in education, in the arts and sciences must build on a history that has thirty years of torn and missing pages.
But it was not all loss, despite the families once again divided between those who return and those who stay. The returnees take back with them an extraordinary range of skills that they could never have obtained in apartheid South Africa. They have mastered many languages, driven themselves up the educational scale, acquired a multiplicity of skills and experiences. They have tasted many cultures, and living in different societies, they can test their own - as it is, as they would like it to be - against those others. They have joined their country, at the southernmost tip of the African continent, to the world.

In turn, they leave a legacy in the countries that hosted them in their long exile. They alerted an important section of people - often the young, through schools and universities - to a basic and over-riding evil: racism; through the revelations of what apartheid meant in South Africa, alerted them to the sly and often disregarded existence of it in their own countries. They leave behind on streets and squares and buildings in countries north and south, the name of Mandela, who broke through the silent incarceration of a cell on windswept Robben Island to become the world’s most famous political prisoner; and thus to symbolise the struggle for human rights everywhere and to inspire others.

And they leave behind something of the fire of their anger, the passion of their commitment, the hope and optimism and joy of their idealism. Going into exile changed their lives, but their lives in exile influenced others; as did James Phillips, whose memory remains in the choirs in Wales, in Holland and Germany that will continue to sing the freedom songs he taught them.

* Members of the Communist Party were listed at the time of its banning in 1950, but you could become a statutory communist if convicted of any offence under the wide terms of the Suppression of Communism Act.
DISCOVERING EXILES

When James Madhlope Phillips died I knew I had to write about exiles. James was what South Africans call 'Coloured'. His mother came from Scotland to work in South Africa as a domestic servant. She married an African in the days when there was no Mixed Marriages Act which later prevented marriages across the colour line; and she had three sons. James was the one she loved most. He became a cutter in a garment factory, but when he was listed as a communist he was placed under bans that prevented him entering any factory, and after that he could not get a job. Eventually he decided to go into exile and left without a passport; his identification was his birth certificate that stated he was a 'kaffir'.

Like so many exiles he left alone, but unlike many others he sent for his family and rebuilt it in exile. He found work; 'I think he only earned about £7 a week,' says his former wife, Maud. 'And then he worked and worked and saved until he had sufficient money to bring over his mother.'

A year later Maud came, and with their joint salaries they managed to buy a terraced London house. They took in lodgers, South Africans who, like themselves had come into exile. Most of the ANC leaders who came to London found their first home with Maud and James: Duma Nokwe, J.B. Marks, Robbie Hersha, and many others. Oliver Tambo who led the ANC in exile for 30 years lived there with his family until they could find a place of their own.

James had a wonderful resonant bass voice. But as a 'Coloured' he had no access to training, and no outlet for his unique talent except political gatherings. Singing was not his priority - he was a leading trade unionist; but he was also the bard of the South African movement, bringing songs of international resistance together with our own freedom
PROPOSED TITLE: A LONG WAY FROM HOME
Sub-title: The exile experience of South Africans

SECTION ONE: THE VANGUARD/PIOENEERS (1960's)
SECTION TWO: THE INSURRECTION (1970's)
SECTION THREE: WARRIORS AND BANDITE
SECTION FOUR: THE FRONTIERS OF LIFE (1980's)
SECTION FIVE: CITIZENS OF TWO COUNTRIES
SECTION SIX: CREATING AND LIVING

1. THE VANGUARD
   A. Trail blazers
   B. Nomads and Pilgrims
   C. Taking on the World (Boycotts, Sanctions, Disinvestment)

2. THE INSURRECTION
   A. Detention and Interrogation
   B. The Mazimbu Pioneers
   C. The Mazimbu and Dakawa Communities
   D. The Student experience

3. WARRIORS AND BANDITE (Convicts)
   A. Wankie Incursion
   B. Jailbirds
   C. In the camps (Guerillas)

4. THE FRONTIERS OF LIFE
   A. Underground
   B. Death Squads
   C. War resisters

5. CITIZENS OF TWO COUNTRIES

6. CREATING AND LIVING
   A. Culture in exile
   B. Living and Learning
   C. Guardians of Continuity (Women)
   D. Families and children
   E. Born in Exile
The book is intended to be in the nature of oral history of the experiences of exile (of South Africans) told in their own words.

This is being done by recording, grouping, editing and explaining the personal experiences of many of the people in our numerous and scattered exile community. It is essentially a 'human interest' book, not based on statistical research, but substantially on interviews with exiles, which is not simply a case of collecting a random group of statements from exiles and putting them together. It is necessary to research to obtain the most apposite and revealing experiences, to select and edit; to obtain the right approach and background material to explain the political and historical context in which the experiences take place.

South African exiles are distinguished by their range across the spectrum of origins, race, colour, social and cultural, economic and educational backgrounds; they are peasants and professors; they are young people, the products of Bantu education, who fled Soweto in 1976 and the Vaal triangle in the 1980s; they are women and men from commerce and industry; they are writers, poets, musicians, actors, artists, journalists, athletes, trade union organisers, labourers, lawyers, doctors, priests. They are black Africans, 'Coloureds' Indians, and Whites of Afrikaans or European origins. They are Anglicans, Jews, Methodists, Catholics, Muslims, atheists. And what distinguishes them is that despite this variety of backgrounds and beliefs, they all have one thing in common:

Whether they became exiles through a personal or organisational decision or through the intense pressure of events, whether they are self-imposed or involuntary exiles, they are all exiles because of apartheid. They have taken to their countries of refuge their abiding, bitter concern about the racial laws and living conditions that dominated their lives, black and white. They are not exiles from South Africa, but exiles from apartheid.

How do I define an exile? Some of my South African exiles were not born in South Africa, but still feel themselves as having been exiled from there. My exiles are any people who left South Africa because of apartheid, whether they were politically involved or not, and left without the intention of settling permanently as immigrants; and who still feel themselves to be South Africans, even if now they do not intend to return home; (much ambivalence has now opened up about this - that does not invalidate their experience of exile.)

Certain areas of special interest have opened up during the course of interviewing exiles:

Culture in exile. How do painters, writers, musicians, photographers, carry on their professions when cut off from the roots of their inspiration? (Many of them don't, but some do remarkably.) What is the influence of the culture of the host country?

Children of exiles, born or brought up outside SA - how do they identify themselves? Why does their parents' home country exert so much influence?

Women in exile. "Women, above all, are the guardians of continuity: if the hearth moves, they move with it." What have been the special problems of the movers of the hearth?
The politics of exile. Those who have involved themselves in boycotts (sports, cultural, economic) in sanctions and disinvestment campaigns. There are many other categories: those involved in the underground, in the forward areas; the experience of those in the Bmps; families who have been victims of death squads and raids outside SA; war resisters; education (Mazimbu and beyond); and others.

The value of the interviews depends to a large extent on the ability of those being interviewed to articulate their experiences. Many tend to reduce them to a chronological sequence of places and dates; most - nearly all - avoid speaking of the painful and negative things, except in the most general terms. There can be no true picture of the experience of exile without the suffering, deprivation and breakdowns that are only the other side of the positive experiences.

I have interviewed exiles in Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe; in Britain; and in Germany. I will be visiting Denmark, Holland, Sweden, France; and also the USA and Canada. I have a contract for the book, and I have the whole-hearted support of the ANC, although it is not intended to be only about ANC members.

Have been to Denmark & Sweden; going to Holland in 2 weeks.
The problem of being in exile is that one is away from the material basis of one’s imagination. You need to be in that bus, to hear that phrase being used by a people quarrelling or laughing or whatever. You need to be near a factory to hear those little things that set the imagination flying. Those images that one encounters when one is walking about, those gestures, that laughter — you miss all that when you live in exile. Using a certain language, you miss a situation in which you are interacting with new developments in that language.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, during a discussion on the role of culture in the African revolution.
My interest in writing this book springs from personal experience. I am deeply involved in exile life and exile politics.

Within South Africa I played an active part in the liberation struggle and was a personal friend of leading members of the African National Congress: Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu and many others. My own journey into exile was hazardous and dramatic, an escape from police who had come to arrest me, a period in hiding, a long night's walk across the border into Botswana (an account of which I wrote in my book *The World That Was Ours*); From Botswana to Zambia in a small plane chartered by the ANC, then overland from Zambia to Tanzania, from Dar-es-Salaam to Nairobi in Kenya, and finally to England. My children, left behind, followed later.

My own experience is not unique. I know exiles who have escaped from jail; who were conveyed by underground routes into adjacent countries; who travelled without documents through Africa and Europe. A few have written of their escapes; but there are many hair-raising stories still to be told.

My own experience was not unique, but the South African exile experience is a unique one.

South African exiles are distinguished by their range across the spectrum of origins, race, colour, social and cultural, economic and educational background. They are black peasants on the edge of literacy and highly-placed professors at leading universities in a variety of disciplines. They are school children, products of Bantu Education, who fled Soweto in 1976; and they are men and women from commerce and industry. They are writers, poets, musicians, boxers, athletes, labourers, trade union organisers, lawyers, journalists, doctors, artists, actors, priests. They are black Africans, Coloureds, Indians, Afrikaners, whites of English or European origin. They are Anglicans, Jews, Catholics, Methodists, atheists. And they all have one thing in common. Whether they became exiles through a decision on their own part or through the pressure of circumstances - self-imposed or involuntary exiles - they are all exiles because of apartheid. They have taken to their countries of refuge their abiding, bitter concern about the racial laws and living conditions that dominated each of their lives, black and white. They are exiles not from South Africa, but from apartheid.

They have taken into exile a singleness of purpose that has brought cohesion rather than disintegration to the exile community. They have not only survived the 'hazardous, sterile, corrosive and demoralising' environment of exile politics but have achieved a remarkable strength, cohesion and international statue that makes the exile experience such an interesting subject for a book. My intention is that exiles should speak for themselves, through a series of interviews with a wide range of people in different places.
Collection Number: A3299
Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:
Publisher: Historical Papers Research Archive
Collection Funder: Bernstein family
Location: Johannesburg
©2015

LEGAL NOTICES:
Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.