Black Consciousness, Black Holes, Black Suns, and Black Collectivity

Stacy Hardy

Staffriding was a platform, a performance, a defiance. A dangerous and informal practice that developed in urban areas in South Africa during apartheid, it entailed boarding or disembarking a fast moving train or riding on the exterior of a train travelling at high speed. On one level staffriding was a practical solution to overcrowding on trains and unaffordable fares but more than that it was an act of bravado and liberation in defiance of oppression.

Conceived in reaction to the brutal constraints placed on black male bodies by the apartheid system's policies of racial segregation, separate development, and economic, social and psychological repression, staffriding was a way of moving when movement was contained, a way of free riding when nothing was free, and a way of subverting the official system by using the establishment toward one's own ends. As poet Lesego Rampolokeng writes:

> *To staff-ride means taking or shaking the train, on the hoof… back-front-sideways, death-dance down the years wrapped in romance, here… mutilation, there… amputated limbs. Staffriders hip-hopped before the fact while their heads got lobbed off….*
>
> *Those whistles were Mission Station Identification crackling thru past the clanging metal on shrieking skull… isiparapara… sound of takkies flapping across concrete. Slip, fall, get mashed up & watch the audience get tickled to cackling. And banana peels sought to turn the sick humour on. & keep the revolution green.*
>
> *And then… speak to someone out the side of your mouth & you'll be warned not to staffride. So there we go, sliding down this platform.*[1]

True to its name, the literary journal, *Staffrider*, sought to provide space where the challenging and turbulent energy that erupted in everyday practices like staffriding could find a voice. Started by Mike Kirkwood in March 1978, and later edited by Andries Walter Oliphant, the journal had two main objectives: to provide publishing opportunities for community-based organizations and young writers, graphic artists and photographers; and to oppose officially sanctioned state and establishment culture by opening up a space for imagination, dreaming and subversion.

"We will have to *donder* conventional literature: old fashioned critic and reader alike," wrote Mothobi Mutloatse, in his daring introduction to *Forced Landing,*[2] a compilation of black writing, much of which first appeared in *Staffrider*, "We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment

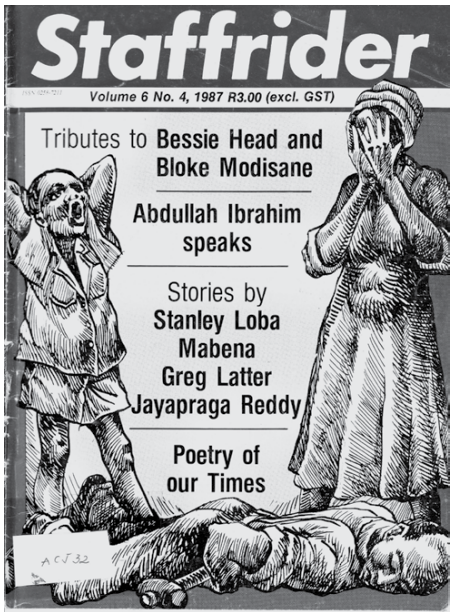
1 Lesego Rampolokeng, "Staffriding the Frontline (2008)," *Chimurenga Library*, accessed February 4, 2015, http://www.chimurengalibrary.co.za/staffriding-thefrontline-an-essay-by-lesego-rampolokeng.

2 Mothobi Mutloatse, "Introduction," in *Forced Landing*, ed. Mothobi Mutloatse (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1980), 5.

and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say …"

Staffrider's pages were thus fierce but also filled with love and generosity. Produced by the same Durban "moment" that saw black consciousness leader Steve Biko begin the South African Students Association, it had a view of literature with a small "l". Subverting the typical concept of the political and the literary, its base was popular rather than elitist, and it sought to provide an autobiography of experience in its witnessing of daily black life in South Africa.

In *Staffrider* the traditional binaries of writer/reader or artist/viewer were rejected so that established relationships between readers and writers were destabilized through various modes. It was not unusual for one person simultaneously to occupy the identities of writer, reader, critic and distributor. An unsigned note in the magazine published under the heading "Critics wanted" announced:



Cover of *Staffrider* 6, no. 4, 1987. Reproduced by permission of the Chimurenga Library.

> *The phenomenon of art groups linked to particular township communities in present-day South Africa [allows for] the art group [to] put forward the work it wants to be published, and then assists in the distribution of the magazine to the community. In this way editorial control is vested in the writers as participants in a community based group.*[3]

Mike Abraham recalls, "I saw all the black suffering and I saw more black resistance and knew I was a staffrider too. That same year I became a *Staffrider* vendor at the bus rank. I even built up a small group of loyal readers …"[4]

The magazine was an expression of its time in other ways. In an essay on the *Staffrider* years, writer and editor Ivan Vladislavić writes:

> *Chris van Wyk was editor, writing teacher, mentor and friend to more writers than I can remember, especially the beginners. He spent half his time at the kitchen table or on a rickety bench in the garden, drinking coffee and talking with some poet who had come all the way from Evaton or beyond, the handwritten work spread out between them. That was the hallmark of the submissions: written in longhand in ballpoint in a school exercise book. In the end, all this talking and advising was bad business: a commercial publishing house is not meant to be a writing school. But it was good in every other way.*[5]

3 "Critics wanted", *Staffrider* 2, no.3 (1979): 58.

4 Mike Abraham, "Of 'Brothers with Perfect Timing' (2008)," *Chimurenga Library,* accessed February 4, 2015, http://www.chimurengalibrary.co.za/of-brothers-with-perfect-timing-an-essay-by-mike-abraham.

5 Ivan Vladislavić, "Staffrider (2008)," *Chimurenga Library,* accessed January 4, 2015, http://www.chimurengalibrary.co.za/staffrider-an-essay-by-ivan-vladislavic.

I was not one of those writers lucky enough to have taken a seat at Van Wyk's kitchen table. By the time I started writing, *Staffrider*, like so many other apartheid-era platforms of dissent, had ceased publication. It was the mid 1990s, a turning point of our history, a time of rapid change and radical uncertainty, but also one of tremendous excitement and possibility. It was a moment of equilibrium between extremes, the moment of uncertainty from which the future emerges. Yes, everything was being questioned: education as well as social, political, religious, and cultural life. To my generation, the dream of a free South Africa provided a space for new audacities, transgressions and a new quest for collective identity.

When you write, you write both with and against literature. You write out of inspiration from writers and books, but you also write against mediocrity and the clichés the literary establishment promotes. Maybe it was unfair to some writers of the generation that preceded mine, but like many of my generation I was frustrated with much of the didactic political writing of the past and even more frustrated by the static, conservative Western view of literature still prescribed by the literary establishment. At the same time, I felt deeply for literature produced by collections of literary rogues operating on the fringes of culture, independent journals like *Staffrider*, innovative writers, dissonant poets, BC poets[6] and other outsiders. I was equally attracted to writing by radicals from elsewhere—speculative fiction, cyberpunk, postmodern fiction, alt lit, literature in translation.

My first prose embraced chance, play, bad taste and fragmentation to upend the authority of the author and the omniscient narrator. Sex and desire with their erotic drives had a great part in it. Part of what I was writing was consciously political, at least at the level of intention. Let's say that my questions started to flow about identity, imagination, history, and then more and more about language and the incredible fraud I was discovering in the accumulated layers of lies told through centuries of the white patriarchal ordering of reality.

I soon found myself amongst a small community of writers who published in the online literary journal *donga*. Like *Staffrider*, the journal took its name from everyday South African experience. *Dongas* are the deep-ridged gullies found in open veld or near new industrial developments in South Africa. In many ways it was a homecoming. When I was a child growing up in Limpopo, *dongas* were everywhere. They broke the flat, even bushveld and provided hidey-holes, places to hang out, to learn to smoke dagga, to play hide and seek and other more dangerous games.

It's difficult to articulate exactly what made *donga* so important at the time. Its short three-year lifespan, modest minimal design and seeming simplicity, masked an unexpected depth. As Alan Finlay, who together with Paul Wessels, edited *donga* explained, "I wanted to create an open, white space for the poems, where the poem could look comfortable."[7]

6 Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy in South Africa was born from the realization that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." A. Mngxitama, A. Alexander, and N.C. Gibson, eds., *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

7 Stacy Hardy, "Liberated Zones(1): Re:visionary Inter-textuality in South Africa (2003)," *ISEA International Newsletter*, accessed January 5, 2015, http://www.isea-web.org/_archives/newsletters/2003-2/091-feb-mar-2003.

The space *donga* created was certainly open but it was far from neutral. "*donga* itself has got something to say, over and above all the submissions, all the parts put together that make up the 'hole'," said Alan. "The submissions we get change and refine that space we call 'donga'. And you can't predict it… Maybe a donga's a place that collects things. Things we chuck away. Or others chuck away, the other publications."[8]

I was struck by Alan's use of the word hole, a word with so many connotations in South Africa. As Alan pointed out, "hole" is a homonym of whole. It rhymes with mole and sounds like hold. But what kind of hole? Is it a peephole? A body cavity? A crude sexual representation? A gaping maw in the physical earth? And caused by what—Mines? Bombs? Shovels? Erosion? Is it a grave? A wound? A hole in the wall? An escape hatch? An entrance? An exit?

A manhole covers a sewer, but is permeable, spewing gas and steam and sometimes liquid. A *donga* is open, but forbidden, a no-go area where unwanted rubbish collects. And as www.donga.co.za suggested back in the day, and my mother often warned me: "*dongas* are dangerous to people and animals. They undermine houses."

And, like *Staffrider* before it, *donga* did undermine the fixed walls and halls of the existing literary structures and conventions in South Africa. It captured the reality of a new generation and gave voice to its profound contradictions, its myriad cultural clashes and human frailties, its emergent political energies, as well as its hopes and dreams. With many common threads intertwining, doubling back, sometimes unraveling, donga created a matrix of poetic conversation.

On its pages I encountered the wisdom of Lionel Abrahams, the velocity and precision of Lesego Rampolokeng's word bombs, the roiling imagination of Ivan Vladislavić, Aryan Kaganof's political pulp, Graeme Feltham's sex-crazed anti-fiction and so much more. Who else would have had the sheer bravado, to run an interview with Arthur Mafokate on his riotous Kwaito re-claimer "Don't Call Me a Kaffir" along with Greg Latter's dark, unnerving short story "Piccanin (Born in the RSA)"? Where else could you learn "how to put together a book of poems" and "how to shoot a crime"? Rather than trying to build a bridge across the gap that existed between languages and cultures, between literary genres, *donga* simply descended a rope ladder into the chasm itself.

Paul Wessels always said, "The criterion for me is what I like." Whether or not someone agreed with his choice, he stuck to this principle, rigorously. Paul also said, "Good writing is never boring." It's a phrase that stuck with me over the years as a defiant challenge to the white South African literary establishment and the Western novel with its preordained order, its fixed meaning, its causality and noncontradiction.

Paul was a rigorous editor but also a subtle and generous one. He believed the best stories destabilize a reader's view of the world. His approach was always to identify the unsaid possibility within a piece of writing—the tipping point where the writing became unstable, where it faltered or tripped, lost its footing. Hence a sort of precariousness, a feeling

8 Ibid.

that nothing was ever certain, that if something was tried, it might work, or then again not. And more importantly, that that didn't matter.

He was less interested in any kind of experimental formalism than in writing from a place of immediacy, writing "fighting to remain alive and kicking,"[9] slapdash, one might say, texts written in the white heat of a South African summer or a collapsing star. This opened up an enormously exciting territory for a young writer—a space of freedom and of play where one could take risks, fuck up, or, as Graeme Feltham put it, "pluck in the middle of the fucked-upness."[10] Stepping into an antigravity chamber might be comparable, a sense of entering an enormously new context, where the minutest, previously taken-for-granted everyday thing, a swing of the foot, becomes adventurous.

donga was also always as much about reading as it was writing. A culture of critical reading was advanced through regular reviews, interviews and analyses of exciting contemporary writing from around the world. While *donga*'s focus was unashamedly South African, this was not the bunkered South Africa of the apartheid era, but a country in conversation with the larger global literary community. The active conversation that happened as I read and thought towards my own writing gave me a new sense not only of what was necessary, but also of what was possible. As Paul wrote, "to read is to recognise. If in luck one can recognise what one has never seen before. Aha! A new, or another thought. It is rare for all of us, I think. To read is also to be read."[11]

I soon found myself in conversation with other writers on *donga*. This was never forced. There were no prearranged social events or dinner parties. Rather it happened naturally over emails, telephone calls, conversations in bars and coffee bars—out of our shared excitement and our shared fear. Basically we all found ourselves together in a hole. Apart but a whole.

Maybe that (w)holeness is best viewed in retrospect, in the surprising affinities found in the writers' techniques and compositional methods, and also in their use of content. It's there in the interstices of Pravasan Pillay's texts; the shadows of Robert Berold's writing; the mistakes in Graeme Feltham's prose, the blip-outs and flip-outs that "morph good music into good-bumps";[12] the hiccup in Nadine Botha's poems; the buckshot that sprays Aryan Kaganof's novels; the corrigendas that Paul Wessels finds littering Ivan Vladislavi 's *Restless Supermarket*; the line breaks and shudders of Joan Metelerkamp's verse; in Lesego Rampolokeng's short circuits and blown fuses and "x-rayed burn"[13] and Arthur Mofokeng's zero budget music production model; and in Ike Mboneni Muila's stomach ulcer, and the typos that litter Lauren Beukes's short story 'Dear Mariana.'

donga eventually died. Isn't it, after all, the fate of all holes to eventually collapse, to cave in? Without *donga* there was a definite hole, a hole unfilled. Black holes are a complicated phenomenon. They aren't really

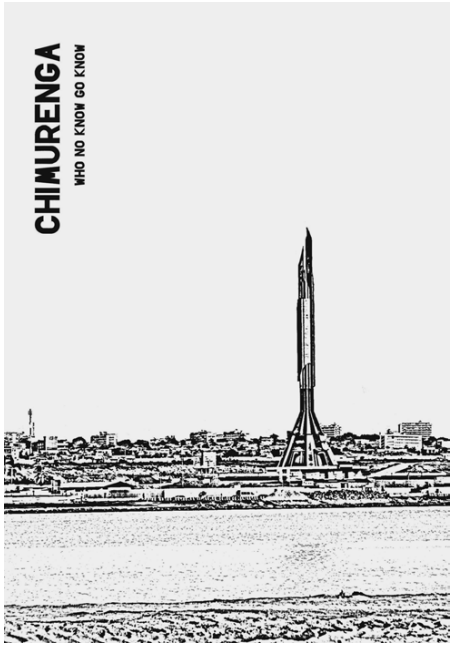
9 Ivan Vladislavi, "What Does He Need Me For? [instead of an Interview with Paul Wessels]," in *donga*, eds., P. Wessels and A. Finlay (Johannesburg: BleKSEM, 2012), 118.
10 Graeme Feltham, "Getting Squelchy, Naked and Yummy with Graeme Feltham and the Ordained Inevitable," in *donga*, eds., P. Wessels and A. Finlay (Johannesburg: BleKSEM, 2012), 69.
11 Ibid., 119.
12 Ibid., 75.
13 Lesego Rampolokeng, "Koshun In The Bog," in *donga*, eds., P. Wessels and A. Finlay (Johannesburg: BleKSEM, 2012), 75.

holes but objects that because of density and gravity look like emptiness. Their light is darkness. They do not reflect light but capture it and reflect the absence of light. Maybe then, in its absence, donga remains as significant as it was in its presence. Maybe in its death and its refusal to die, it allows us to ask what's next. How can we operate in the void of today's critical and political apathy? How can quantum mechanics work at the center of a black hole? How does an individual writer function and act in the center of a cultural void?

By the turn of the century, South Africa was in the grips of a rapid, rampant capitalism. For the older generation, it was becoming more and more difficult not to feel the cauterizing contradictions of the post-apartheid era. For old "staffriders" like Mike Abraham, it was impossible not to feel a very uncomfortable nostalgia for the good bad old days:

> *Now, as I wander the new South Africa, around Newtown, Berea, Yeoville, Melville and sometimes Rosebank I see young people chasing a recording deal, funding for one or another project, connections for a show or some publishing contact and I yearn for staffriders, for those who jumped off fast moving trains with the grace of dancers, who did not wait for handouts, dared, defied and took the leap.*[14]

But there are also always holes within holes, and like a black hole, the energy that both *Staffrider* and *donga* created never entirely vanished. It was *donga* that led me inadvertently to the literary journal *Chimurenga*. My first encounter with its editor happened in a small bar in Cape Town. Ntone Edjabe, *Chimurenga*'s Cameroonian-born, Nigerian-educated editor, sidled up to me and in his characteristic low loping growl, said, "I like your 'Nigerian Drug Dealer'." He was referring to a story I wrote for *donga*. We started a conversation that ran from the verbal revolutions of Nigerian pidgin through to silence as a strategy of resistance. Before long I was contributing to *Chimurenga*, and by 2008 I was an editor.



Chimurenga, 12/13, "Dr. Satan's Echo Chamber," March 2008. Reproduced by permission of the Chimurenga Library.

Chimurenga works across a range of platforms, it's a literary journal, a quarterly Pan-African newspaper titled the *Chronic*, an annual reader on African cities, a regular series of pocket literature, and it hosts a Pan-African radio station. The initiative takes it title from Murenga, the name of a mythic Shona warrior. It came to mean the struggle for freedom during the Zimbabwean wars of liberation. It's also the name of the music made popular by political artists such as Thomas Mapfumo. The name is fitting. *Chimurenga* has a fiercely political agenda, but more than that it

14 "Of 'Brothers with Perfect Timing'", *Chimurenga Library*, 2008.

understands that politics is equally expressed through style as it is through content. How you write is as important as what you write.

Ntone isn't interested in writing that doesn't take risks, that doesn't propose something beautiful, new or dangerous. He has little interest in writing with boring structures, boring language. He is interested in publishing literature that is musical and visual and also explosive. Most of all he is interested in our capacity, through imagination and invention, to produce something radically new and original.

Here, like *Staffrider* before it, and in a different way *donga*, *Chimurenga* take its inspiration from everyday life on the continent, from the inexhaustible capacity for innovation that defines even the most apparently superficial instances of life here. It draws on the way we somehow manage to live our lives with joy and creativity and beauty, sometimes amidst upheaval, suffering and violence, and sometimes perpendicular to it. It invites us to imagine our lives and our futures differently.

What *Chimurenga* publishes then reflects what preoccupies us, here and elsewhere, or what preoccupies others we're close to. The project's byline in many ways lays out its agenda. "Who no know go know" is a phrase of Fela Kuti's, exemplifying his wit. In it we hear Fela signaling that knowledge is something that one makes (or takes) rather than merely receives; an active rather than passive process. As Ntone explains:

> *We do not always try to overexplain, overclarify and always justify our existence and say "Well, the reason why we do this is because we are trying to liberate the mind"—No! Not that this would a bad thing, but there is no absolute necessity for us to know why we are doing what we are doing. We are doing it primarily because we are alive. That was a very libratory idea for us and it kind of canalized the ideas behind the design and the writings we take on.*[15]

Chimurenga is made through a process of engaging a different reality, other realities; secretions and accretions of reality to help us see and think it differently. The journal is always produced through a comradeship in writing that is based on human contact, on passionate and committed friendship, and a meeting of minds and ideals. It is produced through a communal practice based in the informal Pan-African networks and circuits that span the globe. Most stories and commissions begin as conversations between friends, colleague, and comrades, in shebeens, urban nightclubs, business meetings, university hallways, taxi ranks, street corners and on skype, facebook, twitter and email.

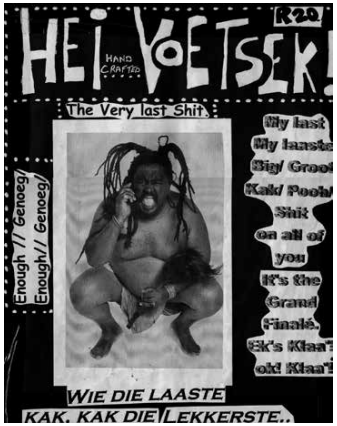
The result is a language that features an extraordinary cosmopolitan inventiveness. Published work ranges from long form journalism, personal memoir, political analysis, journalism, fiction, historical narrative, polemic tracts. *Chimurenga* publishes primarily in English, but also in French, Xhosa, Arabic, and its pages are charged with pidgin phrases, multilingual neologisms and a sort of slangy insouciance that forces even the most experienced editor to reassess what they know, or think they know.

15 Moses März, "Embracing Opacity: Interview with Ntone Edjabe", *Africavenir* (2011).

Like *donga* then, *Chimurenga* is vividly aware of the link between reading and writing, aware that the best writing always happens in conversation. As Ntone confirms:

> *Generally one starts a publication because they want to add something to the publishing universe they inhabit, to transform it somehow. It's not always the case with commercial publications, but often with small magazines such as* Chimurenga*. I have always admired magazines that imagined a world as much as they reported it—publications such as* Transition*,* Black Orpheus*,* Staffrider*. These publications confronted their world but also mediated and shaped it. When I founded* Chimurenga *I wanted to create a space where we could speak with similar force and imagination in this time.*[16]

In 2008 *Chimurenga* started the Chimurenga Library to explore the publications that have influenced its ideas as a publisher; the little magazines, journals and periodicals which have been influential platforms for dissent and which have broadened the scope for print publishing on art, new writing, and ideas in and about Africa. Gathered in an online library, these selections, some dating back to the early 1970s and others appearing in print for the first time, provide an opportunity to trace the diverse networks, influences, dialogues, dialectics, and interventions that have and continue to challenge the official discourse on and from Africa, and the already written history.



Cover of *Hei Voetsek!* 1, 1997. Reproduced by permission of the Chimurenga Library.

Doing the research I was struck by the energy and innovation of many of the journals I encountered. What I seemed to be reading was a secret history of the continent, one that posed a virile challenge to what Achille Mbembe calls "a crisis of language"[17] in writing on Africa in the world and writing the world from Africa, which presents itself in the tendency to presents Africa as a pathological case, a figure of lack—and focuses on what Africa is not (yet) rather than what it is.

Through page after page of poetry, prose, critique, art and photography—often filled with luminous and fugitive experiences—I learned of the richness or complexity of African social and creative experience. Not only are these journals an astonishing reflection on the past, but they also show how the past resurfaces in the present, lending a new dimension for which we have no name, where the here and now is framed by what was, where memory is transposed by imagination, and where experience through the spell of art is alchemized into eternal moments.

Mostly I was drawn to journals that, like *Staffrider*, *donga* and *Chimurenga*, seemed to work in and against accepted language, journals that recognized language as inherently problematic and a perpetual sub-

16 D. MacViban, "An Interview with Ntone Edjabe: Breaking Divides (2013)," *The Ann Arbor Review of Books*, accessed on Janurary 10, 2015, http://www.a2review.net/tag/prince-claus-award.

17 Annalisa Oboe, "Africa and the Night of Language: An Interview with Achille Mbembe (2010)," *Johannesburg Salon*, accessed on January 10, 2015, http://www.jwtc.org.za/the_salon/volume_2.html.

ject of inquiry. Journals that featured writing that demands a heightened level of attentiveness and attunement to what language can do on the page and in the social worlds of its making.

My favorites included *Mfumu'Eto*, a Cameroonian comic, self-produced by the one-man guerrilla empire of Mfumu'Eto Nkou-Ntoula, printed using stencils and photocopying machines, and distributed informally in Kinshasa in the early 1990s. Like other comics produced in Kinshasa at the time, it was heavily influenced by urban culture, and smeared with local indiscretions known as "kinoiseries." *Mfumu'Eto* however also drew inspiration from local traditions, combining black magic and religion, pulp fiction and politics, irony and attitude in a wild display of interdisciplinary bravado that directly contested dominant colonial systems of knowledge.

I was similarly inspired by *Hei Votsek!*, (loosely translated: Hey! Get lost!), a diatribe of a publication, that burst upon the Cape Town writing and peddling scenes in 1997, at a time when the South African cultural journals happily basked under the rainbow. Written, designed, drawn, photoshopped and photocopied by self-proclaimed culture terrorist Elliot Josephs aka Zebulon Dread, *Hei Voetsek!* dissected South African politics, culture, society and sex. Using Cape Flats taal, a street-smart mixture of English, Afrikaans and slang, Dread railed against the establishment. As the editorial of the first issue read: "This magazine is just to say we're out there and we don't buy your shit. It's freedom of expression and the means by which a long-suffering artist becomes an entrepreneur, taking destiny into his own hands and out of the devious honkies who so love control."[18]

Cover of *Frank Talk* 1, no.6, February–March, 1985. Reproduced by permission of the Chimurenga Library.

Nigerian musician Fela Kuti's "Chief Priest Say" was born of a similar defiance. Bypassing editorial censorship in Nigeria's predominantly state controlled press in the 1970s and 1980s, Kuti began buying advertising space in daily and weekly newspapers such as *The Daily Times* and *The Punch* in order to run outspoken political columns. Published under the title, "Chief Priest Say," these columns were essentially extensions of Fela's famous "Yabi Sessions", consciousness-raising word-sound rituals, with himself as "chief priest", conducted at his Lagos nightclub, the African Shrine. Employing genre malleability, a trickster's penchant for play and language games, withering social satire, incantations and invocations, Fela's writing constituted a literary symphony of dissent and resistance.

Moroccan quarterly magazine, *Souffles* was an equally provocative platform. Founded by leftist intellectual Abdellatif Laâbi in 1966, as a reaction against imperialist and colonial cultural domination, the journal used language as the starting point for revolution. From its first issue, *Souffles* posed an aggressive challenge to the traditional Francophone and Arabophone literary divides by encouraging experimentation, translations and collaborations. This approach birthed a new generation of young subversive writers whose "guerilla linguistique" combined French and Arabic to

18 "Hei Voetsek!", *Chimurenga Library*, 2008.

challenge the hegemony of the French language in Morocco and topple traditional literary models, whose respect for chronology, accuracy, and punctuation they regarded with disdain. Writer Issandr El Amrani recalls, "It was not a magazine that one bought and read in one's living room or at the café; it was a manifesto for a young and diffuse political movement."[19]

There are so many others I could name: *Lamalif*, another Mococcan publication from the 1960s that believed, "the goal in this tragic situation was not to lose hope, to build an alternative"; *Frank Talk*, published in South Africa in the 1980s by The Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), a nationalist group committed to Steve Biko's ideas of Black Consciousness; London-based artist and cultural theorist Rasheed Araeen's *Third Text*, a bimonthly international scholarly journal that set out to challenge the West's position as the ultimate arbiter within arts and culture; *Tsotso*, "a magazine of new writing in Zimbabwe," published in the '90s, whose mandate was to undermine the continued colonial domination of literature; *Amkenah* [Places], founded in Egypt in 1999, in direct response to elitism, parochialism and conservatism in the literally scene in Egypt, as well as its Cairo's centralism.

Many of these journals no longer exist. This does not matter. What matters is that they did exist and that their energies, ideologies and imagination lives on in work that is published in other journals on the continent today.

Chimurenga, for its part, continues to reimagine its world. The Chimurenga Library has expanded into a series of exhibitions in libraries around the world. The next of *Chimurenga*'s literary journal is a collaborative novel, while the forthcoming issue of the *Chronic* asks: what if the maps were made by Africans for our own use, to understand and make visible our realities and imaginaries? The issue uses texts and testimonies as data (including fiction, where it provides a deeper truth) to produce beautiful representations of the new that is emerging or reemerging across the continent geopolitically and otherwise. Expect to encounter "secret countries"; Qaddafi's financial and military network; soft power (foreign cultural agencies; the entertainment complex and its relationship with the trendy "Africa Rising"); new trade routes (scrap cities, soccer cities, religious and market cities, drug and prostitution ports and more); water conflicts (tied to land and water grabs); neopats and repats (new and returnees migrants from the West and Asia); pidgins (meeting points of major language groups, spoken and written); transnational armies (that explode the fiction of national armies and various players in armed conflicts). And more.

Chimurenga also just started work on an Arabic edition of the *Chronic*. In the prologue to the inaugural issue of *Souffles*, Laâbi wrote: "Something is afoot in Africa and in other Third-World countries. Exoticism and folklore are falling by the wayside… the day will come when the real spokespersons of these collectives make their voices heard, and it will be like dynamite exploding the rotten arcana of the old humanisms."[20] Almost fifty years later, I can't help wonder, could *Chimurenga* be one of the spokespersons he foresaw?

19 Issandr El Amrani, "In the Beginning There was Souffles (2008)", *Bidoun* 13, accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.bidoun.org/magazine/13-glory/in-the-beginning-there-was-souffles-by-issandr-el-amrani.

20 Ibid.

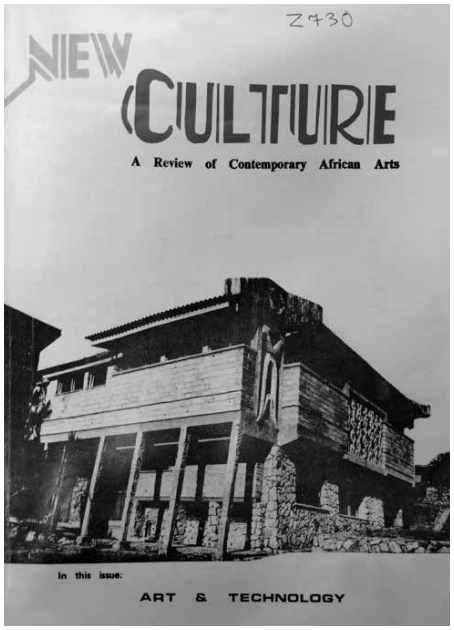
New Culture[1]

Bisi Silva

One of the lingering consequences of the failure of the postcolonial state is inadequate investment in the development of education. With the rise of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes from the late 1970s to the late 1990s, a frontal attack was made on academia and any form of intellectual life. The plethora of journals, magazines and reviews that followed the euphoria of the independence period were soon to be consigned to obsolescence. Nonetheless, a few have been able to reinvent themselves, outside of the continent. Some of the best known Pan-African titles, which focused on art, culture, politics and society, included *Drum Magazine*, *Black Orpheus* and *Transition*,[2] and they complemented the scholarship that was coming out of the dynamic university presses across the continent at the time.

My discovery of *New Culture: A Review of Contemporary African Arts* highlights the informational vacuum that exists with regards to past critical endeavors. Until Janet Stanley, Chief Librarian at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute, offered to provide the library of the CCA, Lagos[3] with copies of the publication, I was not aware of the existence of the review. Only eleven issues underline its brief existence over a fifteen-month period in the late 1970s. During this period in Nigeria, a handful of defunct magazines stood out for their focus on the arts, such as *Nigeria Magazine*[4] and *Uso: Nigerian Journal of Art*.[5] *New Culture: A Review of Contemporary African Art* placed a particularly strong emphasis on the visual arts. It started with an illustrious editorial team that consisted of important artists based both on the continent and elsewhere, as part of the diaspora, such as the American sculptor Melvin Edwards, the London-based artist Taiwo Jegede, and Nigerian artists such as Demas Nwoko (founder) and Uche Okeke, who were subsequently joined by Ola Oloidi, an art historian and professor at the University of Nigeria.

The review delved into many issues such as identity, colonialism, postcolonialism, as well as history and tradition as they came to highlighting the new African reality, and the way these were engaged by the artists in their work. The key section of the review focused on the aesthetics of African art and culture, which propounded a return to the study of traditional art, which the founder, artist, architecture, poet and writer, Demas Nwoko (b. 1935) considered to be the "only one art stylistic idiom… valid to the African and the Blacks of African descent the world over, its origin being the well-known form of traditional African arts, a form that was created and nurtured to maturity by African people themselves, with a history that dates beyond 2000 years." In espousing a return to the past he also acknowledged the need for "a new aesthetic position relevant to our time."[6] To achieve these objectives, the reviewers covered the arts across the continent. The drawings by Sudanese artist Ibrahim El Salahi (b. 1930) that were featured in the May 1979 issue are a good example, as they reached out to the diaspora. The eleven editions are filled with reviews and essays, in addition to containing a vibrant children's section that makes palpable the dynamism of the cultural and creative sector of the period. The exhibition review I found to be the most illuminating was that of Theresa Luck-Akinwale (b. 1934),[7] one of the few trained female artists in Nigeria who still remains inadequately represented in the history of Nigerian Art. As such, the eleven editions constitute an indispensable archive of our cultural life in a context where such information remains difficult to find.



Cover of *New Culture: Art and Technology* 1, no. 7, June 1979. Image courtesy of New Culture Studios, Ore-Meji Heights, Ibadan.

1 This article was originally published as part of the *Manifesta Journal* #17 "Future(s) of cohabitation." The MJ is published by Manifesta Foundation and is available online and in print at manifestajournal.org.

2 *Drum Magazine* (initially called *African Drum*) was started in South Africa in 1951 by Bob Crisp and Jim Bailey. It was a lifestyle magazine that targeted the black population. However it became popular for its coverage of township life under apartheid in the 1950s and 1960s. *Black Orpheus* was founded in 1957 in Nigeria by German expatriate Ulli Beier as a journal of African and Afro-American literature. *Transition: A Journal of Arts, Culture and Society* was started in Kampala, Uganda in 1961 by Rajat Neogy as a platform for East African intellectuals.

3 Full disclosure: the writer is the director of CCA, Lagos, http://www.ccalagos.org.

4 *Nigeria Magazine* may be the longest running arts and culture magazine in Africa. It was founded in the 1930s and the final volume was published in 1990.

5 *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art* came out sporadically, only managing to release three publications in three volumes (one edition per year) between December 1995 and December 2001.

6 *New Culture Magazine* (November 1978): 1.

7 Pat Oyelola, "The Art of Theresa Luck-Akinwale", *New Culture Magazine* (1979): 29.