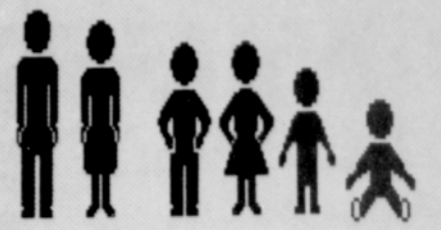




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Success Was Eminent

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

Selaelo Maredi first came to Portland in 1977 with a Theatre Company from South Africa. He performed with the group in a play titled "Survival." Selaelo remembered, well, Concordia and Portland State University.

Two years passed and the Theatre Company was back in Portland, again. This time they performed for the Portland Community College Cascade and Portland State University. The Portland Black Repertory Theatre had specifically requested that Selaelo, a noted playwright, be brought back to work with them on a play entitled, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona. The play is a satire about Black workers in the Ford Company. It wasn't just about the Ford Company but it depicted the overall feelings of any large company who hire persons to do their work. The play shows how the large company just doesn't care about the workers, how they have no need to know about them or their family concerns, or how the worker is not even seen . . . just as long as the work is done. Even when the worker is ill, they cannot understand why the work is not done. "This is a typical feeling which I've personally experienced," says Selaelo.

One time when Selaelo, along with other persons, came late to the factory, the owner of the factory said, "We didn't hire you to give you employment. We hired you so that the work could be done. When you come late, the work is stopped. So, there is no need to have you."

After listening to Selaelo, I found that *Sizwe Bansi's* death was more symbolic than actual. Symbolizing when people's hopes die.

There was even confusion concerning the playwright for this particular production because Athol Fugard is White and John Kani and Winston Ntshona are Black. In South Africa, Athol Fugard is considered the "Godfather" of South African Theatre. Selaelo says that he recognizes Fugard but he does not run to endorse him. Because there are many Black, South African playwrights and they do not receive the proper recognition. There are others who are overshadowed by Athol Fugard.

After Selaelo had completed the play, he returned to New York. He lived in New York for nine years. Later, he moved from New York to California, in the Bay area. During that time, he performed in London for eight months and on a European tour for six months. On the European tour, he was touring with his play *For Better, Not For Worse*. He not only directed the play but he acted, as well. In London, they did the play *Poppie Lomgema*. Selaelo was one of the actors, while in London.

The South African Theatre Company was thrown out of London by the British actors Union. Word was—that they were taking the British actors jobs. But, mind you, they were invited to Britain, to perform; so, somebody had to know something about this quandary. To add more confusion, the South African Theatre Company brought their own production. So, how, on God's green earth, were they taking anything from the White, British actors? Tell me, huh?

There is a general consensus that—if its Black, hold it back and if its White, its always right. This feeling goes from state to state and from country to country. There are some countries where everyone is dark skinned—but, some are lighter than others. The light ones are then elevated. The elevation is done, not only on the position or physical level; but, also, on the emotional level. All that it takes is for a few to begin "a click" and they're on their way.

The British government said that there is a specific regulation about how long a foreign theatrical company can remain in their country. And that after six months you have to give the play to the British actors. If you don't, they have to shut you down. Even after going to the media and complaining to the British Embassy, they had to leave the country.

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Selaelo came back to Portland, two years ago, and did a play called *Homeland* which he wrote and directed. During that

time, he visited a place called the Whitney Young Learning Center. There, the young people are given help with their school studies by people from the community. "This is a beautiful thing" says Selaelo. He went to see the children, in the program, to tell them about South Africa. And, eventually, they went to see *Homeland*. "When I'd returned to California, I received letters from these children" he shared. "They thanked me for coming to share with them, for telling them about South Africa, about how they went to see the show and that they had learned a lot about apartheid and racism." Since he has been back, he has done work with the Whitney Young Learning Center children. He specifically wrote a play for them entitled *Our Parent's Day*. The play was performed at the North Portland Library on N. Killingsworth Avenue, for all the parents and friends, of the children. The play was designed after an annual day celebration in South Africa when the parents of all the students come to the schools to see the children's work. Selaelo wrote the play, produced it, directed it, rehearsed with the children and received not one copper cent for his efforts. "It's something that I did back home" says Selaelo, "putting back something into the community and helping the children. Which is so important."

"I wrote a play called The Young Diplomats. It was about these two kids that went to South Africa."

"I love working with children" says Selaelo. He continued writing. One play after another. "I wrote a play called *The Young Diplomats*. It was about these two kids that went to South Africa." It was a tale about two American children who went to visit South Africa. A Black child and a White child. The first reading was done at the Civic Theatre. Unknowingly, in the audience was Sue Busby from the IFCC. She liked the play but she wanted this children's drama school to do a South African

play. The problem she had with *The Young Diplomats* was that it was all girls. She requested that it be recast to include boys and girls. In response to her request, Selaelo wrote *Never In A Thousand Years*, a one act play.

"I wanted to show how mean and selfish and inexpressible parents can be to teach their children to hate" adds Selaelo "this is one thing that I just hate." He continued, "The parents, the society, the church and the schools spend so much time filling their children with negative things."

There is a line in the other play, *The Young Diplomats*, that explains that when a young child is born—the baby's eyes don't see. It only sees what everybody around it sees. It hears only what everybody else hears. The child doesn't see color and it doesn't have understanding of knowledge or who's knowledge is that. In it's innocence, the child draws from it's environment. So much so, that the child knows not to take it's hand from a burning candle.

SOUTH AFRICAN AWARENESS NIGHT

The African Student Union of the Portland State University campus presented a special program in the PSU Smith Center Commons on the seventh day of November, nineteen hundred and eighty-nine at 7:30 p.m. The special evening featured: music by The Brown Sisters, Selaelo Maredi's play *Never In A Thousand Years*, and the key note speaker was Lindiwe Mabuza, African National Congress Chief Representative to the U.S. The program was co-sponsored by the Black Cultural Affairs Board, Students Against Apartheid, the Women's Union and the Poetry Committee.

The reason that this kind of a program was held was simply because Portland is still so backwards as far as South Africa is concerned. "Its like it's in another time zone" Selaelo says with a smile. The state of Oregon was the first one to pass the divestment bill; but the people in the cities of Oregon . . . Some of them don't even know that Africa is a country. "The pro-

gram made quite an impact on those who attended."

"we, the African people, were so very happy to have Ms. Mabuza to come to Portland. She is such a dynamic speaker. The African National Congress is the fighting liberation movement in South Africa. It is the ANC that has been fighting the Africans since 1912 when South Africa was ruled by the British. The Africans just came into power in 1938. Instead of giving the power back to the African, they gave it to the Africans. "Its just WHITE, WHITE, WHITE" says Selaelo.

WHAT IS THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS?

This is a very important, very dignified, decent and well mannered group. So far, every group that has fought for a 'just cause' has been called a terrorist organization.

Even until now, the ANC has refused to wage war against the White Africans. This is the first of many times we hope to have Ms. Mabuza here in our city. All of the African community, here in Portland, should have present to hear the wealth of information that she had to share with us. The ANC was once exiled but is now doing well and even though our representative still doesn't have a voice in the United Nations, we, at least have an official office, which is located in Washington, D.C. To us, Ms. Mabuza is our ambassador.

For further information concerning the ANC, contact the African Students Union at the PSU campus.

"where there is profit, conscience is destroyed" says Selaelo. Africa is one of the richest countries in the world. "Rather than help" expounds Selaelo, "the entire world would rather turn a blind eye and

look the other way while all of these atrocities continue to go on, seemingly unnoticed. Just because they don't want to effect the profit. Its very tragic; but, at the same time, its a reality."

The ANC has been struggling for years trying to get national support. They are not recognized as a government. All they have ever had was 'observer status' to the United Nations . . . never to participate. But for the first time, an ANC representative has an office in Washington, D.C. "The South African students were so proud to receive Ms. Mabuza" says Selaelo.

"We are still fighting injustice. And, yes, we are capable of running our own country."

SELAELO REFLECTS BACK TO AFRICA

"One day we went to visit our aunt. This was in downtown Johannesburg. We stopped to buy some cold drinks and some fish and chips. We went into this African [a name given to White persons born in Africa] store. While we were there, we encountered this African boy, who was about twelve years old. He walked into the store and become a policeman and he had been given a form. The form had to be filled out and sign properly or else he would not be taken. The storekeeper asked the boy, 'Why do you want to become a police officer?' and the boy responded, 'Because I want to arrest them.' He was pointing to us." These children are preached at in the churches, the schools and in the homes about how to do away with the Black Africans. Imagine, twelve years old and spewing such hate. Its unbelievable. In twelve years, he had been totally indoctrinated in a negative and ugly manner.

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