

Helen Suzman on: Alan Paton, liberalism and the New South Africa

(a precis of the 5th Alan Paton Lecture delivered by Helen Suzman at the School of Law, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, on 3 September 1998)

Why did liberalism become a negative word for South Africans in the liberation struggle? Why did Alan Paton, one-time hero of the international anti-apartheid movement, attract such hostility later? Is it because liberals like Mrs Suzman, by serving in the apartheid parliament, albeit as vehement critics, were seen to lend legitimacy to an illegitimate regime? Is it because, even when the Law became corrupt, they still obeyed the rule of Law, obediently closing down the Liberal Party when it was declared illegal? Is it because Alan Paton and other liberals opposed the use of force and economic sanctions for fear that these weapons would hurt the innocent more than the guilty?



The Natal Witness

"Paton admitted that he had a simplistic understanding of the situation. He ignored the views of those black South Africans who supported disinvestment and economic sanctions because most of these ..would not be the ones to suffer hunger. I took the same view. I know that economic sanctions and disinvestment would lead to widespread unemployment, especially of black people..and inevitably would lead to an escalation of crime and violence. And so, of course, it has proved to be."

Paton, Suzman and other liberals, were seen as enemies of transformation. Suzman quotes Neville Alexander:

"..liberalism is a greater danger in the long run to the struggle of the oppressed than fascism, for the very reason that it seems to speak with the tongue of the people."

Now the struggle for liberation is over, and apartheid is ended. Has the hostility to liberalism died down? "Yes", said van Zyl Slabbert. "No", says Mrs Suzman. It is true that many liberal values have now been enshrined in our new constitution, one of the most liberal in the world. It is true that our constitution uniquely embodies socio-economic rights. Other constitutions direct governments to give heed to the need for education, housing, health care, etc - but the South African constitution goes further to make these justiciable rights, protected in law.

"Thus I suppose it is arguable that, using the constitution as a yardstick, liberalism as a creed has triumphed in South Africa".

But, says Mrs Suzman, the liberal values of the constitution have not prevented frequent media attacks on liberalism or those seen to be "conservative neo-liberals". Liberalism is identified by many opponents as support for particular political parties, as protection for the privilege of wealth. Liberalism may have triumphed, but liberals are still under fire. Were he alive today, Paton would probably be at the receiving end of the attacks.

What would he have thought of the new South Africa, Mrs Suzman asks. He would have welcomed the disappearance of the oppressive laws that bedevilled the lives of the majority of our citizens during the apartheid regime. He would have been delighted to vote in the first democratic election in 1994. He would have welcomed the Bill of Rights in the constitution, and the establishment of the Constitutional Court as the highest Court in the land.

But, as a firm supporter of federalism, he would have opposed the concentration of power in the hands of the central government. He would have thought that there is too much emphasis on rights in the constitution and not enough on responsibility. He would have opposed a culture of entitlement. And for this he might still have been attacked.

Would he have approved of the TRC? Mrs Suzman is not sure. He would have welcomed its emphasis on reconciliation; he would have been appalled, as we all were, at the revelations of torture and murder. But he might not have approved of the granting of amnesty to people on the basis of dubious political motives.

"Most of all, Alan Paton would certainly have cautioned that a liberal constitution would not guarantee that the principles it contained would be implemented. He would have been alarmed at threats to the freedom of the press and the strong reaction to criticism from government sources. He would have sounded an urgent warning about the need to maintain a strong civil society and a watchful parliamentary opposition to protect basic liberal principles."

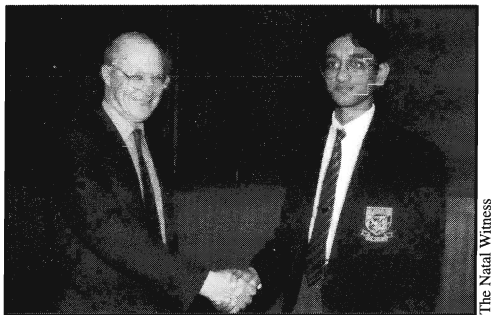
In celebration of 50 years of *Cry, the Beloved Country*

1998 saw the 50th anniversary of the publication of Alan Paton's classic. To commemorate this event, the Alan Paton Centre hosted and co-hosted several functions with overwhelming success. Festivities kicked off with a Paton Film Festival in the first half of the year, accompanied by a University Lecture by Ray Swart. An essay competition, open to all schools in southern Africa, was also launched in April. September brought a week of functions with a Civic Reception, a Paton Tour of Pietermaritzburg and the 5th Alan Paton Lecture.

Alan Paton Essay Prize for schools in southern Africa

The Essay Prize went to Lev David of Glenhaven Secondary School in Verulam, and was presented to him on the evening of 3 September, prior to the 5th Alan Paton Lecture, by Professor Ronald Nicolson, Dean of Humanities on the Pietermaritzburg Campus and member of the Alan Paton Centre Advisory Committee.

Lev David's essay on the topic '*Cry, the Beloved Country*: its relevance and value in 1998' won him a year's free tuition at the University of Natal. The runners-up, Morwenna Bosch of St. Anne's College, Hilton, Nkateko Mkasi of Khanyisa College, Giyani, and Bianca Morris of Thomas More College, Kloof, each received a Certificate of Merit.



Lev David receiving his well-earned prize
from Professor Nicolson.

University Lecture by Ray Swart (13 May)

A highlight of the commemorative festivities was the University Lecture by retired lawyer, politician and friend of Alan Paton, Ray Swart, entitled '*Paton and Cry, the Beloved Country*: the man, the book and the message'. Swart reminisced about the Paton he knew and he spoke about the man's strengths and his weaknesses. He continued with interesting statistics on *Cry, the Beloved Country*, mentioning that the book had sold over 15 million copies by the time of Paton's death ten years ago, and was still selling at the rate of 100,000 copies a year. This bestseller was also recently selected by the American Library Association, together with classics such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, as the outstanding book selected most often by library patrons. Ray Swart concluded with the message *Cry, the Beloved Country* conveys to all South Africans - that of hope and reconciliation.

The Paton Film Festival (11-13 May)

50th Anniversary functions commenced with the Paton Film Festival on the Pietermaritzburg campus. Audiences had the rare opportunity to see both film versions of the commemorated classic *Cry, the Beloved Country*: the 1952 black and white version produced by Zoltan Korda of British Lion Corporation featuring Sydney Poitier, Canada Lee, Charles McRae and Vivien Clinton, and the recent version produced and directed by South Africans, Anant Singh and Darrell Roodt, featuring the well-known Hollywood actors James Earl Jones and Richard Harris, along with South African actors Vusi Kunene and Leleti Khumalo. The award-winning documentary '*Alan Paton's Beloved Country*', produced by Clive Morris Productions, also drew an enthusiastic crowd.

To coincide with the Film Festival and to make relevant collections more accessible to local students, the Alan Paton Centre made available to the Main Library a large selection of videos and audiotapes from its collection. Students could in their own time view interviews with Alan Paton, as well as Paton reading from his own works. Audiotapes included a lecture by Alan Paton given at the University of Michigan, Flint, USA on his years at Diepkloof Reformatory, readings by Alan Paton with introductions by Jonathan Paton and Jo Dunstan, and '*Paton at 80 - a celebration*' - a series of lectures at the University of Cape Town in 1983, which included lectures by Archbishop Denis Hurley, Rene de Villiers, Richard Rive and Paton himself. A display on *Cry, the Beloved Country* featured in the Main Library at the same time.

The Film Festival was repeated in September at the Malherbe Library on the Durban campus, and the display subsequently at Hilton College during October.

Commemorative Items

To mark this Anniversary year the Alan Paton Centre has been selling Anniversary mugs, featuring Paton in typical pose, for R14 per mug, and Alan Paton Centre pens in assorted colours for R4 each.

Please note that these items, especially the mugs, are limited in numbers. These items may be obtained from the Alan Paton Centre.

Civic Reception (2 September)



The Natal Witness

Attending the Civic reception are from left to right: Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, Councillor Siphwe Gwala, Helen Suzman, Mr. James Joseph, American Ambassador, and Mrs Anne Paton.

A most successful Civic Reception was hosted in honour of Alan Paton by the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg and the Transitional Local Council in the beautiful Supper Room of the City Hall.

At the well-attended function guests included Helen Suzman, Mr. James Joseph, Ambassador of the United States of America, and the Paton family. In his speech The Mayor Councillor Siphwe Gwala paid particular tribute to Alan Paton as the city's most famous son. 'Cry, the Beloved Country' he said 'with the possible exception now of Nelson Mandela's *Long walk to freedom*, is the best known book written by a South African'. It had not only stirred the conscience of many people to the gross racial injustices existing in their own societies, but had also awakened overseas interest in the situation in South Africa.

In turn Jonathan Paton, son of Alan Paton, entertained the guests with his humorous anecdotes on the impact the success of *Cry, the Beloved Country* had had on the family's private life. Professor Ronald Nicolson spoke briefly of the establishment in 1989 of the Alan Paton Centre as a centre for the study of the literature and politics of conflict and conciliation - two of the major themes in Alan Paton's life. Guests were then treated to a hearty dinner.

Guests were also invited to sign a book celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Amnesty International.



The Alan Paton Centre

Mrs Anne Paton, widow of Alan Paton perusing her husband's book *Save the Beloved Country* in the recreated Alan Paton Study. Donor of the books, audio tapes, photographs and memorabilia from Alan Paton's original study, her presence on the Paton Centre's Advisory Committee will be missed when she returns to England next year after 35 years in South Africa.

'We are the stories we tell' (1 October)

This seminar aimed to give public exposure to writers at grassroots level, some of whom perhaps would not otherwise be able to make their stories public.

'We are the stories we tell' was a joyful, thoughtful celebration of both Heritage Day (24 September) and the International Day of the Aged (1 October), and recognised that aged or older people **are heritage** in Africa.

Bishop Michael Nuttall set the tone in his opening address by narrating passages from the diaries of his father. Introduced by Kendall, the three authors then shared their stories with the audience. Linda Kotze and Teboho Hlabane enacted a scene of police harassment in the townships from *Singing away the hunger* by Me 'Mpho Nthunya, the Lesotho writer, whilst Raaz Pillay read the poignant story of 'Awa's toes', an account of the trials of her indentured Indian grandmother in a Newcastle coalmine. In 'Matat, sweet Matat' Mary Phumani Tenene recounted her life from rural childhood at Mpharane near Matatiele to that of community service, first as a teacher and later as a nurse at Umlamli and Madadeni Hospitals.

The authors then presented the gift of their manuscripts to the Alan Paton Centre for safekeeping.

An options programme was made available to the audience who were encouraged to join a Writing Group, enrol in a Family History workshop, or start their own school or community archive around the theme 'Archives tell our stories'.

Co-hosts for the workshop were the Alan Paton Centre and the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository.



VIP Photos

From left to right:
Me 'Mpho Nthunya, Kendall, Raaz Pillay and Mary Tenene



VIP Photos

Drama students Linda Kotze and Teboho Hlabane enacting a scene from *Singing away the hunger*.

Pietermaritzburg's Alan Paton Tour (3 September)

Alan Paton spoke of himself more than once as being a 'poet who wrote novels'. Douglas Livingstone, in his foreword to *Songs of Africa*, spoke of Paton as an author who made 'poetry of prose'. But for those listening to the stirring performance of Paton poetry in the Colin Webb Hall at the University of Natal during the Anniversary Paton Tour of Pietermaritzburg recently, Alan Paton is 'a poet in his own right'.

Performed by 'The good Companions' in a setting dear to Paton - his Alma Mater - and where he himself 'trod the boards', Rosemary Bamford and Michael Lambert delighted their audience with recitations of 'Psalm of the forest', 'Indian woman', 'We mean nothing evil towards you' and other poems.

The Tour, part of the 50th Anniversary celebrations to mark the publication of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, began at 9am with a visit to Paton's childhood home at 19 Pine Street. A plaque now marks the site. Paton's earliest memories are indelibly recorded in his autobiography *Towards the Mountain*. Pietermaritzburg 'the lovely city' was a place of 'hills and mist, of birds seen and unseen, and the crying of the trains on their way to Johannesburg'.

The former head offices of the old Liberal Party of South Africa (1958-1968), now part of the large 'Canada Room' in the Lambert Wilson Study Library, were revisited. Colin Gardner spoke of days when Liberal Party members were shunned in the street for their supposedly Communist learnings, and of the many members that were banned in the dark days of the 1960's.

A stop for tea was taken at the old Supreme Court building, now the Tatham Art Gallery. This was where James Paton, Alan Paton's father, spent much of his working life as a short hand writer.

Boarding the minibuses the tour drove to Maritzburg College where Paton was a pupil from 1914 to 1918, and a teacher from 1928 to 1935. A fine school, Paton's 'special pride' was the Old Main Building or Clark House. The Tour visited the rooms of 'Fluff' Abbot, Mathematics master during Paton's school days, reliving the 'fire-drill' story as recounted in *Towards the Mountain*. On his return to the school as a master in 1928 Paton penned these lines:

**'Old walls that echoed to our cries,
Our oaths and prayers and laughter,
And echo now to cries of those
Who follow after'**

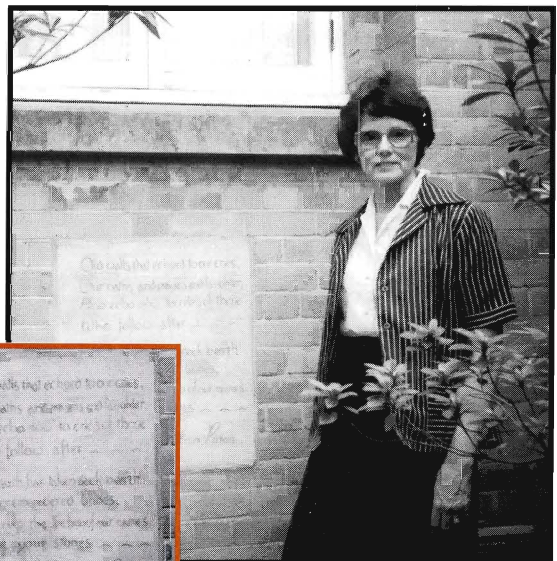
He affixed them in concrete on the wall of the Drama Complex when the school celebrated its Centenary in 1963.

At the University of Natal the tour was joined by a number of staff and students who had come for the poetry recital, which was followed by a short walk down to the Alan Paton Centre which houses Alan Paton's study, archives and memorabilia. Here, around the rich core donations of the Paton Archives and the Liberal Party papers, have come many others - for example, the papers of the Midlands Region of the Black Sash, the Detainees Aid Committee and the Five Freedoms Forum.

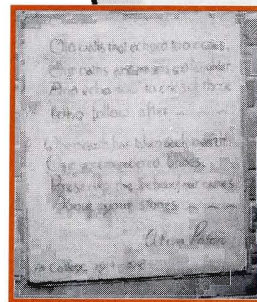


The Natal Witness

Jonathan and David, sons of Alan Paton with Cynthia Mahabeer, owner of 19 Pine Street.



The Natal Witness



Legacy to Maritzburg College schoolboys.

Reflecting our developing history these documents are also part of 'the struggle for improved human relations that filled so much of Alan Paton's essentially human life' (C. De B. Webb 1989).

Here the Tour ended and a return was made to the Pietermaritzburg Publicity Association in town. Half-day 'Drive Tours' from the Publicity Association now include visits to the Alan Paton Centre. Brochures may be had from its offices.

CONCORD

Out of the study of conflict and conciliation there comes, hopefully, **concord** - that is agreement, harmony, and a 'being of the same heart or mind', so that justice and peace make take root in the new South Africa.

Donations in the form of money or documents for deposit, will be welcomed by the Alan Paton Centre. Cheques should be made out to: The Alan Paton Centre

Oral History: 'Finding the Future in the Past'.

Vansina states that 'oral memory is stimulated in the interview process'. What is increasingly apparent to interviewers is that interviewees often appear to rethink and re-evaluate their lives, and particular incidents in their lives, during the interview process. Sharing and evaluating lived experiences can be both personal and painful, but at the same time empowering and healing. Where the interviewer has been trained to listen and empathise as well as question and guide, the interview experience can assist a process of healing of memories that may already be taking place.

The oral history project '**Recording the Anti-Apartheid struggle in KwaZulu-Natal**' was undertaken by the Alan Paton Centre in March 1995 in response to a number of pressing needs.

These were:- to begin to build up the resources for a people's history of the subregion, a history which had been largely unrecorded and neglected; to record the struggle experience of older people in particular as a matter of urgency before this material was lost; to create archival material for academic research; to encourage more community involvement and use of the Alan Paton Centre and its resources.

A life history approach was adopted which also allowed for particular attention to be paid to the circumstances surrounding specific events, for example marches, boycotts, bannings, harassment and imprisonment.

The Oral History Committee has advised the project in a number of areas including methodology, and the selection of interviewers and interviewees. The committee also reviews progress. A contextual approach is employed and an oral history release form is completed. The form notes details concerning the interview, and interviewee may give or withhold permission for public access to the tape.

Since the project began 112 interviews have taken place and 71 people have been interviewed, some several times. Names that spring to mind are Archie Gumede, Anton Xaba, Archbishop Denis Hurley, Harry Gwala, Peter Brown, Else Schreiner and Samuel Nchunu. Interviews take place in Zulu or English.

Interviewing has continued steadily through 1998: so far 34 interviews have taken place. Included among these are Philip Dladla, Stanley Mbambo, Pauline Stanford, Happy Blose, Michael Worsnip, Monika Wittenberg, Makhosi Khoza, Vera Cebekulu, Moses Ndlovu, Chris Langeveld and Radley Keys.

In attempting to record, albeit incompletely, a diversity of experiences across the cultural and political spectrum during the past three and a half years, several broad subject areas or themes recur in interviews. These are violence in the Midlands during the past thirteen years, the role of the Trade Unions, and the continuing effects of the Sarmcol Strike in the late 1980's, and the role of women and protest.

The project also looked to follow up wherever possible on the history of protest in Pietermaritzburg from the early 1950's

particularly when interviewing older people. Linah Mabhida, wife of Moses Mabhida, was active in the Beer Hall (Matsheni) Protests in the 1950's, and Violaine Junod in protest marches down Church Street during the same period.

Wherever possible interviews in Zulu have been translated into English, and the transcription of longer interviews and interview series undertaken. Shorter interviews remain to be transcribed as funding becomes available. The Oral History Project has been funded to date by public donations.

All interviews continue to be documented onto the University of Natal Main Library Catalogue. They are also lodged with the newly formed National Register of Oral Sources (NAROS) at State Archives, Pretoria. It is anticipated that a sample publication will be available from NAROS in a number of months. All interviews will also shortly be listed, together with a summary, on the Alan Paton Centre's website at:- <http://www.un.ac.za/UNPDepartments/Library/ahome.htm>

C. Adenaike and J. Vansina (eds.) 1996.
In pursuit of history : field work in Africa.
Portsmouth, Hants .: Heinemann.



A former President of the S.A. Federation of Leather Trade Unions, Mr. Dasrath Bundhoo and his wife Durga, in their Raisethorpe home after an interview on 29 October 1998.

Continued from page 1

But overall, she says, Paton would have believed that the present state of the nation is better than it was 10 years ago. Crime and corruption may concern us, but corruption was rife in the old South Africa too; and to Paton, as to herself,

"...race classification, pass laws, forced removals, detention without trial and all the hideous violations of human rights in the old South Africa are just as appalling as hijacking and robbery and rape."

Finally, Paton would have rejoiced in South Africa's present international standing - no longer a pariah state; but a member of the Commonwealth, the United Nations, the OAU, a leading member of SADC - and the fact that President Mandela is the most popular and sought-after leader in the world.

Ron Nicolson

The Alan Paton Collections: from the local to the global

One of the main functions of an archive is to make its collections, in whatever format, available to researchers and visitors. The accessibility of the collections at the Alan Paton Centre continues to increase as a result of a number of national and international links that are being established.

Our in-house link

URICA

Urica is the On-Line Public Access Cataloguing (OPAC) system used by the University of Natal Libraries. All manuscript, audio and videotape collections at the Alan Paton Centre are catalogued onto OPAC, and may be accessed by computer through the University of Natal Libraries.

Our national link

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SOUTH AFRICA SERVICES

The availability of the many different registers of the National Archives of South Africa has done a great deal in giving exposure to the Alan Paton Centre collections to a wider South African public. Presently there is on-line access to the collections via terminals at all the major archive repositories in South Africa for example Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein. It is hoped that within 6 months there will also be access via the Internet.

NAREM (National Register of Manuscripts)

All URICA catalogue entries on OPAC for the Alan Paton Centre Manuscript collections are submitted to the National Register of Manuscripts (NAREM). A Guide to Manuscripts at the Alan Paton Centre is also published annually by NAREM.

NAROS (National Register of Oral Sources)

Similarly, catalogued entries of the Oral History Project are submitted to NAROS. This is a new register, and the Alan Paton Centre's Oral History Project has been selected for the 'trial' Guide. A Directory of Oral Sources in South Africa is also being compiled by NAROS.

NAREF (National Register of Photographs)

In an attempt to find a suitable in-house computer database for its photograph collection, the Alan Paton Centre came in contact with NAREF. Since the beginning of this year the Centre has submitted entries on a steady basis to NAREF, and hopes to have its entire collection on this database as soon as possible.

Our international link

Our website has been particularly successful in connecting us with the big wide world. Since its commencement last year, a vast number of enquires have come in from all over the world. Queries have ranged from information on Alan Paton and his works in general, to this year's stream of requests on *Cry, the Beloved Country* in particular. Our Oral History Project has also attracted increased interest via the web.

African Research Central

Archival resource material at the Alan Paton Centre now features on the 'Africa Research Central' website which aims to alert researchers worldwide to resources available at repositories in Africa.

Their URL is <http://africa@csusb.edu>

Documents of interest received include:-

Nthunya papers 1929-1996

Manuscript of '*Singing away the hunger : stories of life in Lesotho*'.

(University of Natal Press, 1996)

Me' Mpho Nthunya is a Lesotho elder, a survivor, a storyteller and family leader. Her autobiography reflects the poverty and reliance on ritual that shape the lives of the Basotho people, and her resourcefulness as an African woman. Her book was a finalist for the Sunday Times Alan Paton Prize for non-fiction in 1997. PC 120.

Pillay papers 1930-1998

Manuscripts of her autobiography, family photographs, and cuttings.

Raaz Pillay is the granddaughter of indentured Indian labourers who worked in the coal mines near Newcastle after arriving in South Africa. Pillay tells the story of her grandparents and her family, and their struggles to survive in South Africa. Born in Pietermaritzburg, Pillay is a teacher by profession.

Access restricted until publication. PC 121.

A Year of Global Coverage

The activities and functions undertaken by the Alan Paton Centre during this Anniversary year brought widespread exposure both to the Alan Paton Centre and to the University as a whole. Furthermore, it put the Alan Paton Centre in the spotlight as an increasingly recognised archive and conflict and conciliation studies centre.

Media coverage ranged from numerous newspaper articles locally and abroad to a number of radio interviews for SABC and SAFM. The most significant was the panel talk show 'Talk at Will' on SAFM in which the Manuscript Librarian of the Alan Paton Centre, Joicelyn Leslie-Smith, participated, together with panelists Jonathan Paton and Ray Swart. Further contributions were by Archbishop Denis Hurley, Eddie Daniels, Professor David Welsh and others. Although the relevance and value of *Cry, the Beloved Country* both yesterday and today formed the main theme of the show, Mrs Leslie-Smith took the opportunity to also discuss the aims and functions of the Alan Paton Centre at large. This not only generated an overwhelmingly positive response from many listeners, but also resulted in a number of donations to the Centre.

Concord is produced by Joi Leslie-Smith and Debora Matthews, Alan Paton Centre, and layout is by Alistair Nixon, Audio Visual Centre, University of Natal, Private Bag X01, 3209, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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