An Exile Collage: Politics, Stories, and Resistance in Cyberspace

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with Gian Pagnucci

The importance of *collage* lies in the displacement of agreed-upon painterly conventions, thereby extending the reach of references, breaking down the hierarchy of 'values' to bring us closer (in the juxtaposition of dead or re-cycled images and nascent areas of paint) to the flitting flow of impressions provoked by the oddity, the breaks in surface texture and in expectations, the sleight of mind, perhaps the 'happy accident', all of which— re-ordered or disordered—becomes the matter of con- sciousness. (Breytenbach 67)

In this article, we will explore the nature of the exile in the post-Internet age. We will look at how exiles and oppositional groups create communities online to reconnect them to their homelands, but we will also explore the limitations and risks of these virtual returns. Our aim is to create an exile collage which provides a space for many voices to re-present the complexity of the human and social issues intersecting exile, resistance, and technology.

Our collage is loosely based in a research approach which Gubrium and Holstein call 'new ethnography.' This approach aims for the creation of a participatory and multi-voiced text where inquirers and participants have the opportunity to re-present their varied assumptions about their worlds and make meaning through personal and collaborative inquiry. In short, we hope to open a window for "readers to feel, think about, and compare their own worlds of experience with those of the people they meet on the pages of these stories" (Banks and Banks 68), dialogues, poems, words, and visual images.

The complexity and 'messiness' of human issues involved in exile, resistance, and technology not only calls for an interdisciplinary approach to their study, but also different authorial voices—those of researchers and participants. Our collage-based approach to this paper has sought to defy the traditional hegemonic discourse of the researcher as an expert:

> If the academy is to change, if our views of reality are to be more inclusive, then we need a broader representation of authorial voices as we approach the twenty-first century. Thus, we offer here an argument or experimental representational practices that may well not enable us to discover new lands—as if they are out there, waiting to be found, but instead, help us to create new ways to see the world, and in doing so, broaden who we mean by "us." (Tierney and Lincoln xvi)

Our research began with a review of the writing of authors who were forced to leave their homelands. We also searched the Internet and gathered written as well as visual information that contained materials related to resistance by progressive groups in cyberspace. Since our research project involved participants from different walks of life—journalism, literature, art, and guerillas—and geographical distances, we also engaged in informal face-to-face interviewing, telephone conversations, and e-mail exchanges. Finally, we also told some of our own stories connected to all these issues.

In this article we present multiple texts, multiple voices, and multiple stories of researchers and participants to create new understandings of what it means to be an exile. By experimenting with non-traditional forms of textual representations and by combining art, poetry, and fiction (Banks and Banks; Diamond and Mullen; Denzin; Tierney and Lincoln), we attempt to give a rich, layered picture of exiled life and resistance in the Technological Era.

Exiled Spaces: A Three-Person Dialogue about Political Resistance on the Internet

To provide an understanding of the ways technology weaves into the issues of exile and political resistance, we begin by providing here a dialogue among the following voices:

Dennis Brutus—South African poet living in exile in Pittsburgh, PA
Ken Campbell—Canadian journalist, and Internet expert on political resistance
Ron Douglas—Human rights activist for the Zapatistas, Mexican freedom fighters

All the statements were taken from actual interviews conducted with the three participants. A different font style has been used for each interviewee's voice. Rather than offer separate reports of the interviews, we provide here a fictionalized dialogue. Though our three interviewees never actually spoke with each other, the common ground their views have about how the Internet has impacted the life of the exile and the disenfranchised illuminates these issues in some startling ways. We have worked to blend the real words of all three speakers in order to create a collage of voices which embodies the nature of how political dissidents can use technology as a form of resistance. By creating a fictional dialogue, we are able to use our research findings to illuminate dilemmas and relationships which would otherwise be difficult to see.

> What role does the Internet play in political resistance? I think it plays three things . . . (1) it acts as an aggregator, (2) it acts as an amplifier, and (3) it acts as a conduit.

> *I was an exile until the end of apartheid. Mandela invited me— as a fellow prisoner on Robben Island to celebrate his election at the Presidential Residence in Pretoria. But Exile did not change my relationship with South Africa. I continued to serve the struggle from outside.*

The Serbians have downed one F-15 fighter and downed one NATO Web server. They knocked it down. The Serbian army deliberately knocked a NATO Web server and they knocked it through a technological tool called 'pin star.' They understand that war is no longer just about bombing people, but about who controls the message. In this case, controlling the Internet. Think about what military operation in the past would have included an Internet Web site as part of its military objectives.

As far as the Internet goes, in reference specifically to the Zapatista movement, the Internet is essential for the international organizing end of it. I mean, there have been Zapatista solidarity groups that have formed in every part of the world and that's because anybody can go on the Internet, look up the word 'Zapatista,' and find out what the program is. Instantly, there's some kind of connection to it because they support the Zapatista program or they just feel like they support the people of Chiapas. Or, maybe they want that resistance for their own country because the Zapatistas have promoted an autonomy movement and an economic rights as human rights movement.

You have to change people's minds to cut through the facts. And that's why the Internet is different. It's because almost every single media revolution that has happened thus far has simply reinforced the status quo. It's always been point, multi-point. That's the broadcast medium. Books come from a single manufacturer and go out to a bunch of readers. Newspapers are the same thing. TV and radios, same thing. Mainframe computers, same thing. The Internet, though, is a different technology, which is actually more empowering because it gives everyone the capacity to broadcast.

We can get all of their writings, all of their books, the testimonials of the indigenous people there that nobody had heard, nobody had listened to for hundreds of years and then they get hooked into the Internet and we can read all of them. That's what a lot of the struggle is about, is being heard, being a different voice in the world.

When information travels that path you are building an intimacy and a connection.

The other thing I would say, the Internet is essential for documenting human rights abuses and finding out which corporations are involved in helping those human rights abuses. How our government's involved in that war down there. It's really

amazing what's been done. The Zapatistas themselves can call an International mobilization just by clicking a few buttons on the Internet and then we all know. And that's happened. We mobilize all the time on their requests. We can actually respond to their immediate needs and their immediate demands.

Communication was important—has been increasingly important—to our success in opposing brute reality.

During the Zapatista consulta, March 21, the government were sending what they call e-mail bombs into Zapatista solidarity groups' e-mail. What the bomb does is that it subscribes that e-mail account to a whole bunch of news services so you end up getting your e-mail account hit with a million messages at once so it doesn't work anymore. The other side of it, too, is there's a potential for governments to spread misinformation, which happens as well.

But, the Internet is truly destabilizing and I think businesses are still having a hard time figuring out how to get online and have their messages fed when all of a sudden people can write back and say: screw you! And organize online. So, it's a wonderful, tough, tumultuous time of the world to live in.

Zapatista supporters have also used the Internet as an attack method on the government. I know one case where they took down the government's Web page for a time, they put the pictures of the Zapatistas on, and they put it back up.

And in fact Turkey is a good example for the way that cyberspace, the online world has to work with the outline world. In general, what the Turkish opposition does is that it pumps stuff out through Germany into Holland. Holland, of course, is this wonderful resource, a protected resource, for all kinds of alternative messages to the mainstream message. And they are fiercely independent of the outline community in the Netherlands. So, you can get all kinds of information of what's going on in places like Turkey. Sometimes the message streams out to people, but it cannot be quickly translated into the culture, so instead it is recoiled and slowly works it's way through the populace in the same way that great big businesses recoil their messages through other companies or Washington lobbying groups.

One of the things they are doing, too, is setting up satellite modems in the jungle so that indigenous people can broadcast live television over the Internet. And I mean, a few years ago, I

was getting little movie clips the Zapatistas were sending out. You can actually see them, you can hear what they're saying, and see the place.

In a world that becomes small, where your message can be bounced around everywhere, what they have to start doing is to kill the source. We can manage exile. And the government's enemies will eventually fund these people. We will give them guns and laptop computers and satellite hook ups.

But we're not there yet—in fact, in some cases there has been a retreat from the goals of the struggle.

While the technology of the Internet has helped unify the cause of exiles and political dissidence in many countries around the world, this cause is also deeply rooted in a much more traditional conception of the exile.

Traditional Conceptions of Exile

Foremost in our picture of the exile is a confrontation with geographic and cultural displacement. Usually, as a result of hostile political actions and often a military coup, a writer is forced to leave the home country and take up residence in a foreign land. In this dis-placed site, the exile must struggle with a new language and new culture. This directly impacts the exile's sense of personal identity:

> [L]ike some of my characters, I have led a double life, between cultures, between languages, between sexes, between nations, between two very compelling and different ways of looking at the world and its people . . . . When I write, I have the privilege of being on the bridge between these disparate entities, and in my imagination I can walk from one side of the Border to the other with ease. Some of my characters are not so fortunate. (Islas 72)

Many Puerto Rican writers, such as Rosario Morales, Aurora Levins Morales, and Sandra Maria Esteves, write about being de-territorilized. These 'twice-hyphenated' writers speak of the pain of experiencing the struggles of resettlement and being caught between places and cultures:

A light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean
A child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a
crossroads.
I am Puerto Rican. I am U. S. American.
I am New York Manhattan and the Bronx.
A mountain-born, country-bred, homegrown jíbara
child,
Up from the shtetl, A Californian Puerto Rican Jew
A product of the New York ghettos I have never known.
(Morales and Levins 9)

I am two parts / a person
Boricua / spic
past and present
alive and oppressed
given a cultural beauty
. . . and robbed of a cultural identity

I speak the alien tongue
in sweet boriqueño thoughts
know love mixed with pain
have tasted spit on ghetto stairways
. . . here, it must be changed
we must change it. (Esteves 186-187)

In reading the work of exiles, we find the problem of geographic space appearing again and again. The exile is uprooted, cast adrift, unable to find solid ground on which to frame identity. Added to this is fear about the length of exile. Time is the enemy. Each day in exile changes the person, making it that much harder ever to return:

And so, there sits, very uncomfortably, the writer in exile, torn between regaining his homeland through writing—to the point of obsession!—or losing it—to the point of amnesia! These two conditions are prevalent in writing by exiles. Often the reality of the native country, a reality that the writer seeks to reclaim, becomes submerged in a dream of the past. Geographical distance becomes psychological distance, for writer and country develop and change along different paths. The homeland of which he has a particular image, from a particular time, is no longer the same. Attempting to

> reinforce *his* reality, the exile can spend too much time trying to reconstruct the details of his country as he remembers it, as he lived it. (Munif 110)

In response to the problems which come with exile, Abdelrahman Munif says what the exile most needs to do is to write, to tell stories of what has been lost. Munif, author of the "Cities of Salt," had his Saudi citizenship taken away and was forced to seek exile in Damascus for political reasons. In Munif's view, the exile must work to keep alive an inner voice of home. This writing is also done while contending with a host of fears, fears about those who would now suppress the exile's words, fears about the consequences of the writing, and fears about the nature of writing out of place:

> The discourse of power exacerbated the breach, the separation. There will be two Argentine literatures, they said: the literature of the writers who remain in the country, thus keeping in touch with the language; and the literature of those who left, which will drift farther and farther away from its original roots. Divide and conquer; it was an easy maneuver and its effects quite insidious. (Valenzuela 81)

Central to all to all discussion of exile is the pain of loss and separation. At the heart of the exile's life is sorrow. Whatever else we understand about the experience of the exile, we must understand this:

> When I left El Salvador I brought documents and photographs with me in spite of the fact that people advised me not to. I had my passport and birth certificates for myself and my children. I also took a lot of photographs of my family. They were the only memory of them I have. I took them wherever I went. I wanted something intimate to remind me of my family and my life in El Salvador. It's very important to have something like that when you are so far from home. (Tula 170)

Examining literary representations allows an understanding of what it means being away from home or feeling cultural *dis*-placement. This diaspora blends the poetic and the political to show the experiences of being culturally and politically *dis*-placed from home.

Two Stories of Exile, Technology, and Resistance

In the next two sections, we share some personal stories of learning from those who are exiled. In the spirit of narrative researchers such as Clandinin and Connelly and Schaafsma, we bring ourselves into the collage to deepen our discussion of exile and to help ourselves grow through the telling of our own stories. Gerardo tells a story of how political dissidents in his neighboring country, Colombia, have used a variety of technologies to disseminate their messages of political resistance. Michele tells of her repeated encounters with a South African exile, and how her

. . . and the Elephant by Aristarchus Kuntjara, 7/1999

understanding of his displacement, and her own, changed over time.

This merging of ourselves into the work is an approach also grounded in the arts, again affirming our interdisciplinary, multivalent research approach:

> The act of writing and painting nevertheless carries profound social significance—and for Breyten "aesthetic" equals "ethic"–because the inherent ability of the image to expose the multivalence and shifting nature of all things undeniably *affirms* the power of art to question and transform. (Sienaert 45)

> Living in diverse, often conflicting, cultural, social, and political conditions, I try to both solve and depict this situation. The process of constructing *my identity* is unsettled between the Us and the Other; being both, at the same time being neither. My background of continuous mobility and of being a minority in everywhere I've lived result in hybridity and rootlessness. (Kuntjara 1999)

"On the Air—On the World Wide Web: From the City of Bogotá to the Acanonda Rainforest of Chiapas"

Gerardo Contreras

PLAY >

It's summertime in Indiana, Pennsylvania. I leave my apartment and head to Indiana Free Library during noontime. The summer heat is already stifling, and there is no wind, or even a breeze. I look at the People's Bank digital clock. It's 107 °F. I know that summers are hot, hazy, and humid here anyway, but could this electronic thermometer be right? Well, it's new. Then, I realized that the metal surrounding the clock collects the heat and the temperature clock shoots up, thus failing to display that it's around 94 °F. I feel the sweat under my long-sleeved T-shirt. I arrive at Indiana Free Library, where it's nice and cool. I sit in front of the computer, type the Internet address and with a single stroke of the keyboard, I am navigating in the cyberspace of Colombia.

PAUSE I

For a few months, I have been researching in newspapers, the WWW, and e-mailing people in search for information about some spectacular actions that happened during the 1970s and early 1980s on TV stations in Colombia. I eventually found events that prompted insurgency groups which fought against the Colombian government for more than a decade.

MEMORY

This story goes back to my second visit to Santa Fé de Bogotá in Colombia, during the years that the M-19, a left-wing movement, was still very active and had been carrying out different successful operations in some urban areas around the country.

REWIND<< Site of Memory* One—A journey to Bogotá

I was flying from Cúcuta, a city in the eastern central part of Colombia, to Bogotá in an early morning flight of SAM airlines. The stewardess woke me when she announced that we were landing in a few minutes at the El Dorado airport. As the plane was circling, I gazed through the small window. The land was flat, organized in perfect squares, but with different tonalities of color—dark to light green. In the middle of all this green, I could spot small villages. What I was contemplating was the Sabana de Bogotá—a broad highland plain located at approximately 8,500 feet above sea level. From the plane losing altitude, I could see what looked like many dairy farms. The sky was blue and I could see just a few tiny clouds covering the mountains in the horizon. I had been in Bogotá before and kept nice memories of the hospitality of the Cachacos—very warm and friendly people.

I went outside the airport where the yellow cabs were welcoming visitors and residents. *"Will you take me to the Falcon Hotel?"* I asked. *"Of course, Su Merced,"* the taxi driver replied. He reached out under the glove compartment and pulled out some business cards with other hotels and their rates. *"I can find you a discount,"* the cab driver said. He persisted. *"I could find you another place. Your place might no have accommodations for today."* I politely refused. I did know the place that I was staying and had enjoyed the cozy environment, the food—sancocho de gallina, ajiaco, postre de natas, cuajada con melao—and was very pleased with the hospitality of the owners. The taxi driver insisted

and insisted, *"how about this hosteria—El Manantial?* And I said not. I finally convinced him and he decided to take me to the hotel—El Falcón. But not after telling him that I would give him an extra tip.

REWIND<< Site of Memory Two—
Somewhere in the streets of Bogotá

It's 12 a.m. on a cool day in August 1980. In the streets of Bogotá the *Fabio Rodríguez* M-19 combatants were ready for action. The doors of their cargo van, disguised as a construction vehicle, were closed and secured. The van actually contained a movable satellite television station. These combatants were ready for television broadcast interference. A female voice yelled out, *"Everything is ready to go ON THE AIR."* Then she said and sighed, "*The interruption has been successful!"* A few minutes later, police cars, television crews, and radio reporters passed by, rushing in the direction of the interference signals. By then, the *Fabio Rodríguez* M-19 combatants were on to another destination.

At the same time, at the Falcón's hotel living room after savoring a delicious lunch of frijoles, arroz, aguacate, y tajadas de maduro, I walked into the living room. The noon news was still on, when, suddenly, the TV image started to fade, and then a young man with his face covered by a ski mask appeared on the screen. He sat at the table, and a female freedom fighter flanked him. The wall behind him featured the M-19 flag with the image of nineteenth century Latin American independence hero Simón Bolívar's sword along with a banner with the phrases, *"Freedom For All Political Prisoners!"* He leaned forward to speak and said, "*This is a communiqué of the M-19 Fabio Rodríguez Commando. Compañeros nuestra lucha es por la defensa de los intereses del pueblo y de la nación. We will continue with our cause and dream for a just society. Honor and glory for the revolutionary martyrs!"*

The television signal lasted for a few seconds until the channel went off the air. My eyes glazed with curiosity—I was startled. I glanced toward the corners of the living room—silence prevailed as if everyone else in the room was hypnotized from what we were watching and hearing on TV. I left the room and wandered into the hotel lobby, dazed, intrigued. Some European visitors clustered in the living room in front of the TV to watch the news. The question going through each one of our minds was "*How in the world are M-19 commandos able to interface and broadcast their message?"* "*How did they get the signal on the air?*

Scene III Site of Memory Three—*Escape*

It is late afternoon. Some of the *Fabio Rodríguez Commando*' M-19 broadcasting combatants sit in the back of the cargo van at a safe house in the north suburbs of Bogotá. They have removed the construction banners from both sides of the van, and one of them begins to repaint it.

Next morning, the driver is at the wheel again with the rest of the commando members. As he approaches the southern part of the city, one of them turns on the radio and the news announces that the city road exits have been taken up by police in search of possible suspects responsible for interfering with a national TV station signal. The driver says*, "I want you to act super normal. No fear in your faces! If anybody asks questions, we are just on our way to work!"* There is a police barricade a few feet up the road. For an instant, the driver chuckles. *"Where are you heading for?"* a policeman asks. His voice is courteous and uninflected with ulterior motives. Then he requests the driver to open the back door. The guard examines the boxes that contain paint gallons, brushes, and tools. Then he asks for their identifications. Finally, another policeman waves them to go ahead because the traffic is building up.

For a few minutes, nobody says anything. Leaving Santa Fé de Bogotá the driver takes a northern road to Tunja. Forty minutes later, the driver pulls off onto the side of the road. A few miles away, a bus will be leaving the station in town. It's late afternoon and they will get aboard soon. All *Fabio Rodríguez Commandos* get off the van and hug the driver. A very emotional and moving moment, these combatants don't know when they will meet each other again. Then the driver gets into the van and drives away.

Intermission: Commentary

This incident that I witnessed on Bogotá TV has been lingering in my memory since 1980. It is even more obvious today that we talk about the potential uses of technology, specifically the Internet, for political resistance in countries where the 'official' stories are the only ones heard and seen. The history of these uses of technology by political resistance groups or official groups in the 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s in Latin America shows how technology—radio, TV, and now the Internet—has been a double-edged sword for oppressive or emancipatory purposes.

Speaking of the positive benefits of the Internet for emancipatory ends, Tim Jordan, a sociologist from London, states that in virtual

communities of cyberpolitics, no one can be silenced and there is hope that virtual technology may create a more political egalitarian debate.

PLAY>

Back in my apartment—in my study room, sitting in front of my computer trying to finish this story—it is late night. *What time is it? I ask her.* She looks into the sky with her sweet and enchanting smile. She looks at the full moon in the sky. *About 11:00,* she says. *How can you tell without looking at the clock?* I ask. *By the position of the full moon,* she replies. *You're right,* I say [*laughs*]. And she asks *how does your story end? I'll show you,* I say.

Search for: **<**http://www.ezln.com> and hit **Enter**

A note on the format of my story: I borrowed the idea of using the key words of play, rewind, forward, pause, and memory from a short piece of fiction entitled *Adult Video: A Very Modern Courtship,* written by William Boyd in the May 31, 1999 issue of *The New Yorker***.**

* Tony Morrison uses the term 'site of memory' in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Eds. Russell Ferguson and Martha Gever. Cambridge: MIT, 1992.

Waiting for a Lift in Botswana: No Cyberhighways on the Horizon

Michele L. Petrucci

Nkosi sikelel' i-Afrika,	**Lord save Africa**
Maluphakanyisw' udumo Iwayo,	**May its honor be lifted high,**
Yizwa imiyhandazo yethu,	**Hear our prayers:**
Thina lusapho Iwayo.	**Lord save Us, the family of Africa.**

Standing on the side of the road with my right hand flapping up and down, I waited for a lift back to Lobatse from Botswana's capital, Gaborone. It was September 1990, spring in the Southern Hemisphere, and the days were already hot and dry. More often than not when I hitchhiked, I was picked up by white South

Africans (Afrikaners or English) which always was a tense and potentially stressful ride but a ride in an air conditioned car was safer than the back of an open *bakkie* (pick-up truck) on roads shared with cows, goats and springbok. The town where I taught was only six kilometers from the South African border which created an interesting and, at times, volatile dynamic. South Africa was just starting on its long road to political and cultural change— Nelson Mandela had been released only eight months earlier—and people in the region were unsure about the country's future. The tension was palpable.

Woza Moya	**Come spirit . . . .**
Woza Moya, oyingcwele,	**Come holy spirit,**
Usisikelele,	**That you may save**
Thina lusapho Iwayo.	**Us, the family of Africa.**

As I stood in the pull-off section, I thought about how homogenous Botswana was (one language, culture, traditions) with a population just peaking over one million. There was a unity based on a similar, established cultural identity which contributed to the country's peaceful and prosperous history and, on the negative side, to its sense of superiority and intolerance of difference and change (see their racist treatment of the small population of indigenous !Kung Bushmen). South Africa, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. With nearly twenty different cultures and languages represented by approximately 40 million people, confusion and misunderstanding were inevitable. A society in flux—interregnums tend to bring out the best and worst in people. It was hard to imagine how South Africa would change or, a bigger fear, not change.

Moreno boloka sechaba sa heso,	**Lord save our country,**
Ofelise lintoa le matsoenyeho.	**That you may end**
	wars and oppression.

Between thinking and waving my hand, I didn't have to wait long for a car to pull over and offer me a ride. It wasn't air-conditioned but there was space for me and my pack so I climbed into the battered VW. As we started off on our hour drive, we introduced ourselves. He was an English-speaking South African from Natal (home of the Zulus and, some say, the last British outpost) and had been living in Botswana for nearly two years. As we started to talk I discovered that his name was Johan and he was the grandson of an author of many famous works on South Africa and the destruc-

tive nature of apartheid. We talked about his famous grandfather—
a topic he grew both boastful and bored with. The conversation
eventually shifted to his own life and, I soon found out, his self-
exile in Botswana. A two year National Military Service was
required of all white, South African males and, to put it plainly,
Johan had "no fucking desire" to covertly enter Angola through the
Caprivi Strip and kill people. South Africa had been fighting in
Angola for years against "the threat of the red tide" the old buga-
boo Communism—a fear which lasted, in a bureaucratic sense,
until Mandela was inaugurated as President of South Africa in
1994. Johan had joined the End Conscription Campaign and even-
tually left Durban because he was opposed to this conflict as well
as to the state of politics within South Africa. He had had several
choices: 1) go to the Border and perform his national duty, 2) go to
jail, 3) leave the country on an Exit Permit with no chance to return
without the current government retaliating (imprisonment, house
arrest, military service), or 4) wait, in self-exile, until the emergence
of a new and free South Africa.

Oseboloke o seboloke,   **That you may save . . . save,**
Oseboloke morena   **That you may save Lord**
Sechaba sa heso.   **Our country.**

   As we drove through the scrub brush and passed the *koppies* (lit-
tle hills), I listened to Johan's litany of reasons for his self-exile but
underneath his railings against apartheid and white, liberal apathy
(a dig at his family? himself?), he missed South Africa. The pain and
struggle were visible. His identity had been formed by the sugar
cane fields and the Indian Ocean, not by the acacia trees and
Kalahari Dessert. He felt like a stranger in Botswana, an Africa he
didn't understand or particularly like. Intellectually he knew that
he was doing the right thing, but spiritually and culturally he was
torn and on a self-destructive route (major contributors: Ohlsson's
Lager and self-pity). He missed decent restaurants, surfing in
Umdloti and his bricks of Durban poison (high grade marijuana)
but his principles and, I suspect, natural fear of killing and/or being
killed prevented him from driving the six kilometers back to South
Africa. He knew that if he crossed the border, he would be arrest-
ed and sent to military prison as a deserter or worse: shipped
directly to the Caprivi Strip via Cape Town and Windhoek.

Makube njalo,   **Let it be so,**
Kuze kube ngunaphakade.   **Let it be finally and forever so.**

During the next few months I got to know Johan well. The expat community in Lobatse (South Africans, Brits, Canadians, Australians, Americans, Zambians, Zimbabweans) was small but flourishing and even those on the fringe were dragged into the group from time to time. Billiards on Fridays, cricket or rugby on Saturdays and bowls on Sundays—all with the requisite beer and *braai* (barbecue taken to its highest level). The more we talked, the more I realized how utterly miserable Johan was with his life in Botswana—he couldn't find meaningful work, his wife hated the country, and the colonial atmosphere was stifling. While I was only planning on living in Lobatse for two more years, Johan didn't know when his release would arrive. His exile was painful and relentless and, in many ways, best expressed by Dennis Brutus, a South African poet in exile from 1964 to 1994:

> I *am* the exile
> am the wanderer
> the troubadour
> (whatever they say)
>
> gentle I am, and calm
> and with abstracted pace
> absorbed in planning,
> courteous to servility
>
> but wailings fill the chambers of my heart
> and in my head
> behind my quiet eyes
> I hear the cries and sirens. (137)

Johan was finding it harder and harder to keep his pain and 'wailings' silenced. At this time in Southern Africa, technology was only slightly better than primitive. The mail service was mediocre to poor; the telecommunications system was unreliable and extremely expensive. Johan felt very cut-off and distanced from his country and identity although, geographically, it was only six kilometers south of his cinderblock house. Electronic mail and the whole concept of the Internet were not even imaginable. Carrier pigeons would have been more useful. He wrote and received letters from friends and family but was never sure if they were being read, copied or stolen. Had they been altered? Marked, cut, copied, censored, or filed away for future use? Johan could never be certain but he carefully maintained a regular correspondence with

friends within South Africa. If possible, he gave letters to friends or acquaintances visiting South Africa and paid them to post the letters from within the country.

The television wasn't particularly helpful either since the broadcasts were from South Africa and were dominated by the National Party rhetoric and propaganda. No information about the struggle for liberation and democracy was available through the televised news programs. With the right location and a large fee, which Johan couldn't afford, he could have gotten CNN. It didn't help much since the world was consumed with Sadaam Hussein and the Middle East. CNN had a world market to reach and keep tuned in. The End Conscription Campaign was a tiny bleep on the world's conscious and wouldn't keep viewers glued to the set like the unfolding conflict in the Persian Gulf. While the plight of South African conscientious objectors was not top priority for the media, it was Johan's entire world.

The radio was a more reliable and cheaper source of information but it didn't always broadcast much news related to Africa. The BBC and Voice of America sometimes addressed issues occurring within sub-Saharan Africa but it received limited coverage. Suffice it to say that Johan, although six kilometers from his country, suffered from a media blackout. It tortured him to be uninformed and in flux. A range of technologies was available but none were both reliable and affordable.

Nkosi sikelel' I-Afrika,	**Lord save Africa**
Maluphakanyisw' udumo Iwayo,	**May its honor be lifted high,**
Yizwa imiyhandazo yethu,	**Hear our prayers:**
Thina lusapho Iwayo.	**Lord save Us, the family of Africa.**

The last time I saw Johan was at my unexpected going away party in February 1991. I was moving to Bloemfontein, South Africa (an Afrikaner stronghold). It was a strangely exhilarating party. We talked for hours about Africa and its future and, more importantly, our futures. He was less melancholy than usual—he had just received a good shipment from Durban. We fell out of touch but, through a friend, I heard that Johan and his wife returned to South Africa a few months after I left. To this day, I do not know if he entered undetected or was forced to perform his duty to the Republic of South Africa, the nation which formed his identity yet repelled him at the same time. The lack of technologies and the physical and psychological barriers prevented Johan from staying informed and active during his self-exile. These factors, in my

opinion, finally combined to erode his resistance and commitment to the End Conscription Campaign, to blunt his politicized nature.

His resistance to the apartheid regime was not particularly hero-ic—he didn't protest and get arrested for his beliefs or go to Amsterdam or America to raise awareness of the abominations still being perpetuated on millions of South Africans. Instead, he retreated from the world and tried, every day while in Botswana, to console himself and to create a powerful, personal resistance. He was not bold or daring but he was an additional individual in opposition to the South African government. His exile, although forgettable for many reasons, has remained with me as a beacon of positive resistance in the face of adversity. Johan wasn't rotting away in the basement of a Durban prison but he had to contend, on a daily basis, with his personal demons and ideological beliefs. Johan showed me that it often takes more courage to leave one's homeland for a life of isolation and tedious self-exile over the flash-ing glory of arrest and detention. At that time, Johan couldn't cre-ate a Web page with a dossier of atrocities committed in Angola or a chatroom for other men fleeing mandatory national service or narratives of men returning from the Border. This technology, if it had been available, would've broadened Johan's world and been a meeting point for men and women with similar political views to garner support and his plan ways to subvert the government. Unfortunately, Johan's struggle began over a decade ago, which never allowed him the privilege to utilize the democratizing power of the Internet.

*NOTE: "Nkosi Sikelel'I Afrika (Lord Save Africa)" was written at the end of the nineteenth century by Enoch Sontonga. Popular in many parts of Africa, the Xhosa song, in recent years, has been adopted by several countries as its national anthem.

> The inspiration for my work comes from my experience of rootlessness. Born and raised in Indonesia and of Chinese descent, I identify with both cultures while wholly belonging to neither. Furthermore, after moving from place to place and from one country to another, I am both immersed and distanced from the cultures I have been exposed to. I place myself in between these diverse cultures and try to unify them in paintings of invented narratives. Memory plays a significant role in the image-making process due to my constant move-

ment to new environments. I keep these memories in the imagined space in my work, where they can be stored, remain still, and be juxtaposed with new daily experiences. (Kuntjara 1999)

P by Aristarchus Kuntjara, 7/1999.

Working to Reclaim Home Via the Internet

How fragile civilization is; how easily, how merrily a book burns! Inside my novel, its characters seek to become fully human by facing up to the great facts of love, death, and (with or without God) the life of the

> soul. Outside it, the forces of inhumanity are on the march. "Battle lines are being drawn up in India today," one of my characters remarks. "Secular versus religious, the light versus the dark. Better you choose which side you are on." Now that the battle has spread to Britain, I can only hope it will not be lost by default. It is time for us to choose. (Rushdie 96)

> But it is not only that the writer in exile is trying to win over foreigners to an understanding of his country, but he is also trying to prove to the people in his own country that he still stands with them, that he still drinks from the same well they drink from; that though he is far away, he is still among them. (Munif 108)

> The rhizomatic pattern of collaboration has emerged as a partial solution to the failure of old organizational forms; it has—by definition—no single formula to guide the kinds of elaboration required. The power of the Net in the Zapatista struggle has lain in connection and circulation, in the way widely dispersed nodes of antagonism have set themselves in motion in response to the uprising in Chiapas. (Cleaver 97)

Governments or powerful groups who fear that progressive writers or social activists might represent a threat to their authoritarian and culturally and socially oppressive regimes force these oppositional voices to remain mute in public spaces within their own countries or to seek exile in other lands. Yet with the advent of the Internet, new cyberspaces of resistance throughout the world emerge and become connected, thus enabling resistance groups to speak, to exchange stories, and to find support for their intellectual, political, and social forms of dissent.

As a new electronic borderland, the Internet redefines the work of the exile to reclaim home because it overcomes isolation, but it also offers unlinked voices in and out of their homelands a space for communities of resistance to join voices and efforts to unmask repressive and dehumanizing forms of government. Through their writings and testimonials, authors and political activists will also help stir the hearts and consciences of those who are willing to join forces and create communities of resistance for a more just society. In bell hooks' words, "Within communities of resistance, narratives of struggle are testimony . . . . As writers and readers of critical fic-

tion, we rejoice in the power of community, because it renews our hope, intensifies awareness, and invites us to imagine together" (61). Furthermore, the Internet creates "social networks" (Smith and Kollock) in the form of a "rhizomatic pattern of collaboration" (Cleaver) that dissolves hierarchies, and the distance of time and geography that separates us from those who experience the pain of exile and oppression.

> [B]etween the possibility of disturbance in the system and the system's power to recuperate that disturbance there is 'room for maneuver,' and it is in that space of 'play' or 'leeway' in the system that oppositionality arises and change can occur. But no radical, universal, or immediate change; only changes local and scattered that might one day take collective shape and work socially significant transformations. (Chambers xi)

Chamber's notion of 'room for maneuver' helps us understand some of the promises of the Internet for oppositional narratives, testimonials and social networks in cyberspace. The emergence of the Internet with its unlimited and decentralized potentials offers more advantages than TV and radio for the disempowered to have a space to organize and voice their struggles to the rest of the world. Specifically, the Internet shows how Chambers' idea of a 'desirable social change without violence' can take place via cyberspace.

Many groups around the world are using the Internet as a 'room for maneuver' against tyrannical governments or to organize local social networks for action and community empowerment. Electronically supported resistant groups and local communities are using e-mail, newsgroups, chat rooms, and the WWW to "create that space of 'play' or 'leeway' in the system that oppositionality arises and change can occur" (Chambers xi).

We know that the Internet doesn't provide ends or radical changes to the unequal social conditions and forms of oppression that people experience in their everyday lives all over the world. But the Internet opens up new spaces to discuss political issues, oppose oppressive regimes, give voice to subjugated people, and even create online social networks for collective action and empowerment of local communities or groups (Smith and Kollock; Cleaver). As Chambers states in the above quote, for now, these are only local and disperse changes, but they hold the promise of bringing about collective action that might one day lead to major social transformations.

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