

JOHN KANI Market Theatre, July 13, 1990

Davis: Impressions of "JIM COMES TO JO'BURG"?

Kani: Well, I was still very, very young in Port Elizabeth -

(Re-start)

Kani: OK. I was still very young in Port Elizabeth when this great movie - you know, we'd been going to the cinema - it's called the Bioskops then - to see Tex Ritter, Roy Rogers, a little bit of the Cowboy and Indians with Spencer G. Bennett and the Tomahawks, we'd never ever seen a black person on the screen. That was a "whites only" affair. And when JIM COMES TO JO'BURG was shown, it was alike a miracle, we saw black people in this movie, we saw black people talking, some of the people we'd seen in the Zonk Magazine, some of the people we could shout and say and scream, "That's Dolly!" Because Dolly you see was married to Welcome Dugu, who is a very great friend of mine in Port Elizabeth, and most incredible singer Dolly Rathebe, in fact there was even a saying in the Tsotsi lingu, which is the language of the township hustlers, if something is good, is perfect, that's "dolly", you know, then that's good. And that's how she was perceived by us as young people in the township, you know, and it was incredible just to see, I mean not going to the cinema and see... an overseas film, but to see something South African. Later, "Jim Comes to Jo'burg" even became a cliché in the type of work that was to follow in SA, all the kind of work that was dealing with the white man's point of view of what the black life is in SA was always referred to as a "Jim Comes to Jo'burg" because it was again their concept of what African lives are, are about, and must be. Even in theatre, if you did a play that dealt with the bad side of black people, the bad side of our culture of our language, of everything, it was always referred to Jim Coming to Jo'burg here, this country bumpkin coming to the city, get excited and become a thug, yet he comes from the good solid foundation, a background in the rural areas that is the essence of being, the essence of being African. But people like Dolly were an incredible inspiration to all of us young would-be actors in the near future, because... didn't know what acting was about. Showbiz was, like, taboo amongst our parents. Now, to be in the showbiz, what does it mean? It means, as far as my father is concerned, you don't want to get a job. You want to be a lout, you want to hang around smoking daga, wearing tattered jeans, and low morals. That's being an artist. That was the end of it. So you couldn't dare go to your parent and say, "I want to be an artist". He says, "What you talking about? You can't even sing," which was the worst thing for me. I can't even sing. But er, pictures, as we called them then, like er JIM COMES TO JO'BURG, and in fact the ensuing life in the movies of people like Dolly Rathebe, Simon Sabela, Sam Williams, there was, er, I mean, many, many, Ken Gampu, were this incredible influence in our lives. It was them we emulated, them we wanted to be. But Dolly specifically for me, because she was very successful, you know, in my father's eyes, he knew Dolly's record, Dolly's songs, he knew Dolly when he saw Dolly in the Zonk Magazine, I don't know if he had an incredible crush on this beautiful lady, but once I said "I want to do what Dolly does," I had his ear for the first time. It was their influence that made my father understand that you could make a profession out of this strange art form.

Davis: You were still conscious though that the films were controlled by whites, even if this was a kind of black cinema, you knew that the cameras, the financing, it was all white -

Kani: Absolutely. Even the story, for that matter, everything was for whites in SA,

you have to understand apartheid. It divides even the way of thinking. "Going to town", just a phrase, "going to town" in the entire world, it is the only place in this country where that has a racial connotation. "Going to town" to me means I'm leaving the black area, I'm going to a white area, it doesn't mean I'm going to a shopping complex or a commercial centre. Even in school, even in the township where I lived, everything, it had to be white. I still remember my aunt, who is a very traditionalist, they used to sing the Xhosa songs, he (sic) had a song called Kobeta Lum Langu, Guundum Umyanga Soza Kwenz Zolento, the song said, "It's better to be white, because things go right when you're white. Do you understand, that was the concept, even with the incoming of the great skin-lightening creams, it was trying to be lighter, because that was the in-thing. So the movies, the newspapers, except the New Age, which was an ANC-controlled newspaper, which was immediately banned, or any black newspaper per se that is writing for the black population was controlled by the white people. The business, everything, the schools, I mean, look at me, I speak very good English because I was taught in English, even I was taught Xhosa in English, to analyse the verb, the structure, was taught in English. So that is how everything in the film, in the theatre, was controlled by white money, white people, white cameras, white soundmen. I mean, in 1981, when we did MARIGOLDS IN AUGUST, I mean, I flipped out, I was already an actor then, when I saw Joe Mafela being the assistant director to Ross Devenish. That was the first time that a black man held the highest position on the technical side of the film industry.

Davis: What about the experience of going to the cinema, of course there were segregated cinemas, OK, but there was an interview with Nelson Mandela done by Walter Cronkite soon after Mandela's release, and he spontaneously said what a great experience it was, the experience of going to the cinema, what a liberating experience it was, the entertainment for black people at that time.

Kani: Absolutely, we - we used to hustle right through the week, carrying old ladies' bags trying to do everything, be nice to Mum and Dad, especially Friday, because the biggest outing was Saturday, going to the cinema. We used to pay seven pennies. It was incredible. It was in fact, the whole bug of me being an actor is the result of those great movies. I mean, THE STREET WITH NO NAME, Spencer G. Bennett, Edward G. Robinson, those are the great influences in our lives, just to sit in this dark place, and magic takes place on the wall. For a moment we forgot apartheid, we forgot that there was another world that wasn't good, we sat there and were carried away by the dream of these American movies. It was the biggest outgoing thing for a black person. In the evenings, the elderly people, to take someone out was to take someone to the cinema, because there were no restaurants for blacks because there was the white-by-night law, 9 o'clock you gotta be out of town. So the elderly people would be able to take people to the matinee. It was an incredible, I mean, it was a culture shock to speak, to go to the cinema. To see - because also it opened a window to the other world. My world was South Africa, New Brighton, that little black township outside Port Elizabeth, and there was nothing, there was not even Johannesburg. I didn't know what Jo-burg looked like. There was no television. All - when I sat in the cinema, the world opened, and saw words "London", "America", "Europe" - then the world in my head got bigger. I could at the people, I could understand other worlds, other languages, other cultures - that was cinema. It brought about an incredible understanding to the black people in this country, that the - especially the young black boy - that the world is not SA. We're part of a bigger world, we're part of a bigger community. I'm saying that now with wonderful words in English, because I can now know what that effect was in my life. But my son now, who always says "I want to go to the Centre, I

must see a movie," I say, "Please go!" because I know what that does, it broadens his perspective of the world.

Davis: Did you see CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY when it first came out?

Kani: Yes.

Davis: How did you experience that?

Kani: We were very very much moved, because by then we were a little older, and I knew that there was this great actor called Sidney Poitier from America, and er - I knew about Alan Paton, about the nice white man who other white people don't like, who sometimes is referred to as a Communist, I couldn't work up clearly whether a liberal, was the difference between him being a liberal. But when we saw the movie, we went to the Newell High School, I was already doing Standard 10 then, which is pre-university entrance. It was - again, you know, from seeing black people, I know it was a white story, I know it was written by a white person, but again, you must understand, to see our people in the screen, to see people who will become our heroes, in it, and be able to say, "I'm not Tex Ritter, I'm not Roy Rogers, but I'm Sidney Poitier". We used to call him Sidney Portia, because we couldn't pronounce it correctly then, so CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY was another milestone in my life in understanding this art-form.

Riesenfeld: What about the story, about what it said about SA?

Kani: That, then in our minds, we - it wasn't so much the political content, or the social-political content of it to us. To my father, yes, very moved, very disturbed. We also understood the message to a lesser degree. What was exciting was the fact that this black man spoke back, this black man touched, this black man pushed the white man - was good, you know, it was good. But the story of the pain of the two families remained in my mind subconsciously all throughout my life as an actor. It's one of the greatest classics ever written in this country. I mean, as a book itself. And er, because, looking back, it was done by Americans, or not South Africans, it wasn't well treated on a SA-based story, but it was an incredible thing when it happened.

Davis: There was no sense of resentment, of course, you were not then an actor, of course, but it was I think the first film which imported black actors to play black South Africans. since then.

Kani: Absolutely, now then I wasn't yet an actor, and to us it didn't matter then at my age whether this black man who played the son of Kumalo was a black American actually, we were even you see, understand the American influence in the movies in our lives, in our upbringing, especially in the Eastern Cape, it was an incredible thing for us, because there were no black people then who were prominent in this profession, who could, of course, who could have played the part, but the money was the determining factor, then, and even now for instance, I mean we still have the rubbish going on in this now, in the 'Nineties, where they still want to import Americans to play parts in movies about SA. We have the classic example of CRY, FREEDOM, where Denzell Washington, with due respect, played Steve Biko. We've seen Danny Glover playing Mandela. And he's talking about Banta Bakuti Mas Bona Mandela Kufa - that's not Xhosa, that's not Zulu, I don't know what it is. But I have to work it out that he's actually saying that the people must volunteer and be prepared to die for the struggle. And I was here, all the great actors were here including Zakes Mokae, including Winson Ntshona, all the great who could have played the part. But the point is, the Americans always, "You get me Sidney



...itier, you got 10 million for me." They would blacken the face of Robert Redford to play Mandela if they could.

Davis: We're getting a little bit into the politics of the cinema now. What do you think a black actor should do, if they're offered a part like that, should they show solidarity with people in SA, and say "No, you should choose a black SA", is that possible, is that feasible in our world?

Kani: Take the opposite. You can never get an African actor, a West Indian actor, or any other black actor to play a historic part about the American black struggle. Totally. I don't care how you coach him with the accent, you can never do that. They, Equity there, and these people behind, will say it's not authentic. There is always an exploitation element in the thing, there is always a convenience on your side. I would refuse to play Martin Luther (sic) It's not right. I'm not an American. It's an incredible part, if it were to be done a series in America. Now, we have a situation in this country where we are trying to address our problems. We are trying to redress the past that has been so hurtful and painful in our lives. So for American actors to come and play black actors in SA is actually aggravating a situation which we're trying to fix. My personal view is to uphold the cultural boycott, is for the overseas artist not to come to SA until such time we have a fair and a just government. By then the part will be available to any actor and there will be cross-cultural activities anyway. We cannot close ourselves into this little island called SA. We're part of the bigger community. We need to learn from other great actors like James Earl Jones, Sidney Poitier, and Marlon Brando, a legend, the late Lord Olivier, Ben Kingsley, Richard Hardwick, all these greats, willing to mingle with them and share and er - experiences and teach each other. But to have, at one stage they considered, er Mohammed Ali to play Shaka in some other series, I mean although we ended up with Henry Cele, who was not the solution, but it was terribly wrong to even consider Mohammed Ali to play Shaka, historically.

Davis: How would you analyse Hollywood's interest in SA, our experience has been, looking at the earlier films, that really apartheid was simply accepted, was not a theme for Hollywood, apart from the 'Fifties, until after 1976.

Kani: Hollywood's attitude, it's a big business conglomerate. They don't care, if they want to shoot this movie in the rain forests of Brazil, or South America, and they needed to mow down a hectare square, they don't care about that. They created these jungles and these natives, these cannibals, using American actors and using local natives because it would make money. That's the bottom line. "Will it make money?" They have no sensitivity whatsoever, even to the ecology of the land where they work. They leave Africa littered with plastic cups, and they don't care whatsoever. Their concern in SA has been an incredible tax rebate, where they're able to do a movie very very cheap, and the SA film industry has met them halfway by promising them very very cheap black labour, in order to have these movies here. So the SA film industry grew to what it is today by sacrificing the dignity and the respect of black people in this profession. People working for R10 a call, while Americans know that they wouldn't even have a passerby for \$10 in America. So Hollywood's interest, even in the 'Forties and the 'Fifties and the 'Forties and the 'Thirties had never been a concern about Africa or its people, it has always been a Johnny Weissmuller thing with a "Do it quickly, get the hell out of there," as Bob Hope said in one of the movies, when the natives came to welcome him, showering and shouting, he says "Keep the engines running, I make one speech and I get out of here" - and that has been Hollywood's attitude towards Africa as a whole, and SA because we are a little advanced than the other countries, to use the available technology, and just do their movie and get out.

Davis: Just following up, do you think Hollywood has presented an accurate picture of the

struggle in SA, since it has taken an interest in apartheid?

Kani: Yes and no. It always depends on the producer, director or people around that particular story, what their interest is and what story they are telling. There have been wonderful movies that came about the struggle, that informed to a great degree the overseas ignorant audiences who don't know what apartheid is about. But I find it difficult even as the words come out of my mouth, that there could be a people on earth who do not understand what segregation is, but apartheid is specific and unique, because it's on the basis of the colour of the person, this is what is happening in America and in England, so I wouldn't say they don't know apartheid, they would know segregation, they would know denials of certain freedoms, to other people, to other people. So what they have done, they have exposed the SA situation, they've conscientized many, many people who now are pro the struggle of SA, who are anti-apartheid. So that they've done some incredible work. But when you come to the actual story now, and the way they have told the story, they've told it from the American point of view, with American parallels. It has a SA base but a very strong American flavour. For instance, you take CRY, FREEDOM, it's an English movie, it's the story of this wonderful great journalist, who through his activities, anti-SA government activities, came into contact with this young black man called Steve Biko, but it has nothing to do with Steve Biko, it's all about Mr. Donald Woods, with due respect. You take again the other one about Mandela, done by Danny Glover, and that again is about their perception of what we are, you know, they've been flooded about the postcard culture showing Zulus with bare-breast maidens and spears, and then when Buthelezi addressed and Inkatha rally you still see the same people in same garb of spears and what, when you see SHAKA ZULU in Los Angeles, you still see the savage, backward blacks, and that's the concept they have. So that when you go, like I'm dressed now, people ask me where did I buy my clothes, did I get them at JFK at the airport, or at Heathrow, I mean you still get those crazy people like that, so that's the image of Africa they have projected right through. Except in certain movies, where they've come - I did THE WILD GEESE, for instance, and there were some black American actors, in which I, being South African, even played the part of a West Indian, because that was the image they wanted to project.

Davis: You mentioned SHAKA ZULU, we've spoken a bit with Bill Faure, who is surely a very sincere man, felt he was making a very positive film about the Zulu nation, and I think he's quite upset about the controversy that came out of it. How would you analyse SHAKA ZULU in the struggle?

Kani: Isn't it always the case, when someone who doesn't understand the local infrastructure of a culture, of a people, decides to write or make a movie about it, that he actually annoys the natives, because he's telling the story of the people through his white pair of sunglasses. The problem with SHAKA ZULU, it was first a lie, number two, a gross representation of the African people, three, it was tribal, at a time when we are working strongly to consolidate the people of SA into being SAs. Even the white people themselves. It was at a delicate time when even the government itself was beginning to promote a different image of the swart gevaar, you know swart gavaar, the black danger, and the white hate, and then came this wonderful movie, series, called SHAKA ZULU, which did not only portray a lie about the historical events that happened during the reign of Shaka, two, presented on screen for our children the most violent scenes which I'm surprised that the Censors Board controlled by the Dutch Reformed Church, which wouldn't allow a movie when the black man hits a white man on screen, allowed that kind of gross violence to be seen by our children. And that's what we objected to. Strongly.

Davis: There's also the other element of sexual exploitation -

Kani: I remember the scenes, I mean, they were really terrible, I mean there's always the difference between the white people's concept of African culture and the black people's concept of their own culture. When you go to poverty-stricken areas, where people don't even have clothes, where women through shame can walk with their bare breasts when they already are married and have children, because there is nothing they have, that is now reflected on screen as their culture. And yet, when you go to other areas where at least poverty hasn't ravaged their lives, that much - my mother, being an African lady, once you get married, you put on, now you have not been touched, you've never had sex, you're a virgin. Then at about age 11 to about age 15 to 16, before the little girl can menstruate, they're still allowed to walk around with the little ti-bare-breasted. But once they become ladies who are already meeting with men, and are married, they always have some beads that cover their breasts, or a little calico strip if they are Xhosa, to cover their breasts, but when the white people do these movies, they ask 45-year-old women to take their bras off, because that's what sell overseas. And then you have how the women were punished and killed by Shaka with - I mean, I can't explain that now, you know those scenes where, how those women were killed in that movie, put on staves and hung up the whole day. And going almost on you know, on them. It was incredible. I mean, I wanted to ask my kids not to watch, but I couldn't, because they would scream, because they wanted to watch those things.

Riesenfeld: It was very popular.

Kani: It was popular with the children. Very much hated by every elder. Even my mother, who is apolitical, said "this is bad to watch. My mother, who is apolitical, who says Don't rock the boat, because I don't want to lose you, said This is bad for children to watch.

Riesenfeld: I don't understand what might have been the - you said it took place at a delicate time, during '84, '85, what deeper purpose might this have had, what -

Davis: It was a government-financed film -

Riesenfeld: What purpose did it serve for them?

Kani: For them? You mean, the government? Besides -?  
Oh, well, there are different versions really. This was an incredible moment for them to show to the world around that you are talking about negotiations, you are talking about power-sharing, you are talking about creating a democratic, just, fair society in SA. We are showing you the people we have to deal with, we still have to usher these blacks into the twentieth century, we still have to deal with them on the level of a human being. And, you look at the postcard and you look at an Inkatha rally, on the same day, you find these blacks dressing up the same way as in 1852, or whatever the time of the Shaka movie was. You see, they have not developed, they have not progressed, this is what we have to deal with. And in that sense it's still the Indian and the Cowboy movie, which many Americans are totally against now. The black people were again presented at an incredible disrespectful and undignified way. And of course it promoted tribalism.

Davis: What is the position now of black actors, of course black actors, African actors appeared in that film, did they know that they were contributing to this, you know, and also the question of not being enough work for black actors here, how can that be resolved, the tension that there is between this being the only kind of work available for many actors,



but it's counterproductive, it is propaganda. try to promote apartheid through using the great media and all these kind of crazy movies

Kani: Well, let's take it from the bottom first. There were no actors in that movie. They used the Zulu impi, with the permission of the Buthelezi Kwa-Zulu government, and the couple of guys in front, Henry Cele - I didn't know Henry was in this profession before that, I know Henry used to play soccer, from hearing from his own stories, I knew that Henry was a chauffeur when they met him and offered him the role. That would never happen in England or any country if it wasn't SA. To take a person who doesn't have any experience. If the part was played by Simon Sabela, Ken Gampu, was played by any of the great actors we know, that would have been an understandable situation. And the fact again that the industry in this country does not cater for black actors whatsoever. The quality of black programmes in the SABC is a testimony of how they avoid to use actors they would have to pay a decent salary. People have been picked up in Eloff St. and Commissioner St. and just given these roles. Every time you tune in to the black channels, you see a person you've never heard of in my life, 25 to 27 years in this business, I still see faces I've never seen in the theatre. That's the attitude, because it's cheaper to run it that way. So the once-employed actor, who gets a job once a year, when that movie or series came into being, and there was a chance to work, to earn, people didn't care whether it represented the black man's dignity correctly or whatever, it was a chance to earn, feed a family. We understand that, and this is what we are trying to address in our present day, that there should be work, we should industrialize the art, and make it not just an entertainment on-the-side thing, but make it an industry like it is abroad, encourage colleges at the universities, intermediary drama schools for black people, so that we could have a proper professional contingent of actors, a population that would lift the standard of the work in this country. But you cannot blame those actors, when you haven't worked for two years and suddenly you get a role. We had a similar situation with a movie called THE RED SCORPION, which was about, again another controversy, I was offered the role, and I can tell you now, I was offered over a hundred thousand dollars to do a part of this black guerrilla fighter who is fighting for democracy and justice against a Russian-backed Cuban army. When I read the script I realised, I'm being asked to play Savimbi. I said, No, thank you. With the money as well. Now, I'm John Kani. I am politically aware. And I choose what I do. Right. Now, the part being offered to any other person, who wasn't given the opportunity to read the entire script, but was given a pink page and a yellow page and a blue page, saying This is your lines in this scene, would have done the part. And I wouldn't have held it against him. Many things, when the controversy erupted, some artistes who took part there- (beep)

Davis: Blaxploitation films?

Kani: As the Minister of Planning and Development said in 1955, the great Minister of Education, the hero of apartheid, the architect of apartheid, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, he said, "Black people are appendages into our white cities." We've always been appendages to white projects. We have never been the real thing. We will be the rough material but not the finished product. And that's what we've served. Even when we come together together to work, even when I worked with Athol creating plays, plays were always referred to as "Athol Fugard's plays", though the authorship has never been contested by anybody, it has always been written by the three of them. But the concept from the white people, "I saw you in Athol Fugard's play", that has always been the concept of white SA. So when we came into the film industry, we came in with our hands put together, begging for work. We were put into these stories, and paid a little in order to stay alive. We were never represented by any union, nor did we think of any union. The concept was always, We have a structure in our budget for white actors, we have a structure in our budget for black actors, and if we could save, a cut in the corners of the black actors resolved. I never get work in this country because I'm accused of asking for white actors' money. I should take black actors' money. So when th

time came with the Department of Information try to promote segregation through using the media of the movie, and we had all those Heynes' movies and all those kinds of crazy movies in Xhosa and Zulu, which had no base, no theme, no story, it was again another time, another exploitation phase in the industry. But the white man did not know one thing, that we learn during that time. We were learning to look at the camera, we were learning to act, we were learning the technical side, because some of the guys were carrying lights, holding sound, we were learning the terminology of this industry, because we learn very fast if we are not allowed to learn. We grasp so many things. And it's still happening today. Up to today, all the movies that have been shot in this country are just exploiting black actors. All of them. They are always trying to say, look this is a shoestring budget, there's very little we have in it, we've got so used to these terms, but this is what we can offer. But because we're not part of the industry, we do not control the money that make the industry, we're not in the desk that make the decisions about this industry, we're on the receiving end, and it is so designed that the stories written in this country are stories about white people, 300 of them, and two blacks, who just make tea, or open the gate of the white man, that's the television industry. If it is a black, television or white, er, er, a white-financed, -controlled movie, with blacks in it, it is a white man-told story, and it is a 60,000 budget thing. Therefore we walk out of seven movies, person like for instance Ken Gampu, Simon Sabu who could count their fingers twice, of the amount of movies they've done, and they still don't have money. And yet the white actor, who has done 5, and is already comfortable, and this is an ongoing - we have to address that situation in the new SA, where we will have the opportunity, already there are a number of young black people I know, that are studying abroad the film industry, I mean, the technical side, the camera, some in universities now studying acting as a profession. So, the future is bright, the future is promising, but we have to re-educate the white exploiter, that that time is past, now you're going to have to deal with a SA film industry in a more decent and professional way, like any industry on earth. But it's a long way to go, because we have 35 million black people. We have about a third, I'm being really generous here, who are unemployed, or not working, there are more than that. So you have people who move into the arts as means of making bread, put bread on the table. Who then - the part is offered to John Kani, I want R75,000, and then they find Philemon Sibeko, who will do it for 10. And that's it. Because there's no industry that would protect me or protect any working actor. So then the industry always uses new faces, unknowns, in order to cut the corners in their budget. And that's what we're faced with. We've now, for instance, we've FAWO, which is the Film-Allied people, we've PAWE, the Performing Arts Workers Equity, which is going to begin to control the participation of black people, white people, artistes, in this country, in theatre, television, and in the film industry.

Davis: When we last spoke, Thomas Mogotlane was there, could you comment on MAPANTSULA, that portrayal, and that character.

Kani: You know, MAPANTSULA's first private viewing was here at the Market Theatre, and I went over, because again I didn't see, I just heard roughly about this black project, of course co-written by a white person, and the finance of course came from the white people. But there was a rumour going around that this is a good something to see. So I walked in and I saw, you know, MAPANTSULA, the part played by Thomas, you know, coming over very strongly as a black man telling his story, not supporting a white man. Not in a story where the black man supplements the main white plot, but the plot was about him, it was his story, it was an incredible feeling, I just stood at the back with many and I smiled.

I said, With all the faults of the movie, the learning people have in it, this is a beginning in the SA film industry. Especially for black film industry. This is the first time we see



a black hero, portrayed, coming across to you with incredible dignity. Thomas I've never known before, and he acquitted himself in an incredibly wonderful way, he played the part like a déjà vu, was the man acting was the man being himself. He was so fine, so good, I really believe he has an incredible future in this profession. It was a great movie, it was a pleasure again to see my old mamma, Dolly Rathebe, in it, and was pleased she won a Vita award as best supporting actress for it, and it was just wonderful to see Dolly playing a mother, with the big 52 bust of hers, and that warm, huge arms, she reminded me of my mother, it was an incredible story for me, really, I talk about it with great warmth and admiration, and to the young white people who were part of that struggle, to do that movie. You know, I'm glad now there's the possibility it will be shown as the SA government tried its best to block that movie, so that black people cannot see it. It is an incredible piece of work. In fact, for me, it is an indication which direction we must take in this country in the film industry.

Davis: Censorship?

Kani: I am anti-censorship. I have spent my whole life in this theatre fighting censorship. My plays have been banned, I've been harrassed by the security, scripts have been torn to pieces by the security, I've been detained for doing plays, and my whole life I've continued to work because I believed that the artist has the right to express himself. And I believe it is embodied in the Freedom Charter that we have the right to pursue our culture without any inhibition or any censorship from any quarter. When Mandela speaks wonderfully, I still remember his speech saying he has fought against white domination and has fought against black domination, the coming incoming government, if it's ANC, PAC, or the combination of the SA character, I will still oppose censorship. I believe in - I'm not talking about moral censorship, like pornography, child-abuse pornography, moral obligations, I mean we're a very religious country, I mean, nation in this country, though there are other people who are not religious, who are Muslims, one would have to be cautious in insulting the religion or whatever beliefs of other people. But to censor on political grounds is something that will never be acceptable among the artists in this country. Even in our new organization, which is the Performing Arts Workers Equity, number one we say we are non-racial, we are non-sexist, we are anti-censorship. So we in the arts, in the culture, we are the watchdog of the nation, of these politicians. We will still serve the purpose of Mbongi, the praise-singer, who said when Transkei got independence, on television, very proud when he was referring to Matanzima, he said, We thank you for bringing us independence and left freedom behind. When Ciskei got independence, the Mbongi said to Chief Justice Mbangla, We thank you for bringing the calabash of milk, our children will drink and be healthy, but you left the cow behind. And that's the office we hold in culture, it is to be the conscience of this society. It is to praise it when it does good things, it is to attack it and criticize it when it does bad things. It is to build the cultural bridges between the people of SA, it is to build communications depots, for people to know, to dispel fallacies of fear about each other. That's our service. If you censor culture, you censor the conscience of the people. You can't do that. I'm very glad you said "Intimated" - that has been made totally clear that the artists and the cultural workers in this country from grassroots level up to top professional that that will not be tolerated, and will be fought, but we will be responsible in a changing SA. That's the only thing I say. "Responsible in a changing SA." We will write our stories aware of the responsibility we have in re-educating our community. We still have to teach my brothers to like white people. My younger brother doesn't. He doesn't understand why I'm friends with Athol. We still have to teach many brothers and sisters in the Afrikaner world to see me not as a black terrorist who is waiting to slit his throat, given an opportunity. We still have to build a SA culture that comes out of the people. We have to blend these different languages, different people, different cultures into what Americans called a melting-pot. We have to portray SA culture which only during certain particular holidays - that's certainly

in America, you have the Irish holiday, the Polish holiday, the holiday, only during those activities, and people have to maintain also their own cultures if they want to, because it's important, you are what your culture is, your language is. But there will be no form of censorship whatsoever, especially political, that will be tolerated by the artists and the cultural workers.

David: Well, I was still very, very young in Port Elizabeth -

(overstart)

David: Oh, I was still very young in Port Elizabeth when this great movie - you know, we'd been going to the cinema - it's called the Siskops then - to see Tax Rister, Roy Rogers, a little bit of the cowboy and Indians with Spencer G. Bennett and the Tomahawks, we'd never ever seen a black person on the screen. That was a "whites only" affair. And when Jim Jones' "Johannes" was shown, it was like a miracle, we saw black people in this movie, we saw black people talking, some of the people we'd seen in the Zank magazine, some of the people we could shout and say and scream, "That's Bolly!" Because Bolly you see was married to Weltona Daga, who is a very great friend of mine in Port Elizabeth, and most incredible singer Bolly Mathibe, in fact there was even a saying in the Tsonga language, which is the language of the township hustlers, if something is good, is perfect, that's "Bolly", you know, then that's good. And that's how she was perceived by us as young people in the township, you know, and I was incredible just to see, I mean go' going to the cinema and see an overseas film, but to see something South African. Later, "Jim Jones to Jo'burg" even became a cliché in the type of work that was to follow in SA, all the kind of work that was dealing with the white man's point of view of what the black life in SA was always referred to as a "Jim Jones to Jo'burg" because it was again their concept of what African lives are, are about, and must be. Even in theatre, if you did a play that dealt with the bad side of black people, the bad side of our culture, of our language, of everything, it was always referred to - Jim Jones to Jo'burg here, this country might be coming to the city, get excited and become a thing, yet he comes from the good solid foundation, a background in the rural areas that is the essence of being, the essence of being African. But people like Bolly were an incredible inspiration to all of us young would-be actors in the near future, because we didn't know what acting was about. Showbiz was, like, taken amongst our parents. Now, to be in the showbiz, what does it mean? It means, as far as my father is concerned, you don't want to get a job. You want to be a liar, you want to hang around smoking drugs, wearing patterned pants, and low morals. That's being an artist. That was the end of it. So you couldn't dare go to your parent and say, "I want to be an artist". He says, "What are you talking about? You can't even sing," which was the worst thing for me. I can't even sing. But at, well, as we called them then, like or Jim Jones to Jo'burg, and in fact the amazing life in the movies of people like Bolly Mathibe, Simon Nkomo, Sam Williams, there was, say, I mean, Mary, Mary, Awa Daga, were this incredible influence in our lives. It was then we realized, then we wanted to be. But Bolly specifically for me, because she was very successful, you know, in my father's eyes, he knew Bolly's record, Bolly's songs, he knew Bolly when he saw Bolly in the Zank magazine, I don't know if he had an incredible crush on this beautiful lady, but when I said, "I want to do what Bolly does," I had his ear for the first time. It was their influence that made my father understand that you could get a profession out of this strange art form.

David: My way still consciousness, that the films were controlled by whites, even if this was a kind of black cinema, you know that the cameras, the financing, it was all white.

David: Absolutely. Even the script, for that matter, everything was for whites in SA,