

# After Lives

Legacies of  
Revolutionary Writing



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colleagues on many issues: from Hungary in 1956 and Afghanistan in the early 1980s, China versus the Soviet Union, to the rights of the Eritrean people to struggle for their self-determination. As Shawn Slovo would remember of her parents, Ruth First and Joe Slovo, who often conflicted dramatically on several such issues: "You could set them off really. [We (Shawn and her sisters, Gillian and Robyn) used to] do it actually, at Christmas and times when we were together here. And we'd just throw in some kind of remark about Russia, or some remark about China, because Ruth was pro-China. And they'd just go at it" (interview with Buntman).

Ghassan Kanafani, Roque Dalton and Ruth First, committed critics each, and at a time when criticism and commitment often challenged the other's practices, in their own work, as in their persistent example, continue to give critical dissent a good name. And now again, perhaps, that dissent, those names – their names – might well discover re-examined terrains of debate and renewed histories of the future. Might their radical visions keep them potentially under threat of death in the current era of "democracy" and "negotiation?" What, in other words, would they say now?

## PART I

### WRITERS AND ASSASSINATIONS

You do not die because you are created or because you have a body.

You die because you are the face of the future.

Adonis, "The Desert" (1982)

People who die for the freedom of others are, like women who die in childbirth, difficult to explain except to those for whom they died.

Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile* (1988)

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 3: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

On 22 July 1987, the Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali was shot on a London street outside the offices of *al-Qabas*, a Kuwaiti newspaper for which at the time he drew his political caricatures. On 29 August 1987, some six weeks later, Naji al-Ali died from those wounds, without regaining consciousness. His last cartoon, drawn just before his assassination, was strangely ominous. In it, Hanzalla, the "child of the camps" who appeared in all his drawings, standing with his back to the viewer, observing the corruption, exploitation and repression in and of the Arab world that Naji al-Ali's cartoons relentlessly depicted, lay now face down on the ground, an arrow in his heel, killed perhaps by the same forces of political oppression that for the last decade and a half the cartoonist had committed himself to exposing.

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting – the assailant has still, and amid continued rumor and speculation, gone unapprehended – writers, critics, ideologues and friends of the Arab artist raised collectively and in individual articles the insistent question: Who killed Naji al-Ali? Univocal as the question might have been, the proffered answers, some tentative, others accusatory, were decidedly dissonant. The *Observer*, in London, on the day following the artist's death, blamed the PLO. Reporting a phone call that Naji al-Ali had allegedly received from Yasser Arafat's

organization warning him to "correct his attitude," the *Observer* article went on to describe Naji al-Ali's subsequent cartoon critiquing the Palestinian resistance and its leadership. It concluded from these details that "the tone may have cost him his life".

Various factions within the PLO, including Yasser Arafat's Fatah, Iran, the Palestinian renegade-extremist Abu Nidal, and Mossad, the Israeli secret service, were variously accused in the months that followed of assassinating the Arab world's most popular and well-known cartoonist. An editorial in the 14 September 1987 issue of *al-Hadaf*, the weekly magazine of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), however, asked further – and with implications for that other, more preliminary question of "who killed Naji al-Ali?" – "Why was Naji al-Ali buried in London?" Why in London and not in Palestine where he was born, or in Ain al-Hilweh, the Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon where he had grown up? Two answers were suggested by the editorial. The first explanation invoked reasons of security: given the cartoonist's reputation and renown and the popular anger at his death, could state security forces contain, or even predict, the force of people's reactions to the loss of this exemplar? The second response was more provocative still: Naji al-Ali's burial in London testified to his controversial independence, his contentious and critical ideological positioning *vis-à-vis* the Arab regimes, and his insistent "representation" of all the Arab peoples who, like the Palestinians, are systematically exploited by those same concupiscent regimes. Issues of nationalism presaged, even then, the encomiums of another internationalism still to be determined.

In a commemorative poem, one Palestinian poet, Murid Barghuti, seconded this indictment of the Arab regimes and their reactionary politics when, in an allusion to the biblical Joseph story, he suggested that it was not the wolf at all who had killed Joseph but his own brothers. For Mahmud Darwish, another Palestinian poet and then head of the General Union of Palestinian Writers, Naji al-Ali's assassination was the occasion to scrutinize the current political and cultural discourse of much of the Arab world. In an article in *al-Yawm al-Sabih* on 3 August 1987 entitled "No to Assassination by Bullets, No to Assassination with Words," Darwish wrote that "for every bullet

there is more than one killer and more than one victim." Much as Israel has sought the mass removal and territorial and political dispossession of the Palestinian people, whether by assassination or transportation, and now "ghettoization", so too, according to Darwish, had "assassination come to characterize the dialogue of the Arabs with themselves."

What was it that had singled out Naji al-Ali for death by an assassin's bullet and assigned him a place in the pantheon of martyred artists? For Faysal Darraj, Radwa Ashur and Murid Barghuti in an article in the 17 August 1987 issue of *al-Hadaf*, "The Tragedy and the Greatness of the Different Artist," Naji al-Ali had distinguished himself by his very difference, his refusal to accept the dogma of doctrine either aesthetic or political. It was this tenacious independence that rendered the artist unacceptable, intolerable even, to regimes and systems that must, for their own self-preservation, suppress external opposition and contain internal contradiction. As an artist, the critics maintained, Naji al-Ali eschewed the structures of power as sanction for his work and chose instead, in order to transform the existing distorted relations of power, to draw from out of the arena of popular struggle. His political practice too differed from that of the politicians themselves in that he scorned the machinating maneuvers of opportunistic tactics, calculations, brokering and bargaining. Naji al-Ali's concerns and priorities were elsewhere. But where? What is the task of the political artist/the artist politician? And why should it get them killed?

In April 1988 in Mozambique, Albie Sachs did not die, despite the car bomb that sought to kill him. Sachs, a South African lawyer who had been imprisoned in 1963 under the 90 Day Detention Law, had on his release gone into exile in London and then Maputo. Currently serving as a Justice on South Africa's Constitutional Court, he has recounted the project of reconstruction – personal as well as political – that followed that assault on his person. In his memoir entitled *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* (1990c), both the body and the body politic are at stake in the writing. The scars left by the bomb blast are manifold: the loss of an arm and an eye, and the critical trauma no less to the rest of the corpus. In his memoir Sachs translates

these traditional corporeal marks of physical violence into an anticipation of political reconstitution:

This is a strange time to think that the struggle has become less simple, less direct, when I have just been a victim of an old-fashioned assassination attempt. Yet I feel convinced that one of the biggest tasks facing our movement at the moment is to overcome the psychology of the embattled and begin to think with the vision of leaders of the country as a whole. And yet, and yet, for all our new thinking, and breaking out of stereotypes, the police forces of the world continue their time-honoured surveillance and controls, and maybe I am just being naïve. (1990c, pp. 57–8)

For Sachs, “At least one’s body is a whole entity, not fragmented into a million egos and currents and contradictory trends like political movements” (p. 173). The body and the body politic, the significance of assassination and its assessments notwithstanding, Sachs survived that attempt on his life. For those writers who did not, who were assassinated, the combined issues of exhuming the corpse and examining the corpus weigh heavy on their legacy to the “political movements” and their adherents.

Citing nationalism’s political and cultural sway, its “imagined community” over the last two centuries, Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 7) has suggested that that very “fraternity” of national identification has made it possible “for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings”. John D. Kelly (1995, p. 477) has gone on otherwise, in an examination of the “politics of shed blood,” to question the connections between “the kind of blood you are born with” and the “kind of blood you shed”, suggesting further that it “is not the abundance of martyrs but the value of stories of martyrs that is truly central here.” “Martyrdom stories,” he argues, “signal an effort to force a social alignment, to force a decision about a social truth” (pp. 488–9). Writers and their assassinations, in other words, engage precisely such a “politics of shed blood,” but, just as significantly, the very stories of their life and work have dissented from, even militated against, the hagiographies of martyrology and/or opportunistic rehabilitations. In the stead of such eulogies, the writers had worked on

behalf of critical re-readings. Had they lived, their stories would not only have turned out differently, but perhaps been written in another register as well.

During the two trips to Africa made in the last year of his life, and following his controversial departure from the ranks of Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam, Malcolm X sought support from the African heads of state that he had met with for his proposal to bring the historical situation of African Americans in the United States before the United Nations. That situation, like those of their counterparts in South Africa and Rhodesia, he argued at the time, should be globally condemned as a flagrant and wilful abuse of international covenants and agreements respecting the human rights of all peoples of the world. Malcolm X’s work in Africa, like his activities in the United States, was meanwhile of considerable concern to the FBI who included in their copious files on him a *New York Times* article written from Cairo and dated 14 July 1964. It reported: “Malcolm X the black nationalist leader said today that he had come to attend a meeting of the council of ministers of the Organization of African Unity as an observer. He arrived yesterday. He said he intended to acquaint African heads of state ‘with the true plight of America’s Negroes and thus show them how our situation is as much a violation of the United Nations human rights charter as the situation in Africa and Mongolia’” (cited in Carson, 1991, p. 330). Malcolm X would, however, speak more challengingly – and decisively – to the same issue of international accountability on his return to the United States. In an interview on 2 December 1964 with radio talk-show host Les Crane, he asserted that: “[i]t’s not a Negro problem or an American problem any longer. It’s a world problem, it’s a human problem. And so we’re striving to lift it from the level of civil rights to the level of human rights. And at that level it’s international. We can bring it into the United Nations and discuss it in the same tone and in the same language as the problems of people in other parts of the world also is [sic] discussed” (Malcolm X, 1989, p. 89). A few months later, just five days before he was assassinated in Harlem’s Audubon Ballroom, Malcolm X returned to that transformative work that would link “civil rights” with “human rights” and

make the United States internationally accountable for those rights. He had concluded his Rochester speech of 16 February 1965 with the provocative admonition:

All nations that signed the charter of the UN came up with the Declaration of Human Rights and anyone who classifies his grievances under the label of "human rights" violations, those grievances can then be brought into the United Nations and be discussed by people all over the world. For as long as you call it "civil rights" your only allies can be the people in the next community, many of whom are responsible for your grievance. But when you call it "human rights" it becomes international. And then you can take your troubles to the World Court. You can take them before the world. And anybody anywhere on this earth can become your ally. (Malcolm X, 1989, p. 181)

Five days later, Malcolm X's body, as he rose to address a meeting of his newly formed Organization of Afro-American Unity, was riddled by assassins' bullets that did succeed, temporarily at least, in halting the international inquiry that the black leader had sought to initiate.

Much as the assassins had shot down the man – and a quarter of a century later, it is still in dispute who and how many they were, and at whose behest(s) they had carried out the attack – so the United States Congress, for a decade and a half, engaged in obstructing the project of bringing to bear in that country the various United Nation Covenants on human rights. While the United States, with most other UN member nations, had been among the signatories to the international organization's several charters, the Congress had (and in most cases has) yet to ratify those declarations and treaties. Of particular concern to congressional representatives at the time was the Genocide Convention, the first such treaty to be forwarded to the Senate for approval. Though the congressional objections, as Natalie Kaufman (1990) has pointed out, were largely indicative of subsequent opposition to the other treaties as well – they would "diminish basic rights," "promote world government," "enhance Soviet/Communist influence," "subject citizens to trial abroad," and "threaten the US form of government" – Senator

H. Alexander Smith (R.-N. J.) voiced the concerns of others in suggesting that genocide might well be worth killing for. According to Smith, referring, as did others who endorsed a similar position, to the history of African Americans, ratification of the Genocide Convention could mean that "[w]e may be charged with [genocide], that is the danger, and the Court of International Justice may say that there is a *prima facie* case made against the United States of genocide, and there you are, left, condemned in the eyes of the world" (cited in Kaufman, 1990, p. 45). That condemnation is precisely what Malcolm X, in linking the issues of "civil rights" with the imperatives of "human rights," was preparing to do when he was killed on 21 February 1965 by the assassins' desperate bullets.

Many questions have been raised over the last quarter of a century about the circumstances of Malcolm X's death. For Malik Miah, writing in 1976, in the introduction to *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, "Identifying the killers of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Fred Hampton is not just a matter of historical interest. It is an urgent defensive measure for the Black movement, to prevent future assassinations of its leaders" (p. 12). Bruce Perry (1991) more cynically considers that "Revolutionaries are not required to succeed. Usually, they end up defeated or dead, martyrs to their chosen cause" (p. 280). For the FBI, the matter was different again. In a memorandum from 25 February 1965, the Bureau wrote:

MALCOLM K. LITTLE

INTERNAL SECURITY – MMI

In view of the subject's death, his name is being removed from the Security Index at the Bureau and you should handle accordingly in your office.

Submit an appropriate memorandum noting his death, for dissemination at the Bureau.

*Attention* [BUREAU DELETION].

Cancel SI cards (Cited in Carson, 1991, p. 383).

The question, however, of who killed Malcolm X, like the inquiries two decades later on another continent into the death of Naji al-Ali, is more than a defensive one, a cynical comment, or



a "security index" card. It is a systemic question, a historical one. What happens should genocide turn to assassination?

The very function of the author, at least in Western culture, according to Michel Foucault in "What Is an Author?," is to "limit, exclude, choose." The author's putative self, in other words, provides the "functional principle by which, in our culture . . . one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault, 1979, p. 159). The author, Foucault maintains, is "the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (p. 159). The critical convention governing the concept of "author" presupposes the separation of the artist from the political conditions within which they write, the ideological milieu within which they work. Such a separation between a self and an other, the rhetorical basis of a politics of identity, itself crucial to the definition of author as Foucault presents it, is a cordon that Naji al-Ali, for example, refutes, that his drawings confute. The collapse of the inherited distinction between culture and politics is, however, anathema to the dominant structures of power which continue to insist on what Terry Eagleton (1990, p. 33) has called the "stalest of Arnoldian clichés, [that] the 'poetic' as we have it today was, among other things, historically constructed to carry out just that business of suppressing political conflict." The guardians of cultural preserves and political dominion must maintain the separation of culture and politics at least in so far as this separation underwrites their territorial elitism and the ideological mystification whereby such ascendancy remains unassailed. The politicians must, for their part, be wary lest something called "culture" be wrested from the control of their servitors, whom they have appointed and whose services the state apparatus has again and again enlisted, and begin to function in mobilizing popular political opposition. The language of objectivity and transcendence cultivated by culture's keepers has been designed to obscure its own antinomies, partisan positionings and the very sectarianism of the self/other divide.

The threat posed by the reassertion of the intersection of culture and politics, such as that argued in Naji al-Ali's cartoons, to

a dominant ideology of authoritarian control is attested to by the violence and consistency of the policing reaction to such an intersection. Such policing has been marked, for example, by the implementation of censorship both overt and covert, from the McCarthy hearings in the United States in the 1950s to the rhetoric of "standards" and "basics" that had characterized the Reagan/Bush regimes' education policy and made it possible for one and the same man to qualify for the positions of both Secretary of Education and "drug czar." It has also included the Israeli military occupation's repeated closings of Palestinian universities and schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (particularly during the intifada), the official denial of a teaching post in 1974 to the historian Walter Rodney when he returned to his native Guyana, and the Salvadoran army's four-year occupation of the University of El Salvador from 1980 to 1984, as well as the assassination by right-wing death squads in November 1989 of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador's Central American University. The control of what Foucault referred to as the "circulation, manipulation and composition" of cultural production also extends to the imprisonment of dissident intellectuals and even, when necessary, to the assassination of the "authors."

The litany of committed intellectuals, partisans of organized resistance movements, who have been the victims of political assassination, bears witness to the coercive effectiveness of a dominant ideology of separatism and its need to eliminate those individuals in whose collaborative, secularizing work a space was elaborated for "the face of the future" – the conjunction of culture and political struggle – as well as to the creative potential of such a conjunction and the collective possibilities across self/other divides that that secularizing vision entails. The violent deaths of these intellectuals delineated and continues to demarcate in turn a critical site for a self-critique from within the resistance movements to which they contributed through their writing and work and a re-elaboration of strategies of resistance that has emerged out of the inquiry into the circumstances of their deaths: Naji al-Ali (Palestinian, died 1987); Malcolm X (African-American, died 1965); Amílcar Cabral (Guinea Bissau, died 1973); Steve Biko (South African, died 1977); Walter Rodney (Guyana, died 1980); Archbishop Oscar Romero

(Salvadoran, died 1980); Ignacio Ellacuría (died, 1989); Roque Dalton (Salvadoran, died 1975); Ghassan Kanafani (Palestinian, died 1972); and Ruth First (South African, died 1982).

But alas! sacrifice is not a political argument and martyrdom does not constitute proof. When the list of martyrs grows long, when every act of courage is converted into martyrdom, it is because something is wrong. And it is just as much a moral duty to seek out the cause as it is to pay homage to the murdered or imprisoned comrades.

Régis Debray (1968), *Revolution in the Revolution?*

The assassination of political writers, artists and intellectuals raises a number of significant questions with regard to the very nature of the investigation into their deaths. Beyond the most immediate question, "who killed . . .?", there is a further set of issues implied in the attempted responses to such a question, issues that challenge both the investigator and the research itself: what does it mean to ask, "who killed . . .?" – and what are the consequences that attend upon the asking of the question, "who killed . . .?"? What kind of examination is required in constructing an answer to these questions? The question posed in the terms of "who killed . . .?" entails for the investigator a kind of detective function, according to which a murderer-assassin must be identified, apprehended and "brought to justice." The traditional "whodunit" narrative paradigm provides a literary model based on the structural prerequisites of "law and order" for the narrative of such an investigation. The political or ideological function, by contrast, that asks not after the "who?" but into the "how and why?" that they were killed, not only redefines the "crime" but reconstructs the very elements of history and agency that are constitutive of it. Unlike the detective function, the systemic or ideological response to political assassination involves an interrogation of the state apparatuses that have determined the nature of crime itself, proposing thereby a narrative that challenges the past in its demands for a review of history and charts alternative possibilities for the future in its critical rethinking of the contradictions and conflicts of that past.

These two functions, the detective and the political or

ideological, are, for example, differently assigned and alternatively defined in *Murder in Mexico*, the report on the investigation into the assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico City on 20 August 1940, or what Isaac Deutscher (1963) has referred to as the "Hell-Black Night." At the time of Trotsky's death, the report's author, Leandro Sanchez Salazar, was Mexican Chief of Secret Police. In the introduction to his personal account of the police mission the official describes his role in the investigation as well as his own investment in the work:

Destiny ordained that there should be a gap in my long career as a soldier to allow me to occupy the post of Mexican Chief of Police. I threw myself into this work with great enthusiasm. Police investigations thrilled me. I realized that I had the makings of a good detective, and, with the loyal collaboration of my assistants, soon got used to the work and devoted all my energy to it. And thus it fell to my lot to investigate the final tragedy of Don Leon, as, with respect and admiration, I called Trotsky. (Salazar, 1950, p. ix)

Julian Gorkin, by contrast, who assisted Sanchez Salazar in his narrative reconstruction of the police investigation, emphasizes rather the different significance for him of the ideological opposition to Stalinism at the time that such an inquiry enabled. Gorkin's introduction to *Murder in Mexico* which follows that of Sanchez Salazar, while not eschewing his own personal implication in the investigatory process, nonetheless foregrounds instead the alternative possibilities of the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic political positionings and conflicts contained in the question, "who killed . . .?":

I have never been attracted by police work, for I have too often been its victim, but in these circumstances my disinterested aid was a duty. I took a deep interest in the enquiry. It was, in fact, really engrossing, for it consisted of a battle against Stalinism and its methods. I was only continuing a struggle started at the time of my break with the Comintern in 1929, a struggle which had already cost me so much bitterness. As will be seen, it was not yet finished. (pp. xv–xvi)



The subversive consequences of this combined investigation and report by both police chief (albeit an exceptional one) and ideologue are further emphasized by the delay imposed on the publication of Sanchez Salazar's *Murder in Mexico* by the circumstances of the Second World War and Stalin's alliance at the time with the Western powers, a delay also related to the deferment of the release of Trotsky's own book on Stalinism until, as Gorkin reports, a more "opportune" moment (p. xviii). As Deutscher (1963) points out in his biography of Trotsky, already in 1936, many of Trotsky's sympathizers were inhibited in the expression of their support for him by the "simple-minded fear of aiding Hitler by criticizing Stalin" (p. 369). And while Trotsky planned for the establishment of a Fourth International, the Comintern itself was anticipating its own dissolution, which followed three years after Trotsky's fated demise.

The controversy, then, surrounding the investigation and its published report of Trotsky's assassination – as much even as the assassination itself – makes manifest the critical enterprise and its political ramifications, from the national to the international, that ultimately inhere in the question, "who killed . . . ?" and its translations into an inquiry as to the "how and why?". The investigation itself becomes an intervention into the existing relationships of political power with consequences for the positioning of the principal investigators and their own political situations.

Assassination has been variously defined over the ages by political scientists, historians and legal advisors to monarchs, by rulers both legitimate and illegitimate, and governments and their agencies and agents provocateurs. The term itself, "assassination," is generally traced to an Ismaili Shi'ite sect that operated in Syria and Iran in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Known as the *hashishiyun* (whence the designation "assassins"), the members of this group were reputed to slay their opponents with a bravado that was popularly attributed to their use of drugs. More recently, however, the legal and political definitions of assassination have been debated and refined in order to accommodate both the pressures of contemporary circumstances and, just as significantly, the demands of the system that seeks to

contain the challenges to its authority within its legal and political jurisdiction. The political scientists Havens, Leiden and Schmitt, for example, in *The Politics of Assassination*, written in 1970 following a period of recurrent international assassinations, define assassination as the "deliberate, extralegal killing of an individual for political purposes" (p. 4). The case studies that they present in their account of assassination range without distinction or qualification from Verwoerd in South Africa and Somoza in Nicaragua to Patrice Lumumba of the Congo and Martin Luther King in the United States, a collocation presumably designed to demonstrate an ostensibly objective neutrality concerning the politics of assassination. That neutrality, however, betrays its own partisan positioning in the authors' expression of their abiding concern for the "systemic impacts produced by assassination," their concern, that is, with assassination as an untoward, "extralegal" disruption of the *status quo*.

Franklin Ford's subsequent study, *Political Murder* (1985), assumes a similarly "neutral" position in its presentation of the history of assassination, from the regicides of ancient Egypt and Israel to contemporary acts of "terrorism." Ford, however, locates his neutrality in that same historicizing of the phenomenon of "political murder" and its centuries-long development, revealing in the volume's subtitle the political program that informs the ideological trajectory of his reconstructed historical narrative: "from tyrannicide to terrorism." Ford defines assassination as the "intentional killing of a specified victim or group of victims, perpetrated for reasons related to his (her, their) public prominence and undertaken with a political purpose in view" (p. 2). In his adjudication of contemporary assassinations, however, Ford marks a shift, the move "from tyrannicide to terrorism," in what he has delineated in the history of assassination as "political purpose" and concludes that "what remains [today] is behavior, stripped of political trappings. And of behavior that is murderous, whatever its partisan claims, one must ask: What about political life?" (p. 240) In thus cordoning off, on alleged historical grounds, what counts as "political" and what does not, the "political" itself becomes only that which can be accommodated within the parameters of the dominant ideology and its legislation of that same construction of the "political." Ford's

analysis of the modern world thus exempts assassinations carried out by the state or its paramilitary branches from public political scrutiny. It also disallows investigation into the events of state-sponsored "terror" (such as the US's "School of Assassins" – or School of the Americas) and their legacy: a legacy of opposition and resistance, of organized protest against such abuses of power, that might serve to regenerate the very strategies that the state-committed assassination programs had sought to eradicate.

The much-heralded "death of the author," then, the assassination of writers and authors, cannot always be reduced or for that matter sublimated to a metaphorical or even literary phenomenon. Rather, the assassination of the writer is a historical and political event with very tangible cultural, critical and material consequences for theorizing the subsequent participation in and reclamation of the work of intellectual figures who have been instrumental in organizing resistance to systems and discourses of domination, and whose life work had been committed to redefining the very "politics of shed blood."

In his essay, "National Liberation and Culture," delivered at Syracuse University in 1970 as the first Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture, Amílcar Cabral addressed his audience with the appeal, "If we manage to persuade the African freedom fighters and all those concerned for freedom and progress of the African peoples of the conclusive importance of this question [of the relation between the national liberation struggle and culture] in the process of struggle, we shall have paid significant homage to Eduardo Mondlane." In concluding his address, Cabral returned to the assassination of the former president of Mozambique's resistance movement, Frelimo, murdered by agents of the Portuguese government in 1969:

One might say that Eduardo Mondlane was *savagely* assassinated because he was capable of identifying with the culture of his people, with their deepest aspirations, through and against all attempts or temptations for the alienation of his personality as an African and a Mozambican. Because he had forged a new culture in the struggle, he fell as a combatant. (p. 154, Cabral's emphasis)

In this contextualization of his remarks on culture and struggle within the history of Mondlane's assassination, Cabral insists on their political and ideological significance in understanding the reconstruction of the resistance movement and in recharting its agenda of liberation. While the essay "National Liberation and Culture" stands on its own as an important contribution to the complex debate (including, for example, Frantz Fanon's analysis of culture and political violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*) on the function of national culture in organizing resistance to colonial domination, the narrative frame of Mondlane's assassination is itself critical to the essay's intervention into the terms of that debate. Cabral grounds historically within that frame his already-historicized theoretical formulations of the role of culture, developed out of the specific material conditions of the resistance, in the national liberation struggle.

Just four years after he delivered his homage to Eduardo Mondlane, Cabral himself was assassinated in Conakry by members of his own Guinea Bissau resistance organization, the Partido Africano da Independência de Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), working in collaboration with the Portuguese military regime. While Cabral had always maintained that "we are all necessary to the struggle, but no one is indispensable" (cited in Chabal, 1983, p. 142), his death was critical to the subsequent history of the national liberation struggle in Portugal's African colonies. Liberation would come to Guinea Bissau a year later, in 1975, but the means to that liberation as well as to its developments in ensuing years were conditioned significantly by Cabral's leadership and his unanticipated death.

As Chabal wrote in his posthumous intellectual and political biography of the PAIGC leader, a study in which the fact of Cabral's untimely death once again provides the framework for a retrospective re-reading of the issues of "revolutionary leadership and people's war":

Revolutionary leaderships are sensitive to the deaths of party leaders both because leadership is usually a key to the success of their political action and because they often have no institutionalized mechanism to replace the leadership. In the early stages of

a revolution, particularly, the loss of a strong leader may well change the unity and cohesion of the party itself. (p. 132)

Chabal goes on to examine the dynamics of the PAIGC on the eve of liberation and in the shadow of Cabral's death, as well as in the later developments of political independence and post-colonial cultural practices. Cabral's own philosophy of resistance in this context becomes crucial both to the enterprise of understanding the motivation for his killing and to the party's structural and theoretical capacity to sustain its agenda of organized political resistance after his death. Critical to Cabral's philosophy had been the international vision of emancipation that he represented from within Africa in the combined resistance movements of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau as well as globally in his emphasis on the necessarily collective and combined struggle of Africans and the Portuguese working class against imperialist exploitation.

Basil Davidson, in his tribute to Cabral in 1984 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the African leader's death, reiterated that vision: "The true vocation of these new nations – true in the sense of the capacity to yield a further process of development – was to overcome the colonial heritage by moving 'beyond nationalism'." Why, Davidson goes on to ask, "should a revolutionary nationalism not grow in time, organically, regionally, into an internationalism?" (p. 43). Davidson's essay, "On Revolutionary Nationalism: The Legacy of Cabral," focuses on Cabral's contributions to what was then the First World's theorizing of resistance. In this it shifts the emphasis from Patrick Chabal's study which had centered on the African context for inquiring into the significance of the assassination of Amílcar Cabral. Davidson, however, reminds his audience that it is to Africa that the First World strategist must by turns look in order to sustain the political and cultural legacy that Cabral, in his struggle and in his death, had bequeathed.

Davidson's re-reading of that critically dynamic legacy opens with two components of Cabral's thinking: the concept of a colonial petty bourgeois leadership which must commit "class suicide" in its class consciousness (and class interests), and the argument that any real liberation must itself be a process of

revolutionary struggle. These two directives taken from Cabral's strategy of resistance also contribute to an understanding of Cabral's own death at the hands of an assassin in that that death itself, its circumstances and its perpetrators, revealed the decided failure of the colonial petty bourgeoisie to rethink and revision its own historical role. Davidson proposes rather to relocate Cabral's death by assassination through a re-examination of its significance in a "process of revolution." Significantly, then, it was Cabral's own explicit acknowledgement of internationalism that Davidson sees as crucial to his legacy, and its critical reversal of a linear narrative that moved historically from center to periphery. Pointing to Cabral's engaged work with the Portuguese situation and the elements that historically constituted it, Davidson asks, "Whenever before had revolutionary change in Africa helped to promote revolutionary change in Europe? Hadn't 'all the books' declared that such a thing was impossible, even unthinkable? Yet it happened, and this was another part of the legacy of Cabral" (p. 23).

At the trial in South Africa in 1976 of Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness movement, on charges of "alleged subversion by intent," a singular aspect of the prosecutor's examination of the defendant focused on the death by assassination of Nthuli Shezi, who had been the vice-president of the Black People's Convention (BPC). The prosecutor brought as incriminating evidence against Biko the wording of the tribute to Shezi issued by the BPC: "The violent assassination was inflicted by an agent of protection of white racism, superiority and oppression on our black brother. It should not be regarded as being directed towards him alone, but should be regarded as an assault on the entire black community" (cited in Woods, 1987, p. 201). More incriminating still as evidence of Biko's subversive intentions was the defendant's own attendance at Shezi's funeral:

*Attwell:* Did you attend Shezi's funeral?

*Biko:* I was there, yes.

*Attwell:* Was it an emotional funeral?

*Biko:* All funerals are emotional.

*Attwell:* What sort of speeches were delivered?

*Biko:* There were speeches to encourage people to continue. It is the typical African situation, when anybody of note dies the normal theme of the speeches there is that what he was doing other people must continue with. That was the theme of the white minister who conducted the funeral.

*Attwell:* You say it was a white minister who conducted the funeral?

*Biko:* Yes, it was.

*Attwell:* I submit to you that the speakers brought out all the good in Mr Shezi, whatever good there may have been, and neglected any weak points that he may have had.

*Biko:* This is done.

*Attwell:* And brought out all the evil things they could about the whites, and ignored all the good there may or may not be. Would you agree with me?

*Biko:* I think they have not finished all the evil. (Woods, 1987, p. 202)

Steve Biko's own death in detention in 1977 importantly assisted in producing another kind of cross-examination, one designed to interrogate the South African apartheid system as a whole – as this system was consummately summed up in its prison apparatus. The official inquest into the physical causes and personal responsibility for Biko's death while in detention did not culminate at any time in any indictment, much less punishment, of guilty parties in his assassination, because, as Donald Woods puts it, "the State had not seen fit to indict anyone for the death of Steve Biko, it becomes necessary to indict the State" (p. 355). Following the inquest, however, and in response partly to international protest, the South African government did finally appoint a commission of inquiry headed by Justice Rabie to investigate the conditions of detention, and in particular political detention, in South Africa. The conclusions of the Rabie Report did expose some of the individual collapses, infringements and miscarriages of justice; nonetheless, it upheld the overall authority of the legal system and its penal apparatus. The report, further distinguished for the egregious selectivity of its sources of information and testimony, carefully avoiding the testimony or evidence of even a single former detainee, made a number of

important recommendations that were eventually translated into law, including the Internal Security Act 1982 allowing for four types of detention without trial.

In the meantime, South African deaths in detention multiplied, including that of the trade unionist Neil Aggett in 1982, following which the Detainees' Parents Support Committee was established. Five years later, in 1987, three independent researchers from the University of Cape Town, Don Foster, Dennis Davis and Diane Sandler, published their own report on torture in South African prisons. Designed to be a response to the Rabie Commission's official government-sponsored inquiry, *Detention and Torture in South Africa* is itself a kind of commemoration of Steve Biko's assassination in detention and the indictment of the state that Biko's comrades had called for. In the testimony of several former detainees cited in the report, the example of Steve Biko figures prominently, critically displaying the attempt on the part of the state interrogators to appropriate once again from the popular narrative their own ultimate control and authority over the investigation – and its story – into the circumstances of the South African leader's violent death. According to one former prisoner:

I was asked where I was going, and I told them that I was going to Sterkspruit for a holiday, and then I was taken to another office where there was a picture of Steve Biko. Then I was asked if I know this guy, and I say yes, that I know him. And they asked me where he is now, and I told them that he is dead. And they said that I will follow him if I don't speak the truth. (p. 130)

Another prisoner told again a similar story of his experience of questioning:

Because it was just after that Biko thing and they also told me, You know how Biko died? So we are going to take it seriously. After – they say people are trying to escape. (p. 147)

In recontextualizing these excerpts of the prison system's interrogation of political prisoners within an investigation into the prison system itself, *Detention and Torture in South Africa* offers

an alternative future, another legacy – if a posthumous one – to Biko's work and his death. That death then becomes a part of the investigation into conditions of political detention throughout the world. As Mario Hector would write from *Death Row* in Jamaica in 1984, "A new vibe emanated from this genesis of resistance" (p. 36).

In 1968, the Guyanese historian and theorist of Europe's underdevelopment of Africa, Walter Rodney, was barred from re-entering Jamaica where he had been teaching at the University of the West Indies following his two-year assignment in Tanzania. Twelve years later, Rodney was assassinated in his native Guyana where, as in Jamaica, he had been prevented from assuming the teaching post he had returned from Africa to undertake. The actual circumstances of Rodney's death are well known, but the reasons for it, the calculations behind it and the consequences that ensued still remain controversial and conflicted. According to Pierre Michel Fontaine, citing a sworn statement by Donald Rodney, Walter Rodney's brother, "a government plant, Gregory Smith, an electronic expert and covert member of the Guyana Defense Force, had given Walter a two-way radio and advised him to go and test it in a particular area near the Georgetown prison. Apparently the bomb that the murderer(s) had placed inside the device being tested was triggered by a radio signal" (Fontaine, 1982, p. 42). The Guyanese government claimed for its own disingenuous part that the technological ignorance and lack of sophistication on the part of the writer and revolutionary historian himself had brought about his untimely death.

If the government's account of the assassination is still hardly credible, the death of Walter Rodney, the author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1974), occasioned important critical reassessments among his comrades and colleagues of Rodney's own historical significance and the history of counter-hegemonic resistance more generally. In investigating Rodney's death and its attendant injunctions for charting alternative trajectories, the historian's own admonitions, cited by Douglas Ferguson, are perhaps incumbent on his successors: "Make certain the history you produce is the result of the application of the analytical

tools and not the imposition of conclusions from elsewhere" (Ferguson, 1982, p. 101). If Patrick Chabal had seen in Amílcar Cabral's assassination the fortuitous conjuncture of happenstance with the leader's "personality and his style of leadership [and] the structure of the PAIGC as a whole" (Chabal, 1983, p. 135), C. L. R. James elicited a similar problematic from the conditions of Rodney's death. James (1982) asked not only "who?": "The assassin, I believe, has disappeared. He was an agent of the Burnham government. Everyone has talked about the murder, but they have not talked about *that*" (p. 140), but James also wanted to know "why?" With this other question, James raised a further debate about Walter Rodney's assassination, one that summoned a larger political analysis of the structures of leadership and the collective responsibilities of the organization itself: "Rodney," James claimed, "should never have been there. No political leader had any right to be there. Not only should he never have been there, the people around him should have seen to it that he was not in any such position. That was a fundamental mistake, and it was a political mistake" (1982, p. 139).

Rodney, though, had looked to James's response to his death when he recalled the influence of James on his own "life and thought." Speaking with colleagues in the United States in 1974–5 shortly before his return to Guyana, Rodney recollected that:

later on, at the university in Jamaica, C. L. R. James did exercise this force as a kind of model figure. And more recently, in my own life and thought, he's remained a model in a specific kind of way, not in the sense that I feel any commitment to pursue positions which he has adopted *per se*. But, as he has grown older – and as I have looked around me and recognized how the struggle creates so many casualties (and somehow along the line physiology plays a part) and how the older people get the more they seem to opt out of any revolutionary struggle, seem to wane, seem to take up curious positions that are actually reversals of where they earlier stood – James has become a model of the possibilities of retaining one's intellectual and ideological integrity over a protracted period of time. In other words, I've always said to myself that I hoped that at his age, if I'm around, I still



have some credibility as a progressive, that people wouldn't look around and say, "This used to be a revolutionary". (p. 16)

That credibility could be neither special nor specious, however, and for Rodney it was to be garnered across several fields – including the academic. Recalling his work in the British university system, Rodney would maintain critically, even self-critically, that:

[t]here is a certain distance which one has to go in trying to meet the so-called standards. But beyond that it becomes self-defeating and ridiculous. And the question is, where is the cut-off point? To claim that the standards are irrelevant is never really to attack the world of bourgeois scholarship. Rather, it is simply to leave it in the hands of the enemy, as it were. (p. 25)

The task, then, that followed for other researchers on the occasion of Walter Rodney's assassination is more than academic. According to Ewart Thomas, those inquirers into the manifold question of "Who killed Walter Rodney?" are enjoined now to "go into our various disciplines and attack the myths and distortions that result from the dominance of Eurocentric scholarship in these disciplines" (p. 40). This task involves, as C. L. R. James had maintained at the time, the research of politics as much as it does the politics of research: "I hope somebody will make it his business to write a thesis on what happened in the Guyana revolution and the death of Walter Rodney, which is not just the death of a singular and remarkable individual. It is a whole political problem that is involved there, and I would like you to look at it that way" (Alpers and Fontaine, 1982, p. 144).

Guyana's independence came in 1966, following a protracted contest among representations of race, economics and ideology, and working both with local political exigencies and under the international auspices of the United Nations' professed commitment to decolonization and its documentation of the rights of colonized peoples. Twenty and more years later, though, as anthropologist Brackette Williams (1991) would write, there were still "stains on [the] name, war in [the] veins," and the politics of socialist promises, ethnic divisiveness, territorial

nationalism and cultural heterogeneity continued to disrupt the Guyanese claims to self-determination and independence.

"A whole political problem," in James's words, it remains meanwhile, for it has not always been that writers have been singled out for death, nor that they have died alone. And the question of accountability, answerability, often strains the account of their demises. The death of Bobby Sands, an Irish republican prisoner on hunger strike in Long Kesh, on 5 May 1981, was followed by the deaths of nine fellow prisoners on strike with him: Francis Hughes (12 May), Raymond McCreesh (21 May), Patsy O'Hara (21 May), Joe McDonnell (8 July), Martin Hurson (13 July), Kevin Lynch (1 August), Kieran Doherty (2 August), Tom McIlwee (8 August), and Mickey Devine (20 August). Was this assassination? And who was responsible? The IRA hunger strike raises critical questions about agency, responsibility, answerability and accountability. Much as C. L. R. James had asked "why?" Walter Rodney died, the Irish hunger strikers posed the very questions of their own role in their protracted dying. Was their slow starvation assassination? or suicide, as Margaret Thatcher and the Church claimed? The republican prisoners were striking for the restoration of their political status. Although that status had not been officially restored by the British authorities when the strike was ended in October 1981, Bobby Sands had meanwhile served briefly as an elected member of Parliament, and Sinn Féin had crucially and decisively re-entered the realm of political participation in conjunction with its continued commitment to armed struggle for the liberation of Ireland. *Nor Meekly Serve My Time* (1994), the collected recollections of surviving prisoners from that period a decade ago, edited by Brian Campbell, Laurence McKeown and Felim O'Hagan, narrates the five years of protest demanding political recognition that led up to the 1981 hunger strikes, from the blanket protest through the no wash protest – and ultimately the deaths of ten men. Its contributors are from the ranks of the "Blanketmen" themselves, prisoners who now emerge as "historians, people who not only changed history but were themselves changed by it" (p. xvi). No less than Amílcar Cabral, Steve Biko or Walter Rodney, the "ten men dead" on hunger strike in a



British prison in the north of Ireland were, it has been argued, assassinated by the same official determinations that refused to recognize their political demands, and insisted that their political status should not be acknowledged. "Nor meekly serve my time," the title of the prisoners' memoirs of that collective assassination, is taken from the chorus of the song written in 1976, when "status" was rescinded, by Francie Brolly:

So I'll wear no convict's uniform  
Nor meekly serve my time  
That Britain might brand Ireland's fight  
Eight hundred years of crime.

And yet, as Bernadette Devlin McAliskey – who had outlived the attempt on her life in 1983 – would write in the foreword to the testimonies of the hunger strikers' comrades, "'Greater love than this no man hath than he lay down his life for his friend.' Maybe I'm not sure how to deal with that degree of love. Maybe I wonder why they died for us, and we didn't die for them" (p. xiv).

The question of "why they died" would be repeated once again, eight years later, in El Salvador, following the mass murders at the UCA. According to the terse account provided by Lieutenant José Ricardo Espinoza, the order had been to eliminate the "intellectual leaders" of the guerrillas (cited in Whitfield, 1995, p. 9). Espinoza, once a student of the Jesuits and now a member of the infamous Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran army, had participated in the murders of six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and her daughter. The assassinations on the night of 16 November 1989, five days after the beginning of the major FMLN offensive of that year, was carried out on the grounds of their residence at the University of Central America (UCA). Fathers Ignacio Ellacuría, the university's rector, and Ignacio Martín-Baró, its vice-rector, Segundo Montes, Amando López, Juan Ramón Moreno, Joaquín López y López were murdered, along with Elba and Celina Ramos. Intellectuals the priests unequivocally were, and the Ramoses, mother and daughter, who died with them, were for their part representatives of the priests' own mission in El Salvador. Other massacres, to be sure,

at the hands of the Salvadoran army during the last decade of civil war had preceded theirs: tens of thousands of Salvadorans across the city and throughout the countryside; and other priests as well – Father Rutilio Grande in the village of Aguilarés in March 1977, Archbishop Oscar Romero as he delivered his homily at mass on 25 March 1980, and four North American religious women in December of that same year. Vilified by the Salvadoran army and its government and their no less complicitous supporters (including representatives of several US administrations), as "Marxist," "subversive," "theologians of liberation," the popular church in El Salvador had indeed espoused a historical mission, effectively, defiantly – and very differently – articulated by both Romero and Ellacuría, that committed them to a combined "option of the poor" and the Salvadoran "national reality."

For Romero, that commitment had come late, following the murder of Rutilio Grande, an assassination since referred to by many as the "miracle of Rutilio," in forming Romero's vision of his country's needs and the appeals of its people. The very titles of the four pastoral letters written by Romero during his three short years as Archbishop of San Salvador, however, indicate the renewed direction and political development that his last work had assumed as the "voice of the voiceless:" "The Easter Church" (April 1977); "The Church, The Body of Christ in History" (August 1977); "The Church and Popular Political Organizations" (August 1978); and finally "The Church's Mission amid the National Crisis" (August 1979). Only a month before he died, on 17 February 1980, Romero had written to the then US President Jimmy Carter, asking for his help – by limiting aid to El Salvador's military government – in protecting the human rights of El Salvador's people. And in his homily in the metropolitan cathedral on the Sunday before his death, the Archbishop had openly demanded of the Salvadoran military: *Cese la represión!* Those last words, "stop the repression," on 24 March 1980, were interrupted by the gunshot that killed him (see Romero, 1985).

Even as Romero's homily had been cut short by his assassination, so also Ignacio Ellacuría's mediating work on behalf of dialogue and negotiations between the Salvadoran government

and the FMLN, was halted by his assassins. Already in 1969, in remarks entitled "Ponencia sobre vida religiosa y tercer mundo" and delivered in Madrid, Ellacuría had argued that the "third world is the prophetic denunciation of how badly arranged are the things of this world" (cited in Whitfield, 1995, p. 41). Those political negotiations which Ellacuría endorsed and for which he struggled and died would eventually lead three years later to the Peace Accords signed in Chapultepec, Mexico, on 16 January 1992. Paradoxically, then, as Alvaro de Soto, the United Nations negotiator throughout the Salvadoran peace talks, would argue, "the story of the negotiation, yet to be written, will have to interlock with the Jesuit murder story from which it cannot be separated" (foreword to Whitfield, 1995, p. xii). The end of the Jesuits' lives, it could be claimed, was yet another beginning. According to Romero, in a June 1979 homily, "It would be sad if in a country where they are killing so terribly, we did not count priests among the victims" (cited in Whitfield, 1995, p. 99). But the slain Jesuits' colleague at the UCA, Jon Sobrino, who was in Thailand at the time of their deaths, would shortly afterwards recall the critical moment of receiving the news of the slaughter:

At the other end of the telephone, in London, was a great friend of mine and of all the Jesuits in El Salvador, a man who has shown great solidarity with our country and our church. He began with these words: "Something terrible has happened." "I know," I replied, "Ellacuría." But I did not know. He asked me if I was sitting down and had something to write with. I said I had and then he told me what had happened. "They have murdered Ignacio Ellacuría." I remained silent and did not write anything, because I had already been afraid of this. But my friend went on: "They have murdered Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Amando López, Juan Ramón Moreno, and Joaquín López y López." My friend read the names slowly and each of them reverberated like a hammer blow that I received in total helplessness. I was writing them down, hoping that the list would end after each name. But after each name came another, on to the end. The whole community, my whole community had been murdered. In addition, two women had been murdered with them. (Sobrino and Ellacuría, 1990, p. 5)

"Something to write with": making once again – before as after the fact – the all-too-pained connection between writing and assassination.

More important perhaps than the question "who killed?" is the issue of how? and why? And when is the "opportune moment" for the examination of these questions? Roque Dalton was a Salvadoran poet, writer and partisan in the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) within the Salvadoran resistance movement. In 1975 Dalton, who opposed the militaristic agenda of some of ERP's members in favor of a prolonged people's war and more popular organizing on the ground prior to a major military operation, was ordered executed, in a decision whose consequences are still being played out, by those cadres with whom he had disagreed.

Three years earlier, in Beirut in July 1972, Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian writer, critic, novelist and journalist for the PFLP, was assassinated in a car-bomb explosion that also took the life of his twelve-year-old niece, Lamees. Mossad, the Israeli secret service, eventually claimed responsibility for the death of the "commando who never fired a gun," as one obituary described the Palestinian intellectual. Mossad's claim, however, relieved the Palestinian resistance of the kind of self-scrutiny that had followed on Naji al-Ali's assassination, or Roque Dalton's execution. Kanafani's radical political theorizing on behalf of a "democratic revolution" as the prerequisite for a "democratic secular state," an argument that had characterized his writing from the early novel *Men in the Sun* to his last essay on "the case of Abu Hamidu," raises again – and again – the question, If Ghassan Kanafani were alive today, would he be allowed to live? Nine months after his death, for example, Israeli commandos broke into the Beirut apartment of Kamal Nassar and shot him dead. Like Amílcar Cabral's internationalism, Steve Biko's black consciousness, Walter Rodney's class analysis of the world capitalist system and Roque Dalton's revisioning of militarism, Kanafani's critique of sectarianism was as anathema to recalcitrant forces in his own movement as it was to the Zionism of the state of Israel. The resistance movements themselves, and in turn the political and intellectual inheritors of these legacies, have

only begun the task of elaborating answers to the questions posed by the "deaths of their authors," the assassinations of their leadership.

*Black Gold* is a study of Mozambican migrant workers in the mines of South Africa, published in 1983 under the name of Ruth First, a white South African woman active in the ANC and the South African Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s. A journalist and a historian of Africa as well, Ruth First had been arrested during the Rivonia raids on the ANC in 1963 in South Africa and sentenced under the 90 Day Detention Law. Her prison memoir, *117 Days*, takes its title from this law which allowed for automatic renewal of the detention period at the discretion of the authorities. Eventually, following various banning orders and restrictions on her work, and later a period in England where she co-authored a biography of Olive Schreiner with Ann Scott, First went into her final exile in Mozambique. Her activities as a researcher at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo came to an end when she was assassinated by a parcel bomb in August 1982. At Mondlane University, First had been part of a large research collective studying migrant labor patterns in the countries of Southern Africa and their effects on historical transformations in the region's indigenous social structures. The volume, entitled *Black Gold*, was part of that collaborative research effort. It combines historical background and sociological analysis of the "proletarianization of the peasantry," interviews with miners and their families, and work songs composed and sung by male migrants as well as by those men, women and children who remained behind.

*Black Gold* was published posthumously in the year following Ruth First's death, posthumously only if one considers the function of "author" according to the most limited definition of the word, as referring to the personal identity of the authorial individual. The contribution of *Black Gold*, however, to a reconstruction of political strategy and the ideology of literary critical practice is manifold and includes an implicit critique of authorship and the "task of the intellectual" in the resistance struggle. The reformulation of genre, together with its textual analyses of class and race in the migrant labor movement, which

confutes too sectarian a definition of "nationalism" as an enabling paradigm, are reiterated on a sociopolitical level over the issue of authorial identity – and another "politics of shed blood." The very circumstances of "exile" that had conditioned First's participation in the research project require a particular construction of nationalism and departures from it. Unlike her compatriot Nadine Gordimer, for example, for whom exile from South Africa has at times been novelistically construed either as escape to Europe, as in her novel *Burger's Daughter*, or as existential flight in the case of Maureen Smales's headlong plunge at the end of *July's People*, Ruth First would seem to have reworked the exile imposed by the South African state as continued participation in the popular history of African resistance. Ruth First's biographical narrative intersects with the labor history of the migrant worker and *Black Gold* can be read critically as an active, indeed committed, conflation of the two narrative modes, two historical paradigms, otherwise separated by disciplinary strictures and a cult of individual authorship. If *Black Gold* is read as the autobiography of the partisan intellectual subject in which a personal itinerary is assimilated into a larger historical narrative of resistance and struggle, then First's own exile – and death – become crucial as part of the means to the narration of the history of the migrant workers. Her political task as an intellectual is subsumed by the cooperative research project in which the laborers themselves acquire authorial voices and historical agency.

The issues of authorial identity and the work of the intellectual are defiantly reconstituted across national borders. Ruth First's identification, like that of Roque Dalton and Ghassan Kanafani, with the "faces of the present" provide the critical parameters for an analysis of the "face of the future." It also allows for a re-identification of the resistance movement within an expanded emancipatory agenda. Rather than their elevation uniquely as "writers, martyrs, revolutionaries," their work addresses the exigencies of criticism and the recreation of intellectual priorities. Their writings suggest too the multiple answers to the questions, "who killed?" and "how?" and "why?" and "when?" – answers to be located perhaps in a revisioning of the

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calculated antagonism of the dominant self/other paradigm into a collective and secularized struggle against sectarian exploitations.

A teeshirt popular in the occupied West Bank from the beginning of the Palestinian intifada carried on its back Naji al-Ali's "child of the camps," Hanzalla. On the front of the teeshirt was stencilled another Naji al-Ali cartoon in which a Hanzalla figure with *nahnu*, or "we," written on his back is shown reaping a field of wheat, whose shafts are drawn in the shape of *ana*, the Arabic word for "I." All of these biographies/obituaries were written in blood prior to 1990–91: before, that is, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, each of which crises configures part of a conjunctural closure to one era of "national liberation." And then there came Somalia, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia. Other lists. That erstwhile "closure" enjoins at the same time a new urgency, a rewriting – and even if not in blood, a reprise at least of the radical secularist issues, of the emancipatory and visionary linkage of "civil rights" and a new "human rights," of "internationalism" – that these writers, martyrs, revolutionaries lived – and died – for. Naji al-Ali, Malcolm X, Amílcar Cabral, Steve Biko, Walter Rodney, Bobby Sands, Archbishop Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría – and Roque Dalton, Ghassan Kanafani, Ruth First: if they were alive today, would their erstwhile enemies not have found new collaborators, who in turn would find it just as necessary to assassinate them? And what would they have to say?

## PART II

### WRITERS, MARTYRS, REVOLUTIONARIES