

Cecil A. Abrahams

My Visit to Alex La Guma's Biographer

「ゴンドワナ」10号（1987年7月）10～23ページ所収の「セスウル・エイブラハムズーアレックス・ラ・グーマの伝記家を訪ねてー」の英語訳です。1987年8月に

In Canada I have found a South African who has been fighting against Apartheid outside his own country.

This August I made a visit to Cecil A. Abrahams, in exile in Canada, I found his name in Alex La Guma, published in 1985 when La Guma was still alive, but at that time I knew nothing about him except his name. I was so moved by his biography and the critical essays in his book that I soon found myself visiting the author in Canada. I wanted to know more about Alex La Guma and to give a fair estimation of La Guma and his works.

I visited him, and he was kind enough to spend three whole days with me and generous enough to accept my long interview. Fortunately I was given many xeroxed copies of La Guma's primary and secondary sources and I returned home with many recorded cassette tapes and photos which I had taken with my new camera. I can't introduce all of them to you here, but with some of the photos and my Japanese translation of some of the interview I'd like to give a picture of Cecil A. Abrahams, a biographer and critic of Alex La Guma. Abrahams is fighting against Apartheid in Canada, waiting for the day of liberation for South Africa.

My destination was St. Catharines, in Ontario. A tour book listed St. Catharines is a city of 124,000 on the Niagara Peninsula along Lake Ontario. The famous Niagara Falls is close to the city. It took me about an hour to arrive at Toronto Airport by Air Canada from New York. From the airport a limousine bus took me directly to the front of his house, located in a quiet residential district.

It was Rosemary, his wife, who appeared first at the front door, and then came Cecil, smiling. "All the way far from Japan!" he said. After a hasty greeting, I took out of my bag GONDOWANA No.8, pictures of La Guma in Japan, which Mr. Kobayashi had taken the trouble to hand to me at my house two days before my departure, and some gifts from Japan. Gazing at those pictures, Cecil soon began to talk about their last visit to the Soviet Union in 1985 when he and Alex La Guma had been invited there.

A Blind Man with....

Cecil --- I'd say that in June, 1985, the Soviet Writers' Union had a special evening for Alex La Guma in Moscow to celebrate his sixtieth birthday and they had...in the auditorium there over a thousand people came to celebrate with him. And I was one of the speakers. And I was so amazed at how many people had read La Guma. So all came to the auditorium with books under their arms for autographs and there was one man in his, probably late seventies and he was blind but his arm was full of La Guma's books. And he came up to him to ask him to autograph it. It was a very touching experience. In fact what they did! The publishers in the Soviet Union for his sixtieth birthday brought out half a million copies of his collected works and they sold it all within one month. He is, he was a very popular writer in the Soviet Union and of course he visited there many times, Also because he was a member of the South African Communist Party. His father had been in the South African Communist Party. So there's this connection to the Soviet Union and his books have been translated into many Soviet languages. So he is widely read and more respected in the Soviet Union. So maybe

some day in Japan there will be just as many people read Alex La Guma.... (Smiling....)

—I hope so · · (Nodding....)

Cecil ---Yeah, because for South Africa, and for South Africans, we think, among the black writers Alex La Guma's always the best writer that has been produced by South Africa, And also because he's written more books, more novels than any other black South Africans expect Peter Abrahams. But Peter Abrahams wrote many years ago. And he stopped writing about South Africa. He started writing about Africa in general and about Caribbean. But Alex La Guma's five novels have made him perhaps our best writer among black South Africans, And what is important now is even though Alex La Guma was banned in South Africa, so his books could not be read by South Africans. It was not allowed to be sold. Now some South African publishers ask permission from the government to...to...,

—To publish books?

Cecil --- To publish books and they think it may be possible because I had a letter just recently from Phillips Company in Cape Town and they asked me whether I could make it possible for them to publish his material again. They wanted to do *A Walk in the Night*. They wanted to publish it again. Maybe soon South Africans will have the opportunity to read Alex La Guma.

I found that Cecil called La Guma and Peter Abrahams black writers, not coloured writers. So I asked, "Can't we call them coloured writers?" He answered, "No. Today, they don't Like to be called coloured any more. Just white and black, because the government of South Africa tried to divide the black people into 'black,' 'coloured,' and 'Indian.'" I felt glad to find they knew that recognized the difficulty of uniting when they couldn't unite when they were separated by the government's ploy. I remembered a 'poster play', a kind of street theatre, Don Mattera's "One Time Brother," which clearly depicts the vicious intent of the white regime. Mr. Kobayashi's essay on this play was included in the Japanese magazine *Terra* No.1 (September 1, 1986) by Mondosha Sogoshuppan (Yokohama: Japan). To my surprise Mattera and Abrahams went to the same high school, Cecil said, "At that time Don Mattera was not interested in politics. He used to belong to a gang like Michael Adonis in *A Walk in the Night*." And he added, "He's changed a lot. He's become political...." He gave a rather cynical smile.

"I'd Like Japan to Know, . . ."

Cecil then began to talk about his interview with La Guma in Cuba. Looking back on their days in Cuba when they "had many, many discussions on the books, his life in South Africa," he said, "So while you are here, I'll let you listen to some of them to give you an idea of what he said and so on, also to hear his voice talking about his own books and his experiences. He was very helpful, he was not...; you could ask him for anything, he'd do it for you. He was a very kind, very friendly person...." He seemed to be controlling his emotion. Some happy memories must have been stirred up....

I wished La Guma were still alive, so I could visit him. Somehow I could not shake off a certain guilty conscience.

Recently I've begun to dwell on Alex La Guma. Inevitably I've found myself reading many books on histories and politics on South Africa, for especially in the case of African studies one cannot separate literature from politics. As I mentioned briefly in the last issue of *GONDOWANA*, I learned about American black history through Richard Wright, and began to think about African problems through his *Black Power*, the book of his trip to Ghana. History taught me the brutality of the slave-trade, and the travel book showed me the devastating conditions brought by colonial policies. And through La Guma and South African

history I caught a glimpse of the miserable conditions of South Africa caused by the arrogance of white racism. Such historical and political circumstances made me think about Japan, her attitude towards Africa, and her shameful past.

When many countries began to take economic sanctions toward South Africa in protest against the Sharpeville Massacre, Japan reopened trade in compliance with the white regime's request. To our shame Japanese people have enjoyed the status of "honorary whites."

It was in 1969 that the late Kanjiro NOMA, the founder of Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee, introduced in his book on South Africa a letter from an ANC representative saying, "Isn't it shameful for Japanese people to be treated as 'honorary white' only because of their economic ties?" In 1970, Mazisi Kunene declared in a discussion held in Japan, "Japan is killing us!" Taking no notice of their accusations, Japan has forged a role of one of South Africa's major trading partners. It has recently been reported that the strong yen has resulted in Japan's becoming South Africa's largest trading partner.

Without doubt Japanese people stand on the side of oppression whether they like it or not, and there is no denying the fact that I am one of the Japanese people and come from such a Japan. That is why I had a guilty conscience. I heard that La Guma had criticized Japan sharply while staying in Japan. Then I sat face to face with Cecil, a South African to the core like La Guma, so I felt the heavy pressure even more.

I began to apologize about the present attitude of Japan to African problems, saying, "I'm sorry I must say the situation in Japan is not good...." I wanted to explain that the Japanese way of thinking on African problems and her attitude towards Africa have been poor in quality because Japan had been far too Europeanized and Americanized, so that even some scholars and intellectuals, who should play an important role in introducing Africa justly to their people, can not themselves have a fair viewpoint and way of thinking.

Cecil, however, read the whole story in my face and said, "...you've come all this way from Japan to come and ask me questions about La Guma,..." And he went:

Cecil --- You want to know as much as possible. So when you begin to write about it, and introduce him to Japanese people, you'll be speaking something from authenticity, not something that is not true. And that'll be very helpful, because I think it for us South Africans is very important that Japan or people in Japan know about what's exactly happening now, because Japan is a very powerful nation economically and she has quite a lot of investment in South Africa. And our aim is to try to get all the countries that invest there to stop investing, because the South African regime will continue to be as they are at the moment -if they know countries like Japan, West Germany, France, Britain, U. S. A., Canada, that they're all supporting economically. So they'll simply say, "there's nothing wrong with our system, why should we change?" So we feel that, you know, these rich countries or these economically strong countries should stop investing there. Furthermore, our view is that Japanese are an Asian nation and therefore should be closer to other Third World nations especially to Africa and that we should be able to get help from Japan.... They should have no difficulty in listening to our position. It may be more difficult to convince U.S.A. or Britain because they can argue that people over there are our kith and kin, you see, but Japanese, they are not kith and kin, so why should they help? The economy is there, you see.

What Cecil expects of Japan is the same in content as Mr. Oliver Tambo and Dr. Allan Boesak who came to Japan this year. (Two booklets about their visit and speeches have already been published in Japan.)

According to Cecil, he has been active, travelling all over Canada to talk about the South African situation from the viewpoint of the ANC, since he arrived there. At first the Canadian people paid little attention to that matter, but now both the government and citizens have

become a little more interested in what's happening in South Africa. He said reflectively, "I've been in Canada since 1963, teaching and working with the ANC. At the beginning we had no ANC people, but now we have a few working for us in Canada,... The ANC in Canada has about 30 members." I was told that Dr. Allan Boesak had visited Canada to speak at the end of May. – We and the ANC are moving forward now; even though the situation in South Africa is very hard, the people are everyday showing their revolutionary feelings. So things are changing everyday," and he went on that, "we are more hopeful now than we've ever been; in fact it's very sad Alex La Guma should have died in 1985 because all his life had been worked for the coming of these days, you see...."

(Just recently the newspaper has reported that Govan Mbeki(77) and four other ANC members were released on the 5th of November. Mbeki was arrested in July 1963 and in 1964 sentenced to servitude for life for high treason together with Nelson Mandela and others. He had been in prison for more than 23 years. At that time he was one of the leaders of the ANC. It was reported that he was released from prison unconditionally and that he said he also felt sure of Mandela's upcoming release. An ANC spokesman said, "Mr. Mbeki's release is a great victory of our Anti-Apartheid movement both inside and outside South Africa and now we are going to make every effort to obtain the release of Mr. Mandela and other members, too." This is indeed wonderful news.)

Cecil looked with nostalgia at the pictures of Johannesburg in GONDOWANA and said, —This is my hometown, Johannesburg...." When he turned over to find some photos of Cape Town, he muttered "Alex La Guma was born in Cape Town...." Cecil told me that he went to Witwatersrand University for a year. There are pictures of this university in the same issue of GONDOWANA. Es'kia Mphahlele, whose animated face appears on the cover, is now one of the faculty members.

Cecil said a little about an unavoidable thematic difference between black writers and white writers ---white writers always enjoy the privileges of white society sustained by the exploitation of black people while black writers are forced to Live out miserable lives.

After stressing the point that La Guma's books deal with the problems of South Africa, Cecil said:

La Guma Recorded History

Cecil---Alex La Guma located himself in a central position.

He didn't just write for writing's sake. • He wrote to tell stories about the real problems of the people in South Africa. So I think in that way his books will always be important. They're important as stories but also important as histories. Because La Guma always talked about recording the history of South Africa. You stress it in your book. Cecil --- I stress the point that he saw himself as a recorder of history. That he had to give the picture of the lives of the people in South Africa, which is very important. So I think in that way his writings will always be important. Even one day when South Africa has no more apartheid our young people will have a history of what had happened before so that we don't repeat those mistakes in the future. Because it's very important that we don't replace white racism with black racism. It's important that all our people are given democratic rights and that people are seen as human beings not human beings who are black or brown or white, but human beings who are just living and trying to make a life. And so it's very important that we have these books so that if we have the majority of the blacks, for example, say, well, why don't we oppress the minority? Then we can always point out, look, we've gone through this before and there's no point repeating this. Alex La Guma believed very deeply in the integrity of the human beings not integrity of the black person or the white person - human beings - and the violation is not the violation of white or black person but of the human beings. And so in this way all his work, it was his purpose in life to try to bring about South Africa

and a world, where all people are respected for their humanity not for their colour.

—They are the policies of ANC.

Cecil --- It's ANC policy. ANC policy is exactly the same. That you don't look at the person's colour, person's wealth, whether a person's beautiful or ugly but you look at a person as a human being, what you offer as a human being to make it a better society, and a better world. La Guma believed in very firmly and he loved it. And I think that was one of the nice things about him - If you went to visit him, he would be very easy with you. He didn't look at you because you came from Japan and even if Japan is not one of the countries that is a big support of ANC. La Guma doesn't look upon you as being the country Japan. He looks upon you as another human being who is interested in the problems of South Africa, who would like to see changes that will bring about our equal society. That's what he's looking at.

Even though I hadn't been there long, I found myself feeling easier owing to these talks with Cecil. Without any personal introductions, we talked about La Guma and his work, but we stopped talking temporarily, and went out for a walk around the neighbourhood with Rosemary and their year-old baby son, Alexei. Cecil said that they made it a rule to send their son to sleep at that time of the afternoon, pushing the baby cart around. Cecil pushed the pram. We walked round near his house. Cecil said happily, "We named Alexei after Alex La Guma and Pushikin." I felt his strong respect for both great writers, Alex La Guma and Aleksander Pushikin. They were both realist writers. There were signs of autumn in the Canadian twilight as Alexei fell asleep comfortably rocked in his baby cart.

At supper Chinese chop sticks were set before us on the table. It seemed to me that the sticks indicated their consideration for the guest who had come all the way from an Oriental soil.

We had a wonderful meal of Canadian-style Chinese food, and then we began our interview in earnest.

Cecil was born in Johannesburg, in a suburb called Brededorp, which had already been made famous by Peter Abrahams, who was introduced to Japanese readers quite a while ago.

Cecil knew about La Guma through his columns in the newspaper, but inside South Africa he didn't meet La Guma who was born in Cape Town. So it was outside the country that they met for the first time. They met each other as exiles.

After talking about Don Mattera, as I mentioned a little earlier, Cecil began to talk about his own life:

At the Age of Twelve....

Cecil --- So I was born in a home where my father came from India and my mother had a Jewish father and an African mother, a Zulu mother. So we were classed as coloured in our area by the government. And we were a poor family. There were six children. And...but my mother had a strong interest in us getting schooling, that we should get some education. She argued that if you have an education, you can take care of yourself, I lived in an area that was very poor, really poor, and so early in my life I became conscious of the inequality between white and black, So I, at the age of twelve, I went to jail for the first time.

—To Jail?

Cecil --- Jail. To prison. For opposing we had some sports fields, soccer fields. One side was for black children. The other side was for white children. Black children had just gravel. White children had grass. So I took all the black children into the white side.

—Is it, was it difficult to play on gravel?

Cecil --- Very, very, because we got scratched, and injured and so I took the children over to the white side of the grass, and we got arrested. Then I was very active in my community,

helping people oppose all sorts of wrong legislation. So I went to jail three times. And I become....

—How long?

Cecil --- Well, each time was only a short period, for a few weeks, and I became a member of the African National Congress. When I was only sixteen,...

In Exile

After graduating from Coronationville High School, Cecil went on to Witwatersrand University.

He left it after one year, for the white administration discriminated against black students. There were about 4950 white students, and about 50 black students who were not allowed to take part in dancing, gymnastics, and sports. They were only allowed to go to classes and the library. He left and went to a college in Basotho, which is now called Lesotho. Finishing his B. A. there, he went back to South Africa and taught at high-school, without a teacher's certificate, for seven months.

In 1961 he was arrested again for his part in a "stay home" protest. He asked the people to stay off from work, when South Africa became a republic. This time he was kept in jail for four months without trial.

In 1963 he left South Africa on the ANC's advice. He first went to Swaziland, then to Tanzania, From Tanzania he was sent to Canada. (Later he heard that his mother had been arrested and his brother dismissed from his job as a high-school teacher.)

In Canada he got his master's degree and his Ph.D., then started teaching at the university. He finished his doctorate dissertation on William Blake, for he couldn't find anyone sufficiently cognizant of African literature in Canada.

Cecil Met Alex

It was in Dar-es-Salaam University that Cecil met La Guma for the first time. It was in 1976. At that time Cecil was a Friendship Commonwealth visiting professor and La Guma was a visiting writer in residence.

Two years later in London he met La Guma again and decided to write a book on La Guma.

In 1982 La Guma made him his official biographer, so he is now responsible for all of La Guma's literary materials, He said he intends to collect La Guma's unpublished works together and publish them some day. These include a biography of his father, some radio plays written in London, the unfinished "Crowns of Battle," and so on.

In London and in Cuba

La Guma was constantly in financial difficulties. His financial condition was one of the main reasons why La Guma and his family asked Cecil to keep his literary stuff and decided to go to Cuba. Though he had published some books and gained an international reputation, La Guma could not get enough money from publishers. So he had to accept a position as an insurance clerk at one time. Cecil talked about some of La Guma's life in London:

Cecil --- Alex didn't do too well financially, you know. His family was always close, just making enough to survive. His wife always sold his stories. She said that there were sometimes days when they had no food in the house and the children were still small and she just didn't know where to get a piece of bread in London....

Cecil, who had left South Africa alone after the ANC's advice, confessed that he had felt very homesick for a few years after he came to Canada. Though La Guma left South Africa with his family, he must have been very homesick, too. His exile must have been a heartbreaking period for La Guma who loved his country and loved his people. On one hand he was very active both in creative writing and in the liberation struggle, but on the other hand he smoked and drank too much. His excesses drove him into bad health, so his family

and friends were deeply concerned about him. One day a young editor of *Sechaba* in his twenties died of a heart-attack on a plane to a meeting. The night before La Guma had drunk too much with him as usual. His death may have been one of the reasons why La Guma went to Cuba. Cecil explained some of La Guma's life in Cuba:

Cecil --- Unfortunately at this time the ANC had no way of compensating Alex with money.... That was one of the reasons why he went to Cuba because they thought it'd give him something, you know, he'd get enough to live on. The Cuban Government paid for the housing, the food,....

—The Cuban Government?

Cecil --- Yes, Cuban Government sees the ANC as the legitimate representative of the South African people, so they treat the South African representative as a diplomat.

—In Cuba?

Cecil --- Yes, in Cuba. They gave him a house in the diplomatic area. So they provided them with the house free and gave them a voucher to get food from special stores, gave them a car and so on. So that was the first time, from '79 to '85.

La Guma was stationed in Cuba as chief representative of the ANC in the Caribbean with residence and often travelled to Jamaica, Trinidad, and so on. During this time Cecil visited Cuba twice to research the coming Alex La Guma. It was then that La Guma visited Japan in his position of secretary-general to take part in the Asian-African-Latin American cultures conference held in Kawasaki city.

In 1985, a week before he died, La Guma was supposed to be at a conference in Canada, He wanted to make a tour of Canada. Cecil finished all the arrangements. He had already sent tickets and everything to La Guma. So he was very shocked to hear the news of La Guma's sudden death. He said sorrowfully, "I was quite surprised because we didn't expect it. So drink for South Africans, it's nothing good...."

In Cuba there was a funeral service for La Guma in which the secretary-general of the ANC attended. In October 1987, I heard, the Cubans were going to have a special second service to which Eugene was invited instead of Blanche. Eugene is now living in Moscow, He is married to a Russian girl and has two children. Bartholomew, the second son, is now working for the ANC's film unit, after having studied photography in East Germany. After La Guma's death Blanche went back to London and still lives there.

Like a Father Who....

Cecil looked back on La Guma's life and began to talk about how much La Guma loved his people and wrote for his own people. He stresses this point in his Alex La Guma :

Cecil --- So Alex tried, in fact, to set himself up to tell the story of the coloured people, because he felt they'd been ignored. They had been neglected. He also hoped that he could inspire in them a confidence, a pride that they were worth something, they were not nothing, they had something to offer and so his stories, if you look at them, are quite affectionate, I mean, they're problems but he is very kind, because it is his own people. He feels for them Like a father who looks at his children even though he is cross with them, he still says, "Well, that's my children." But he still tries to be kind. So you notice that in his books he sees himself doing the job of a historian, collecting the history, a teacher showing his people what to do. And then, of course, Alex was very much a kind of an optimist, a very optimistic attitude, even though life was rough for him sometimes, all the arrests, detentions, house arrests. He always saw the bright side. He always saw on the side of the mountain, it will be better. And so with this optimistic spirit then, when people did something wrong, he could still forgive them.

In Cape society there are many coloured people who can easily "pass" as a white man. So you can see the problems of "passing." La Guma would argue against it, saying, "You should think of your dignity and you should be proud that you are who you are. You don't go trying to be someone else."

With His Own People

La Guma continued to struggle with and write for his own people all his life. In that sense we can find a difference between him and American black writers, Richard Wright and James Baldwin. Cecil compared La Guma with the Afro-American writers:

Cecil --- But Richard Wright in a way went to Paris then and wrote books about his life in America. And he got out all his anger, and his bitterness. He never wanted to go back to the States. You know because he was so cross with the state of the black man in the States, you see. In a way he becomes like James Baldwin who also was very angry at what had happened. But Alex La Guma was not like that Alex La Guma, what saved him was that he was also involved with the political movement, a liberation movement. When you work for liberation movement, and you're also an artist you know that in your liberation philosophy there's the strong belief that we gonna win this fight, we just got to keep going at it. We are writing what we are doing, our cause is just. And if we do it together collectively, we are going to win someday. But if you don't do it collectively, if you don't have a political movement, if you do it as an individual, then you're more likely to get angry all the time, because you've nowhere to turn, there's no communities to fall back on. So Alex could keep on believing, because there wasn't just the writing going on but there was the practical political work, you see.

A Wonderful Artist

Cecil resumed:

Cecil --- He could go from one to the other. Many writers can't because they are entirely writers and they remove themselves from the world, and so the problem is inside heads and finally in their emotions and then they destroy themselves.

If you're also involved in your community and your world, then you don't have the time to get only angry with yourself and destroy yourself, because you must give the energy to others. Now I think this helped. Alex was first politically involved before he became a writer, which helped a lot because if he was at first a writer and then a politician. He would have had problems because he was first involved in politics. He then very easily went over to writing artistical. And that was because he had a gift, a talent to write, he could tell a story in a way where even though he was politically involved, he never tried to indoctrinate you. He just told a story. You ought to read, to look at the stories... And also if you notice in Alex La Guma's writings, he does not tell you how to think. He leaves the story there, he lets you decide what to do with it. He doesn't say to you, "This is love. This is life." He says "Here's a story, you deal with it." Even the story, "Coffee for the Road" you watch - when the lady explodes in the cafe. Alex La Guma didn't tell you she is exploding because they are treating her in such an unjust way. He just says that she exploded because the situation was not human, not dignified. But you, as a reader, you have not been given any propaganda. You've been given a story and you can easily see, look, if I were in the same situation, I would have acted in exactly the same way. You're looking for a cup of coffee and they tell you you can't come inside the cafeteria, you have to go behind and, order your coffee from there, then obviously, you know, you're going to react to it. So I think in that sense Alex tells the story but leaves it to us who are reading the story. If you read a lot of South Africa writing whether it's novels or poetry or so on, you'll see that there's a lot of straight sloganeering, a lot of straight propaganda. You know you can read it and you can say, "Well, I suppose if

this had been a political leaflet, it would be better but as a story. It's not coming out, you know." He didn't do that. That's his story. You can see the loss of people's rights. It is his artistic ability to take a very dry political situation, and make it live for you who are not living in South Africa, after you've read a story like, let's say, 'Lemon Orchard' or "Coffee for the Road" or, let's say, A Walk in the Night, or A Threefold Cord, you finish reading it, though you've never been to South Africa, it's so graphic and it clearly describes.

For the Day of Liberation

Cecil's meaningful talk about La Guma went on far into the night. He did not show his own weariness after their long trip even though he would have to go to university the next morning.

Before long, I went to bed, feeling a little excited. Through my dreams I heard Alexei crying in the next room.... I awoke to find it was already in autumn in Canada. I put on my sweater, thinking that if I were in Japan I would go swimming in the nearby sea.

Cecil has moved to Brock University in St. Catharines from Bishop University in Quebec. He now has an administration job. On our way to the university he said to me, while driving, "This is a challenge. I'd like to use my knowledge for my country when the day of liberation comes near in the future...." According to Cecil, his every day work as the Dean of humanities is rather hard. "In Bishop University I went to school two days a week, so I had enough time for my research. But here....This is my new challenge. Our ANC members outside South Africa are making every effort in their own position for the coming day of liberation," he said.

Kwame Nkrumah once achieved independence with the enthusiastic support of his own people. However, he couldn't pass on his idealism, and he had to go into exile. His support and power-base had been eroded, to the detriment of his country. Many African nations have the same trouble since they became independent. South Africans, fighting outside their country, have been doing their best so as not to repeat the same mistakes as other African nations. Cecil talked about South African writers:

Cecil --- I'm very concerned that there is a history of South African writers written, and prepared so that when the day of change comes, we have all this material available for our people, for our younger people to read. And all these writers who lived outside the country and who have done a lot will maybe provide them whenever they come because these children have never seen them, never heard of them. So in a way I'm trying to do a job, also for the country, to leave behind for the country and for the world, so there is a history they can go to.

And he added, "Now, I'm negotiating with the Canadian government so that we can open a center for their materials. When South Africa will be liberated, I'll move all the stuff to South Africa."

The Young People Today

The previous night he had talked about La Guma in a serious and earnest manner, looking back on his memories with La Guma, but today he talked more easily in the kitchen, saying, I'll cook South African curry for you." As I often cook, I think it natural for men to cook. The sight of his cooking made me ask him, "Do men usually cook in South Africa?" His answer was: "No, men don't usually cook. Women have done most of the dirty work." So I asked, "How about the younger generation?" He answered:

Cecil --- I think the younger people will change. They're very different because they respect each other more as human beings not as woman and man but as humans. And I think they

will bring a complete change. I think what is happening in South Africa is very positive because the young people are not doing the things their fathers used to do. They have very different attitudes. And I think that's very good for South Africa because I'm always arguing with the ANC that we don't just need a change of government, we need a change of humanity. In other words I feel still today that in the top leadership of the ANC there're not enough women, and there are many, many women who work for the ANC. And but they are not getting to a high position. So I always argue that women should be treated fairly, because, you see, the majority of the members of the ANC, of course, are black, and they come from various communities, Zulu, Xhosa, and so on. In our traditions, in African traditions, the men are brought up to be selfish. There is no sharing. The man is the boss. And the women must do all the dirty works, you know. So, in that way, many of the men who are in the ANC, especially the older men, like the generation of Oliver Tambo, the generation of Nelson Mandela - the oldest generation. They grew up being chauvinists. It takes a while for them to understand that revolution is more than just politics. It's also your way of life. It's what you do at home, it's the way you treat your children, it's the way you treat your wife. It's a way of life. You can't just say I'm gonna change the system. If all that you mean is I'm gonna change the government, you've got to say I'm going to change the way of living, of doing things. I'm a member of the ANC not because I'm only interested in that. We're going to become the government. That's not the most important thing. What is important is that we're going to make a new society, a new way of life, a society where we respect each other as people, where we are kind each other and sensitive, where we don't look at you and say "you're a man, she is a woman, therefore you must get more than she does." I think that's important.

La Guma declared, "I'll record history for our younger generation," while Cecil is making every effort to preserve the material of modern South African writers for generations to come. Cecil continued talking about the contemporary black youth in South Africa—

Cecil --- Now the young people today they don't drink, because they say it is drink that only people don't know how to fight. So they don't like drinking. When they start demonstrating, they can them shebeens, they beat up the people, they throw out the liquor, they chase them off. So you know they don't only attack the government, they also go for their own people because they say all those things are not healthy and also, you know, when they get their salary, they go straight to the shebeen, they don't go home. By the time they got home, there's no money for the wife and children, for food, for milk, for bread, for clothes, for books.... But now many South Africans in exile, especially in England because many of those, who were political in South Africa, go to England-they get together and they drink. And when I visit them in England, I'm surprised how much they can drink.... Ohh!

"Soweto" in 1976

—The younger people are hopeful!

Cecil --- Yes, and they don't drink.

The generation of 1976.

Cecil --- "Soweto." Since 1976 they are all very militant. And they don't drink, don't smoke. They are very serious.

It's the generation of "Soweto." They are the students who gathered at a stadium to protest in 1976. We can get a glimpse of them in the film "Amok!" The older generation believed in peaceful negotiations with the white regime, but the younger generation no longer believes in talking. Cecil suggested, about such young people:

Cecil --- And so the younger generation said, "No! We're tired of talking! If we're gonna get

a change in this country, we'll have to fight for it. But unfortunately they were not many. They were not enough people who shared that view, because most people were worried about their lives, didn't want to die, or go to jail, and so on. The younger generation from 1976 is very different. They don't spend as much time talking. In their minds they know what they want. They want FREEDOM NOW! EQUALITY NOW! They don't want to wait for the next generation. They want it NOW! This is why they're doing things we never dreamed to do. We believed in peaceful demonstration like Buekes. We went on the street all the time, with leaflets. So we got beaten up and put in jail. We didn't do anything. We'd just given out leaflets. And then on top of that you got beaten up so badly by the police, you got tortured.... But today's generation don't. They don't believe merely a change of government, they believe in the change of life. That South Africa must not concentrate so much on material things. We must concentrate on the spiritual life, improving our way of thinking about life.

Afrika! Amandla!

Cecil's South African curry tasted wonderful. We ate it with our hands, wrapping it in roti, which Rachel baked for us. They were very good, too. When we had finished our excellent supper, Cecil put on a record of Abdra Ibrahim's WATER FROM AN ANCIENT WELL. After a short while, Cecil suddenly invited Rachel to dance. Both of them are fine dancers for sure! I played the role of spectator and photographer and pressed my shutter repeatedly!

When the melody of "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" was in full flow, he cried suddenly, "Afrika! Afrika!" with his fist raised up to the air. Rachel chuckled and chuckled, dancing. Rosemary was smiling in delight, sitting. "Amandla!" "iAfrika!" "iAmandla!" "iAfrika!"

Cecil, who rarely smiles, is now dancing in high spirits....

The three whole days I spent with his family, made me feel and think about many things. The happiest thing was that I could feel we can all achieve basic mutual understanding even though we are brought up in different countries and with different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Cecil from South Africa, which has been oppressed by Japan, can say to a person from Japan, which is still now on the side of oppression, "Let's respect each other as human beings."

When we parted, he said, "The day will soon come when our family can meet your family in South Africa. I look forward to the day." I was so moved that I could not find any suitable words to say. The newspapers have reported that the ANC International Conference of the Anti-Apartheid movement was held in Tanzania on the 3rd of December. There were many people at the gathering. They were from political organizations, Labour Unions, religious groups, and so on. It was also reported that this was the largest-meeting of its sort.

Cecil's talk about their younger people, the good news of Mr. Mbeki's release and of the conference teach us the undeniable fact that South Africa is gradually moving forward towards liberation. Even though the situation in South Africa is still hard, the younger generation will soon bring about the, "united, democratic state," which La Guma had been longing for all his life. Then our family will be able to visit South Africa and talk with his family without the shadow of exile, about our happy memories in Canada. In the material which Cecil gave me, there are two poems of his own. They are both written on "Soweto." He confessed, "I'd like to write my own novels and poems, but now I have to arrange La Guma's materials, next perhaps Dennis Brutus...."

Cecil wrote these poems for the young martyrs of "Soweto" when he heard the awful news of the massacre. I'd like to put an end to this essay with one of the poems:

On June 16, 1976, several thousand black high school children in Johannesburg, South Africa, protested against the injustices of the notorious apartheid system of South Africa. Their peaceful demonstration was, however, soon, turned into a Massacre when hundreds

of white policeman and soldiers in dis crimenately mowed then down. In one week alone over 1,000 children and women were killed. The poems below represent my feelings about that tragic happening.

Poems for the Soweto Martyr

Cecil Abrahams

I saw that picture
in a newspaper 12,000 miles away
my people's blood
flowing again at
the hands of hate

A courageous boy
he was
barely eight years old
defying the inevitable terrifying
bullets of death

he was first to go
though last to begin
his only crime was
to protest the crime of hate

Where does one
so far eemoved from
the heinous scene of crime
hide or defy or identify
how does one tell
one's worlds neighbour
who has never felt
the heavy brutal hand
of the terror
the pain
the frustration
that lurks deep
down in the revolutionary heart?