

312

M/catalagoalo

Music in Mozambique: structure and function

Andrew Tracey, the Director of the International Library of Music at Rhodes University, recently attended a seminar on ethnomusicology at the Museum of Ethnology in Lisbon. The following article is based on a paper which he presented at the seminar and deals with some of the concepts and values of African life which are reflected in African music.

Music in Africa uses structures that express fundamental African ideas about life which can and should be adapted for use in the modern African state. The values and relationships that are highly developed in African music are the same as those needed in national life. There is no conflict between the small and the big scale.

Music puts things right, puts one in a condition to live life, make a living, get on with one's neighbour. It puts people in harmony with each other, and emphasises the African belief that the most important thing is the *human being* — the importance of *people* and one's relationships with them. Life without other people is inconceivable. African thought accepts this more readily than Western thought. Does this seem unbelievable? What about Western ideas of self-reliance, individualism, every man for himself, backed up by the principles of capitalism, Christian personal salvation, the scientific method, where things and thoughts are more important than people? Now compare the above with African ideas of group awareness, cooperation, "brotherhood", family, hierarchy of power, constant identification with the forefathers. There is a proverb which is found in several South African languages: in Zulu it is "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" — a person is a person by virtue of other people. All these values, I believe, are stated plainly in African music if only we can read them

and use them. I want to mention in this article some of the concepts to which the study of African music has led me, and to suggest that these concepts which work in music are also desirable in the modern African nation.

African concepts

One must first accept that Africans *have* concepts. Then we must accept that *my* concepts usually get seriously in the way when I have to consider *yours*. In a word, this is the problem of ethnocentrism.

John Chernoff (1979), who has just written a brilliant book on his experience of learning drumming in Ghana, writes the following in the introduction:

A researcher realises that the process of learning about and adapting to life in foreign cultures is as much a breaking down of the categories and concepts he has brought with him as it is a recognition and realisation of the new perspectives he can establish.

This is a musician speaking. Let us take one favourite concept of Western music, that of the up-beat and the down-beat. Imagine you have noticed that a dancer's foot weighs more heavily on the ground *between* drum beats, or between claps, than *with* the drum beat, and that his body moves up as his foot goes down. This happens in the Gumboot Dance in South Africa, in Caribbean calypso, and in many other African dances elsewhere. From this observation one could conclude that there

is a difference between the African and Western concepts of up-beat or on-beat; or perhaps that the African prefers to beat upwards rather than downwards. Both these conclusions have been reached in the past. But they are only significant in terms of Western thought and Western music and dance, and they do not take the African reality into account. When you are inside African music or dance you realise that the concepts of up-beat and on-beat just do not seem very important any more. It is replaced, for instance, by such African principles as an increased awareness of relationships, conflict and cooperation, and movement patterns. These are some of the things I will discuss below.

Cooperation

The most fundamental aesthetic principle in Africa concerning music or anything else is that without participation there is no meaning. You can go so far as to consider African music as being a form of cooperation which happens also to produce sound. So *cooperation* is one of the first key words. Everything starts from the feeling of cooperation; the musical sounds come later.

Look at the way we learn Western music, say in an orchestra. Each player is expected to learn his part alone first before he is *forced* by the conductor to play in time with the others. Even in free practice

players do not naturally listen and fit in with their neighbours before starting to play. One gets that typical sound of an orchestra warming up. Compare this with almost any African group: from the very first moment you start to play, you have to relate to what others are doing. The cooperation comes first.

Some of the first things taught are: one's exact entry point in relation to the other parts; how one's part coordinates with the other parts; particular points of coincidence or non-coincidence; and special moments of importance when things may happen together or change, like the "stop" in jazz. The correct use of body movement is taught — usually correct only when it crosses what one is playing in some way. Then one is taught, though hardly ever explicitly, more often by example, to make one's part so much at one with oneself that one can freely listen and respond to the other parts. Then comes endurance, or power, which is where one starts to give back something to the others, to feed them back some of one's own vitality.

Coordination

From the start, children's music shows the same basis of cooperation. A Chopi child of as little as six often plays a *chigowilo* gourd flute, which has only three or four different notes, in duet with another child who has his three or four different notes. This is quite enough for a cooperative tune. By the time a Chopi boy is ten he will already be starting to learn the extraordinary degree of *coordination* needed to play *chimveka*, the boys' single-note reedpipe dance, both within himself and with the others. They play way out in the fields, far from adults. Each boy plays a single piece of reed. That may seem simple, but he also plays a rattle in the right hand, and dances with the feet. The three elements, pipe, rattle and feet are all different. In relation to the other players, the rattle is played together with theirs, the dancing goes together, but the pipe is different. There are several other peoples in southern Africa who have reedpipe dances like this, for example, the Tswana in Botswana, the Pedi and Venda in northern Transvaal, and also the (former) Hottentots (Khoi). In every case this dance, which needs the maximum of physical coordination, is also one which induces the greatest social coordination.



Chopi composer Venancio Mbande. (Photo: Denis Claude)

A Chopi boy continues his musical education by going through several other stages until he reaches, if he is good enough, the peak of Chopi musical expression, which is the *timbila* dance. The songs for this dance have apparently always been predominantly on political subjects (strictly *wukoma*, or "chiefship") — and this remains the case right up to now, with Chopi composers producing songs about Frelimo and the new Mozambique. Here is a recent (1980) example, a composition for the *mzeno* movement of the *timbila* (xylophone) dance, by the leading Chopi composer Venancio Mbande.

Meet up all of you this year, we are composing for *timbila*.

Timbila of sadness, mourning Mondlane who was

killed by the Portuguese.

The Portuguese, who thought that by killing Mondlane they would conquer us.

The *timbila* of this year are sad, mourning the great people of old.

And we also mourn Josina Machel, mother who has left us.

You are lucky, Josina, to have died fighting for the people.

The people of Mozambique, your efforts were being exploited by foreigners.

Joana and Simango are crying because they wanted power.

Go to Spinola in Portugal, you will be given power!

Gird yourselves, Mozambique, the whites have run away.

What are you afraid of, now the Portuguese have left you your inheritance?

A ● = a sung note ○ = a note blown on the panpipe

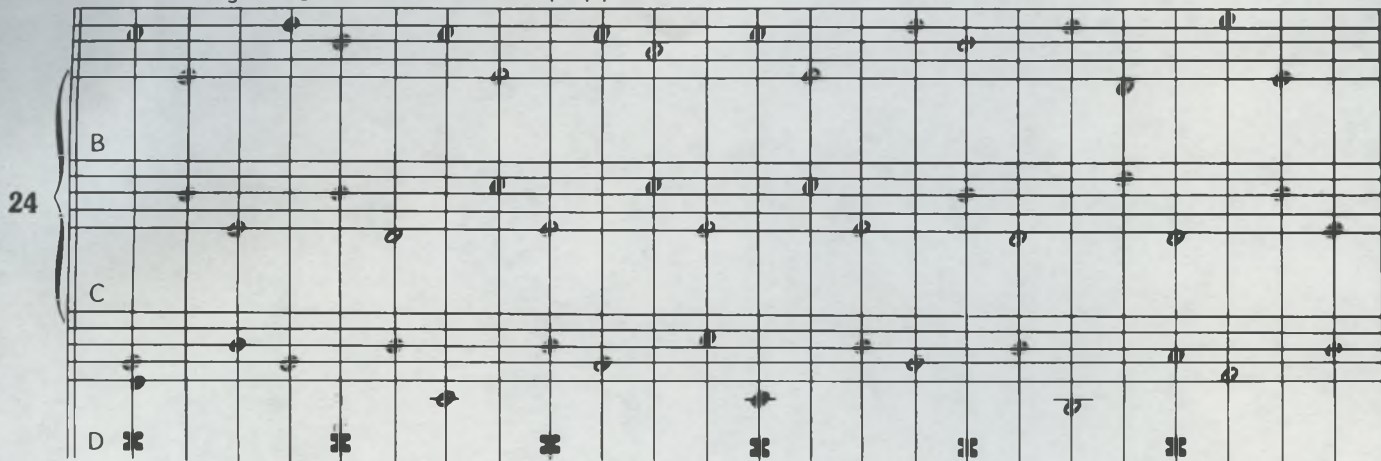


Diagram 1

A typical example of "reinforcement", from the *nyanga* panpipe dance of the Nyungwe, Tete district, Mozambique. A, B and C are panpipe players. D is their basic dance step. The 3-pulse parts A, B and C interlock with each other, and all conflict with the 4-pulse basic dance step.

Timbila

I have been told that there has been an attempt to start a "school of *timbila*" at Inhambane, which worries me a little, as too much national control of music and art can have a negative effect. I believe there is a great danger in trying to divorce *timbila* composing and playing from its social matrix, its source of inspiration, its standard of judgement. It would risk losing its salt, its meaning, and could reduce it to a mere exercise, a step towards Westernising it. One of the strengths of *timbila* is its total integration with its society. If it is to be encouraged to develop a national meaning as well, care must be taken not to remove it from its own roots at the same time.

Support for *timbila* should therefore be within the framework from which the art springs, i.e. in Chopiland, by supporting the composers, the instrument makers, the dancers, the sponsors. If African music is social, which we must agree it is, then we must encourage it socially, not by forc-

ing Western moulds onto it, which have the effect of distancing music from life, of objectifying it, of creating different classes of creators and consumers of music.

Where will future *timbila* composers come from? It will be those people who, just as in the past, have grown up surrounded by *timbila* music and its systems of expression, not people who have gone to learn *timbila* once a week at a school. Support must be where the music is and grows.

The Chopi are unusual in that music specialists have a particularly prominent place in their society, so composers can be easily found and supported. There is a long tradition of social criticism in Chopi song, and Chopi composers are very sensitive to pressures in their society. But the composers themselves, I gather, are now being put under a certain pressure to produce new songs to support the revolution, Frelimo and the national aims of the country. They would feel happier if they received support for their creativity, a fertile ground in which to grow, and not pressure

on them to say what does not grow from their own experience. Some songs that I have heard have plainly not come from the composer's heart. The Chopi, however, have a long experience of putting political comment into clever forms, using African methods of concealing and revealing at the same time. They will be very capable of continuing to do that without government control. Their awareness of their relationship with those in power can be seen in this first verse of a *mzeno* by Sathanyane Bokisi:

When you compose for *timbila*, Sathanyane, start by telling those in power, or they may be angry.

Whenever you tell them about *timbila* they will be happy.

Chopi music shows a way in which music can be used, in a modern state, to a more effective purpose than the usual national songs or revolutionary songs, which is what one normally associates with a "political song". With the Chopi, music is a means of social control, particularly of people in power. Can you imagine the power that could be released if music in

Start of a Shona tune on *karimba mbira*, showing (a) how one may be led to hear the rhythm, while (b) is the correct way.

Diagram 2



modern Mozambique were performed on the same relative scale as it is in Chopi communities? The whole country voicing its comments in song, with the freedom to say what it wants in an artistically controlled way, without fear of retribution. That would really be democracy, African style. The Mozambique Resistance would have no hope against that sort of moral control!

Along with John Blacking (1973), I feel that money spent on musical development might be a better form of national defence than armaments, a better cure for crime and violence than moral appeals or force, and it would generate phenomenal progress in social and national development. Music in a modern Mozambique could help everybody, poor or rich, to develop their social consciousness, realise their brotherhood, and take control of their destiny in a way that can be uniquely Mozambican.

Conflict

To return to our "concepts": the other side of cooperation, which co-exists equally with it, as it were, the back of the mirror, is *conflict*. In the boys' *chimveka* dance, for instance, the pipe parts must be as different from each other as possible so that they "fight satisfactorily". Combining, African style, could be better described as "conflicting together". All parts should be different, primarily in rhythm, but why not in melody, pitch, tone, words as well? The more different the better, as long as they are united in the overall construction of the piece. The best way of "joining in" is to add something that shows up the other parts by being different from them. So the individuality, the *difference*, gives more meaning. If you look at the design of African instruments, each one is intended to sound different enough so that it can be clearly heard against the others. One typical way of achieving this is with the use of the buzzers or rattles which are built into many African instruments, like the membranes on the *timbila*, the shells on the *mbira* or the rings on the *kora*. There is more importance attached to difference than to blend, quite the opposite of the Western orchestra or choir.

One part gains meaning in terms of the others; in fact one can say that a part only realises its full potential meaning *in relation to something else*. It can ruin some kinds of music if you join in by doubling what another part is playing. You could be

kicked out of a Zambian drumming group for that! Two parts playing the same tune together is not music: there is nothing to refer to, no duality, no conflict. The first part is actually weakened, not strengthened. But this is the only way that Western music knows how to reinforce a part, because it does not start from a point of view of complementarity.

You can say: "One rhythm defines another". A good drummer restrains himself from emphasising his own rhythm, so that he may be *heard better*. He has to fill the gaps in the other rhythms, and similarly create an emptiness in his own part which they may fill (Chernoff, 1979). That is real social responsibility!

Relationships

So you have the inherent duality of *cooperation/conflict*, or, in other words *dependence/independence*, at the root of all African music. I believe much of the enjoyment is found directly in this basic duality. It may seem paradoxical in terms of Western music, but we must agree that one cannot look at one music in terms of another. To me this dual principle, as I said earlier, is built on a fine appreciation of other people and the building of relationships with them, which are supportive and cooperative but determinedly individual. Would you not say that there is something of this approach to *relationships* in the way Africans handle life at a personal and public level? Even their wider relationships, from local groups to nations? A spirit of independence, *within* a larger sense of interdependence. The very forms or structures of African music demand relationships that are a microcosm of national life, individual freedom and difference, joined together for the common good, basically democratic and socialist.

Thinking again of the Chopi *chimveka* dance, and many others like it, what about a new slogan for African music: ONE MAN, ONE NOTE! This is fine as far as it goes, but it should take the other half of the equation into account, which would be something like: Many notes, one music. When you listen to one of these cooperative reedpipe dances, say at a distance, or in a recording, the music may easily sound over-simple or repetitive. But that is *not the point*. The aim of the performance is more than merely producing sound; it involves stating and restating

human and musical relationships. As John Blacking put it, Africans are concerned more with the *process* than with the *product*.

Integration

It is remarkable how the very structure of African music has the effect of inducing *integration* in a group of people performing it. Africans are aware of this, of course, because they expect it; they know what music is for. But the effect can be the same for everybody, African or not; when one gets inside a piece of African music one can be amazed at what it does for one personally as well as musically. I have found this so consistently, for instance when teaching members of my steelband, that I know it is true. So which comes first, the group integration or the music? A mere technical question. What does it matter anyway? The fact is that it is there, and is one of the best ways that humans have ever devised to induce people to work together, to be together and to like it, sacrificing at the same time nothing of their own individuality. It is a system that can integrate people at all levels, personal, local, national.

Having mentioned some of the inherent values in African music, what are some of the basic techniques of listening at it? First there is the whole African listening posture, a general phrase, in which I include not only body attitude, but cultural attitudes towards music, people, life and social situations, which can be learned properly only by long exposure to African values. For instance, you do not listen only to the sounds themselves but you relate yourself to the whole social situation in which you are hearing them. Also you do not listen passively, as we tend to, but you probe actively into the sound structure with your ears, to pick out the elements in which you can find meaning.

Pulse, beat and cycle

Second, and more specifically, there are three key words for approaching that part of the structure of African music which most differs from Western and other musics, that of rhythm: *pulse, beat and cycle*. Pulse is the smallest unit of time used in any particular piece of music. It is like the common rhythmic language of all the parts. The stream of pulses is metronomically regular, all potentially

equal, all equally usable. Sometimes all the pulses are expressed (see diagram 3).

Or there may be gaps, as in the pan-African clap pattern called "*Kon ko lo*, *kon kon ko lo* in Nigeria (see diagram 4).

Even when there are gaps, the feeling of the pulse continues right through. Sometimes the pulse can only be perceived in the *difference* between two parts (see diagram 5). The point is, whether heard or not, the pulses go on irrevocably behind any piece of music, and provide the building blocks for the rhythm when they are combined into *beats*.

The beat is what is actually played, and is what you hear. As is obvious to anyone, the beats in a piece of music usually conflict with each other. Very often they stand in the relationship of two, three and four with each other.

How does an African musician handle the complexity of these relationships? There are several ways, but one that helps to make it possible is the sense of pulse. All parts share the same pulses, but do not necessarily group them in the same way. Simple arithmetic is at the base of most African rhythm, and one, two, three and four are the key numbers. "Three against four", for example, is virtually impossible for a Western musician to perceive, let alone to perform, but when you can feel the common ground in the pulses the two can be much more easily combined. When one's "pulse sense" is strong enough one finds that the rhythmic feeling



Orchestra front line. (Photo: Denis Claude)



Diagram 3

A drum pattern where all the pulses are played



Diagram 4

"Kon ko lo", showing gaps in the stream of pulses

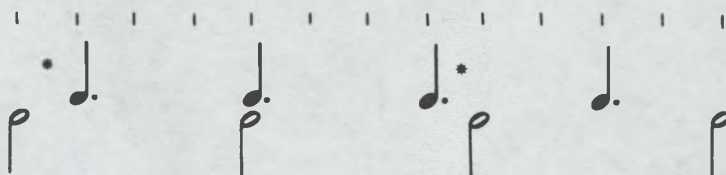


Diagram 5

Two drums playing 3 against 4, showing the pulse in the smallest difference between the parts at *

of one's own beat is reinforced whenever another part plays *any one* of its constituent pulses, no matter if they are "on" or "off" one's own beat. The only condition is that they must be accurately *on* one or more of the pulses (see diagram 1).

So a beat is the audible result of a grouping of pulses. The next level of organisation is the *cycle*. This is a sequence of melodic/rhythmic ideas which continuously repeats itself. Its length is fixed for any piece. You can think of it as you please — as a fixed metric length, a succession of musical ideas, a chord sequence, but you *must* be aware of it, or you will not get anywhere. Of all the many cycle lengths used in Africa, 12 is the most frequent, followed by 16. Remembering the use of arithmetic in African rhythmic forms, 12 is the most useful of numbers, as it can be divided into two, three, four and six.

All African music has a cyclical repeating form. It starts at a certain point, goes through a number of ideas, and keeps returning to the same point all over again. This fact becomes an inter-cultural breaking point: the African cycle is intensely frustrating to Westerners, although to Africans it is one of the firm bases on which all expression is built. Western music is linear or straight-line; African music is cyclical. One merely has to accept this, and get rid of the reactions which frustration may cause (such as calling the music boring or primitive) by means of refocussing one's attention onto those things which *are* important in African music, such as the key ideas I am trying to describe here.

Hidden beat

I mentioned earlier that one had to probe actively into the sound structure. A large part of the pleasure of listening to the music depends on the ability to find and move to beats and patterns that *nobody may be actually playing as such!* Or at least they are not emphasised. It is clear that this is *very* difficult for White musicians, as they put an obvious stress on their on-beats, just because they *have* to be obvious to hold that kind of music together. In African music, it is frequently the listener or the dancer who has to supply the beat. A full drum ensemble is an *accompaniment*, a music-to-find-the-beat-by (Chernoff, 1979). The *hidden beat* is one

of the techniques of African music that draws a listener into participating. How often you hear a piece of music starting, you think you have got the beat, and then the dancers start on a completely different beat! (see diagram 2).

This is the "hidden meaning" in music, just as African song words often have a hidden meaning. One of its effects is to give the insiders a feeling of unity, sharing a common secret.

Tradition

The author of a little catalogue of instruments published recently in Maputo (Duarte, 1980), says in the introduction that in colonial times the culture of Mozambique was despised, true, and that only now after independence have the arts managed to express the real personality of the people. I doubt this. Where did today's music come from? To anyone who has experienced the music personally it is obvious that it has always expressed the people's personality, and usually with great depth, whatever the regime may have been. Music in Mozambique has, I believe, never stopped performing its function, just as in other African countries, of keeping society together, of providing a secret way of expressing both the *miseria da vida* and the *alegria da vida*, of being a safety valve for personal and social pressure.

In fact it is clear from comparing Mozambique with other countries nearby that many of its traditional musics are so strong today precisely because the colonial government did so little to develop the country. It is an unfortunate paradox. This underdevelopment meant in some cases, like the Chopi, Tswa, Ndaou and many others, that traditional institutions were *less disturbed* by modernisation than they were in more developed neighbouring countries, and music could retain more continuity. You could possibly point to this fact as one of the few bright sides of the otherwise lamentable history of colonial times in Mozambique. Music could also serve as a powerful undercover means of expressing opposition to the regime, which it certainly did. The magnificent musics which still survive in Mozambique could quite obviously not have sprung up from nowhere in a few short years since independence. No, the music has had an unbroken continuity

right through: a continuity of style, not of content.

There were tremendous pressures on the people in colonial times. Music was always one of the best ways of relieving the pressure, and in a way totally incomprehensible to the colonial power. I am very glad to see that moves are now under way to gain more understanding of Mozambican culture; self-knowledge is an important part of a nation's growth. But I am worried that these moves may be hindered by yet other idealisms, similar to those which prevented the colonial power from understanding the real culture. Although the present mood of research is undoubtedly positive, there is still a danger from such factors as over-Westernisation in ideology, in objectification of the musical process, distancing of the art from the people, and in pressure from those in power, as for instance in the current pressure to fight against the "bonds of tribalism and traditionalism". This pressure can put, and I believe is putting strain on the creative musicians of the country. Africa knows what is African. Mozambique is an African country and its artistic aesthetics are basically identical with the rest of Africa. African creativity flourishes in certain conditions. Mozambique should study those conditions elsewhere in Africa to see where the best developments have taken place. I think it would find that the best art occurs where there is support, encouragement, sponsorship, but no pressure from above. As Venancio Mbande, the leading Chopi composer says, "To compose you must be poor". The pressure of this "poverty" on a composer is already quite enough to inspire him, without additional pressure from those who would tell him what he must say.

I mentioned the unpopular word "traditionalism" above. It is fashionable to decry this as an unwanted inheritance. But I must point out that traditionalism as seen in politics, in technology, in hygiene, agriculture etc is a quite different thing from traditionalism in *art*. In art, "traditionalism" is surely synonymous with the basis of artistic principles on which the art is built. Mozambique shares these principles with the whole of Black Africa; they constitute a system which can hardly be challenged if its African nature is to be preserved. Africa knows what is African.

Many individual African musics have their own coherent systems, with their own

rules and logic refined over centuries. Some examples are the music of the Chopi, Barwe, Nyungwe, among many others. It is the existence of "rules" that makes an art possible. There *have* to be rules, whether they are consciously perceived or not, for any art that is to be enjoyed by more than one person. Stravinsky, in a favourite quote, said, "The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free. In art as in everything else, one can build only upon a resisting foundation".

Progress in music

So this resisting foundation is what we are looking for in our research and in our attempt to understand and strengthen the musics of Mozambique. But "resisting" does not mean that there cannot be progress. What does progress in music mean? Does it mean improving something that has already been improving constantly for many centuries? Is it

learning to understand Western music theory, tonic solfa, playing the piano, singing hymns or revolutionary songs to Western melodies? Revolutionary songs are fine and necessary when there is a revolution, but although they may promote national unity and common purpose, who would insist that they represent musical or artistic progress? Except for the language, many revolutionary songs of Africa have little to do with national character.

I would say that "progress" in music has everything to do with *growth*: growth in the awareness and the practice of the national musics by everybody; growth in knowledge of music among the experts and teachers and rulers, which will lead them to support their music in a more intelligent way (and this needs real, inside knowledge, based on extensive research, publishing, with an attitude of humility and respect towards the art and the artists); growth in the music of the kinds of communities which political and social change

bring into being, and growth in the effectiveness of music in doing its job, to improve life, to be the best kind of social medicine. We do not need any kind of ideological medicine from outside Africa — we already have what we need in music!

References

- Chernoff, John M, *African rhythm and African sensibility: aesthetics and social action in African musical idioms*, University of Chicago Press 1979.
Blacking, John, *How musical is man*, Faber 1973.
Jones, A M, *Studies in African music*, Oxford 1959.
Duarte, Maria da Luz Teixeira (ed), *Catálogo de instrumentos musicais de Mocambique*, Ministerio da Educaçao e Cultura, Mozambique 1980. □

ZAMBIA: THE SEARCH FOR RURAL-URBAN BALANCE — A review

by T J D Fair

In all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, population, especially the poorer population, is still overwhelmingly found in rural areas. This geographic fact, according to Professor Fair, is of paramount significance to governments since inequalities or imbalances in income and socio-economic opportunity have serious political implications.

In his latest publication Professor Fair examines Zambia as a classic case of an African country which inherited an extremely unbalanced spatial pattern of development from the colonial era and which ever since, while committed to policies of balanced regional and urban/rural development, has in fact found the imbalance intensifying. In addition to examining the nature and causes of Zambia's inherited inequalities, Professor Fair considers some trends in spatial development since independence, the national development plans concerning spatial development and the government's own assessment of its success or shortcomings in meeting the objectives of these plans. Finally, he reviews some of the extensive literature which has appeared over the past 15 years in academic journals and other sources in regard to the problem.

Price: Rand Monetary Area R6,00. Elsewhere R10,00. Members less 25%.

Order from the Africa Institute of South Africa
P O Box 630
Pretoria, Republic of South Africa
0001

Telephone: (012) 28-6970
