

Black S. African studies to bring justice to country

By A. Phillips Brooks
American-Statesman Staff

Mojanku Gumbi was born to privilege.

As the daughter of an African woman who once owned extensive farm lands, she attended private schools and graduated from a prestigious university with a law degree.

But the 30-year-old attorney can not own property, vote or travel freely in her own country. And whenever she enters the courtroom, she is searched.

Gumbi is a Black South African: a person, by law, without privilege.

Gumbi, who lives in Soweto — a Black township near Johannesburg — came to Austin 1½ weeks ago to participate in the University of Texas Law School trial advocacy program. The program is designed to help Black lawyers from South Africa improve their courtroom skills, and in so doing, advance the quality of legal representation for South African Blacks, said UT Law Professor Michael Tigar.

Gumbi said she found the classes about jury selection to be the most interesting of the comprehensive nine-day program which ended this weekend.

"In South Africa, we don't have juries, only a judge. I like the concept of having a jury decide the guilt or innocence of a person in-

stead of just one judge," she said.

The tall, striking native of Thaba Nchu in the Orange Free State — one of South Africa's four provinces — said she will use her newly acquired skills in questioning and examining witnesses, conducting arguments and communicating with judges to better represent Blacks, particularly in human rights issues.

When she returns to South Africa this week, Gumbi said she will begin training to become an advocate. Attorneys, she explained, can only practice in lower courts while advocates can practice in any of the country's courts.

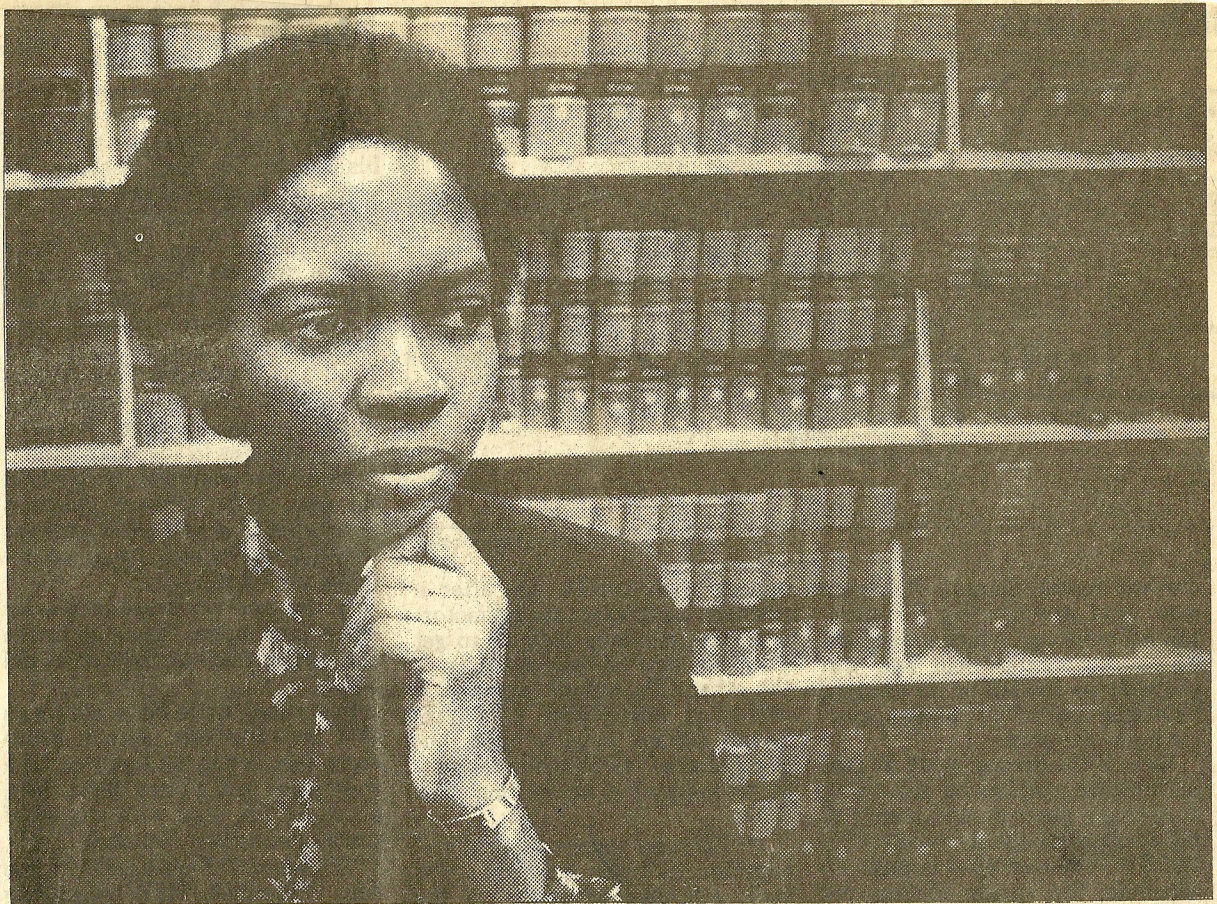
Fluent in four languages, Gumbi said she will have to study Afrikaans, an official language of South Africa, to become an advocate.

"I will learn it, but I will never speak it," she vowed. "It is the language of our oppressor."

Gumbi said there is a growing need for Black attorneys in South Africa to defend the thousands of Black Africans facing treason charges due to their acts against a repressive South African government.

"Generally, there is no justice for South African Blacks. The majority of Blacks in my country are poor, illiterate and without the money to pay for legal representation. There is no public defender system," she said.

As a youngster, Gumbi saw her



Staff photo by Karen Warren

Mojanku Gumbi is an attorney from South Africa who is participating in UT's trial advocacy classes.

mother stripped of her inherited property by a government which banned Blacks from owning land in their own country, she said. Gumbi said her mother was compensated "pennies" for rich farming acreage.

So segregated is South African society that even hospitals and other public facilities are classified according to race, Gumbi said. In her own crowded township, one hospital serves two million people.

But far worse than the decades of economic oppression imposed on Blacks, Gumbi said, is the psychological tyranny heaped upon generations of Blacks by Afri-

kaners, who are not indigenous to Africa.

"The education system teaches that whites are superior and Blacks are inferior. It tears Blacks down emotionally. So many Blacks believe that this is their lot," Gumbi said.

But change is inevitable, Gumbi said, as more Blacks demand decent housing, jobs, facilities and justice.

"I wish the United States would meddle a little less in Panama and more in my country . . . South Africa needs international business and currency to grow. Without it,

they will crumble. If American companies truly want to see freedom in my country, they will divest," she said.

Pointing to a photograph of her nine-month old baby girl she left behind to attend the law program, Gumbi said "this is my hope for South Africa.

"I named her Kopano Nkululeko. In Tswana, it means unity and freedom. I dream of a country where Blacks and whites will share power in a democratic government. But this will not come peacefully to South Africa. It will be bloody, very bloody."