In My Country
This poem was written by the South African poet Pitika Ntuli.

John Vorster Square, the place mentioned in the poem, was the Johannesburg Central Police Station. It was particularly known for the activities of the Security Branch on the 10th floor. What do you think happened there? Why do you think the narrator is afraid?

In My Country
In my country they jail you
for what they think you think.
My uncle once said to me:
they’ll implant a microchip
in our minds
to flash our thoughts and dreams
onto a screen at John Vorster Square.
I was scared:
by day I guard my tongue
by night my dreams.

Opposition and punishment
Read here to find out how the government treated people who opposed apartheid...

The government and the secret police punished all opposition to apartheid. They arrested political activists. Some political activists were tortured or murdered. For example, some “fell” out of the windows of the headquarters of the secret police. People who were arrested could be held without trial for 90 days, later 180 days.

The government also used a tool called banning orders. A person who was banned could not attend meetings, leave their local area, or write or broadcast in the media without special permission. This affected the leaders of protest movements.

Newspapers were censored if they opposed the regime. Some were banned. Journalists were prosecuted if they wrote critical articles.

The government could declare a state of emergency. This meant that it could ignore normal laws about the treatment of demonstrators and prisoners.