

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**Wozanazo : A Bio-bibliographical Survey of Twentieth-Century**

**Black South African Women Writers**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

The canon of South African literature, as shaped by publishers, academics and past government education policies, reflects dominant race, class, language and gender biases. Knowledge of large areas of South African literature is still limited by such biases. This research focuses on and seeks to redress some of the silences surrounding Black South African Women writers and their texts. Working within the bounds of a literary canon defined by an established hierarchy and a system of binary opposites, the research deals with denied existence using the terms 'Black', 'South African' and 'Women' as tactical tools to rewrite history and repossess, revalue and reposition identity and knowledge. These terms are not intended to act as indicators of static or essential being and are used provisionally. It is hoped that the research will provide the means for new and continued interrogation of meaning within and beyond the labels and categories I have used.

Prompted by an obvious lack of secondary reference material on Black South African Women writers, the research was developed as a reference source. It takes the form of a bio-bibliographical survey of Black South African Women writers from the first 'known' published Woman writer to the present day. The survey includes texts written in African languages as a conscious attempt to overcome the inequalities and silences promoted through the priority given to English-language texts within the South African literary canon. While Black South African Women's writing does not have a tradition in the canonical sense, the survey illustrates that it does have a past, a present and a future. It is guided by a notion of recovery and an attempt to begin a process of preservation that will hopefully continue and expand. The research aims to encourage a return to the original texts which would not otherwise be 'known'. It is thereby hoped that it will foster a greater critical awareness of

Black South African Women's writing. The emphasis on both auto/biographical and bibliographical data is considered important in enabling the development of a better understanding of the way in which Black South African Women writers and their writing emerge from and intervene in specific and diverse contexts, public and private. The greater aim of the research is to provide a resource which will help us explore and begin to theorise that which resists, decentres, transforms and operates beyond the limitations set by established hierarchical polarities.

**To**

**My parents, Allan and Gladys Sobott**

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## INTRODUCTION

Literary history and the present are dark with silences...

Tillie Olsen *Silences*

Silence from and about the subject was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by authors who lived with and within the policing strategies. What I am interested in are the strategies for breaking it.

Toni Morrison *Playing in the Dark*

For the purpose of creating a beginning, it is perhaps best that I explain my academic positioning in relation to this research. In 1991 I joined the English Department of the University of Botswana as a Staff Development Fellow. The Fellowships aim to groom citizens of Botswana for academic positions by providing access to postgraduate studies according to the needs of the department concerned. In my case it was decided by the English Department that I should specialise in twentieth-century literature and feminist theory. While the choice of twentieth-century literature as a subject area was largely determined by syllabus requirements and a lack of specialised, local staff, the focus on feminist theory was not seen as a syllabus priority but as accommodating my leanings as an undergraduate student at the University.

While employed by the University of Botswana, approximately one year before I embarked on the three-year Ph.D. programme at the University of Hull, I began reading in the general field of twentieth-century literature. The only focus I had at that time was determined by my



choice to concentrate on women writers and an untheorised sense of rebellion at western dominance of knowledge. I soon became aware of the diverse contributions that were reworking and challenging the concept of twentieth-century literature as a western, anglophone, white, male canon. Although I did not have access to the more recent theoretical contributions until I came to England, it was in keeping with my limited knowledge of these challenges to the canon that I felt justified in narrowing my focus to South African literature. In then reading and searching for data on twentieth-century South African women writers, it became clear that South African literature, as shaped by publishers, academics and past government education policies, reflects dominant race, class, language and gender biases, 'creating a situation where knowledge of large areas of South African literature is still limited'.<sup>1</sup> The silences and imbalances that I perceived surrounding black, women writers and their texts within this construction of South African literature concerned and interested me. I narrowed my focus to twentieth-century black, South African, women writers.

I found the general assumption was that the silence surrounding black women writers was mainly due to the simple fact that apart from the likes of Noni Jabavu, Miriam Tlali, Bessie Head, Ellen Kuzwayo, Lauretta Ngcobo and Gcina Mhlophe, there were very few, if any, Black South African women writers. I was warned by well-meaning scholars that it was unlikely that I would find substantive data upon which to base my research. I began to feel that although this was a depressing assumption, it was perhaps rational given that the South African historical, socio-economic and political context had not been conducive to black women's literary production and that discussions on the topic had not ventured beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Feminist Literary Criticism in South Africa', *English in Africa*, 19, 1 (May 1992), 89.

seeming omnipotence of apartheid and patriarchy. For example, Miriam Tlali writes about the way in which censorship and repression of black people in South Africa has 'succeeded in curtailing (if not obliterating) creativity'.<sup>2</sup> She explains that compared to White women, Black women are 'hemmed in on all sides by the political system [...]. Of course that goes for black men as well as black women, but women have so much less time, because they have to run the house in addition to holding down a job. It is very rare for a black man to help with domestic chores. All of which means that women don't write as much as men.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly Laretta Ngcobo describes how

Writing had always been a fascination for me, but I had accepted earlier on that it was beyond bounds. I can even say I accepted it without bitterness. I convinced myself that it was not possible and that no one would have any interest at all in what I could say - not the men, not the white people, and not even the other women, for years of conditioning had taught us that only men have a voice and are worth listening to. This, over and above the intolerance engendered by Apartheid South Africa in all spheres of life. That tutored feeling of 'less-worthiness' has been a crippling factor in all my creative thinking.<sup>4</sup>

In her Foreword to the anthology, *Women in South Africa*, Ellen Kuzwayo confirms that 'black women suffered a regrettable delay' in obtaining 'education in South Africa [which] was the right and privilege of white people and black men'. She commends Noni Jabavu, Joyce Sikakane, Maud Malaka, Miriam Tlali, Lindiwe Mabuza and Laretta Ngcobo, the 'few

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<sup>2</sup>Miriam Tlali, 'Remove the Chains: South African Censorship and the Black Writer', *Index on Censorship*, 14, 1 (February 1985), 22.

<sup>3</sup>Mineke Schipper, 'Interview with Miriam Tlali', *Unheard Words*, ed. Mineke Schipper, London: Allison and Busby, 1984.

<sup>4</sup>Laretta Ngcobo, 'My Life and My Writing', *Kunapipi*, Special Double Issue: *Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, 7, 2 and 3 (1985), 86.

women writers who have made their mark, despite the many barriers in the path of their development to achieve and earn recognition'. The Publisher's Note in the same anthology emphasises that 'the mere act of writing, of finding time, let alone space to do so, is in itself an act of monumental significance'.<sup>5</sup>

It was during the initial stages of my research that I attended the Grahamstown Arts Festival in South Africa. I decided to take advantage of my stay in Grahamstown and visit Rhodes University Library and the Cory Library archives. The Cory Library staff were very supportive but felt the archives did not, to their knowledge, hold any data on Black, South African Women writers. They none the less pointed me in the direction of the catalogues and I began my search. It was then that I realised that as with the creation of literary canons, a similar hierarchical value system applies to the collection and categorisation of archival data. This was repeatedly confirmed by my later searchings through archives. Apart from the obvious colonial and missionary bias of the archive material, many possible observations slip through the dominant web of categories that is created as a filing and reference system. Such observations are then left unrecorded and silenced. In the Cory collection there was no easy reference category such as 'women writers' to point the way so I decided to look for women's names and work from there. I found the names of Victoria Swartbooi and Zora T. Futshane. The files revealed correspondence between these two women and Lovedale Press relating to their first novels published by the Press. Swartbooi published *uMandisa* in 1935 and Futshane published *uJujulu* in 1939. Their letters, written in English, pointed to missionary

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<sup>5</sup>Seageng Tsikang and Dinah Lefakane, eds., *Women in South Africa: From the Heart - An Anthology*, Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1988.

education, and demonstrated confidence and keen business sense. It was exciting to see their handwriting and signatures but it was more exciting to realise that I had found affirmation of existence denied or ignored. The silence surrounding Black, South African Women writers was far more complex than was assumed. The history of Black, South African Women writers and their writing had alternative dimensions.

In defining the investigative parameters and the aims of the research I was aware that as I was working within the bounds of a literary canon defined by an established hierarchy and a system of binary opposites, and that I was dealing with denied existence, the terms 'Black', 'South African' and 'Women' were to serve as tactical tools to rewrite history and repossess, revalue and reposition identity and knowledge. These terms are not intended to act as indicators of static or essential being and are used provisionally. As Carole Boyce Davies argues the term

Black as a descriptive adjective for people of African origin and descent, came into popular usage during the period of the Black power movements in the US, the UK, the English-speaking Caribbean and in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. At that historical juncture, there was also a political imperative to articulate African existences in relation to white/Anglo cultures. While there was some relationship between these movements, each carried its own specificity based on geographical and political realities.<sup>6</sup>

For the purpose of this research the term 'Black' situated within the South African historical and political context includes the 'various segments of the black community [...] Africans [...] Coloureds and Indians'<sup>7</sup> operating within the Black Consciousness definition of Black 'as

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<sup>6</sup>Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp.5-6

<sup>7</sup>Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1987, p.52.

those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society'<sup>8</sup> where 'the cause of their oppression [is] the blackness of their skin'.<sup>9</sup> As Mbulelo Mzamane writes, "'Black", as understood by the new generation in South Africa, refers to the darker races of acknowledged African, Asian and mixed decent, who constitute the vast majority of the disadvantaged and oppressed in South Africa'.<sup>10</sup> The terms 'Black', 'South African' and 'Women' are relevant to this research in relation to the struggle against dispossession and the struggle for recognition; appreciation and re-knowing. My decision to consider texts in all South African languages is similarly a conscious attempt to overcome the inequalities and silences promoted through the priority given to English-language texts within the South African literary canon. I have deliberately avoided any attempts to homogenise the 'multiple orders of difference' that exist and persist within the labels and categories I have chosen to use as tools.<sup>11</sup> The only sweeping generalisation that I could confidently make based on the findings of my research is that Black, South African Women writers have suffered deep trauma under white settler and apartheid rule. Even then the specifics of each woman's suffering manifests difference. Referring to the ideologies of terminologies, Carole Boyce Davies writes that 'at each arrival at a definition, we begin a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions'.<sup>12</sup> It is hoped that this research will provide the means for new and continued interrogation of meaning within and beyond the labels and categories I have used.

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<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>10</sup>'Introduction', *Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories*, ed. Mbulelo Mzamane, Harlow: Longman, 1986, p.ix.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of Black Feminist Criticism in the Introduction to Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

<sup>12</sup>Carole Boyce Davies, *ibid.*, p.5.

My decision to develop the research as a reference source was prompted by an obvious lack of reference material on Black South African Women writers and by my further reading of the limited secondary sources available. I identified a need for the summary and critical reassessment of existing secondary material and a need for the collection, examination and assessment of a great deal more primary data. While I found sources such as B.W. Vilakazi's D.Litt thesis, 'The Oral and Written Literature in Nguni', S.Z. Qangule's article 'A Brief History of Modern Literature in the South African Bantu Languages' and B.W. Andrzejewski *et al.*'s *Literatures in African Languages* helpful in providing names, titles of works and biographical details of some writers, the secondary source material was occasionally out of date and misinformed. For example, I found that Joan Mokwena, Rita Sefora and Doris Sello - names listed in House's *Black South African Women Writers in English: A Preliminary Checklist* and Berrian's *Bibliography of African Women Writers and Journalists* - were pseudonyms used by Arthur Maimane when he was writing for *Drum* magazine. Some women are listed separately under their early pseudonyms and under their own names which they later used for publishing. Some translations of titles from the original African language to English are inadequate or incorrect as with the title of Futshane's novel *UJujuju*, which in the *Bibliography of African Women Writers* is mistakenly translated as 'magic' presumably by way of an assumed connection to the English word 'juju' of West African derivation. Jujuju is a person's name based on the onomatopoeic association with a train - the means by which men were transported from the rural areas to the cities to work in the mines. In *James James Ranisi Jolobe: An Annotated Bibliography*, Patricia Scott's only comment on Victoria Swaartbooi's novel, *uMandisa*, is a quotation taken from A.S. Gérard's *Four African Literatures* which states that the work displays 'obvious autobiographical

overtones'.<sup>13</sup> I felt that such statements should be questioned and further researched rather than simply reproduced.

In 1988 Boitumelo Mofokeng criticised *Staffrider Magazine* for ignoring Black Women writers in their collection of writing called *Ten Years of Staffrider Magazine*. She asks, 'Do you want to tell me the works of women writers who started with *Staffrider* ten years ago were not good enough for reproduction in that collection?'.<sup>14</sup> In the late 1980s and early 1990s a discourse which began to recognise the active silencing of the existence of Black South African Women's writing was being articulated amongst White feminist academics. At the 1987 Victoria Falls Conference, Antjie Krog lists volumes of collected poetry 'which almost without exception include no black woman's voice'. She asks, 'Am I to conclude that black women do not write poetry, or do I have to suspect the collectors of considering their duty done, when they have included the work of a few white women?'.<sup>15</sup> In the anthology, *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*, published in 1990, Cecily Lockett writes 'a few black women who gained access to a western education through the missionary schools produced poems in English which were published in the newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal*'.<sup>16</sup> She notes that 'black women's voices have also been suppressed by the anthologists and critics who have documented the Black poetry phenomenon of the 1970s and

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<sup>13</sup> A.S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p.8.

<sup>14</sup>Boitumelo Mofokeng, 'Women Worker Writers: Breaking the Silence', *Buang Basadi: Conference of Women and Writing*, [n.p.]: COSAW Transvaal Region, [n.d.], p.6.

<sup>15</sup>'Women Writers in South Africa', *Crossing Borders: Writers Meet the ANC*, eds., Ampie Coetzee and James Polley, Bramley: Taurus, 1990, p.126.

<sup>16</sup>Cecily Lockett, ed., *Breaking the Silence*, Cape Town: AD Donker, 1990, p.30.

'80s'.<sup>17</sup> In the anthology *Raising the Blinds: A Century of South African Women's Stories*, also published in 1990, Annemarie van Niekerk explains that 'the title signifies a gesture of raising the blinds of a dark and shut-in interior, exposing it to light. This involves the exposure of an already existing, but previously obscured interior'. She adds that generally speaking 'white middle and upper class women featured fairly prominently, though never fully representatively in the sphere of South African fiction. Until very recently however, black working class and peasant women have been systematically marginalised and obscured for political as well as cultural factors'.<sup>18</sup> Such anthologies provided a welcomed publication outlet for some Black South African Women's writing. However, the introductions and the attempt at an overview which contributed to the discourse on silenced writing produced fragmented examples and understandings of Black, South African Women's writing. It was a discourse which lacked thorough research and produced dangerous over-generalisation and untested assumptions.<sup>19</sup> While I did follow leads and gather some insights from existing literature, I felt that the inaccuracies and generalisations created an urgent need for a thorough and precise reference source.

As a reference source, my research takes the form of a bio-bibliographical survey of Black South African Women writers from the first 'known' published Woman writer to the present day.<sup>20</sup> I do not in any way wish to undervalue the importance of women as writers of unpublished manuscripts, letters and diaries; the collection and consideration of such works would justify a separate research project. Similarly I do not wish to undervalue the

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<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>18</sup>Annemarie van Niekerk, ed., *Raising the Blinds*, Cape Town: AD Donker, 1990, p.11.

<sup>19</sup>See Isabel Hofmeyr's review essay, 'Feminist Literary Criticism in South Africa' for a detailed discussion of these anthologies.

<sup>20</sup>See Opland and Mtuze's reference to a Black South African woman known as Mary Ann who is believed to have published in 1850, in *Izwi Labantu*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp.77-79.



importance of women's oral texts. In understanding women's cultural production I recognise that it is necessary to explore the interaction between the oral and the written. I do touch upon the way women writers use oral traditions and how 'their revisions of Western literary forms are integrally and dialectically related to the kinds of content and themes they treat'<sup>21</sup> but to explore the subject fully would again take me well beyond the parameters of my research. While Black South African Women's writing does not have a tradition in the canonical sense, the survey illustrates that it does have a past, a present and a future. It is guided by a notion of recovery and an attempt to begin a process of preservation that will hopefully continue and expand. The research aims to encourage a return to the original texts which would not otherwise be 'known' because they are out of print, have been taken off shelves or are confined to quaint and dusty collections of Africana. It is thereby hoped that it will foster a greater critical awareness of Black South African Women's writing. The emphasis on both auto/biographical and bibliographical data is considered important in enabling the development of a better understanding of the way in which Black South African Women writers and their writing emerge from and intervene in specific and diverse contexts, public and private. The greater aim of the research, which has also been applied where possible in the collection of data, reading of the women's texts and contexts, and the presentation of the material, is to provide a resource which will help us explore and begin to theorise that which resists, decenters, transforms and operates beyond the limitations set by established hierarchical polarities.

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<sup>21</sup>Ketu H. Katrak, 'Decolonizing Culture: Toward a Theory for Postcolonial Women's Texts', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35, 1 (1989), 173.

The research developed into a survey rather than a source book or a guide because the eventual affirmation of the existence of a larger than expected number of published Black South African Women writers and the practicalities of time limitations, word limitations and financial restraint which apply to the completion of a Ph.D. discouraged my initial desire to achieve exhaustiveness or comprehensiveness. Therefore I have had to be selective and regretfully exclude some writers. In excluding some women writers I have contributed to a process of silencing which although unavoidable is contrary to the research ethos. Unfortunately, I had to make the decision to exclude some women writers due to lack of information. For example, with Zora Futshane, whom I felt was very important to the research, I was unable to gather enough data to write an entry. The letters I found in the Cory Library were my only source of information. In general, the focus on published writing was limited to fictional works, including poetry and drama, auto/biography and journalism. In cases where women have written within these categories and have also written academic pieces, I have included their academic writing in the entry. While the research emphasises the importance of collecting data on Black South African Women writers to demonstrate the sense of unity contained in a past, present and future, it also emphasises diversity. In my attempts to ensure that the research was representative I applied what may seem like a varied logic. For example I chose a woman, Juby Mayet, because of her historical importance as one of the first black women journalists and omitted another more recently published journalist. Of two recently published women I chose one because she represented women writing within the workers' movement. Then again of three women writing within the workers' movement, I chose one out of the two writing in English and one because she writes in Zulu. I used similar criteria of representation to choose between women who have

published very little, women who have more substantial publications, women whose work fits into the definition of 'intellectual' and 'aesthetic', women whose work would be classified as 'popular or functional', women who write in Xhosa, women who write in English, women who write poetry. The list is long. I have included all the better known writers, even though they would not be unduly disadvantaged by exclusion in terms of an almost guaranteed place in literary heritage, because I believe they provide essential reference points to a more complete understanding of Black South African Women writers.

The collection of primary data and the presentation and structuring of the entries in the survey are framed by an eclectic methodology. The methodology is principally informed by a feminist consciousness and an awareness of colonial and western dominance that is not however necessarily unique to either feminist or postcolonial theory. The entries generally consist of the writer's name, pseudonyms, biographical details, comments on her writing and bibliography of her published work. There are discrepancies in the length of the entries and in the ratio between biographical content and comments on the writer's works. Such discrepancies were determined solely by the amount and type of information I was able to gather. My comments on the women's writing are largely descriptive and restricted to summaries of content. I had the African-language texts translated into English which proved to be a major task in terms of organisation and finance. In some case where I was unable, due to time and financial restraints, to have the whole text translated, I arranged for English summaries of the texts. I believe that translation is invariably tied up with the context within which it is made. I hoped to determine the context slightly by choosing women translators who were first-language speakers of the language they were translating from and whom I believed would be a little more gender sensitive than men in relating to the context and perspectives of the women writers they were translating. I do invariably make value

judgements and simply through 'reading' both the original English language texts and English translations of African language texts take part in a process of interpretation. But I have generally attempted to avoid ideological and political, formalist or aesthetic interpretations. Whilst I feel there is a great need for critical interpretation of the texts, it is beyond the scope of this research and in the case of the translated texts, beyond my language capabilities. Although I believe I have the right to 'read' any text from my recognised subject position, I would not presume to attempt a formalist analysis of for example the English translation of a Zulu text as a substitute for the analysis of the Zulu text, nor would I presume competence in the cultural intricacies of ideological and political interpretations so firmly rooted in the intimacies of living the original language. In having texts translated and then describing them, my aim is not to attempt the translation and containment of one culture into another but to disturb or displace history and colonial representations of Black South African women's lives and cultures. I hope that through translation a process of deconstruction will occur which opens up a postcolonial space where researchers competent in the original language of the text return to the texts in search for new constructions of 'self' and contribute in various languages to an ongoing re-articulation of the meaning of the texts.<sup>22</sup>

In my search for writers, their published works and for biographical information on deceased and elderly writers, I consulted archives and 'Africana collections' in the Cory Library, Rhodes University in Grahamstown, the Kille Campbell Africana Library, University of Natal in Durban, the Howard Pim Library at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, the Kaffrarian Museum (South African Missionary Museum) in King William's Town, the William Cullen

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<sup>22</sup>For a discussion of how translation becomes a site for raising questions of representation, power and historicity see Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Library at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, the Strange Collection at the Johannesburg Municipal Library, the *Drum* Archives in Lanseria, the Khama III Memorial Museum in Serowe, Botswana and the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York, England. I was able to gather some information from book-jackets and introductions, old newspaper reviews and articles, collections of letters and missionary records. Although missionary sources yielded very little, I did find dates, places and names that were useful leads. The Victoria Swaartbooi and Zora Futshane letters to Lovedale Press gave some insight into publishing conditions and attitudes of the time and the personalities and capabilities of the two women concerned. When using the archives I was aware of the dangers of 'designating archives as repositories of "facts"'<sup>23</sup> where 'often the dimensions of the [archival] document that make it a text of a certain sort with its own historicity and its relations to sociopolitical processes are filtered out when it is used purely and simply as a quarry for facts in the reconstruction of the past.'<sup>24</sup> I 'read' the archival texts conscious of the 'epistemic violence' of colonialism and I 'read' other sources/texts with the view that identity is not the sole creation of the colonial othering process but a complex interweave of forces that have escaped, existed parallel to, perhaps tactically colluded with or resisted colonialism. I wrote to publishers, to the friends and families of writers and where possible the writers themselves. The gathering of biographical data was though largely reliant on discussions and interviews with the writers or with people who knew the writers. While an obvious lack of secondary source material necessitated this approach, it was also part of a conscious strategy to allow for expression of perspectives that may normally be excluded.

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<sup>23</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24, 3 (1985), 248.

<sup>24</sup>Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, NY, Ithaca, 1983, p.31, cited in Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur', *History and Theory*, 24, 3 (1985), 250.

The interviews were guided by the existence of a questionnaire and a prepared framework but were often structured by spontaneous interaction between myself as the interviewer and the person I was talking with. It was through the interviewing process that I learnt to recognise and suspend my own assumptions and flow with logics and discursive models that I had not previously envisaged. It was also through the interviewing process that I realised the construction of a life-story 'is a fabrication, not necessarily a lie but certainly a highly complex truth' selected from a number of possible realities.<sup>25</sup> Whilst I am committed to recording 'facts', this did not preclude me from flowing with and attempting to articulate other 'realities'. For example, in my interview with Juby Mayet she states that Bessie Head was much older than her. In terms of Juby's reality this is a truth. It appears however that both Juby Mayet and Bessie Head were born in 1937. Emelda Damane's life-story demonstrates some of the difficulty involved in establishing 'facts'. She told of how she was born in Lesotho but that when her parents decided to work in South Africa they claimed a South African place of birth for her, and hence South African nationality and papers. Her birthplace is then officially recorded as being in South Africa and previous biographical notes on the writer state that she was born in South Africa. Some women told me of certain life experiences and then asked that I refrain from using this information in the survey entry. The biographical content of the entries should therefore be seen as versions of life-story. They are made up of bits and pieces of life-story from varied sources. They are constructions that rely on different socially located realities and selected voices which include my voice as the researcher, the writer's voice and on occasions the voices of family, friends and colleagues. I

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<sup>25</sup>Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography*, New and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, pp.242-243.

have placed importance on including the woman writer's voice in addition to my own voice, not as an authenticating device but as an attempt to facilitate some form of active reading by providing alternate evidences.

The framework I applied during the interviews was multi-purpose in design. One of the aims was to gather data of a linear chronological nature as pertinent to life history. This approach was not determined by a belief in progressivist ideas but by the need to present the entries within a chronological framework for ease of reference and because chronological data provides valuable leads for further research. The danger of a chronological focus on the women's life stories is that it 'effectively trains a spotlight on them and them alone'<sup>26</sup>, tracing their life from birth to death, as if they exist in isolation and are not constructed through and located within complex social networks and historical contexts. Whilst allowing for individuality, my questions also aimed to gather data that contextualised the subject and her writing within such networks. I began the interviews by asking about family. The first questions related to the woman's mother and the mother's 'maiden' name. I then moved on to questions relating to the father. The emphasis on the mother was a conscious strategy to allow for expression of female genealogies and mother-daughter relationships which are so often subordinated to relationships to fathers in patrilineal societies and was applied to all aspects of data collection not just the interview situation.<sup>27</sup> This does not mean that the role of the mother was idealised. Some women's lives and works were constructed around problematic relationships with their mothers. Neither does it mean the exclusion of the

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<sup>26</sup>*ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>27</sup>For a discussion of the subordination of female genealogies in patrilineal societies and strategies for breaking the 'vicious circle of the patriarchal phallogocentric order', see Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993, p.47.

importance of father-daughter relationships which were often significant. The interviews did not restrict questions to biological parenting but encouraged and followed the subject in speaking of caretakers and family relationships that exist beyond the limitations of the nuclear family.<sup>28</sup> The trajectory of the interviews was not necessarily linear in the chronological sense. From reflections on the family it was not unusual, for example, for the subject to then talk of her own role as a caretaker. Discussions of family could lead to mention of 'forced removals' described within the context of family or community experience which could then lead to discussions of later political involvement and/or writing. How and why the women write; the influences, motivations, difficulties associated with writing; how they perceive the nature, activity and status of writing, are questions intrinsically interwoven with their life-stories. Depending on where the interview led and what gaps I perceived, I would perhaps ask if a grandmother told stories and from there we would unravel the influences of oral storytelling traditions. A particular teacher may have encouraged essay-writing and engendered a love of the English classics reflected in a writer's choice of genre or style. The student uprisings of 1976 and the experience of extreme injustice may have prompted the writing of poetry as an expression of protest and a tool aimed at raising the consciousness of a surrounding community. In the interview with Deela Khan she tells of how she incorporates her dreams into her poetry and often writes from somewhere deep in her unconscious.

My questions allowed for free movement within the oppositional range of a 'popular and functional art' and 'an intellectual and aesthetic one' and for the redefinition of received or

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<sup>28</sup>I adopt Chodorow's use of the term caretaker here to refer to the whole primary relationship which includes 'mothering' and taking care of a child's needs. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1978, p.59.



imposed contents of such classifications.<sup>29</sup> I tried to allow for a loosening of ‘the strict distinctions between the literary and the social text’<sup>30</sup> where literary form is understood as connected ‘with what is being read [written]: history, political economy - the world. And it is not merely a question of disciplinary formation. It is also a question of questioning the separation between the world of action and the world of disciplines’.<sup>31</sup> At the same time I attempt to nurture what is seen by feminist and postcolonial theorists as the productive tensions and contradictions that exist between ‘the world of literal politics and history, of identifiable events and intentions [...] [and] the alternative reality and pleasure of language for its own sake’<sup>32</sup> or as Spivak puts it, ‘the dialectical and continuous crosshatching of ideology and literary language’.<sup>33</sup>

The interviews were not, in general, difficult to arrange. I traced the majority of women through a type of snowball interaction whereby through talking in informal social situations I would find the whereabouts of a particular woman and through talking to her I would find out about someone else and so on. After tracing the women’s work or home telephone numbers, I phoned and explained that I was from the University of Botswana and gave a brief outline of the nature and aims of my research. Fortunately the usual response was an enthusiastic desire to help with the research based on the women’s commitment to similar ideals. I did not expect the women to come to me although a few felt it was easier to do so. For the majority

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<sup>29</sup>For a discussion of the positioning of the writer, specifically writing women, in relation to society and the nature of literature see chapter one of Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

<sup>30</sup>Susi Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India, Volume II: The Twentieth Century*, London: Pandora, 1993, p.39.

<sup>31</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, London: Routledge, 1988, p.204.

<sup>32</sup>Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p.6.

<sup>33</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *ibid.*, p.100.

of the interviews I found my way to the women which entailed the initial travelling from Johannesburg to Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town and then finding my way into 'townships', various suburbs and rural areas. I met many women in their homes and some at their places of work. The interviews usually lasted an hour or more. When I met the woman I was to interview I told her more about my research and my background. Some women asked me questions about my life and opinions during the interview; others were content to simply answer my questions or use my questions as prompts to talk about their lives and work. I was from the beginning aware of different aspects of my subject positioning in relation to the research and the interview dynamics. For example, using the black/white dichotomy, I am white. I am a woman. I am a Motswana. I was born and grew up in Australia. English is my first language and the language in which I was conducting the interview. I am in the context of the research and my career, an academic. I am a published writer. I fit into the category of middle-class. I am married and have children. I do not want to ignore, dispense with or overemphasise any of the large number of elements that form part of the way I operate as a subject or the way the woman interviewed operates as a subject but rather point to the complexity of articulating interview dynamics based on dualistic divisions. As Spivak writes,

That which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network [...] of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on. (Each of these strands, if they are isolated, can also be seen as woven of many strands.) Different knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are

themselves dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject.<sup>34</sup>

In the South African historical context of colonialism and apartheid, racial difference is an important factor in considering research and interview dynamics but not, in my experience, necessarily the dominant factor.<sup>35</sup> Racial difference is not something that can be singled out as existing in isolation from other factors such as class, academic positioning and specific social, cultural and linguistic experiences which can serve to both emphasise or de-emphasise skin colour. For example, the cultural habits I have absorbed from living in Botswana may serve to counter my subject positioning as a white person. My lack of language skills in Zulu and Xhosa may serve to emphasise my subject positioning as a white person. All the women interviewed were fluent in English. I often had to ask how to spell proper names because of my unfamiliarity with Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu. At times I had to ask the meaning and spelling of a word where code switching was taking place. Whilst I was usually familiar with the code switching that took place in Johannesburg, I had difficulty in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. For example, during the interview with Deela Khan in Cape Town she talked of her experience with 'Bergies' and a poem she wrote based on these experiences. I had to ask her what 'Bergies' meant. She explained that they were vagrants who slept in the park and on the mountain. She pointed to Table Mountain and I was able to see the connection to the Afrikaans word for mountain. There were times when I felt that my subject position as a white woman mixed with assumptions based on racial stereotypes were at work in the interview situation and I consciously sought to overcome these as obstacles to open

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<sup>34</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, London: Routledge, 1988, p.204.

<sup>35</sup> I understand 'race' as a socially constructed category with no biological basis.

discussion. Discussion of racial issues was important to an understanding of the women's lives and their specific experiences of and reactions to the pain of apartheid. I also sought to overcome such factors as academic status and class when I felt they were working to distance, alienate or silence either myself or the person being interviewed. The race, class, age, language, political affiliations, profession, sexual orientation, gender interplay of the interview dynamics were further complicated by the fact that more often than not there were other people present at the time of the interview. Sometimes women had their children with them. Sometimes my children accompanied me. Sometimes there were friends and members of the family present. On occasions a woman writer I had already interviewed would accompany me to interview another writer or my friends would accompany me.

Homi Bhabha writes that 'the act of theory is the process of articulation and the event of theory becomes the negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic distances'.<sup>36</sup> My research aims to contribute to that vital process of articulation and negotiation. The act of theory takes place in articulating a reference source. The research articulates by gathering together, interpreting and describing that which has already been expressed in the lives, contexts and writing of Black South African Women writers. It also articulates by summarising, reassessing and interpreting existing secondary sources. The research negotiates contradictory and antagonistic distances in a number of ways which have already been described in this Introduction. This process of negotiation took in the interview situation. It took place in the translation of texts from African languages to English and the reading of the archival material. It was involved in the reading and subsequent description of texts which

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<sup>36</sup>Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds., J. Pines and P. Willemen, London: British Film Institute, 1991, p.118.

required research and understandings of historical, social and political contexts. It was present in the construction of life stories and it is present when the reader engages with this research. It will hopefully be present if future researchers use this survey as a stepping-stone to historically specific and critical explorations of Black South African Women's writing and cultural production, new analysis, new interrogation of meaning, the deconstruction of the categories used in the research and the various discourses that the research intersects with and taps into. Negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic distances has been taking place in South Africa, takes place in this research and will continue to take place in deconstructing the dominant discourse on race. Referring to the phenomena of apartheid, Jacques Derrida points out that

The judicial simulacrum and the political theatre of this state racism have no meaning and would have had no chance outside a European 'discourse' on the concept of race. That discourse belongs to a whole system of 'phantasms', to a certain representation of nature, life, history, religion and law, to the very culture which succeeded in giving rise to this state takeover.<sup>37</sup>

The research presents an act of theory and an event of theory that assume social responsibility. As such it is in itself negotiating the contradictory and antagonistic distances that exist between the traditional western academic notion of theory and a more practical application. It takes a conscious stand against the production of theory as an end in itself, 'confined to the consumption of other theorists who speak the same privileged language in which obscurity is regularly mistaken for profundity'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Jacques Derrida, 'Racism's Last Word', *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (Autumn 1985), 294.

<sup>38</sup>Ketu H. Katrak, *ibid.*, 158.

Tumi Sephula laments that 'my country has no name'. She vows that she 'will unfold the scroll/ of the dead and ululate/ all their names' lest she forgets that South Africa has yet to find its name.<sup>39</sup>

The silence calls out unconditionally; it keeps watch on that which is not, on that which is not yet, and on the chance of still remembering some faithful day.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Unpublished poem entitled 'My Country has no Name' by Tumi Sephula.

<sup>40</sup>Jacque Derrida, *ibid.*, 299.

## Joan (Louise Ann) Baker 1934 -

Poet and short story writer. Joan Baker was born in Claremont, Cape Town. Her mother, Margaret Peterson, was a housewife. Joan describes her mother as 'the one who dealt out the beatings. She was the one who trudged us off to school [...]. She was not just a housewife, she was the home actually'.<sup>1</sup> Joan's maternal grandmother lived with the family but Joan was 'too small actually to remember her as a person'. She recalls, 'I have just a vague picture, like a brown silhouette. I know she always wore brown and that she had long hair.' Joan's father, Edward Laffey, was a plumber and her paternal grandfather was an Irishman who came to South Africa via St. Helena where he met Joan's paternal grandmother. Joan grew up in Wynberg, Cape Town. 'It's one of the few suburbs where there are large blocks of Coloured people living there and it was a safe place. There was no violence. There was no aggression. The neighbours were neighbourly and the schools were close by.' Joan explains that she was classified by the Apartheid system as 'Mixed' because her 'father was white.' Her youth was punctuated with the often petty, farcical but painful experiences of racial segregation. She describes a typical incident:

My sister, the one two years younger than I, she's very fair. She's got very light hair and hazel eyes and there was nothing to say that she was Coloured. My father was fair and there I was looking more like my mother. We were still young when the post office was one of the first establishments to be segregated, where over night they put up these hardboard partitions. Going to the same counter but there's this partition and of course they're having this 'Whites Only' on one side. The official policing the separate queues directed my sister towards the 'Whites Only' queue and me towards the 'Non-Whites' queue. Well she took my hand and asked the official, "Can

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Joan Baker by Gaelle Mogwe, Cape Town, 20 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

I bring my sister with me?" Egg, egg, egg on his face because he realised that there were Coloured children that looked very white.

As Joan was the eldest of nine children a large part of her childhood was spent looking after her younger brothers and sisters. 'My mother had babies every other year. Every other year. You know one was just off the breast. I always had a child that I was responsible for and I resented that.' In 1940 Joan began her primary education at Battswood school. She loved writing essays and reading them to the class. Joan's mother would tell her stories about her life including the flue epidemic of the 1920s and the First World War. She also talked to Joan about the uses of natural medicine. Both Joan's parents were avid readers. She emphasises that 'they were not academics but they read because they loved to read.' Joan read her father's James Hadley Chase and 'pigged out on cowboys.' She says that she also enjoyed her mother's Barbara Cartland novels, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Fanny by Gaslight*. She remembers that 'some of the dialogue, especially in the love scenes, I mean it was for your eyes only[...]. I'm reading all this and my mother comes. She gave me a hell of a hiding'.

In 1949 Joan left Battswood School without completing her secondary education. She explains:

I had to leave school because the sister younger than I wanted to be a teacher and with my father being the only breadwinner, it was hard you see [...], when I was taken out of school I was very angry. I was very bitter about it and what was so sad was that my sister taught for six years and she got married and lived in London. Her family, her husband's family were the 'Try-for-White' kind and that was just before the Republic when they left and she couldn't teach there because the system and method of teaching was different so she worked in a furniture store.



After leaving school Joan worked in a leather factory in Cape Town for four years until at the age of nineteen she went to Kitwe in what was then Northern Rhodesia to work with an egg distribution company. 'I worked and after ten months I couldn't any more. I was too homesick and I came back. I missed my mother and my sisters and I just missed home but I felt better for having gone.' She returned to work in the leather factory until 1956 when she married.

Joan has two sons and two daughters. She wrote her first poem in response to the student unrest of the Seventies and Eighties which involved her children and the children of her neighbourhood. 'I got emotionally caught up in all this but I couldn't go out and march and shout my slogan, add my slogan and toss my stone because I'm sort of physically disabled; not able to do that [...]. I just wrote a very clumsy poem and called it "Sue the Law".' Joan then found she couldn't stop writing. She produced poem after poem about the experiences of young people and her community. She explains that 'it was like a fever working itself out' and describes how her platforms became 'higher and higher' until she ended up on a platform that was so high she 'had to use two ladders to get up there and that was the ANC's very first legal meeting at the stadium in Richard's Bay'. In 1988 she read 'Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted', 'The Fridge the Clock and I', 'The Rawhide Drum' and 'For Those Who Too Easily Take Decisions' as part of the COSAW Womandla celebrations. These poems were later published in *Utterings in the Garden*. Even though Joan's children had left school and were no longer in danger of continual police harassment, she was still worried for other people's children and cites one incident that particularly affected her, where school children were passing her house on their way home. 'I watched them running from the police and I watched a female police smack one girl and I shouted, "Hey, you bitch!"'. Joan subsequently wrote 'Undercover Comrade' to express her anger at police treatment of children and her

solidarity with mothers who still had children at school. The poem tells of a mother who worries about her children but does not limit their freedom to participate in political protest. She hides their activities from their authoritarian father and successfully covers up the reason they are late home from school. Her children recognise that she protects them and call her 'an undercover comrade'. The story ends with the mother standing at the kitchen sink appraising the situation, 'I was caught between two children who had outgrown me, a husband whom I had outgrown, and a voice in my head that was stirring up a revolution in my heart'.<sup>2</sup> Her poems deal with the pain and alienation caused by apartheid. 'Home' published in the anthology of women's writing, *Like a House on Fire*, describes the feeling of dislocation that comes from being treated like a trespasser in her own land - 'stalking virgin paths/ garnished with fallen petals/ brazen distracting colours/ trees no child has climbed,/ that long forbidden 'white side'.<sup>3</sup>

In 1990 Joan participated in the Zabalaza Festival in London where representatives of cultural groups and organisations from all over South Africa came together to assess the nature and future of South African culture. Her essay, 'The Diary of a Deranged Delegate', gives an account of her personal experience of London; its wild floods of people, the Underground and 'the tranquil, dogless, childless neighbourhood' of Herne Hill.<sup>4</sup> These were images that she was 'bringing home to share'.<sup>5</sup> Joan also attended a writing workshop in France where she learnt about writing techniques and style. The importance of writing in Standard, BBC English was emphasised and this for Joan was the only negative aspect of the workshop. She

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<sup>2</sup>'Undercover Comrade', *Raising the Blinds: A Century of South African Women's Stories*, p.243.

<sup>3</sup>'Home' in *Like a House on Fire*, p.177.

<sup>4</sup>'The Diary of a Deranged Delegate' in *Culture and Empowerment*, p.238.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*

feels that writers should have the right to choose to use English as it is spoken by various South African communities. She is critical of those who feel that the alternative standards of English that are developing in South Africa are 'too domestic' or 'too pedestrian'. She believes, 'you can't interfere with a person's language because your language is your heritage.'

Joan admires Bessie Head and Maya Angelou. She says, 'they've had hard lives and I think I respect them for that'. She particularly likes Bessie Head's work for its simplicity of style and feels that it is not valued as highly as it should be 'because it's not party politics'. She would like to see more attention given to black women writers in South Africa and feels that the publishing industry and academia are largely dominated by males who do not understand women's writing. She says,

It's not just black women writers, women in general have a softer approach to everything and I feel that is something we're dying from, especially women who are just grassroot; most of the black women writers are grassroot people, like myself. I regard myself as a grassroot person. It means using what you have, using what you have; the little that you have - you use that.

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**Emelda (Misiwe Mkabaye) Damane, [also published as E.M. Damane and Emelda Sekgalakane] 1938 -**

Playwright, novelist, short story writer and journalist. Emelda's documented place of birth is Durban. Her mother, Caroline Buthelezi, was a teacher. Emelda describes her mother as 'pure Zulu - the royal family' and explains that 'it was my mother who gave me the name Mkabaye. She named me after Shaka's aunt who was a powerful woman; a leader'.<sup>1</sup> Emelda's father, Joseph Damane, was a teacher. 'He was a Moshoeshoe from Lesotho.' Her family was religious and both her parents were strict. She recalls that her mother 'was extremely strict. She wouldn't talk as we were kids. She wouldn't talk with us'. Emelda attended primary school in Natal and when her father was transferred to a new teaching position, she went to high school in Vryheid and then to boarding school in Utrecht. She particularly enjoyed the time she spent at boarding school. Emelda attributes her success in writing to a 'God-given talent' and the encouragement she received at school where she used to 'top the classes each time' with her essays. After she completed her secondary schooling her mother wanted her to take up a profession and become a nurse or a teacher but Emelda refused. She says,

That was the start of my problems. My mother said, 'Well you won't go any further'. So I just stayed at home and did very little. I must confess this one, I had delicate hands. My father didn't trust my cleaning. He didn't think I would clean properly. In fact, I didn't learn cooking to be honest. I didn't learn washing or ironing because you know we always had employees around us so I was not exposed to those things.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Emelda Damane by Gaelle Mogwe, Johannesburg, 12/8/93. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

Emelda's father left the family in Pretoria and returned to Lesotho to take up chieftdomship. Emelda stayed with her mother who 'didn't want to go to Lesotho'. Emelda was seventeen when she was offered a job by a white woman 'as a sales lady'. This woman introduced her to fashion modelling. She recalls,

I used to model for wealthy Germans and people. I think my beauty contributed a lot. I was taken to live with the woman and her husband near Johannesburg. I was treated like a daughter and had my own bedroom in their house. I shared their bathroom and the cleaners did my washing. This was in the days of apartheid. They didn't have any kids. They wanted to adopt me but my mother refused.

Emelda worked as a model and shop assistant for over five years and then 'had the urge to do something different because when I was a sales lady I wasn't very happy. I felt I was destined for better things but I didn't know what.' She decided to go to typing school where she learnt typing and shorthand. She claims that it was only in the late Fifties that she began to gain some understanding of the oppressive nature of apartheid and states,

I went from a shielded life with my family to stay with these white people [...] so I still didn't understand the difference between white and black. Believe me I knew this thing very late then I started developing a hatred for them, for white people. One day I was in Pretoria. I went to town alone. Believe me up to this day I cannot forget this experience. I went to this shop where they were selling clothes and I asked the price of a dress from the sales lady and you know she said to me, very, very blunt, she said to me, 'but you cannot afford to buy this. It is a very expensive dress'. I was quite annoyed. That was the beginning of my anger. That was the beginning of my politicisation.

Emelda married Johannes Sekgalakane in 1962 and they lived in Atteridgeville, Pretoria. She recalls that her husband was politically active and she 'fell in love with his political ideals'. The marriage had problems and in 1979 her husband did not come home. She has not heard of him or seen him since that time. She says, 'I don't know what happened to him. I don't know if he's alive or dead'. After working as a typist for Tower Radio she worked as a credit manager for John Scott's in Pretoria. She left in 1973 to become a receptionist and then secretary to the Charge d'Affairs at the Malawian Embassy in Pretoria. Emelda started working for the *New Nation* as a journalist in 1977. She wrote under her married name, Emelda Sekgalakane. 'I also worked for *Drum* from 1978 to 1979 and freelanced for the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Times* until 1982. I was a member of the Union of Black Journalists.' Emelda speaks Zulu, Sesotho, English and Afrikaans. She prefers to write in Zulu and English.

In 1981 Emelda wrote her first radio play, *Awuthunyelwa Gundane*, which was broadcast to great acclaim on Radio Zulu. It was published in 1983 and is about a woman who finds she has married the wrong person. She says she wrote the play because she feels that very often, 'when we women are young, we don't make the proper decisions. We tend to just rush into marriage'. She later adapted *Awuthunyelwa Gundane* into English under the title of 'Married Life is Unpredictable'. Radio Zulu broadcast the numerous radio plays that followed, including, *Ingabe Kwakwenzenjani*, *Yini Nkosana*, *Ngena Kamakhelwane*, *Yini Makhelwane*, *Kuqalwa la*, *Kusezweni la* and *Hhanyi Mkhwenyana* which won a national drama award. Her television play, *Mtungwa*, also won her an award. She says, 'my longer radio serials took the drama world by storm. One was forty-four episodes and another one was even longer'. She has written and contributed to books aimed at school-aged children and the education market. These include *Amavenge: Imidlalo Enkundlanye*, an anthology of

one act plays, published in 1983 and *Funda Uqonde isiZulu*, a school reader, published in 1986. *Halela Mngani Wami* was published in 1987 and is a novel about two young women, one rich and one poor. The rich girl does not value education and wants to marry, even if she has to buy her husband. The poor girl sets education as her first priority and struggles against all odds to achieve it. It is the poor girl who triumphs in the end. Emelda's novel, *Hhawu Ndlalifa!*, appeared in 1989. It is the story of Ndlalifa, the oldest son who by tradition is expected to inherit and divide his father's possessions. He does not respect African traditions and is rude to his elders. He marries against his parent's wishes and when his father dies he takes all the cattle and land for himself leaving his siblings with nothing. In the end the ancestors take their revenge and Ndlalifa becomes mad. She compiled and published a two-volume anthology of Zulu poetry, *Isilulu Sikazulu: Umhleli Waleli Qoqo*, which is also used in South African schools. In 1992, her novel, *Umcebo ofihliwe*, was published. The story points to the hidden potential of teenage children which is too often overlooked. *Why Bother*, written in English, was published in the same year. It is a novel aimed at teenage readers and deals with varied issues including the generation gap, the struggles of township women who find themselves the sole provider, teenage involvement in political violence and teenage women's susceptibility to pregnancy, the advances of older men and AIDS.

In 1985 Emelda went to England on a five-month course to study television techniques in Winchester, England. In September, 1985 she was attending a writer's workshop in Durban when her house in Sekukuni Street, Atteridgeville was petrol-bombed and burnt. She says, 'they thought I was a government spy or something. I don't understand why they did this to me'. Seven houses belonging to policemen who live in Atteridgeville and Soshanguye were petrol-bombed that same weekend. She still has her house in Pretoria but spends a lot of time in her apartment in Parktown, Johannesburg. In the late Eighties, Emelda obtained her



BA in English through studying by correspondence with UNISA. She then 'worked for the Black Sash and in 1987' worked 'for the British Council in Johannesburg as an Assistant Exchange Officer'. She left in 1991 because she wanted to start up a new current affairs magazine. She set up and ran the Welcome Home Centre in Dornfontein which she describes as a challenge. She says,

I am enriched by the experience. I'm funding the place from my royalties and trying to do fund raising. It's for homeless people. There are exiles, refugees from the violence on the East Rand. Some women have just come in with their babies from Thokoza. We have prayers every night. The prayers are in all languages. There is always someone to translate. After prayers they eat. At least it's clean. It gives people somewhere to sleep. I get something from these people.

Emelda has just completed, *Thamunda*, an anthology of Zulu short stories, drama and poems for Standard Four. She is currently working on a play in English which is concerned with the colonisation of South Africa and the history of racial oppression. An extract of the first draft of the play was published as 'White Wash, Black Lash' in *Women in South Africa* in 1988. She also hopes to write her autobiography. She does not see herself as being influenced by any particular writer but admires 'C.T. Msimang, *Kusadliwa Ngoludlala*, *Buzani Kumkabayi* and so much more, and Professor Ntuli - *Butjoki*, *Imicibisholo* and *Ngamafuphi*. They are prolific writers.' Emelda has one daughter, four sons and one granddaughter.

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## **Minazana (Nomzimilo) Dana 1924 - 1994**

Novelist and poet. Minazana was born in Marambeni, in the Qumbu District of northern Transkei. Her mother, Paulina Dana, came from Ngcolokeni. She cared for the children and the home. Minazana's father, Percy Dana, was a teacher. When Minazana was three years old, her parents sent her to stay with her maternal grandmother in Ngcolokeni. She attended Ngcolokeni Primary School up until Standard Two and then proceeded to Tsomo Higher Primary School where she completed her Standard Five. Minazana studied for Standards Six, Seven and Eight at Lovedale College in Alice. When she was in Standard Eight there was an essay competition at the school open to students from Standard Eight to Ten. She entered and won first prize. One of the teachers commented that she was a born writer but also joked that she would never make it as a writer because there were no writers from Qumbu district. From that time on Minazana was determined to become the first author from Qumbu. After completing her secondary education at Lovedale College, she went on to Shawbury Teacher Training College in Qumbu where she gained her teaching diploma.

Minazana accepted her first teaching appointment at a school in Tsolo district approximately twenty five kilometres from Qumbu. She started writing seriously in the late Forties and in 1951 her novel, *Kufundwa Ngamava*, was published by Oxford University Press.<sup>1</sup> The setting is rural Qumbu and the central character of the first part of the story is Nzingo Sinxothwe, a village headmaster. He is a conscientious man but the community regards him as an outsider because he comes from neighbouring Tsolo district. They would rather have their 'favoured son', Zweni Msweli, as headmaster. Zweni left South Africa to join the British

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<sup>1</sup>The title, *Kufundwa Ngamava*, translates into English as 'Experience is the Best Teacher'.

forces in the Middle East, Italy and the United States during the Second World War. Minazana describes his thoughts on arriving in Italy:

They discovered new forms of food and people sat together to eat. There was no discrimination. [...]. They finally arrive in Rome and noted the beautiful buildings. They realised for the first time that aeroplanes were not only used for war but were used to transport civilians too. Zweni felt sorry when the English bombed Italy. The Italians' screams were heart-rending. Animals, human-beings, young and old. Zweni's party noticed that the Italians kept their graves as clean as their homes.<sup>2</sup>

Zweni's regiment 'gained various skills. Some gained experience as drivers transporting goods in heavy vehicles. Some worked as cooks and others gained experience in telecommunications. They also learnt different languages and many new games.'<sup>3</sup> Zweni is seen by his community to have acquired valuable knowledge during his stay overseas. The community, especially the older women, plot against Nzingo and register false accusations against him with the Education Department. He eventually leaves due to this harassment and Zweni, who is ignorant of the plot, takes over the position. The second part of the story presents, Nomathandazo, a young woman school teacher. Zweni's father decides that Zweni and Nomathandazo should marry. The matter is discussed by the families and the marriage is agreed but Zweni's elder brother tries to frustrate the plans. However, his unscrupulous schemes fail and Zweni and Nomathandazo marry. Meanwhile one of the old women who plotted against Nzingo confesses on her death-bed to his innocence and for the first time Zweni discovers that the women, including his own mother, were involved in Nzingo's

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<sup>2</sup> *Kufundwa Ngamava*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1951, p.5. Quoted from unpublished translation of *Kufundwa Ngamava* by Nontobeko Mofokeng.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

departure. He gives up teaching and becomes a businessman. He influences the community to call Nzingo back and after six years in Cape Town Nzingo returns a better qualified teacher and experienced organiser. He and Zweni become leaders of the community in all things progressive. Along with their wives, they establish a community centre in the village.

The novel extols the virtues of traditional Xhosa agricultural society and Christian morals and education. The story is told with humour and the skillful use of Xhosa idiom. Dr. A.C. Jordan writes,

Her language always suits the occasion. She knows how women talk among themselves, and how they talk in the presence of men. She knows to how men talk on formal occasions, and she knows the language of young people. Her dialogue is therefore very lively and characteristic.<sup>4</sup>

In 1954, ten of Minazana's poems, 'Isidima', 'Abahlobo Abalungileyo', 'Sebenza Kusakhanya', 'Uthando', 'Ukuvuna', 'Ithemba', 'Umsindo', 'Impumelelo', 'Ubuhle Bendalo' and 'Ulonwabo' appeared in *Indyebo ka-Xhosa*, an anthology of Xhosa poetry edited by G. Soya Mama. 'Isidima' emphasised the importance of the dignity of the individual which is drawn from and reflected in the nation and its traditions. Minazana writes, 'We are a people of respect/ we are born of respect/ we thrive on respect'.<sup>5</sup> In the same year Minazana's poems, 'Ihlobo', 'Ithina' and 'Uphindumva Ihashe Lomdyaro' were published in J.J.R. Jolobe's collection of poetry entitled *Indyebo Yesihobe*.

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<sup>4</sup>A.C. Jordan, Unpublished review of *Kufundwa Ngamava*, provided by kind permission of Oxford University Press, Cape Town, South Africa, p.2.

<sup>5</sup>'Isidima', *Indyebo ka Xhosa*, ed. G. Soya-Mama, Johannesburg: APB, 1954, p.47. Translation of 'Isidima' by Mahlomola Ntoane.

In 1955, Minazana married Humphrey Daliwonga Siyotula. He was a teacher and a farmer. Minazana stopped working to look after the home and help with the farming. The couple had three sons and a daughter. Tragedy struck the family when the eldest son died in 1987 aged thirty. Their second son was shot dead in 1992 aged thirty one. Their daughter, Lindiwe Siyotula, is currently studying at the University of Fort Hare. Minazana started teaching again in 1967 when she took up a post at Ngcolokeni School. She was active in the promotion of educational opportunities for the children of Qumbu and in 1972 she established Luxolweni Primary School. This was followed in 1975 with the establishment of Mzingisi Junior Secondary School. Minazana's interests included composing songs for her pupils and involvement in the Girl Guides movement. She continued to write throughout her life although work and health problems sometimes made it difficult for her. She wrote two plays and a collection of short stories which she never submitted for publishing. Minazana died on the 6th of May, 1994.

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## **Fatima Royline Dike 1948 -**

Playwright, poet and short story writer. Fatima was born in Langa, Cape Town. She remembers her early childhood as secure and peaceful. Her mother, Annie Thunzie, loved gardening and going to movies. She worked as a maid for the white superintendent of police, Mr Rogers, who lived in Langa. Fatima recalls that Mr Rogers

used to come here for Christmas and bring her plants because she loves plants and she used to give him a leg of lamb. She continued to call the superintendent Master even after she had stopped working for him and she would worry about the man's children as if they were her own. It used to drive me up the wall and then one day I said to her, "Why do you keep calling him Master when you don't work for him any more?" She just turned around and said, "Shut up! Don't ask me questions about things you'll never understand". And it took me another twenty years to understand the relationship.<sup>1</sup>

Fatima's mother used to tell Fatima African folk tales and stories 'about ghosts, about growing up with her brothers because her father was rich and he had lots of cattle. Little favours that her father would do for her like allowing her to suck milk from the cow before she milked them'. Fatima's father, Daniel Dike, was a wardsman. 'He was a representative of the city council. [...] the go-between between the city council and the people of the township.' He loved sport, especially football and sang in a choir called the Fingo Choir. Fatima remembers with fondness that 'May 14 was Fingo Day. A day when all the people who fell under that tribe would go to the field here and celebrate and stories would be told about this war and that war and this clan and that clan and stuff like that and immediately after that generation of men

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Fatima Dike by Gaelle Mogwe, Cape Town, 16 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

passed on, that [tradition] died too'. Fatima's father died of cancer when she was seven years old.

Fatima began her primary education at the Methodist school 'across the street' which is now called Thembani. She then went to Moshesh Primary School where her subjects included Sesotho. In 1962 she attended St Anne's boarding school at Modimong where she was taught by Irish nuns. She began to read voraciously. 'I'd steal books out of the class room and take them into my dormitory and read them under my blankets with a torch [...]'. She read the English classics including Charles Dickens and Emily Brontë and recalls that 'being a child in Africa [it] was quite difficult to picture those places in England, you know, the marshes and stuff. It was quite a mind exercise. I really enjoyed *David Copperfield*. I just enjoyed everything I read'. She completed her Standard Nine at St Annes and went to Bafokeng High in the village of Phokeng where she obtained her Matriculation. Fatima was the only student from the Cape at the school and amidst taunts of 'lying Xhosa' quickly perfected her Setswana. She appreciated her English teacher's imaginative approach to creative writing and came top of her class in essay writing. 'We were all competing you see and the marks came out and it was a disaster and I got a D plus and everybody else in the class was E minus, F minus, G minus.[...] Everybody came up to me after the class so they could beat me to pulp and the teacher came and I was lying on the floor rolled up into a ball.'

After completing her secondary education, Fatima returned to Langa and worked in the family butchery and general store. In 1974 a seven-year-old girl from Guguletu was brutally raped by a migrant worker and her body stuffed into a rubbish bin behind some shops. Fatima was shocked by the incident and suddenly felt confined by her work in the family business. She



explains, 'from that moment I felt frustrated. I wanted to push the walls of those shops away, and burst out, because I had something to say to my people'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1975 Fatima left the family business to work as a stage manager at the Space Theatre, 'the first non-racial theatre in Cape Town'. She responded to the violence and oppression she saw in her society by writing. She began writing poetry in 1975 and her first play, *The Sacrifice of Kreli*, was written during the student uprisings of 1976. She describes the horror of her experience of police reactions to a student march in Langa on August 11th, 1976. The students had gathered at the Langa police station to ask why their friends had been arrested. Tear gas was fired into the crowd causing chaos. Fatima and her neighbours filled plastic bags with water to wash the student's eyes and called them to come into their houses. A boy came running towards them. Fatima recalls,

He went to the gate. I don't know what happened between him and this policeman but the policeman started chasing him. When he grabbed him, he just took his school jacket off and the policeman ended up with this school jacket in his hands and we were laughing. We were just standing there, just laughing at this whole thing. [...]and then again it was this policeman chasing this boy and this boy just took his shirt off and the policeman was left with the shirt and the boy was still laughing and he had nothing on except his grey flannels. The policeman didn't chase him. He just pulled out his gun and shot him through the head [...] he was running across the street with his head spilling in the air and his brains and then suddenly he stumbled and went weeh, kwa, kwa, kwa and just lay there and finally we just saw the last of the brains coming out and there was shock because nobody really expected that. There was complete silence, just dead silence and then suddenly as if everybody was keeping time we started to scream, men, women, children.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Gray, 'Fatima Dike - "The Pain of Being Black" : An Interview with Stephen Gray', *Contrast*, 45, (July 1978), 79.

It was after this that Fatima realised the extent to which the Nationalist Government would go to retain power and began to anticipate the extreme violence and associated perversion of values that was to ensue.

*The Sacrifice of Kreli* was performed by Sechaba at the Space Theatre in 1976 and published in 1978. The story takes place in 1885, seven years after the end of the Ninth Frontier War of Xhosa resistance against the British. The action centres on the Gcaleka people who were driven off their land during the war and are living in exile in the rocky climbs of a mountain on the Bashee River. Kreli, the king of the Gcaleka, is an old man and this is his last stand against the British. The Gcaleka form one of the last pockets of resistance to the British annexation of Eastern Cape land. Fatima decided to write the play around this historical moment after reading an interview with King Kreli that was published in 1890. She explains that she was prompted by the realisation that black people in South Africa 'had no past since whatever past we had as a nation was oral history - it was not written down; and it was wiped out by the history which the white people in South Africa had written [...]. I felt that if I had a past and a present, I could also have a future'.<sup>3</sup> She researched by reading newspapers and archives from the period, talking to traditional doctors and gathering the oral history from old people. The issues are historically relevant but they also relate to South Africa in the Seventies and the play can be seen as allegorical. Kreli's authority is threatened by the apparent hegemony of the colonial administration and by a lack of solidarity within his own ranks. Traditional relationships to the land and societal structures are being threatened and debased by the separation of men from women and children by external factors. The traditional economy is collapsing, the available land is infertile and there is starvation and so

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<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

the lure of new urban areas is becoming an attractive alternative to a life that is based on the land. Fatima wrote *The Sacrifice of Kreli* in Xhosa poetic verse and then literally translated it into English with the aim of preserving much of the Xhosa idiom, rhythms and declamatory style. She felt it was important to produce the play in English so as to reach as wide an audience as possible but says, 'my only sadness with the play was that in the Xhosa language there were so many beautiful things that I couldn't just take and put into English. They're not worth anything spoilt'.

Fatima's second play, *The First South African*, was staged at the Space Theatre in 1977 and published in 1979. It is based on a true story of a man whose mother was black and his biological father white. He was born with blond hair and blue eyes, grew up in Langa, spoke Xhosa fluently and was classified as Coloured. 'He was a man who looked like a white, who had the heart of a black and was a coloured. My question was: what is this man?'<sup>4</sup> At first it seems he may symbolise the ideal citizen of a future post-apartheid South Africa. But he fails to take any meaningful action in his life against the depressing realities of the social, class, colour and gender oppressions that characterise life in apartheid South Africa. He is a selfish opportunist who never really establishes a worthwhile identity but settles for the 'privilege' of being a 'boss boy' on a gang of convicts working on the railways. In the play Fatima gives prominence to the language mix that is often used in black urban speech. Her phrase, 'Hamba jou bloody fool', for example, includes Xhosa, Afrikaans and English.<sup>5</sup> Her play, *The Crafty Tortoise*, was performed in 1978. It is a satirical piece based very closely on Ekwefi's story in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where the naive birds get their reward and the tortoise

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>5</sup>*The First South African*, Johannesburg: Ravan Playscripts, No.4, 1979, p.24.

who tried to do them out of their birthright is brought to justice. The talking animals of oral tradition are used on stage in a parable that deals with pretension, failure to recognise individual potential, gullibility, and the politics of disempowered masses and oppressive minorities.

In 1978 Fatima won the Papillon Rising Star Arts Award. Her play, *The Glasshouse*, was performed at the Space Theatre in 1979 and that same year she attended the International Writers Programme in Iowa where she was awarded an Honorary Fellow in Writing and 'ended up staying for four years. Suddenly I was in a free, so called free society [...], I was beginning to see in other countries that people were human beings and I started getting angry and I didn't want to come back.' In 1980 she received the Chicago Kwaanza Award and acted in *The Glass House* at the theatre of St Peter's Church, New York. The play examines the relationship between a middle-class black woman and a rich white woman in South Africa. It portrays a meeting and clashing of cultures. Through the love-hate processes of an eventual friendship that forms between the two women, Fatima questions the idea of white helping black and celebrates the destruction of racial barriers. After two years in the United States she began to miss South Africa and in her writing she began to paint pictures of her home and community. 'May Fourteenth' was written during this period. It is a short piece which describes Fingo day in Langa when 'all the clans belonging to this Nation gathered over there in that yellow field to celebrate the seed of their forefathers which has survived this far. You see we are Amamfengu, the British called us Fingos.'

Fatima returned to South Africa in 1984. She published her short story, 'Township Games' in 1988 which tells of a gambler whose luck runs out when he kills a policeman. Her poem, 'Langa, My Love' was anthologised in *Siren Songs* in 1989. It depicts the warm, happy years of her childhood growing up in Langa. She has written another play called *So What's*

*New?* and is currently writing the sequel with the working title, 'Mercedes Benz'. She explains,

There's a girl called Mercedes. She's in *So What's New?* Her mum owns the shebeen and her dad always wanted a Mercedes Benz. He always thought he get one if he marries the daughter off. Then he will get the lobola but he never did. So finally he said, "I'll call you Mercedes Benz". So the daughter becomes his Mercedes Benz.

Fatima hopes this sequel will be the second in a trilogy of plays based on the lives of black women. She also hopes to start working in education theatre to encourage creative writing, reading and an understanding of history amongst both children and adults in the community. She admires the writing of Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou and would like to help her students appreciate 'the poetic things inside the language and of course the similarities between that black and this black'. She sees herself as a writer and not as a poet or a playwright because as she explains, 'we come from an oral tradition, stories melt into each other, into all those categories'. Fatima has one son, two daughters and a granddaughter.

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## Violet Dube ca.1910 - 199[?]

Short story writer. Violet was born in Newcastle, KwaZulu.<sup>1</sup> She trained as a school teacher at St Chad's College, Ladysmith and after gaining her teaching certificate, taught for some time in Natal. It was while she was at St Chad's that she met and became friends with novelist, Natalie Nxumalo, who sees her as one of the major influences and inspirations in her writing career. Violet moved to Johannesburg where she trained as a social worker at the Jan Hofmeyer School for Social Work. After qualifying she worked as a social worker in Johannesburg. She never married.

Violet's book, *Wozanazo: Izindaba zika Phoshozwayo*,<sup>2</sup> was published by Oxford University Press in the United Kingdom in 1935. It is a collection of short stories and is the first known published book by a black South African woman writing in Zulu. The collection is aimed at school children and structured as lessons that increase in difficulty as the book progresses. The stories, in both context and style, are largely based on oral storytelling traditions and African folk-lore. B.W. Vilakazi explains that,

The title of the book derives from the practice indulged in by listeners to folk-tales. As the narrator goes on with his story, he comes to a place where he must rest; but he is always careful to leave off where his hearers' minds are left in suspense, so they shout back to the narrator, 'Woza Nazo!' (Come along with them!) meaning that they are keen to hear the rest.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I was unable to ascertain the year that Violet Dube died. One of her acquaintances thought she died in 1992. Another believed she died in 1993. There is no record of her death in the register of births and deaths for Natal.

<sup>2</sup> Translates into English as 'Tell Us/Bring Forth: The Stories of Phoshozwayo'.

<sup>3</sup> B.W. Vilakazi, 'The Oral and Written Literature in Nguni', D.Litt. Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1946, p.328.

Through her use of traditional oral story lines, storytelling methods, ideophones, 'pithy phrases and apt epithets', Violet 'is not concerned with inventing new forms of literature, but with perfecting and building on the old; so that even the reader might find himself saying, "Woza Nazo" at the end of every chapter'.<sup>4</sup> She translates the oral into the written and as such is seen to make a successful and worthy contribution to 'permanent Nguni literature'. C.M. Doke states that 'all [the stories] are well told in choice Zulu and the book is a real contribution to the as-yet limited Zulu literature'.<sup>5</sup>

Violet's stories put voice to some of the complexities of the confrontation and fusion of African codes and Western cultural influences. The story, 'Nomvula', is based on a popular southern African oral tale of a young girl, Nomvula, who is left alone while her parents work in the fields. The girl is told not to open the door to anybody but her mother who returns regularly to give her food. There is an ogre who has noticed this situation and attempts to persuade Nomvula to open the door. He tries to imitate Nomvula's mother by singing 'Nomvula, my child! My child, Nomvula! Take the food and eat Nomvula, my child'. Nomvula is of course suspicious of the ogre's deep voice and refuses to open the door. The ogre rushes home in a fury and swallows some red-hot poker to change the pitch of his voice. He returns to Nomvula and this time his voice is like that of Nomvula's mother:

Before he had even finished saying: 'Nomvula, my child', the door flew open. As soon as it opened the ogre seized her and put her in his bag; he was so happy he was even choked by saliva saying: 'Today I caught a hare'.<sup>6</sup>

The story continues with the ogre eventually receiving his just deserts. Violet imbues the tale with her own imaginative trappings but it is the reason she gives for the departure of

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.330.

<sup>5</sup>C.M. Doke, Book Review, *Bantu Studies*, 9 (1935), 179.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted from an unpublished translation of *Wozanazo: Izindaba zika Phoshozwayo* by Doreen Nteta, Gaborone, p.12.



Nomvula's parents from the home that is perhaps the most distinctive feature of her rendering of the story. Violet begins the tale with a reference to the coming of white people,

Once upon a time there were people who had long hair like tassels on a mealie cob. They ate their meat with skewers. There was a big white house which could be seen from afar. There were other different things like bangles, iron and beads.<sup>7</sup>

Nomvula's family and community decide to move because of these new settlers. They try to convince Nomvula to accompany them but she refuses. The story ends with the moral 'if you do not listen, you will regret' which is directed at children who may refuse their parent's will but assumes a larger political significance in the context of the individual refusing the will and wisdom of a community and tradition in struggle against the influences of colonialism.

Violet advocates the education of African women in 'Thokozile' and 'Cockroaches' but while accepting Christianity is careful not to belittle her Zulu traditions. In 'The Sea' Nkheli tells her wide-eyed brother of her trip to 'Thekwini [Durban] with the white people' she works for. She describes her wondrous experience with the sea where they were carried away by dolphins which 'rode fast through the water until suddenly, we were thrown back onto the beach', the rug that the white employer gave her to wrap her wet body in and the strange food she was given to eat - 'dry steamed bread which gets stuck'<sup>8</sup> in her throat. Violet's writing is characterised by wry humour which is mainly to be found in her descriptions, choice of dialogue and the antics of the trickster, Phoshozwayo, the protagonist of most of the stories in the collection. Phoshozwayo is a quick-witted genius. When his elder brother, Qakala, steals the two horses left to Phoshozwayo by his father, and plans to kill him, Phoshozwayo retaliates by setting his brother against the police of a local town and convincing him to drown himself in a deep pool. As Qakala rolls into the water, Phoshozwayo sings, 'Go well. At last

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<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.11.

I shall be able to sleep. I have been scared all the time like a buck. The one who tries to stab me, stabs himself'.<sup>9</sup> He then continues by singing his own praises. The name Phoshozwayo translates into English as 'the talkative one' which is how Natalie Nxumalo fondly describes Violet Dube. She recalls that Violet was 'very talkative' and that 'she was Phoshozwayo, Violet, oh, she was Phoshozwayo'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Translation of *Wozanazo*, p.17.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Natalie Nxumalo by Gaele Mogwe, Emhlabulweni, Natal, 22 August, 1994.

## Bessie (Amelia) Head 1937-86

Novelist, short story and essay writer. Bessie was born in Pietermaritzburg in the 'mental' hospital where her mother, Bessie Amelia Emery (née Birch), was confined until her death in 1943. Bessie believed the reason for her 'peculiar birthplace' was that her mother was white and had acquired her from a black man. Bessie writes, 'She was judged insane, and committed to the mental hospital while pregnant [...]. I consider it the only honour South African officials ever did me - naming me after this unknown, lovely and unpredictable woman'.<sup>1</sup> After the death of her son, an unhappy marriage and eventual divorce, Bessie's mother had begun to suffer from mental instability. She was first admitted to Pretoria mental hospital in 1933 where she was described as "simple and childish" with "no insight into her surroundings".<sup>2</sup> She was discharged and re-admitted on a number of occasions until on the 16th of May, 1937, she was admitted, heavily pregnant with Bessie, to Fort Napier Mental Institution in Pietermaritzburg. Bessie told the story that her mother came from a racehorse-owning family but there is no evidence that supports her claim that the Birch family owned race horses.<sup>3</sup> She writes, 'No details were ever available about my father beyond the fact that he worked in the family stables'.<sup>4</sup>

Taken from her mother at birth, Bessie was put into foster care. 'They initially handed me over to a white family [...]. After a week they returned me [...]. In my birth certificate I am registered as being white. My race classification is white.'<sup>5</sup> Bessie was then fostered out to a 'Coloured' woman called Nellie Heathcote 'who was very poor and illiterate. My love of books and reading was a main source of conflict between she and I'.<sup>6</sup> In 1950 the decision

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<sup>1</sup>Preface, 'Witchcraft', *Ms*, 4 (November 1975), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Stead Eilersen, *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*, London: James Currey, Cape Town: David Philip, 1995, p.6.

<sup>3</sup>See *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*, p.26.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Mackenzie, ed., *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1990, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, The Jean Marquard Papers, A1849/C9, 12, 4, William Cullen Library Archives, University of Witwatersrand, p.7.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.13.

was made to transfer Bessie to St Monica's Home, an Anglican mission school for Coloured girls, in Durban. 'Having for a while attempted to provide schooling and training for young coloured girls of "good" (white) background, it reverted in about 1911 to catering for orphan children or social outcasts. Black mothers, the victims of white male abuse, would often bring children there.'<sup>7</sup> Bessie was initially traumatised by the move and writes, 'I loved my foster mother and my removal from her was one of the major crises in my life.'<sup>8</sup> After some time Bessie began to settle down and concentrate on her school work. She loved reading and "ran through the whole library" and afterwards fed on Plato and anything she asked for out of private libraries because she "had become 'Teacher's Pet' and remained persistently top of the class".<sup>9</sup> It was here that she received a solid grounding in the 'old British writers like Dickens and Hardy' and began to show an interest in writing.<sup>10</sup> In 1951, a short essay by Bessie entitled 'The Stepping Stones of Truth' was published in a small magazine produced by the Goodwill Council. The story is about a boy called Peter who is always telling lies. 'They punish him but that was of no help', for he continues his 'wicked' deeds, eventually stealing money from his father. Peter then has a dream. He tries to cross a river by stepping on stones but they hurt his feet. A beautiful woman dressed in 'purest white' appears and explains that these were the stepping stones of truth and that he must help himself before it is too late. Peter wakes and rushes to confess the theft to his father. The story concludes, 'We must help others by Love, just as his guardian angel helped Peter. Punishment only seems to make us worse'.<sup>11</sup> Bessie's experiences with the harsh religious discipline of the school and its guiding principle of 'spare the rod and spoil the child' led her to state, 'for years and years after that I harboured a terrible and blind hatred for missionaries and the Christianity which they represented, and once I left the mission I never set foot in a Christian church again'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*, p.20.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, p.13.

<sup>9</sup>*Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*, pp. 25-26, citing D. Barber, 'A Vessel of Optimism', *Tribune*, 26, 2, (1971), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, p.4.

<sup>11</sup>'The Stepping Stones of Truth', *Goodwill*, 1951, p.101 as cited in *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*, p.23.

<sup>12</sup>*A Woman Alone*, p.4.

In 1952 Bessie was placed into the custody of St. Monica's Home. It was at this time that she learnt some of the truth regarding her origins. She was taken to the Durban magistrate's court where she learnt that, 'my real mother was a white woman, not the Coloured foster-mother I'd grown up with'.<sup>13</sup> While living at St. Monica's, Bessie attended Umbilo Road High School where she passed her Junior Certificate Examination. She discovered the M.L. Sultan Library which had been donated to the Indian community of Durban by a wealthy merchant and was open to anybody interested in reading, unlike the Durban Municipal Library which was reserved for whites only. Bessie spent many hours in the library reading and was particularly drawn to the large sections of books devoted to Hinduism. She continued her studies in teacher training and in 1956 left St. Monica's Home to take up a teaching appointment at Clairwood Coloured School.

Bessie worked as a primary school teacher from 1956 to 1958. She also became intensely involved in the study of Hindu pantheist concepts and the idea of the sanctity of the common man. She felt that her concentration on Hinduism and the experience of teaching brought on a period of 'mental disturbance'. 'I was sure and still feel that teaching is not for me. Perhaps I just imagined that it was driving me out of my mind but I thought so at the time.'<sup>14</sup> She decided to go to Cape Town and search for a job as a reporter. The day after her arrival she went to see the editor of the *Golden City Post*, Denis Kiley and was taken on as a freelance reporter for a three-month trial period. In April, 1959, she decided to move to Johannesburg to work on *Home Post*, a weekend supplement to the *Golden City Post*. She was given the 'Dear Gang' column aimed at young readers and an advice column called 'Hiya Teenagers'. During this period Bessie met other, more established *Golden City Post* and *Drum* journalists such as Juby Mayet who had written the 'Dear Gang' column prior to Bessie's arrival, Can Themba and Lewis Nkosi. She joined the Pan-Africanist Congress and met Robert Sobukwe whom she greatly admired. In 1960 Bessie suffered from severe

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<sup>13</sup>D. Barber, 'A Vessel of Optimism', *Tribune*, 26, 2 (1971), 108.

<sup>14</sup>*Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*, p.35, citing Bessie Head File, 10.9.1958, St Monica's Home, Brighton Beach, Natal.

depression and it appears she tried to commit suicide. She writes, 'I one morning swallowed 50 sleeping tablets and was forcefully brought back to life; by doctors'.<sup>15</sup> After a period in hospital, Bessie left Johannesburg for Cape Town and resumed her job at the *Golden City Post*. After two months she resigned from the paper due to continuing depression and an inability to concentrate on her work. Looking back on the time she spent with the *Golden City Post* she says that it was a 'valuable period' in her life where she gained what she saw as basic writing skills and 'a love of writing'.<sup>16</sup> In 1962 she married Howard Head and in the same year her first poem, 'Things I Don't Like' appeared in *The New African*. It is an angry poem against racism and its dehumanising effect on the individual:

They took all I got,  
Even dignity.  
Then they threw something at my feet  
And I looked down. It was me.  
My labour. My heart. My life.  
Shattered; and I was no more.<sup>17</sup>

In 1964, after the break-up of her marriage, Bessie took her son, Howard, and left South Africa on an exit permit for Serowe, Botswana. The exit permit allowed citizens to leave but did not allow them to return. 'The reason I was given an exit permit instead of a passport is that I contributed to the magazine, *The New African*'.<sup>18</sup> Once in Serowe, she took up a teaching post at the Tshekedi Memorial School. In 1966 her essay, 'The Woman From America', was published in *The New Statesman* and the novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* was commissioned by Simon and Schuster and published in 1968. Bessie describes this novel as her 'most amateur effort' but explains that her protagonist, Makhaya, was of value to her in

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<sup>15</sup>Khama Memorial Museum 74, Bessie Head Papers 27.8.71.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, p.8.

<sup>17</sup>'Things I Don't Like', *The New African*, 1 (July 1962), 10.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, p.11.

that he represented hope. With Botswana facing its first general election for independence she writes,

I think only a South African-born black person could fully appreciate the situation. [...]. It meant that here, all the people could vote for a government of their own choice, which would presumably care for their interests and welfare. Black people will never vote for a government of their own choice in South Africa. So Makhaya's entry into Botswana, as a refugee, was like sending a message back to his own home; this is what we really ought to have.<sup>19</sup>

Makhaya is seen as an ideal man who treats women as his equals. He joins forces with a strong local woman and a British agricultural expert to fight drought and the encroaching desert with an innovative food scheme. The novel draws on Bessie's experience of the demoralising conditions of refugee life in Botswana in the late Sixties and her contact with Namibian, Zimbabwean and South African refugees, mainly men. She problematises the power struggles and hierarchy of liberation groups. 'I have a sort of bitter ha, ha, ha behind everything I say. I knew some time ago that I am a useless kind of person in any liberation movement or revolution; I can't stand them or the people who organise them.'<sup>20</sup>

In 1967 Bessie began to suffer from 'waking nightmares' and depression. *Maru* was written 'right in hell'. After its publication in April, 1971, she had a severe mental breakdown and was hospitalised in Lobatse Psychiatric Hospital, 'the loony bin', for three months. *Maru* focuses on a school teacher, Margaret Cadmore, who is despised because of her 'Basarwa' origins. Bessie 'longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice' and at the same time a novel that was beautiful and magical.<sup>21</sup> She was amazed to find the 'language of racial hatred', that she had thought was exclusive to whites, also existed in Botswana amongst black people. She writes of *Maru*, that 'nothing prevented me from slipping into the skin of a

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<sup>19</sup>'Some Notes on Novel Writing', *New Classic*, 5 (1978), 31-32.

<sup>20</sup>Preface to 'Witchcraft', *Ms*, 4 (November 1975), 72.

<sup>21</sup>*A Woman Alone*, p.68.

Mosarwa person'.<sup>22</sup> The novel begins to break down dominant definitions of normality. The psychic, supernatural, mythical and psychoanalytical merge to prepare the way for her third novel, *A Question of Power*, which was published in 1973. Bessie describes this novel as her 'only true autobiographical work'. It is written on two levels, 'the everyday level involves a development project' and the second level, 'a spiritual journey inwards into the soul, with three soul characters, who are really disembodied persons, the concentration is on arguments of power, good and evil.'<sup>23</sup> Through the mental anguish of her protagonist, Bessie describes the horror of mental breakdown and the search for identity in a complicated and blurred maze of good and evil, black and white, men and women, present and past, South Africa and Botswana. Written in a state of 'high alarm', *A Question of Power* presents complex, fluid 'characters' in an attempt to go beyond the limitations of stereotypes and social constructions of identity.<sup>24</sup> *Serowe: Village of the Rainwind*, commissioned by Penguin in 1972 and eventually published by Heinemann in 1981, is an historical portrait of Serowe composed of local histories and personal interviews with villagers. The themes inform some of her short stories in *The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tales*, published in 1977, where Bessie extends her narrative technique to include features of oral storytelling. Her last novel, *A Bewitched Crossroad*, published in 1984, seeks to present a written history of the Bamangwato, focusing on the achievements of Sebina and Khama the Great. Bessie writes of Khama the Great,

He was like Lincoln in every way - he handled language in the same, Bible-inspired way...Khama brought his people into the modern era. He said just as loud a NO! to Rhodes. Rhodes could have made Botswana another South Africa. He went to England and got

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<sup>22</sup>*ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, p.17.

<sup>24</sup>*ibid.*



British public opinion on his side! Khama saved Botswana from what happened in South Africa. I'm in love with that man!<sup>25</sup>

After her first application was refused in 1977, Bessie was granted Botswana citizenship in 1979. She died of hepatitis in hospital in Serowe in 1986. Bessie was a prolific letter writer and published many essays, short stories and pieces that defy easy classification into genre. Collections of her writing have been posthumously published. *Tales of Tenderness and Power*, a collection of short stories and essays, was published in 1989 and *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* was published in 1990. *A Gesture of Belonging: Letters from Bessie Head, 1965-1979*, a collection of letters to her friend, Randolph Vigne, was published in 1991. It provides a touching perspective to the complexities of her life. *The Cardinals*, published in 1993, contains a novella of the same name and some shorter pieces of writing. The novella was written while Bessie was in Cape Town in the early Sixties and is believed to be the first long piece of fiction she produced. It deals with the painful, destructive effects of Apartheid legislation, specifically the Immorality Act, on the individual psyche. The two main characters, Johnny and Miriam, nicknamed Mouse, are struggling against racism, sexism and various other odds. They fall in love but the past, with a sad story of love across the racial divide, reveals to the reader that their relationship is incestuous. They are father and daughter. The story is seen to reflect the circumstances of Bessie's birth and the torment she felt as never knowing who her father was. 'I feel that with a situation like we have in South Africa, that there must be a lot of people who have tragic artificial barriers set up between the races, people being people are going to try to break through.'<sup>26</sup>

Bessie's writing is characterised by a concern for ordinary people, disapproval of the misuse of power and an attempt to 'deflect people's attention into offering to each other what they offer

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<sup>25</sup>Betty McGinnis Fradkin, 'Conversations with Bessie'. *World Literature in English*, 17, 2 (1978), 432.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with Bessie Head by Jean Marquard, p.6.

to an Unseen Being in the sky. When people are holy to each other, war will end, human suffering will end'.<sup>27</sup>

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## Noni (Helen Nontando) Jabavu 1919 -

Autobiographer. Noni was born at Fort Hare in the Cape Province. Her mother, Florence Tandsiwa Makiwane, was a teacher by profession and taught at Lovedale College before she married Noni's father, Davidson John Tengo Jabavu, who became Professor of African Languages and Latin at Fort Hare University in 1916. Noni explains that she grew up within an extended family of :

people linked by professions, business, blood, and for many of them Lovedale was the *alma mater*, the cradle where they had shared a social and political background inherited from earlier generations of Bokwes, Jabavus, Makiwanes and others.<sup>1</sup>

Noni remembers that her paternal grandparents had a 'country house at Breidback - 12 miles out of King William's Town'. Their town house was 7 Alexandra Road, King William's Town where her grandfather, John Tengo Jabavu, was 'within easy walking distance of his office as owner/editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*...the first ever excursion into journalism by South African "natives"'.<sup>2</sup> She recalls that all her 'uncles became writers or journalists; all were 6' 4" or 6' 5" in height, my grandmother 5' 10". They were keen horse riders (she side-saddle of course). Olive Schreiner scolded her for having so many babies and predicted her early death. My grandmother replied, "I accept what will be will be!"<sup>3</sup> Noni never knew her maternal

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<sup>1</sup>*The Ochre People*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982, pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup>Notes by Noni Jabavu in 'Noni Jabavu SAII', File 3, The Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

grandmother, E. Bokwe, who died before she was born. Her maternal grandfather was the Reverend Elijah Makiwane, a Presbyterian minister.

Noni remembers her childhood as secure and comfortable. Her parents put 'education first and foremost [...]. Musicianship, authorship was the order of the day. As for *reading!* Shelves upon shelves of books everywhere in the house, [...] *Farmers Weekly, School Girl's Own, Arthur Mee's Children's magazine pull-outs!*'.<sup>4</sup> She describes the house they lived in on the campus at Fort Hare:

It stands on the bank of the river, by the bridge, a large bungalow with a pillared verandah. I saw our old garden; the lawns and herbaceous borders my mother had established; the jacaranda tree we had tended, our youthful duty to cover them on winter nights with hoods made of sacking as protection from the frost. She had had a hard tennis court dug out, levelled and rolled. [...]. My mother's lawns stretched down almost to the Tyumie River. I remembered that she had concentrated on the problem of which grass to plant - studying the qualities claimed for Kikuyu or Paspalum and other species. And I saw that a dark green carpet of periwinkle still covered the wild jungly part beneath the willows outside the fence. We were strictly forbidden to go into it and used to hop about fearfully because it was infested with snakes, and if we got bitten our disobedience would be found out.<sup>5</sup>

Noni attended Lovedale Missionary Institution until in 1933, at the age of thirteen, she was sent to the Quaker school for girls, The Mount, in York, England. She occasionally returned to South Africa for holidays over the following six years but the sea journeys took six weeks there and back and she regrets that just as she was renewing friendships with her age-mates, she was 'packed off overseas again'. After completing her secondary education at

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<sup>4</sup>Author's Preface, *The Ochre People*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.27.

The Mount, she attended the Royal Academy of Music in London. When Noni was twenty, her studies were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. She recalls, 'I was unable to finish my training in music (I was military call-up age)'. During the war she worked as a semi-skilled engineer and oxyacetylene welder, making bomber parts in a British aircraft factory. It was not possible for her to return to South Africa to see her family and friends at all during this period and after the war she found she 'got caught up in "other things" - as happened to my contemporaries - such as getting married and all that that leads to, raising a family and so on'.<sup>6</sup> Noni married Michael Cadberry Crosfield, an English film director. She took up freelance journalism and broadcasting, and also became an assistant lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She then began working as a film technician and, with her husband, travelled extensively through Southern, Eastern and Central Africa. In 1952 Noni paid a brief visit to her relatives in South Africa and in 1953 she was invited to Geneva to present her testimony to the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa. She describes 'what it feels like for an African like myself to live under the conditions which the Government's segregation policy forces on us' and draws from her personal experiences and the experiences of her relatives to detail the inequalities in education, employment, the ownership of land and political representation, and the suffering and loss of dignity caused by migrant labour, pass laws and official treatment of black people.<sup>7</sup> She tells of the constant humiliation of black people by white officials at train stations and in hospitals citing the case of her mother:

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<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, Author's Preface to the 1982 Edition.

<sup>7</sup>'Testimony given by Mrs. Michael Crosfield to the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa', delivered at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, August 5th, 1953, p.1. Copy held in 'Noni Jabavu SAI' File 3. The Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York.

There is also this curious custom whereby African patients are not referred to by their full names, only by their first names. On the day my mother died in hospital two years ago, the sister of the ward telephoned to our house and said to the African woman who was working for us and who answered the telephone: 'Florence is not so well to-day'. Our maid could make nothing of this message as she did not know my mother's name was Florence - she knew her as Mrs Jabavu. Owing to the delays caused by this confusion, none of us were able to get to my mother's bedside before she died. [...]. My mother had been entered at the hospital in her married name, Mrs. Florence Jabavu, wife of Professor Jabavu of Middledrift, Cape Province. But the white sisters and doctors, in order to show their white superiority, simply called her Florence. Even in sickness and death African people can be humiliated and stripped of dignity.<sup>8</sup>

Noni's only brother, Tengo Max Jabavu, was shot dead by thugs in Johannesburg. He was twenty- six and studying at the University of Witwatersrand. Noni returned to South Africa in 1954 to attend his funeral. Noni found that she also had to deal with the problem of her father's loneliness and his wish to marry again. She writes that at first she felt 'startled and jealous at the thought of my mother's place being usurped, even though at the same time I fully recognised the need and approved of my father's marrying again'.<sup>9</sup> She attended the marriage ceremony in Alice and then began a journey through Johannesburg, Rhodesia in the Central African Federation, and Kenya to Uganda where she visited her sister. She then flew to Italy to meet her husband and convince him of the need to live in Uganda to be near her sister. Months later they went to live and work in Uganda. In 1955 Noni again returned to South Africa to be with her family. She spent time at her father's home in Middledrift, travelled to Confluence Farm, the home of her maternal relatives at the junction of the two

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<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>9</sup>*Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts*, London: John Murray, 1960, p.32.

rivers, Tsitsa and Nxu in Pondoland, and then on to visit her mother's eldest sister in Johannesburg.

In 1956, Noni published an article in *Concord* magazine entitled 'A Black Girl's Travels in Search of Africa'. She compares East and Central Africa to Southern Africa and celebrates what she sees as the positive aspects of Western influence on 'Southerners'. She writes, 'In Southern Africa, the industrial revolution brought by European settlers is transforming our country. It has brought diversity, interests to our mental life, is dispelling our boredom'. Her view of East Africa is, in contrast, that 'life is more crushingly boring to brain, soul and body' than in even the most remote area of Southern Africa. In East Africa 'human beings make pathetic attempts at pastimes, resort to degrading, transient, meaningless affrays pivoting on sex, beer-drinks, fights'.<sup>10</sup> She adds,

I've seen, dramatically, that we Federation and Union Africans have a priceless link: we feel ourselves committed to westernisation in our part of Africa. We are converted! [...] to industrialisation...to reliable transport and communication systems...to high standards in machinery and building...to efficient production of foodstuffs be they maize and prime beef or boiled sweets and chocolate. Whereas in East Africa, I found no such total acceptance of westernisation, nor of the fact that European settlers bring higher standards from which Africans can profitably learn.<sup>11</sup>

In 1960, Noni's book, *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts*, was published. It is an autobiographical account of her return to South Africa for her brother's funeral, her father's second marriage, her initial journey to Uganda, her experience of living in Uganda and her

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<sup>10</sup>'A Black Girl's Travels in Search of Africa', *Concord*, October 1956, 13.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*



return to South Africa. It is similar in tone to her article in *Concord* but offers a more detailed comparison of the impact of 'westernisation' on East and Southern Africa. She writes, 'I belong to two worlds with two loyalties; South Africa where I was born and England where I was educated'.<sup>12</sup> These loyalties are evident as she focuses on the problems in her sister's marriage to a Ugandan man, and contrasts what she views as the alien and primitive sexual mores of the Baganda to favourable recollections of the Christian influences and Xhosa mores she experienced in her early years in South Africa.

Noni's second book, *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life*, was published in 1963. It gives an autobiographical account of her return to South Africa in 1955 and her travels to Confluence Farm and Johannesburg. She describes her family and cultural history in vivid detail paying particular attention to the importance of her mother's eldest sister, Aunt Daisy, who tells her the life stories of many of the women in the family. She contrasts the often poor but idyllic life of rural South Africa to the harshness of urban life where she sees people struggling to retain their dignity and sense of community. She also refers to her personal struggle to accept her father's second wife who seems to function symbolically as the barrier between Noni and her father, between her past and her present, and between her divided and sometimes conflicting cultural loyalties. Noni demonstrates a pride in the Xhosa language focusing on rhetoric. She weaves Xhosa words and expressions into the English text which is perhaps, for the time it was published, a bold move, considering English readers

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<sup>12</sup> Author's Note, *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts*, p.ix.

often found the presence of 'so much native language'<sup>13</sup> a distraction making a work difficult to read. In the first edition she explains to her Xhosa-speaking readers that:

The present Orthography of the language came into general use after I had learnt its predecessor and I have never become reconciled to it. I dislike the appearance of symbols like 'th' for aspirated 't'; marks for tone pitch; double vowels in plural noun-prefixes, verb tenses, demonstratives, ideophones, and so on. This is the reason why, where I have written out a Xhosa sentence, my spelling is erratic. I am among those who, '*eating with the old-fashioned spoon*', believe that for languages so 'dominantly vocalic in character' as Professor G.P. Lestrade described the group to which Xhosa belongs, nothing short of a new script should be devised. The roman is not suitable, and will always make for troublesome - and ugly - reading or writing.<sup>14</sup>

She also asks forgiveness of her English readers for having occasionally,

inflected a word according to Xhosa rules in trying to convey a non-English thought. When my publishers' reader pointed out that it was an invented construction, I decided to risk letting it remain because it seemed to me that the 'new' word came closer to the meaning I hoped to render than the one which would have been grammatically correct.<sup>15</sup>

The first South African edition of *The Ochre People* was published by Ravan Press in 1982. It includes a long preface where Noni pays tribute to the younger generation and laments her many years of absence from South Africa and her distance from the political growth that is embodied in the activism of the youth. She writes, 'I hope that in reading this book which one

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<sup>13</sup>Comments by Hugh A.C. Maude written in his copy of *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts* donated to the Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York Library.

<sup>14</sup>Author's Note, *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life*, London: John Murray, 1963.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*

of your “grandmothers” wrote long ago and far away, you will see how vastly you have progressed and brought us forward from the views we beheld when we were your age in those times long-gone’.<sup>16</sup> Noni now lives in Zimbabwe.

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### **Article**

‘A Black Girl’s Travels in Search of Africa’, *Concord*, October 1956, 13-14 and 18

### **Extract**

From *The Ochre People* in *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the Present*, ed. Margaret Busby, London: Jonathan Cape, 1992

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<sup>16</sup> Author’s Preface, *The Ochre People*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982.

## **Laetitia [Lettie] Kakaza 1883 - 1977**

Novelist and hymn writer. Laetitia was born and grew up in the East Cape. She was the second of five sisters and two brothers. Her mother, formerly Miss Mjodi, looked after the home and the children. Laetitia's father, Gana Kakaza, was a minister for the Wesleyan Church. The family lived at Healdtown, Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth where Rev. Kakaza was appointed to attend his ministry. Laetitia began her primary education in Grahamstown and passed her Standard Four at the age of ten in Port Elizabeth. Her parents could not afford to pay for further education and she then stayed at home and helped her mother with the housework. She was later sent to Ayliff for teacher training and went on to Healdtown where after three years of study she obtained her teacher's training certificate. It was at this time that Laetitia's brother, Masiza Kakaza, who had been in the United States for six years, arranged for Laetitia to join him. She left for the United States in August 1902. Upon her arrival she was admitted to Fisk University, Nashville Tennessee and worked part-time and during holiday periods to help support herself. It appears that she enjoyed music and was influenced by African-American spirituals and folk songs during her studies at Fisk. After having obtained her B.A. Degree, she returned to South Africa in 1909.

On her return to South Africa, Laetitia decided to live with her parents in Fort Malan in the Transkei so that she could care for her mother who was very ill. She found life in the rural area lacked stimulation and felt a keen sense of isolation. She began writing and produced what are seen as the first novels by a Xhosa woman writer. The first, *Intyatyambo Yomzi* (Flower of the Homestead), was published in 1913 and her second, *uTandiwe wakwa Gcaleka*

(Tandiwe of the Gcaleka) was published in 1914.<sup>1</sup> Both novels focus on the education of women, stressing the importance of formal, western-style education.

In *uTandiwe wakwa Gcaleka* tells the story of Tandiwe, the female protagonist, who leads an exemplary Christian existence. She has set her mind upon going to school and her parents who always 'sought to live in harmony, where the name of the Lord was respected', allow her to go to boarding school.<sup>2</sup> Due to financial problems they later force her to return home before she is able to complete her education. Although she is able to obtain a job as a teacher, she resents not having been able to complete her teacher training and the story ends with a letter from Tandiwe to her friend, where she says, 'I now have a son. I am determined to educate him. My not finishing my education is a sore point with me'.<sup>3</sup>

Laetitia provides positive descriptions of Xhosa rural life in terms of the geographical setting of the story and by giving examples of funeral and marriage traditions, respect for parents and the importance of cattle to the society but she does not place obvious emphasis on the promotion of Xhosa history and traditional values. A review published in *Imvo Zabantsundu* in 1914 states, 'The writer has succeeded in bringing out the atmosphere of Bantu life in its modern conception'<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps one of the most prominent statements of changing viewpoints are those expressed by Laetitia concerning the subject of marriage. She successfully builds

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<sup>1</sup>B.E.N. Mahlasela attributes the novel, *U-Gcinashe*, to Laetitia Kakaza. See *A General Survey of Xhosa Literature from its Early Beginnings in the 1800s to the Present*, Working Paper No.2, Department of African Languages, Rhodes University, 1973, p.11. It appears from notes provided by Geoff Opland that *U-Gcinashe*, a book for girls, is founded upon the tale of 'Susan Grey' and written in Xhosa by Miss M.A. Stanford, whose adopted the Xhosa name Mtakamfi. It is believed to have been written in about 1867/8 and first published by the Wesleyan Mission Press at Mount Coke in 1870.

<sup>2</sup> *uTandiwe wakwa Gcaleka*, Cape Town: Methodist Book Room, 1914, translated from Xhosa to English by Nontobeko Mofokeng and Mbuyiseli Deliwe, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>4</sup> 'U Tandiwe wakwa Gcaleka', *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 22 December 1914, p.5.

tension as she describes Tandiwe's reactions to various suitors and her final choice of a marriage partner. In one instance she receives a letter from the son of her landlady. He writes that his mother finds her a great help in the home. She throws the letter to the ground asking,

Does he think I'm obsessed with marriage?[...] It seems that he has no idea about marriage. He wants to marry me so that I can work in his home and then he can go back to the Rand, leaving his wife in the home like a servant, a house-slave.<sup>5</sup>

The novel goes on to describe the ideal wife when Tandiwe receives a letter from her friend, Jane, who writes,

People say when one is married there is no relaxation, it's only trouble and pressures. I don't find that so. I am happy. Of course there are problems but we cooperate. People forget that a wife should not be vexed by little things. She must be a person who seeks happiness. She must know how to treat her husband. She must give him his due respect as the head of the family. In difficult times and when things don't go well she must show sympathy.<sup>6</sup>

Tandiwe answers, 'Indeed a wife must have a wide knowledge so that she may be happy with her husband. Miss Benson is now overseas. She sent me two books which are very helpful to young women. The titles are *Women and Marriage* by Dr. M. Stephens and *Women and Labour* by Miss O. Schreiner'.<sup>7</sup> Although there are strains of didacticism, Laetitia's occasional use of narratorial intervention and epistolary form does not detract from the novel.

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<sup>5</sup> uTandiwe wakwa Gcaleka, *ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp.35-36.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.36.

She writes with humour. Her characterisation is convincing and she demonstrates a clear understanding of a young Xhosa woman's experiences of Christian boarding school during the early 1900s.

After the death of her mother, Laetitia went to work at Lamplough College in Butterworth where she met and married Rev. R. V. Kwatsha. They carried out their first pastoral work in the Tyhume-Middledrift District and were later transferred to the East London and King Williamstown Districts. Laetitia was known to have written hymns for the church and dedicated a great deal of her time to church administration and to attending church conventions. She died after a long illness and was buried on her husband's family farm in Phumla.

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## **Farida Karodia 1942 -**

Short story writer, novelist. Farida was born in Aliwal North. 'My mother's mother was living there in Aliwal North and so that's how I was born in Aliwal North because that's where my mother went when she was pregnant, to her mother, but my home was actually in Sterkstroom.'<sup>1</sup> Farida's mother, Rosemary Petersen, was a teacher. She later gave up teaching to become a shopkeeper and helped run the family business with Farida's father in Sterkstroom. 'My father was from India. I never really got to know him well because he was much older than my mother and he died in 1966.' Farida was the only child of her parents' marriage and remembers her early childhood as 'very solitary' but comfortable. She recalls that they were 'the only Asian family' in Sterkstroom which was a predominantly Afrikaaner town. 'This was typical of small towns in those days. You'd have an Asian trader right in the middle of the town cut off from the white community.' Farida's mother did make some friends with women in the town and families living in the 'location' who used to visit on occasions but Farida spent most of her spare time reading Mills and Boon, Nancy Drew and Westerns that were sold in the family store. She also loved listening to soap operas on the radio and programmes like 'Lux Radio Theatre' and the 'Creaking Door'. 'For me that was entertainment. That was all we had. There was a local movie theatre, a local bi-scope but we weren't allowed inside.' She attended a 'two-roomed Coloured school' in the township where she was taught Afrikaans. At home she spoke English.

When Farida was about nine years old it was decided that she should attend school in Pretoria and live with her grandmother who had moved from Aliwal North. Her grandmother was poor and quite strict and Farida found it difficult to adjust to the discipline and 'having to do without'. She now regrets that she did not stay with her grandmother for a longer period of time. 'She was a very strong woman. [...] My grandfather died at a very early age and so my

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Farida Karodia by Gaelle Mogwe, London, 14 August 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.



mother and my grandmother raised four children. I missed out on knowing her.' Farida completed her primary school in East London where she lived with relatives and family friends. As her father was Muslim and her mother was Christian, Farida grew up with both Islam and Christianity. In East London she remembers participating in her primary school Christmas pageants as one of the shepherds and also attending classes at the mosque to learn to read the Koran. She went to high school in East London where she matriculated. Her most vivid memories of her secondary education are associated with English poetry. She hated poetry which was taught the last period on a Friday with the teacher 'droning on and on' and feels angry that she was never taught to appreciate the crafting of verse, especially rhythm.

After completing high school, Farida attended Coronationville Teacher Training College in Johannesburg where she graduated in 1961. She then taught English, Social Studies and Domestic Science for three years at Coronationville High School. Bantu education had come into effect and the separation of Indian and Coloured education was in progress. Although Farida enjoyed teaching and particularly liked her students, she was affected by the changes taking place. She explains,

What was happening was that education was being watered down. What they were preparing was a very inferior education and we could see the writing on the wall. They were eliminating some subjects, changing the curriculum and all of these things had an impact on me. I didn't want to teach and because of a variety of personal things going on in my life as well I decided to leave.

In 1965, after the failure of her short marriage, Farida went to Zambia leaving her two-month-old daughter in South Africa with her mother. She was employed by the Zambian government to establish a domestic science department and teach at Maramba school in Livingston. She was later seconded to Hillcrest Secondary High School where she taught Domestic Science. Farida had only been in Zambia for a short time when the South African

government withdrew her passport and she became a stateless person. In 1966 her father died and she was unable to return to South Africa to support her mother and attend the funeral. The experience still evokes feelings of guilt within her and she feels 'very bitter' about the way the apartheid system has affected her life and left her with deep emotional scars. Some months after the funeral, Farida's mother travelled to Zambia in order to take Farida's daughter, Anesia, to her. She then moved to Swaziland where she established a trading post and Farida was able to visit her. Farida describes her mother as a very strong, bright and articulate woman. She says, 'my mother is in her early Eighties but a very active woman. She loves dancing and she loves gardening [...] and I admire her greatly'.

In 1969 Farida emigrated with her daughter to Canada. She first lived in Calgary where she recalls that her first encounters with racial discrimination in Canada came about when she was hunting for an apartment and a job. She found it difficult to find a teaching position and decided to study for a degree in education which she completed in 1974. She took odd jobs to support herself and wrote her first short story. She explains that up until then she had 'always thought writing was for white people. We always read white writers. We saw things from a white perspective. You come out with all these peculiar ideas when you're trapped in this South African mind set. [...] It was only when I left South Africa that I realised, oh, is this what is available out there?'. The story tells of a black child who is born into a white family and neighbourhood. To avoid embarrassment and social stigma the child is given away to a black family. Farida felt that the story would make a good radio play and took the script to the local CBC office. CBC accepted the script and it was broadcast. Farida felt the average Canadian knew very little about life in South Africa and she continued writing radio plays with a South African perspective. She wrote a radio play about male chauvinism and male/female relationships which was set in the Canadian Mid-West and then stopped writing for a while.

Farida applied for a teaching position in British Columbia and was offered a post at a secondary school in the small town of Golden. She taught there for three years and then decided to move back to Calgary to do postgraduate studies. In 1980 she completed her first

novel, *Daughters of the Twilight*. She sent the manuscript to various publishers and it was rejected. 'Every time you have a rejection, it's not only your work that's rejected, you also feel really inadequate. I wrote and rewrote and rewrote.' The novel was eventually published by The Women's Press in 1989. It tells the story of two sisters who grow up in Sterkstroom where their parents run a small general store. The mother is Coloured and the father is Indian. Both daughters are classified Indian. The eldest girl, Yasmin, is sent to a prestigious private school for Coloured and Indian girls where she learns the elite and White world of horse-riding and 'coming out' balls. The youngest girl, Meena's education presents a problem for the family. Her grandmother whispers 'the best thing to do, [...], is to have you reclassified Coloured so that you can attend the Coloured school'<sup>2</sup>. Meena and her mother travel to Johannesburg where they manage to obtain the reclassification without the father's knowledge. Farida describes the family's struggle and the attempts of the two sisters to survive the brutality of dispossession, the destruction of moral codes, identity and female dignity under the harsh conditions of a society founded on racism.

In 1981 Farida went to South Africa but found little had changed. *Coming Home and Other Stories*, Farida's second book, a collection of short stories, was published in 1988. The stories delineate the alienation and dislocation of individual lives in South Africa's fractured society from different race, class and gender perspectives. 'Coming Home' is based on Farida's own experiences. Set on a Boland wine farm, it presents a deeply personal response to changing relationships and estrangement. 'The Necklace' focuses despairingly on the broken, drunken, Burns Mpangela, who is unemployed and unable to provide for his family. 'The World According to Mrs Angela Ramsbotham' is set in a newly independent African state. It describes the Ramsbotham's house with its high stone walls topped by rows of barbed wire, swimming pool and expansive green lawns. Mrs Ramsbotham is locked into a racist, colonial mentality and obsessed with status and material goods. In 1993, Farida's third book, *A Shattering of Silence*, was published. The novel is about Faith, the eight-year-old

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<sup>2</sup>*Daughters of the Twilight*, London: The Women's Press, 1986, p.72.

daughter of Canadian missionaries. She witnesses a massacre in her village in remote Northern Mozambique and manages to escape but not without the loss of her parents, her identity and her ability to speak. Farida explains that she wanted to write about the atrocities going on in the Mozambique war, about Canadian missionaries 'who come to do good and are killed in the process', about the children who are left orphans and traumatised by the war and about the bravery and resourcefulness of 'women [who] are involved as revolutionaries'. *Against an African Sky*, published in 1995, is Farida's latest collection of short stories. The collection looks at how South Africans have coped with the political changes now taking place. Farida feels the stories also reflect some of the very personal transitions going on in her life.

In 1989 Farida went to India with the hope of finding her father's relatives. 'I couldn't speak Gujarati which is something I regret but anyway I located them and I met the family and it was wonderful.' In 1991 she returned to India where she wrote the script and participated in the production of the film, *Midnight Embers*. The film focuses on the relationship between a retired British actress, who decides to stay in India after independence, and her male servant. 'It's a spiritual relationship but she has all these psychological, racial, cultural barriers. They are more or less the same age and she finds him sexually attractive but of course never admits to this.' The male servant is devoted to the woman and looks after her when she is ill. When she dies he takes her to the top of a mountain and cremates her in the Hindu tradition, transcending the barriers that bound them as mistress and servant, coloniser and colonised. Farida has also written a film script for *Daughters of the Twilight*. She sees the film as a 'totally different story' explaining that she added to the plot and was able to bring in dramatic elements that do not exist in the original novel. She is now working on the sequel to *Daughters of the Twilight* where she continues Jasmine's life-story. The working title for the sequel is 'Never Say Goodbye' which is the nearest Farida could come to an Afrikaans expression which cautions 'when you're drinking from the fountain, don't say you will never come back'. Farida moved back to South Africa in 1995 and is living in Johannesburg. She feels that her writing is undergoing a transition which reflects the end of a long preoccupation

with the pain of growing up in apartheid South Africa and that she is now free to explore new themes. She hopes to work more with film.

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## **Baleka (Mmakota) Kgositsile [also published as Dee September] 1949 -**

Baleka was born in Clermont, Durban, the second of eight children. Her mother, Mary Mabitsela was a nurse and her father, Theophilus Mbete, worked initially as a Bantu Affairs official. Baleka spent her early childhood with her grandmother in the Northern Transvaal. She returned to live with her parents in Durban and continue her primary school education. Baleka grew up with a piano in the home and began composing songs and writing poetry at an early age. In 1958 the family moved from Durban as Baleka's father was appointed as a librarian at the University of Fort Hare. The political atmosphere at the University of Fort Hare had a strong effect on Baleka. Many subsequent leadership figures in the African National Congress were students or lecturers at the university. She went to school at Lovedale until in the early 1960's with the crackdown on university campus political activity, her father, a member of the South African Communist Party, lost his post as librarian. Baleka was sent to boarding school in Butterworth. She gained her matriculation at Inanda Seminary in 1967. She then moved to Durban where she worked at various jobs for three years. In 1970 she obtained a teacher trainee study loan and enrolled at Eshowe Training College. She was only there for a few months when she was expelled for challenging college authorities. She enrolled at Lovedale Teacher Training College and obtained her teaching diploma in 1973.

Baleka took up her first teaching post at Isibonelo High School in KwaMashu township, Durban. She joined the KwaMashu Youth Organisation, an affiliate of the National Youth Organisation, an organisation with strong Black Consciousness sympathies and contact with ANC underground structures. She began meeting her students after school to discuss political issues with them and her activities raised the interest of the security police. Following the

arrest of her brother and another NYO member, Baleka decided to leave Isibonelo. She enrolled for a secretarial course but the security police detained her the day she was due to start her classes. A few days later she received a note from her brother advising her to leave the country. On the 10th of April, 1976 she left South Africa, crossing into Swaziland with the assistance of the ANC underground. By that time Baleka had two very young children who she was forced to leave behind and which caused her great pain in her early years of exile. She worked for the ANC and by November 1976 had also obtained a teaching post in Mbabane. One year later she left for Tanzania where she worked for the ANC's Radio Freedom as an announcer. In 1978 she married Keorapetse William Kgositsile, the South African poet, who was at that time lecturing at the University of Nairobi. Baleka continued to work with the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity and following the establishment of ANC's women's section in 1978, she became the first secretary of the regional women's committee in Tanzania. Her poem, 'Struggle: Our Dance and Rhythm' was published in *Sechaba* in 1979 while she was still in Tanzania. In 1980 her children joined her and they moved to Kenya to be with Keorapetse Kgositsile in 1981.

Following the attempted coup in Kenya, Baleka moved to Botswana in 1983. She was a member, and became head of Medu Arts Ensemble, a Botswana-based group of exiled South African artists and writers who hosted the 1982 Conference on Culture and Resistance in Gaborone. In the early hours of June 14, 1985, South African soldiers raided Gaborone and effectively smashed any possibility of the group's continued activity by brutally murdering some of its members, including the artist, Thami Mnyele. The raids continued and South African exiles lived under constant threat. In 1986 Baleka and her family, which now included five children, moved to Zimbabwe. Here she joined the ANC's Zimbabwe regional women's committee and regional political committee. In 1987 she moved to Zambia where

she worked at the headquarters of the ANC's women's section in Lusaka and was elected to the section's executive committee. In the same year her poem, 'Refugee Mother', was published in *Staffrider* under the name of Dee September. It tells of some of the conflict and anguish suffered by a woman who is both political activist and mother. She is a woman who:

forgets her name - forgets the clock  
the scorching sun - the long dusty road  
and remembers only that she is Mother  
with a vacant mealie bowl in hand  
and a swollen belly of sadness  
in a desert of dark grieving.<sup>1</sup>

Although she must feel the pain of not being able to give adequately as a mother, she also gains strength in the realisation that in her struggle for freedom and peace, she is Mother/ to the many children of hope/ for the children of a new age/ creating history from her hidden tears'.<sup>2</sup> Baleka's family joined her in Lusaka in 1988. She was by then serving as secretary to the ANC's women's section. In 1989 Baleka's short story, 'In the Night' and a poem called 'Lindelwa' were published in *Rixaka*. In the same year her short story, 'Still Born' was published in *One Never Knows: An Anthology of Black South African Women Writers in Exile*. It is a story about an English girl, Myra, who meets and marries John, a white man from Cape Town. She enjoys the luxury of her life in South Africa but she is childless which distresses her. She begins to feel suspicious of her husband and believes he is sleeping with 'the maid', Susan. One night she hides in Susan's room to trap her husband but it is another man who comes into the room. She recognises him as Adam, the flower-seller. She

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<sup>1</sup>'Refugee Mother', *Staffrider*, 6, 4 (1987), 25.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*



surrenders 'herself to the flower-seller' and subsequently finds herself pregnant. 'The months that followed were months of trepidation, fear and uncertainty. Adam, the father of her child, was black. Her child would be black. A stigma, a shame she would never be able to face nor live down in her adopted society'.<sup>3</sup> On the pretext of ill health she goes to a retreat to have her child. As soon as she sees the colour of her healthy baby she sends a telegram to her husband 'Darling John, Our son stillborn. Love Myra'.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1989 Baleka participated in the Victoria Falls Conference on South African literature arranged by the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) and the ANC. She addressed issues relating to women writers emphasising the point that women writers do have a significant role to play which is different to the role of male writers. She believes that:

In society the role that they [women] have tended to play, the role that they have played historically, the conditions that they have been relegated to are such that their experience is unique and part of that is that their voice has not been heard [...]. We want them to say what their experience is and therefore in proposing a future, to actually say what is going to change the position of women and the roles that they have been playing over the years, over the centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Baleka returned to South Africa in June, 1990 as a member of the interim leadership corps and task force for the women's section. The ANC's Women's League was officially relaunched in August, 1990 and at its first national conference in 1991, Baleka was elected to the post of

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<sup>3</sup>'Still Born', *One Never Knows: An Anthology of Black South African Women Writers in Exile*, ed. Lindiwe Mabuza, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1989, p.15.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>5</sup>'Discussion: Women Writers' in *Crossing Borders: Writers Meet the ANC*, eds. Ampie Coetzee and James Polley, Bramley: Taurus, 1990, p.143.

Secretary General. She also served in an *ex officio* capacity on the ANC's National Executive Committee and National Working Committee. She was a member of the ANC negotiating delegation during the multiparty talks at the World Trade Centre where she fought hard for women to be represented on all delegations to the talks and ultimately won the right to have a quota of positions filled by women in the future government. She is known as one of a group of exiles who actively promoted feminist ideas among South African women and has always struggled for gender equality within the ANC and the new government. She describes herself as a feminist who:

focuses on issues which are central not only to middle class women but to all women, especially the historically disadvantaged African women. More than 50 percent of the population feel they can't express themselves freely because they are women. They continue to be abused, raped, battered etc.<sup>6</sup>

She asks, 'How then can people argue that we should not have feminism?' and restates her belief that the emancipation of women is an integral part of national liberation.<sup>7</sup> That 'it's not only an integral part, but a precondition'.<sup>8</sup>

A collection of Baleka's poetry entitled 'After the Rains' was published in *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry* in 1992. There are twenty two poems that tell of the South African struggle of liberation from the painful perspective of personal experience. Her poems express suffering, love, tenderness and hope. 'Where is Home' demonstrates the dislocation caused by exile and by the lack in South Africa of the basic human rights

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<sup>6</sup>'Yes! I am a Feminist!' by Glenda Daniels, *Speak*, 41, (July 1992), 12.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>See Baleka Kgositsile's contribution to the discussion on 'Women Writers in South Africa' in *Crossing Borders: Writers Meet the ANC*, pp.119-139.

associated with a claim to home. The narrator has returned to her home country and asks,

where is home  
Is it the hotel room  
which hosts  
this grand occasion [...]  
which delivers to me  
the first sleep  
inside my country  
after 5148 nights  
away from home<sup>9</sup>

She asks if home is 'the cluster/ of mud structures/ which surround/ my father's ageing body/  
and lonely heart'.<sup>10</sup> Her hope is that home should be 'an unfolding dawn/ ushering in the  
new day/ where my daughter/ will be seen and/ judged as a person'.<sup>11</sup> In 'Teach Me the  
Song', the narrator asks the mothers of her forefathers to teach her the names of trees and  
birds, to teach her the song that will allow her to sing when her heart is bursting 'with rays of  
the sun/ filtering through/ the humming leaves and branches' and prevent her tongue from  
shrivelling into the dark corner of her head.<sup>12</sup> She searches for the tune and the lyrics that will  
spray her heart into the air so the particles will 'rain down/ on the earth into/ a loveprint'.<sup>13</sup>  
She was a member of the Southern African Arts Trust Fund and is a member of COSAW.

Baleka is an African National Congress MP and serves on the Constitutional Affairs  
Committee and the Land Affairs Committee. She is Media Liaison Officer for the ANC

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<sup>9</sup>'Where is Home', *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry*, ed. Andries Walter Oliphant, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1992, p.37.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>12</sup>'Teach Me the Song', *ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, p.54.

Department of Arts and Culture. She is known as a politician who can make her voice heard, not only in committees but on the floor in Parliament.

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## Deela [Dilaram] Khan 1954 -

Poet and short story writer. Deela was born in Elsies River, Cape Town. Her mother, Shabira Parker, is a housewife and worked for some years in the family cafe. Deela's father, Achmed Khan, worked for some time as an insurance agent. Suffering from chronic bronchitis and asthma, he was forced to leave his job and eventually opened a cafe. Deela says, 'My father was a very, very soft type of person and too generous. He was a spiritual person. He was in fact a faith healer. He was a person very deeply steeped in Sufism'.<sup>1</sup> Deela grew up in the Rylands Estate, which she describes as 'one of the so called Indian townships in the Western Cape'. Her mother was a strict Muslim and Deela recalls how she resented 'having religion forced down our throats'. She searched for alternatives and eventually became an agnostic believing that 'there is some life force and something probably higher' but she is unable 'to actually identify with any institutionalised religion'. Deela feels that as a child she was 'very abused' by her mother. She explains,

She beat me up a lot but that was because of her own struggle. We were actually going through our own mess because my father was out of work many times. My mother was just a housewife, her education levels were just about Standard Four[...]. She used to beat us up for each little thing...probably because of her frustration, displacing her anger at my father or whatever because she had come from a family that was quite well off. She had to fight, claw, tooth and nail to actually keep the family together.

Deela attended Habiba Primary School in Rylands from 1960 to 1966 where as 'a very lonely child' she began 'scribbling stories'. She feels that her love of writing and story telling can be attributed largely to her father's influence. 'He found it important to tell us stories about what happened in the place where he lived in India; about the seers and sages, the liberation

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Deela Khan by Gael Mogwe, Cape Town, 15 August 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

movement with Gandhi and so forth.' Following her father's death, Deela, at the age of thirteen, was taken out of school by her mother to help support the family and work in the cafe. Ten years later in 1976 she decided to put herself through high school. She continued to work in the shop and attended night classes at Alexander Sinton Senior School. She matriculated in 1980 and was awarded a bursary to attend the University of Cape Town. She describes how she found

that somehow the stuff I'd learnt at school just didn't help me at all. I was in this mess where I had to sit in lectures and felt that my lecturers were speaking far too fast. I couldn't keep up with the tones and rhythms of what these people were saying. Couldn't take notes effectively. It made me read voraciously. One didn't see any black women's writing and so forth [...]. I didn't finish at UCT. I dropped out and then went to work as a travel clerk.

Deela later studied English and Psychology part-time by correspondence with UNISA. In 1986 she published the poem, 'Diurnal Black', which refers to the violence of the Eighties, 'shot-shattered dreams', 'blood-gurgling graves', 'grief-gashed mourners' and asks,

Am I part of this race of destroyers  
Am I human....  
I refuse to share the guilt.  
Am I part of this society [...] this inhuman human society?  
Yes I am.  
No-no I'm not.<sup>2</sup>

In 1988 she completed her degree at the University of Western Cape and went on in 1991 to obtain her BA Honours in English. It was when she was doing her Honours year that she discovered Toni Morrison, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Bessie Head. She feels angry that 'as far

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<sup>2</sup>'Diurnal Black', *Upstream*, (1986), p.5.

as the other black women writers, I mean African black women writers are concerned, they just didn't exist in the syllabi'. Deela worked part-time as a student assistant at the University of Western Cape while she was studying. After her degree she found it difficult to obtain work. She was supported by her sister and typed student assignments and work-sheets for teachers to earn an income while she continued writing poetry and short stories. In 1989 she wrote and published , 'Man of Letters' in memory of Richard Rive. 'Psychotherapy', published in 1992, examines the relationship between a psychotherapist and client from the client's perspective. 'So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age', published in the same year, asks, 'What Gods preserve you Analyst/as you storm through/private lives'.<sup>3</sup> Her poem, 'Ghazal on Universal Dislocation' is influenced by the nineteenth-century Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, who wrote using the Ghazal form. Deela experiments with this form and the 'continuity and unity flow from the associations and images playing back and forth among the couplets comprising the Ghazal'.<sup>4</sup> Deela was runner-up in the Nadine Gordimer Short Story Award in 1992 and co-winner of Thinker Review's International Chapbook Contest for a selection of her poetry entitled *So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age*. She is an active member of the Congress of South African Writers. In September 1994 she left for the United States to take up an award to study creative writing at the New York University Graduate School of Arts and Science.

Deela reads at public meetings but wouldn't describe her poetry as performance poetry because 'it's not oral poetry but then again I write where a person can actually hear the voice coming through [...]. It's poetry that you read aloud. It's not actually meant for the page.' She sees herself as writing against or in-between the traditional labels that categorise South

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<sup>3</sup>'So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age', *Staffrider*, 10, 2 (1992), 68.

<sup>4</sup>Notes by Deela Khan on her poem, 'Ghazal on Universal Dislocation', *Staffrider*, 10, 2 (1992), 69.

African poetry. This is demonstrated in a selection of her poetry entitled, 'Liquid Borders' published in *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry*. She says that although she has been writing for a long time,

I still am not really acknowledged as a poet that is part of the mainstream. But then again I don't really want to be part of the mainstream because it's far better writing from the periphery and saying the thing how you want to say it even if your texts then jar with the mainstream text [...]. I don't write like a Soweto poet so I can't be put into black Sowetan poetry or black poetry per se. I don't write in the type of genre where it's a white clique [...]. One doesn't want to be defined as this or that. A person is essentially ever eclectic and there is always exchange like a quilt with all the blocks of writing being weaved and interlinking and closing into each other - instead of seeing us in these little pigeon holes where you're either there or there.

Deela speaks Afrikaans at home but the language she learnt at school was English. Her inclination is to write in English. 'I can write in Afrikaans as well. [but] the Afrikaans we speak at home is almost like a dialect of the language and when it comes to writing that I find it's most problematic.' However, she would like to write in an English and Afrikaans that is more reflective of the spoken realities of her community and to defy the expectations of the Standard. She feels that publishers don't see her as someone who is writing against the grain but as someone that 'hasn't somehow assimilated the register of the white mainstream...is trying and failing'.

Deela's collection of poetry, *So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age*, like most of her previous work, is characterised by a deep sense of the psychological pain of oppression and abuse. Much of her writing is 'semi-autobiographical' based on her experiences and the experiences of those close to her. Her poem, 'Black Monday', describes how 'Death swept through our roads in



lorry-loads/ The shots of shame skulked in crates'.<sup>5</sup> It is based on her sister's experience of the 'Trojan Horse' killings at Belgravia Road school. The police, who came to the school hidden behind boxes and crates on the back of a lorry, opened fire on the students and killed one of the children Deela's sister taught. Deela sees herself as a poet and has only recently started writing short stories. Her short story, 'Reading the Flames', is written in Afrikaans and is about Bergie - 'destitute people sitting on the lawns [...] begging for food and drinking methylated spirits'. It focuses on a woman Bergie's life story of abuse. 'She was raped as a child...ill treated...ended up being a domestic and in the end just being so completely messed around.' 'Woman in a Hail Storm' is based on the experiences of Ntombintombi Mabika, a Mozambican writer who left Mozambique because of atrocities committed against her sister. 'Apparently they had taken one of her sisters into the bush and when her sister came back, the sister couldn't speak any longer and one of her arms had been cut off and...the comrades had made a whore out of her.' Deela's story, 'The Troubled Child', describes an incident from Deela's childhood which she had suppressed for many years:

I walked up these steps this bottle broke and my mummy had warned me that this was the only money she had and if I'm going to break the milk then she was going to beat me up. She actually banged my head against the wall and my Granny came to the rescue....I wrote this story but when I'd finished the story I started crying because what I tried to do was actually show how a lot of the prisons that we have....probably if a person did have just a measure of love and stability at home she would come out much more integrated.

Deela places emphasis on the personal in both her poetry and stories, often using imagery from her dreams. She feels it is 'important that a person listens to the voice of herself by listening to dreams and so forth and getting all this Western shit out [...]. I feel that far too many people

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<sup>5</sup>'Black Monday', *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry*, ed. Andries Walter Oliphant, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1992, p.286.

have said that if a person delves into working with herself and into dreams that it is elitist. I feel that the time has come [to] look at that term elitist.'

Deela's full name, Dilaram, 'is supposed to mean peaceful heart'. She feels that being a poet means her 'peace is forever somewhere else and forever shifting'.

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## **Ellen (Kate Cholofelo Nnoseng Motlalepule Mokoena) Kuzwayo 1914 -**

Autobiographer and short story writer. Ellen was born on the farm of her maternal grandparents in Thaba Patchoa in the district of Thaba'Nchu, the Orange Free State. She was the only child of Phillip Serasengwe and Emmas Mutsi Merafe (nee Makgothi). She explains her many names stating that Ellen and Kate were given to her for religious reasons. 'They are the names that you had to have when you became a Christian. If I came with my other names I'd be told we want your Christian name and then of course I suppose our dear parents and grandparents were brainwashed and they thought well we must give them other names to make them real Christians.'<sup>1</sup> Motlalepule - the child who arrives with rain - was given to her because 'the day I was born it must have been really pouring'<sup>2</sup> and rain is seen as a good omen. Cholofelo means hope and was a name favoured by her mother. Nnoseng 'is my father's paternal aunt's name'<sup>3</sup>, meaning literally give me a drink of water and Mokoena is a clan name for 'the crocodile people'.<sup>4</sup> Ellen remembers her maternal grandmother, Segogoane, as a strict but lovable person. Her grandfather, Jeremiah Makoloi, was active in the political life of his community. He was Secretary of the Native National Congress (later the ANC), worked as a court interpreter and became a local preacher for the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Both grandparents died within three months of each other in 1920.

Ellen's mother and father divorced and in 1921 when Ellen was about seven years old, her mother married Abel Phogane Tsimatsima. Ellen remembers him as 'a very gentle person, yet

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<sup>1</sup>Video interview, 'Ellen Kuzwayo with Hilda Bernstein', *Writers in Conversation*, London: ICA Video, [n.d.].  
<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Call Me Woman*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, p.55.

<sup>4</sup>Video Interview, 'Ellen Kuzwayo with Hilda Bernstein', *ibid.*

alert, sensitive and calm at all times. He always called my mother Chum. I never saw him agitated for any reason in the 17 years I lived with him, when he took the role of father of the family'.<sup>5</sup> She recalls his love of reading and some of the periodicals he enjoyed including *The Friend*, *The South African Outlook*, *The Farmers Weekly*, *The Government Gazette* and *The Homestead*. He always 'marked out what he saw as important and actively encouraged me to read and try to understand the gist of some of the articles'.<sup>6</sup> Ellen began her schooling in a church that served as a classroom which was close to the homestead. She was well schooled in the 'three R's', Bible classes and catechism lessons. Her mother paid particular attention to instructing Ellen in simple household chores 'such as sweeping and cleaning a room thoroughly, or making and serving tea correctly and on time', personal hygiene and the importance of 'correct conduct in public in speech and manners'.<sup>7</sup> She remembers her childhood on the farm with her grandparents, parents and younger sister, Maria Dikeledi, as a happy time, 'full of the warmth and security of traditional country life'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1927, after completing her Standard Four, Ellen went to Thaba'Nchu to continue her education at St Paul's Higher Primary School. She lived with her mother's youngest sister, 'Aunt Blanche'. Two years later Ellen's mother arranged for her to attend boarding school at St Francis College, Marianhill in Natal. Ellen's mother died in 1930. This was an event she found very traumatic. Aunt Blanche and her step-father married two years later. Ellen passed her teacher's preliminary examination at St Francis College and in 1932 decided to attend Adams College in Amanzimtoti to continue her teaching training. She graduated as a

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<sup>5</sup>*Call Me Woman*, p.66.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.75.

lower primary school teacher in 1933 and then continued her studies for a further two years to qualify as a higher primary school teacher. She explains that this was 'the highest grade that could be attained by blacks at teacher training college'.<sup>9</sup> Ellen felt a need to study in greater depth the subjects she was expected to teach. She attended Lovedale College in 1936 but once there her 'eagerness to study waned' and she discontinued her studies. She took a short trip to Johannesburg to visit her biological father and his new family for the first time. She then took up a teaching post at Inanda Seminary in 1937. After six months she became ill and left Inanda to return to the family farm where she spent four months recovering. Early in 1938 Ellen began teaching at St Paul's Higher Primary School in Thaba'Nchu. She tells of what was to follow:

It was halfway through 1938, when I was teaching in Thaba'Nchu, that my Aunt's attitude seemed to change drastically. She became aggressive and resentful. Even then, I did not take this as directed personally at me. One summer day I was going about my household chores. It could have been a Saturday or during the school holidays, or it could have been in the afternoon after school. [...] She looked straight at me and said something to this effect: 'There is no home for you any more here. You should go and look for your father and your people in Johannesburg. You must go now or as soon as possible. I don't want to see the sight of you any more here.'<sup>10</sup>

Ellen went to live with her father in Pimville, Soweto, where she got to know her paternal relatives and grew to love her father and admire his community involvement and his role in civic leadership. She did not, however, feel settled living in her father's home and wrote to her maternal aunt, Elizabeth Tlhapane, in Heilbron for assistance. Her uncle found her a

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<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, pp.104-105.

teaching position in Heilbron where she moved in January, 1939. Two years later, at the end of 1940 she accepted a teaching post at Phokeng and in 1941 she married Ernest Moloto with whom she has two sons. Her marriage was an unhappy one and in 1947 she left her husband and children and went to stay with her father in Pimville. She found a teaching position at the Law Palmer Higher Primary School and became involved in youth work in Pimville and Orlando. She then became active in the youth section of the ANC. 'I worked very closely with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, as well as Peter Mila and Herbert Ramokgopa'.<sup>11</sup> Ellen auditioned for and won the part of a skokian queen in the film of Alan Paton's novel, *Cry the Beloved Country*. She was engaged in the filming on and off from 1949 to 1951. 'The film absorbed me completely - physically, intellectually and emotionally.'<sup>12</sup>

In 1950 Ellen married Godfrey Kuzwayo and 'was blessed with the birth of a son, Godfrey Ndabezitha Kuzwayo. This gave me three sons in all'.<sup>13</sup> She became increasingly involved in community affairs and registered with Jan Hofmeyer School of Social Work where she graduated in 1955. From 1956 to 1963 she worked as an organiser of youth work with the Southern African Association of Youth Clubs in the Vaal complex and Johannesburg areas. In 1963 she was employed by the Transvaal region of the World Affiliated Young Women's Christian Association as programme director of the Dube Centre. She later became general secretary of the Transvaal Region YWCA. In May 1976 she returned to study for a higher qualification in social work at the University of Witwatersrand. During the 1976 unrest in Soweto, she was chosen to become the only woman member of the 'Committee of Ten' which was to review the role of the Urban Bantu Council and Soweto local authority in the

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<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>12</sup>*ibid.*, p.143.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, p.145.

community. In October 1977, aged sixty-three, Ellen was detained without trial in Johannesburg Fort for five months under Section 10 of the Terrorism Act on unspecified charges. She explains that:

Section 10 means being put away in prison, cut off from your family, friends, neighbourhood, community, work and worship; it means denial of all your freedom of movement and , to some extent, your freedom of speech.<sup>14</sup>

In 1979 Ellen agreed to give her services on a voluntary basis as a consultant to the Soweto Women's Self-Help Coordinating Council later called the Zamani Soweto Sisters Council, an umbrella body of Soweto women's self-help groups. In 1979 she became chairwoman of the Maggie Magaba Trust, she was founding member and the first treasurer of A Re Godiseng Chelete Basadi (let us invest money women) and in 1984 she was elected first president of the Black Consumer Union of South Africa.

Ellen began to write when she was in her sixties. She says,

It took me long to have confidence to write. I didn't believe I could do it. Of course, one other thing was the fact that I needed money. I considered, 'If I leave my job how am I going to live?' Those were the two major problems that I faced, obstacles that were in me, that kept saying, 'Ellen you can't do it'. Then when I finished my dissertation at the university I said, 'Lord, if I can do this I think I can write a book'.<sup>15</sup>

Her first book, *Call Me Woman*, an autobiography, was published in 1985. It took her three and a half years to write and weaves a personal narrative with the experiences and history of

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<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, p.202.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Ellen Kuzwayo by Adeola James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, ed. Adeola James, London: James Currey; Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990, p.56.



her community. She describes forced removal as she lived it when the family farm of one hundred years was wrenched from them 'as recently as 1974. In that year, without any thought for human feeling, the authorities [...] [with] a stroke of the pen made it illegal for black people to own land in that area; white farmers were to take over'.<sup>16</sup> Her understanding of Black Consciousness is seen through her son's involvement with the South African Student's Organisation and the University Christian Movement, and his subsequent banning to Mafikeng. Black Consciousness is documented through her experience of the 1976 student uprisings in Soweto and concern for the youth in her community. Ellen sees the book as a 'celebration of the women' who have made tremendous contributions to their communities in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> She writes about women such as Mary Susan Xakana, Frieda Matthews, Charlotte Maxeke, Minah Soga and Winnie Mandela whose lives have had a powerful influence over her. She recognises the suffering of the black South African women amongst whom she lives and works and attempts to present strong role models to her readers. 'Some women have a tendency to allow a bad marriage to destroy them, [...] I try in this book to role model the importance of surviving.' She says,

I was not writing an autobiography. I was writing about the plight of the black woman in South Africa and I thought the best way I could present it was through my eyes, through my experiences, through my contacts, through my working together with these women.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>*Call Me Woman*, p.56.

<sup>17</sup>*In Their Own Voices*, p.53.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Ellen Kuzwayo by Cheryl-Ann Michael, Soweto, 25 August 1993.

*Call Me Woman* won the prestigious CNA award in 1986: a first for a black South African writer. Ellen's second book, *Sit Down and Listen: Stories from South Africa*, was published in 1990. It is a collection of sketches which document stories from her youth and later life. There are 'stories of women with more than one husband and men with more than one wife. [...] stories, stretching back to the earliest years of this century'.<sup>19</sup> She draws largely from her experiences of traditional storytelling when during her childhood 'one used to sit round the fire in the evening in the country on that farm' and tell stories.<sup>20</sup> She found this second book was much easier to write compared to her first book. 'I don't think it ever needed any special editing.'<sup>21</sup> Ellen was involved in the production of two films. *Awake from Mourning* is about women beginning to awaken from the 1976 uprisings and the beginnings of the self-help movement. *Tsiamelolo: A Place of Goodness* deals with the forced removal of her family from their farm.

Ellen is critical of 'Western feminists' who she believes,

have imposed their views on others [...]. The Western women seemed to think we African women allow ourselves to be doormats to our men. Western women failed to understand that African women will deal with the problems they face in their own way'. She feels, however, that 'the issues discussed are no longer dictated by Western feminists. We should not associate the word "feminist" with Western feminism. It is a good word, whether it is applied in Africa, Asia or Europe. I consider feminists to be women who recognise they are oppressed as women and who are prepared to

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<sup>19</sup>*Sit Down and Listen*, London: The Women's Press, 1990, p.ix.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Ellen Kuzwayo by Cheryl-Ann Michael.

<sup>21</sup>*ibid.*

fight for basic rights, privileges and choices which women should have in a society.<sup>22</sup>

In her community work Ellen tries to rise above party politics. She says that she has been a member of a political organisation for generations but that she recognises that people have different political beliefs. 'We should not be divided by these differences. In my work in the community I never force my political views on anyone. We must work together as a community and be tolerant of each other.'<sup>23</sup> She is currently working on her third book.

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<sup>22</sup>Ellen Kuzwayo', *Speak*, 42 (August 1992), 6.

<sup>23</sup>*ibid.*, p.7.

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## **Lindiwe Mabuza 1938 -**

Lindiwe was born in Newcastle, Natal. Her maternal grandmother played an important part in her childhood. 'She was really the grandest lady I know [...] because I saw her cry, I saw her laugh, I saw her taking into her poor shanty young people who were stranded and needed an education.'<sup>1</sup> Lindiwe remembers her grandmother as a very sensitive and kind person, who was fond of using expressions like - 'You don't throw away a person'. She was the first person to talk to Lindiwe about racism:

When I was walking to town one day I saw these white kids walking into a house. I didn't know what it was. I asked her, 'What's this house?' She said, 'Ah, it's a swimming place'. We ourselves were swimming in a creek, a dangerous creek, a muddy creek. I asked, 'Can I also go in?' And she took my hand and said, 'You can't'. And I said, 'But why?' and she said, 'Because of apartheid .... It's ugly'. She infused me with the sense of justice, injustice and pride.<sup>2</sup>

Lindiwe also recalls that she had some wonderful teachers, especially at high school, who taught the students to have pride in their history and culture. She was particularly impressed by her History and Zulu Literature teacher. 'He inspired all of us not to be satisfied with passing high school but to go on to college. He was the one to propose college to us because we had no other counsellors as people have now.'<sup>3</sup>

Lindiwe went to Roma University in Lesotho and gained her Bachelor of Arts Degree. She

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Lindiwe Mabuza', by Patricia D. Norland, *Like a House on Fire: Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography from South Africa*, ed. Johannesburg: The COSAW Women's Collective, 1994, p.203.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, pp.203-204.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p.204.

went on to study for her Master's Degree in English at Stanford University and in 1968 gained a Master's Degree in American Studies at the University of Minnesota. Lindiwe liked Irish drama, especially the work of George Bernard Shaw, and rejected Shakespeare because she felt he dealt with 'kings and all that funny stuff from Britain, and didn't relate to ordinary people'.<sup>4</sup> Although she knew of Black South African writers who wrote 'in the vernacular', Lindiwe points out that she never studied a single Black writer in all her years of education. 'I was a pure product of colonial education with a Eurocentric bias all the way.'<sup>5</sup>

In 1968, while at the University of Minnesota, Lindiwe taught Black Literature. She brought to her teaching an experience from her time at university in Lesotho. A visiting professor from Britain had asked Lindiwe's professor why he did not encourage creative writing among students. The answer was that there was no subject matter, to which the visiting professor replied, 'But on my way here, I saw a shepherd boy. That's a subject. That child is not at school; he's herding cows and goats. Subject matter is all around us.' Lindiwe took these comments as a challenge and decided that it wasn't the lack of subject material that was the problem but that 'we had never really thought we could write because nobody in our educational upbringing had ever indicated that it was possible'.<sup>6</sup> She encouraged her students to write their own creative pieces and to criticise their work in class. Their response inspired Lindiwe to try writing herself. She was interested in drama and would have liked to write plays but found that writing poetry came more easily to her. One of her first poems, 'Listening to Mbaqanga' was written while she was still in Minnesota. She explains,

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*

Mbaqanga is our version of soul music, music played on street corners on penny whistles by young boys [...]. Listening to mbaqanga in the isolation of my life here in the United States, alienated from a South African community, kept me company. They gave me inspiration. And in dealing with that inspiration, of course, you deal with the sources, the material world, the conditions which these boys had to go through, to live through, to be able to emerge. For me they were emerging as masters of music even though they had absolutely nothing.<sup>7</sup>

In 1969, Lindiwe went to Ohio University to take up a post teaching literature. 'I also taught history, studies of injustice and racism internationally, and we started the Centre for African-American Studies.'<sup>8</sup> Lindiwe was teaching during a turbulent period of America's history with the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement and the rise to prominence of activists like Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael, and 'the beginning of the women's movement in 1975 in Mexico'. Lindiwe recalls, 'I was confronting the situation of the liberation of Africa, learning as I am teaching, about the struggles in Mozambique, in Angola, in Guineau-Bissau, in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa'. With her students demanding course material that was relevant to the upheavals of the Sixties and Seventies and producing challenging essays on African, African-American and African-Caribbean literatures, Lindiwe feels that she was 'the student during that period, more than the teacher'.<sup>9</sup>

Her poems, 'Listening to Mbaqanga', 'Insomnia', 'The Day You Left for L.A.', 'Tribute to Mazisi Kunene' and 'Summer 1970' were published in *Confrontation* in 1974. 'The Day You Left for L.A.' is a love poem where the narrator looks forward to the return of her lover; that time when they will meet again. She tells her lover,

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<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.200.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*

I will anchor my heart  
on your shores  
for centuries of nights;  
dive into your eyes  
for clusters of joy  
together watch temperatures spiral  
with the succulence of love.<sup>10</sup>

In her 'Tribute to Mazisi Kunene', Lindiwe says that 'after feasting for a while' on Kunene's Zulu poems, she wanted to build him a stately monument but 'then remembered;/ monuments of our history/ are heaped skullbone pleas/ for flesh'<sup>11</sup>. In 1975, her poems, 'Patchwork', 'Listening to Mbaqanga', 'Of Time', 'Changeless Change', 'Thoughts from the Pacific', 'Birds and Man', 'Tired Lizi Tired', 'There is no Light', 'Summer' and 'Embracing Exile' were published in the anthology *Speak Easy, Speak Free*. 'Tired Lizi Tired' presents the voice of an old, black, South African woman who has worked most of her adult life as a 'laundry-girl' for white people and is now seen as redundant by her employers. She receives a letter from her granddaughter, Lizi, in America and learns that it is summer there and that 'America is burning!', that 'landlords shake insurance claims' and black people are just taking food and 'clothes and anything brand new!'. It makes no sense to the old woman. She replies to the letter by talking to herself while she continues her laundry duties. She says,

I'm tired Lizi  
I'm tired  
Blowing these stubborn coals for  
Slow winters!

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<sup>10</sup>'The Day You Left for L.A.', *Letter to Letta*, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1991, p.105.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p.45.



Drains your body after a while  
Cuts the heart cold! Lizi!<sup>12</sup>

In 'Embracing Exile' Lindiwe portrays the complexities of life in exile. The narrator begins by stating that she drifts from country to country. Questioning her choice of the verb 'drift', she then asserts, 'I move/ Yes I move on'.<sup>13</sup>

In 1977 Lindiwe became a radio journalist for the ANC's Radio Freedom. She explains that although she had a comfortable and secure position as professor at Ohio University, she found herself asking, 'Do I really have security without freedom in my country?' She thought of her family and community who would not have the same opportunities as her to move 'out of a ghetto in Soweto and to be a professor in an American institution'. She points out that given her South African background, it wasn't difficult to make the decision to move to the ANC and adds, 'I think the biggest sacrifice for me would have been if I had not done so'.<sup>14</sup> Lindiwe worked for some time as an ANC representative in Stockholm and in 1989 moved to Washington D.C. to become the chief representative of the ANC to the United States. She edited and contributed a short story entitled 'Wake' to an anthology of writing by Black South African women in exile, *One Never Knows*, which was published in 1989. The Introduction includes extracts from an interview with Lindiwe where she talks of the loneliness and alienation of exile but adds that 'if you are purposely [sic] engaged in eliminating what sent you away from home, you can see a way out of the madness. You draw strength from your colleagues because they are now your family. [...]The very fact of

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<sup>12</sup>'Tired Lizi Tired', *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry*, ed. Stella and Frank Chipasula, Oxford: Heinemann, 1995, pp. 200-201.

<sup>13</sup>'Embracing Exile', *Letter to Letta*, p.122.

<sup>14</sup>'Interview with Lindiwe Mabuza' by Patricia D. Norland, p.201.

struggle takes the loneliness away'.<sup>15</sup> In her short story, Lindiwe looks at a community and family traumatised by deaths that are a result of the brutality of the apartheid regime. They gather to bury the dead in the cemetery. Lindiwe writes Africans can only claim land and 'possess citizenship after death'.<sup>16</sup>

In 1991 Lindiwe published a collection of her poetry, *Letter to Letta*. The collection includes poems such as 'There is No Light', 'Witwatersrand' and 'Elegy for Johnny' which focus on the South African struggle and poems which were inspired by her stay in America and 'the contradictions in the American system'. She explains that 'the phrase, "A day lost at infancy," from my poem "Of Time", mourns the lack of democracy for black people, for Native Americans.'<sup>17</sup> 'Patchwork' asks why 'So many people in Vietnam must/ Slowly broil in napalm?' and remarks 'That spring in Kent State/ Even the air spun the wisdom of pain/ That spring in America!'.<sup>18</sup> There are poems of love and poems dedicated to 'Super-Women (Grown by Apartheid)', 'For Mothers and Others' and 'To Black Mothers (in the USA - April, 1976)'. Lindiwe has reservations concerning the label 'feminist' stating,

I don't know what feminism means, because there has been a lot of confusion about it, and anyway, I hate to be labelled. But if it means women have a right to equality, then I make no apology about being a feminist. If it recognises that a black woman suffers triple exploitation as a woman, a worker and an African, that this is what we should have in perspective and that we should fight side by side with our men for the emancipation of women, then I am for it. If feminism means that our men should stop lying to themselves that certain things must be left alone because they are custom and

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<sup>15</sup>Introduction, *One Never Knows: An Anthology of Black South African Women Writers in Exile*, ed. Lindiwe Mabuza, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1989, p. vii, (Cited from 'Lindiwe Mabuza in Conversation with Ruth Bhengu', *Tribute*, (March 1988), 32.

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>17</sup>'Interview with Lindiwe Mabuza' by Patricia D. Norland, p.200.

<sup>18</sup>'Patchwork', *Letter to Letta*, pp. 75-76.

tradition and that they should not be examined even if they are wrong, then I think it is a valid approach.<sup>19</sup>

Lindiwe returned to South Africa to become a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Arts, Culture, Language, Science and Technology, to serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee and on the Select Committee on the South African Law Commission Report on Surrogate Motherhood. In 1995 she took up the post of South African Ambassador to Germany and now lives in Bonn.

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<sup>19</sup>Lindiwe Mabuza in Conversation with Ruth Bhengu', *Tribute*, March (1988), 32.

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## **Sindiwe (Cynthia) Magona, 1943 -**

Autobiographer, short story and essay writer. Sindiwe was born in Gungululu village in Tsolo near Umtata in the Transkei region of the Cape Province. She writes, 'I am the second of eight children, seven of whom survived to adulthood'.<sup>1</sup> Her early childhood was secure and untroubled within the comfort of the village and her extended family. 'My recollections of myself, as a little girl of three or four, revolve around my great-grandmother, Nophuthukezi, my two grandmothers, my mother and my maternal grandfather.'<sup>2</sup> She remembers the older members of the family, especially her grandmother, sitting with the children around the fire and telling stories about ogres, giants, weird beasts and animals of the forest and veld. Sindiwe's mother, Lilian Mabandla is a member of the Ntumbeza clan. She is a traditional healer and a housewife. Her father, Penrose Sigongo Magona, worked in Cape Town as a labourer and was away from the home for long periods of time. When Sindiwe was five, her father decided the immediate family should live with him and took them to Blaauvlei Location near Cape Town. For the first time she experienced life in a nuclear family and the insecurity of urban poverty and a shanty town existence. She encountered unfamiliar customs and make-do houses of corrugated iron and cardboard.

Sindiwe went to primary school in Blaauvlei. She recalls her initial contact with 'the world of English books and comics'. Her neighbour would bring the books from her place of employment and Sindiwe was 'introduced to Billy Bunter, his equally fat sister, Bessie, Roxanne and a host of other characters from *The Girl's Crystal* and *The School Friend*

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Sindiwe Magona to Gaelle Mogwe, 30 August 1995.

<sup>2</sup>*To My Children's Children*, Claremont: David Philip, 1990, p.2.

Mickey Mouse, Minnie, Goofy, Scrooge, Donald Duck, Popeye and his sweetheart Olive'<sup>3</sup> She also remembers reading *Pride and Prejudice*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Great Expectations*, *Lorna Doone* and *Treasure Island*. In 1955, she left Primary School and began her secondary education at Langa High School which was the only school in the area available to African students. After three years at Langa she was sent to Lourdes Secondary School, a Catholic boarding school in uMzimkhulu. After completing her high school education, Sindiwe trained as a primary school teacher at St. Matthew's Teacher Training College where she gained her diploma in 1961. Her first teaching position was as a Standard Three teacher at the Hlengisa Higher Primary School in Nyanga. She found the work depressing because her training had not prepared her for the lack of books and facilities, the children who often came from poor, women-headed households and the damage caused by Bantu education.

In 1962, Sindiwe became pregnant to a young man she had met the year before. After having suffered scorn and ridicule for educating a daughter, her parents were very disappointed at the outcome. Sindiwe resigned from her position as a school teacher and was married in a traditional Xhosa ceremony. Lobola was offered and accepted, a sheep was slaughtered and she was taken to her new home where less than a year after leaving St Matthew's with hopes of a splendid career, she became a housewife. Three months after the birth of her daughter, Thembeke, Sindiwe was ready to work again but the Department of Bantu Education did not recognise traditional marriages and therefore did not regard her as married. 'A teaching job was out of the question, for at least two years - the 'punishment' meted out to fallen women teachers like me.'<sup>4</sup> Desperate for work, she eventually found employment as a domestic

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<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.117.

worker. She gave birth to her second daughter, Thokozile in 1965 and in 1966, she found herself pregnant again. She was fired from her job. In June, 1966, her husband left saying he was going to visit his parents. He never returned. Her son, Sandile, was born in October. 'When my husband left we were no longer in love with each other.[...] I was more angry than disappointed. I didn't want him so I wasn't feeling bereft.[...] I was angry because I was stuck with these three children and had no money.'<sup>5</sup> At the age of twenty-three, Sindiwe had to struggle desperately to feed herself and her three children. With no prospect of formal employment she made ginger beer and vetkoek, cleaned and cooked sheep's head and sold her produce. Finding her attempts at self-employment did not bring in enough income, she turned to selling liquor which was a high risk business. It was illegal and the customers bought on credit often refusing to pay their debts. She describes this period as an 'abysmal hole of hopelessness'. Her husband's desertion had plunged her 'from poverty into destitution'.<sup>6</sup>

Sindiwe started teaching at Moshesh Higher Primary School in 1967 and decided to study for her Matriculation by correspondence. In 1969 she took up a teaching position with Fekeza Secondary School. She then 'left Bantu Education for Bantu Administration' where she worked in the welfare section.<sup>7</sup> In 1973 she became a member of Church Women Concerned, a multi-denominational, multi-racial organisation, inclusive of all faiths. It was with the CWC that she began to learn about the lives and problems of women from other racial groups in South Africa, and became involved in administrative and organisational tasks. She attended the International Women's Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels in 1976 and was

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Sindiwe Magona by Cheryl-Ann Michael, April 1994, New York.

<sup>6</sup> *Forced to Grow*, Claremont: David Philip, 1992, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.82.

struck by the range of problems that women battle with on a daily basis all over the world. She left Bantu Administration in 1978 to work as a Xhosa teacher at Herschel High School, a private school for white children. She studied for a BA in History and Psychology by correspondence with UNISA and in 1981 was awarded a scholarship to study for a Masters Degree at Columbia University. After completing her degree in Social Work, she returned to South Africa. In 1984 she again left for the United States, this time with her children, to take up the post of Information Officer with the United Nations.

Sindiwe began writing as a response to political and social events that were happening around her in South Africa. 'Once I began writing, I was amazed at how fulfilling an undertaking I found it. Where it lacked the exciting, prickly presence of an audience, it more than compensated with its convenience. I could do it when I had time.'<sup>8</sup> She found the time after she moved from South Africa to New York. Her children were old enough to look after themselves, she had a secure nine-to-five job and was no longer actively involved in women's movements or youth programmes. 'Once I sat down to writing then the big problem came. I really hadn't given much thought to what I was going to write about. My commitment was to writing a book and that was it.'<sup>9</sup> At first Sindiwe tried to write fiction that did not reflect her life in any way but she found that with everything she wrote she could see herself in the characters and her life-story in the plot. 'Then I realised that perhaps I should write about me and my thinking and that maybe if I wrote about me I would have nothing more to say [...] and then some inspiration would come and I would write about other things and other people and that's how I wrote *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*.'<sup>10</sup> She produced one long piece of writing and presented it to the publishers, David Philip, in South Africa who decided to split the manuscript and publish two books.

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<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Sindiwe Magona.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*



*To My Children's Children* appeared in 1990 and earned an Honourable Mention in the 1991 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. It is addressed to the 'Child of My Child' and presented in the style of an oral account of the first twenty three years of her life. She begins by explaining to her children's children that 'As ours is an oral tradition I would like you to hear from my own lips what it was like living in the 1940s onwards. What it was like in the times of your great-grandmother, me.'<sup>11</sup> The book ends at the point where her husband leaves her with three children to look after. 'If there can be something called a watershed in one's own personal life, this was the watershed.'<sup>12</sup> *Forced to Grow* was published in 1992 and continues her life story from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. She describes her experiences as a young teacher, her studies, the traumas of being a parent during the 1976 unrest, her involvement with women's organisations and her eventual move to New York. Sindiwe hopes that her autobiographical writing will have some historical value for future generations and will shed some light on 'a painfully ordinary life' showing what it was like to be a black woman living in South Africa before the incredible changes of the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> Her collection of short stories, *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, was written after *Forced to Grow* but published in 1991. It focuses on the lives of black South African women, detailing their hardships and their hopes. The book is divided into two parts. Part One entitled 'Women at Work' gives voice to the specific experiences of domestic workers in an urban setting. Part Two, '...And Other Stories', describes a variety of rural and urban, childhood and adult experiences that reflect the far-reaching and painful effects of apartheid.

Sindiwe has translated *To My Children's Children* into Xhosa. It is to be published as *Kubantwana Babantwana Bame*. She feels excited that now her 'mother will be able to read the book!'<sup>14</sup> She found the task of translating far more difficult, time-consuming and tiring than she had anticipated. Remaining faithful to the English text and to Xhosa idiom required

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<sup>11</sup>*To My Children's Children*, p.1.

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Sindiwe Magona.

<sup>13</sup>Letter from Sindiwe Magona to Gaele Mogwe.

<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*

a creativity similar to 'writing the book'. She notes that many of the family relationships which she had to explain in depth in English, are expressed by one word or term in Xhosa. 'Some things that were terribly funny in English were not at all funny in Xhosa and some things that were flat in English were highly funny [in Xhosa].'<sup>15</sup> She feels that it would have been better if she had just written the book in Xhosa. Sindiwe has also translated the children's story, *The Dove*, into Xhosa. It is to be published by David Philip under the Xhosa title of *Ihobe*. *Imida*, a collection of her essays, is forthcoming. The collection discusses the various roles boundaries play in our lives. She is working on a collection of short stories called *Drowning* and a novel called *I Do Not Die in Vain*. Sindiwe has written a number of children's stories and would like to continue to write for children in the future. She would also like to write plays and hopes to take early retirement to become a full-time writer. She feels that her two most significant sources of influence and encouragement are the storytelling of her 'early years in the village around an open fire'<sup>16</sup> and her discovery of Maya Angelou's autobiographical work, *When the Caged Bird Sings*. She was granted an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from Hartwick College, New York in 1992 which she views as 'a high point' in her 'short writing life'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Interview with Sindiwe Magona.

<sup>16</sup>Questionnaire completed by Sindiwe Magona, August, 1995.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from Sindiwe Magona to Gaele Mogwe.

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## **Nise (Bulelwa Margaret) Malange 1960 -**

Poet, short story and essay writer. Nise was born in Clovelly where she spent the early years of her childhood. The family then moved to Guguletu township in Cape Town. She remembers:

growing up in this four-roomed house with my brothers and sisters. We didn't have electricity and we played in the streets, playing all sorts of games. We had lots of games as children and my mother would call us at dusk to come and close the curtains and clean the glasses for the lamps. Mother was a very strict character, although we were free and equal. We grew up as equals at home.<sup>1</sup>

Nise's mother, Grace Ngesi, worked as a midwife. She came from a large family that lived and worked for generations on a farm owned by a white family in Tarkastad. Nise remembers looking forward to the visits to the farm when her cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents used to tell stories at night and compete to better each other. Nise's elder sister, Nombulelo, grew up on the farm and learnt many stories from the oral tradition which she used to tell Nise. In 1972 Nise went to school in Nyanga East where she completed her primary education. Of her primary school experiences she says, 'I started writing when I was at primary school where everyone had to participate in "composition writing" and "imagination recitations". I used to get frustrated when I was restricted on what to write and read'.<sup>2</sup> She recalls passing by the hostels for migrant labourers on her way to school and becoming aware of the tensions that existed between hostel-dwellers and the rest of the community. 'We used

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Nise Malange by Gaele Mogwe, Durban, 10 August 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>'Women Workers and the Struggle for Cultural Transformations', *Staffrider*, 8, 3 and 4 (1989), 76.

to hate the women who went into the hostels and we'd start quarrels with them.' Nise also became aware of the terrible way in which pass laws dominated people's lives. She recalls the panic that she felt when one day she discovered her mother had left without her pass book. Nise ran after the bus trying to take the pass book to her mother because she knew 'that without it she might not come back home'. Nise went to secondary school in Guguletu. Her mother gave her money to catch the bus but Nise chose instead to walk and spend the money on other things. In 1975 she was walking home from school when a tall youth followed her and began harassing her. She swore at the boy and threw stones at him only to find out later that he was a known murderer. 'Because of all this tension between us and the hostel people [...] and when my mother heard the story [about the youth], out came the metal trunk and I was sent away to study.'

Nise's father, Sam Malange, was a farmer and spent most of his time on his farm in Whittlesea in the Ciskei. Nise was sent to live with him and attend school. She discovered the poverty of rural 'homeland' communities. 'We used to starve. My mother would send money and that money would buy maybe fifty kilograms of flour, samp and this would be shared with the community. [...] but I mean we were quite happy. There was unity amongst the people in the area.' In 1976 she went to Amabhele school in Alice where she matriculated. Nise wrote plays and essays for school but she considers her first serious piece of writing to be the poem she wrote in 1977 in response to the killing of Steve Biko. With reference to the brutality and cruelty that surrounded his death she says, 'It was the most horrible thing I'd ever come across [...] I was young and I was angry and I was hurt and I just wanted to express that. That was the motivation for me to write poetry.' After matriculating, Nise studied for a teaching diploma in Whittlesea. She moved to Durban in 1981 where she did a diploma in adult education at the University of Natal. In 1982 she began work with the Federation of South

African Trade Unions<sup>3</sup> as an administrator for the National Union of Metal Workers and as an advice officer for FOSATU. She dealt mainly with cases of worker dismissal and pension claims from widows of workers who had been killed in the Natal violence. Through this work Nise learnt of the difficulties rural women have in obtaining death certificates for husbands who have disappeared in the violence and the problems these women face in attempting to exercise the right of majority and claim outstanding monies. She began to understand the devastating effects of racist legislation and traditional patriarchal marriage and inheritance laws which treat women as minors. In 1983 she became involved in the Durban Worker's Cultural Local which encouraged workers to respond creatively to major political and industrial events through work-shopping, writing and performing lays, poetry and songs. Nise was seconded to work for the Transport and General Workers Union in 1984 as an advisor and organiser. The majority of the cases involved male workers. At first she found the work difficult because the men did not have confidence in her ability as a woman to deal with the issues. They thought 'that they can't get help from women and women are minors and best in the kitchen with babies and all that sort of thing'.

In 1985 a selection of her poetry was published in *Black Mamba Rising: South African Worker Poets in Struggle*. In 'This Poem is Dedicated to Brother Andries Raditsela' she condemns death in detention and asserts that, 'Your blood, Andries, will not be in vain [...] Your blood will give power to your comrades,/ To the workers, to your family and to us all'.<sup>4</sup> 'Today' is dedicated to all those who have died in the struggle and 'First May 1985' salutes 'this day of the workers!'. In 1988 Nise joined the Culture and Working Life Project at the

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<sup>3</sup>It later merged with other unions to become the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

<sup>4</sup>'This Poem is Dedicated to Brother Andries Raditsela', *Black Mamba Rising: South African Worker Poets in Struggle*, Durban: Culture and Working Life Publications, 1986, p.55.

University of Natal in Durban. She participated in the Transvaal Region of the Congress of South African Writers Conference on Women and Writing where she addressed some of the problems faced by women writers. These problems included lack of child care facilities when attending workshops and exhaustion from an already heavy work load. She also discussed attempts by COSATU to encourage women workers to write. Nise believes that everyone has a story to tell and that 'culture must be taken out of the framework of leisure time activities and put back into the working lives of the people who make and participate in it'.<sup>5</sup> Working with the Culture and Working Life Project and the Imbali Rehabilitation Project, Nise ran a year-long programme for young victims of the Natal violence. A creative writing course was offered to the youth of Imbali, one of the worst hit areas in Natal. It was run under severe conditions in the township until it became unsafe for both the youth and facilitators to continue. The written pieces produced by the youth were brought together in a book entitled *Ayofezeka Amaphupho: A Collection of Stories and Poetry from Imbali Youth* which was co-edited by Nise. In *Ayofezeka Amaphupho - 'Dreams Will Come True'* - Zulu children tell their experiences of violence. They mainly write in Zulu. Some write in English. Their writing goes beyond a simple detailing of experience and attempts to heal the wounds caused by violence. The overwhelming theme is a cry for 'everlasting peace'. In 1990 her poems, 'Long Live Women' and 'Nightshift Mother' were published in *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*. The two poems call women to 'stand up and fight!'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>'Women Workers and the Struggle for Cultural Transformation', *Buang Basadi: Conference on Women and Writing*, [n.p.]: COSAW Transvaal Region, [n.d.], p.13.

<sup>6</sup>'Long Live Women', *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*, Cape Town: AD. Donker, 1990, p.341.

Nise also co-edited a collection of poems from around Natal called *Poetry for Peace*. Her poems, 'I Cry Sing for Peace' and 'Listening is Healing' are included in the collection. In the quest for healing and peace she asks that people 'listen to our voices/listen carefully/listen you will be healed/listen we sing, we sing/melancholy songs/we sing about our pain/we sing about reconstruction/and reconciliation/we sing for peace'.<sup>7</sup> Nise emphasises that *Poetry for Peace* is a book that embraces poems written in both Zulu and English, and established and aspirant writers of different races. She feels that through publishing a book of this nature they are challenging dominant publishing norms. She objects strongly to the expectation that African language writing should be translated if it is to be published and feels a lot more should be done to encourage publishing of writing in African languages. Referring to white South Africans she says,

We always speak their language. We always do things in their language but then our languages will never be equal. There is a lot of good writing coming out from the youth and other people but because of the language constraint, they [publishers] push that they write in English and that is restrictive.

Nise feels that, in her experience, publishers in South Africa do not promote and distribute work as they should. She has written a collection of poetry that she has decided to publish herself. It is a collection which reflects on transition. She has included more personal material and has moved from resistance poetry to poetry that is more concerned with nation-building. She now hopes to work more with women. She is active in a support group which encourages women to talk about their experiences and to record these narratives on video,

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<sup>7</sup>'Listening is Healing', *Poetry for Peace*, eds. Nise Malange and Shaun de Waal, Qualbert: Poetry for Peace Committee, 1994, p.33.



audio tape or through writing. She feels that 'women's issues are not given priority and are not taken seriously'. In the new South Africa she says, 'as black women, we are still going to fight for our recognition and acceptance in political structures as well as in culture'.<sup>8</sup> She finds the argument that classifies feminism as a western concept too simplistic and also distracting because she says, 'we are not the first feminists. Our grandmothers always played a big role in terms of families, in terms of heading the family and when I look back to my own grandmother, the person she was, she was a true feminist. [...] I think for me feminism is more to do with women supporting other women and equality.' Nise is writing a novel about how the migrant labour system in South Africa has affected women's lives. She is impressed by the novel, *My Place*, where Sally Morgan, an Australian Aboriginal woman, traces her life searching for the sometimes painful truths of her childhood. Nise would like to write an autobiographical piece going back to her mother's parents and grandparents and their experiences on the farm in Tarkastad. She feels that this is important to exorcising the pain and anger that has come from growing up in apartheid South Africa and essential to her personal healing. She believes South Africans must recognise their psychological wounds, allow them to open and bleed, cleanse them and then let them heal. Nise would also like to record the many traditional tales she was told in her youth and the games that were played. She feels that children have lost a lot of what is valuable in their culture and hopes to bring back some of the fun of playing outdoors. She also hopes to incorporate traditional stories and games in drama and creative writing workshops for children.

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<sup>8</sup>Interview with Nise Malange, *Exchanges: South African Writing in Transition*, eds. Duncan Brown and Bruno van Dyk, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1991, p.45.

Nise has a son born in 1987 and a daughter born in 1994. She has seen many of her women friends go through painful divorces where they come out with nothing because of the way the marriage laws are structured. She hopes to see these laws changed so that women have more rights in relation to the ownership of property and does not wish to marry because of the possibility of such complications. She enjoys cooking, long distance running and African music. Salif Keita is one of her favourite musicians.

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## **Zindziswa (Nobutho) Mandela 1960 -**

Poet. Zinzi was born two days before Christmas in Bridgeman Memorial Hospital, Johannesburg. Her mother, Winnie Mandela (Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela), was ill with the birth, and her father, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, had broken his banning orders to travel from Johannesburg to the Transkei to fetch his son, Makgatho, who required surgery. He returned to find his daughter had been born in his absence. They named her Zindziswa<sup>1</sup> after the daughter of 'the poet laureate of the Xhosa people', Samuel Mqhayi. As Nelson Mandela explains,

The poet returned home after a very long trip to find that his wife had given birth to a daughter. He had not known that she was pregnant and assumed that the child had been fathered by another man [...]. The poet [...] stormed into the house with an assegai, ready to stab both mother and daughter. But when he looked at the baby girl and saw that she was the image of himself, he stepped back, and said, 'u Zindzile,' which means, 'You are well established.' He named her Zindziswa, the feminine version of what he had said.<sup>2</sup>

Zinzi was barely eight weeks old when her father went underground to help establish the new militant wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe. In 1961 her mother, with Zinzi and her sister, Zenani, to care for, received a two-year banning order. Although the banning order made it extremely difficult for Winnie Mandela to work, she did for a time hold a position as a social worker at the Child Welfare Society. In 1962 Zinzi's father was arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment for inciting people to strike and for leaving the country without a

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<sup>1</sup>Zindziswa is known by the shortened forms of her name - Zinzi and Zindzi.

<sup>2</sup>*Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, New York and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994, p.243.

passport. In 1964 he was sentenced to life imprisonment on conviction for sabotage. Zinzi's only communication with him was through letters.

The family suffered constant police harassment. Winnie Mandela's banning orders were renewed in 1965, she was restricted to Orlando township and as a result lost her job as a social worker. She took work where ever she could find it: a furniture shop, a dry-cleaning shop and a shoe-repair shop. She later worked for a legal firm and as a credit controller for a large merchandising firm. She found it very difficult to keep jobs due to continued police harassment and intimidation. In 1966 Zinzi began primary school in Johannesburg. The conditions of Winnie Mandela's banning orders prevented her from taking her children to school so Zinzi was taken to school by friends and relatives. Police intimidation extended to the schools attended by Zinzi and Zeni and in the case of one school they were both forced to leave. In 1967 Winnie Mandela was arrested, sentenced to a year's imprisonment which was suspended, and as a result of the incident dismissed from her job. Zinzi's parents became increasingly concerned about the welfare of their children and it was decided that they should be sent to school outside the country. In 1968 Zinzi went to Our Lady of Sorrows boarding school in Swaziland where she completed her primary education. She found the school to be a place where nobody cared for anybody else and describes the experience as 'awful'<sup>3</sup>. She then attended Waterford Kamhlaba school in Swaziland where she received her 'O' Levels.

With the imprisonment of her father and the harassment, banning and the 1969/70 confinement of her mother, Zinzi's childhood was not easy. She remembers the support they received from friends and relatives who managed to create the sense of a family unit and looked after them

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<sup>3</sup>*Sunday Star*, 27 May, 1980. Quoted in *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela*, Emma Gilbey, London: Jonathan Cape, 1993, p.99.

during holidays and when their mother could not be with them. Zinzi recalls the times her mother would sing Xhosa lullabies to them in the evenings. She feels very close to her mother and views her as a very close friend and a sister. Zinzi describes how she 'has always been so understanding':

Mummy has so many principles, I don't even know where to start [...]. She doesn't have double standards - she lives up to them. She even flushed all her heart tablets down the toilet, because she only believes in exercise and a healthy diet. She is such a health fanatic, she doesn't eat junk - that's how she manages to stay young.<sup>4</sup>

Zinzi goes on to say that her mother 'is a very sweet person, but when she gets into those fights with the police, it's bad, you know; she's got a hell of a temper.' She feels that her mother helped to make her strong and recalls that 'once in court, when Mummy was convicted - I think it was '71 - I started crying and outside court she said, "You must never cry, because you are giving them satisfaction if you do so".<sup>5</sup> In 1972 Zinzi was at home with her mother for the Christmas holidays. There was another of the characteristic raids on their home. A man in a blue safari suit knocked on the door. She says, 'He told me to open the door when I said my mother was in the bath and then he kicked it open. The man shouted and swore at my mother through the bathroom door and then went away.'<sup>6</sup> Zinzi responded by writing to the United Nations Committee on Apartheid. At twelve she writes, 'You have expressed concern over my mother's safety. I would like to appeal to you to ask the South African government to ensure she is protected. The family, and mummy's friends fear that an

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<sup>4</sup>*Part of My Soul: Winnie Mandela*, eds. Anne Benjamin and Mary Benson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.91.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>6</sup>*Cape Times*, 3 January, 1973. Quoted in *The Lady*, p.99.

atmosphere is being built for something terrible to happen to mummy.<sup>7</sup> Zinzi began to assume a more public and political role. She spoke to reporters about her parents' plight and lobbied members of parliament and human rights groups.

Zinzi was still at Waterford when she began writing poetry. 'Ode to My Father' expresses a young woman's desire to relate to and know her father. She talks to her father and imagines 'what you would be/if I was not/what you would say/if I kept quiet' and 'where you would go/if I remained/where you would end/if I started'.<sup>8</sup> Zinzi had not been allowed to visit her father. The prison rules were that no child between the age of two and sixteen could visit a prisoner. Their first meeting took place in 1975 with glass barrier between them and in the presence of warders. Zinzi recalls this first visit, 'I was a bit apprehensive, I thought Jesus, this is meant to be my father. What am I going to say? Will he be proud of me? Have I lived up to his standards? But he is such a warm person, and he is so tactful. He said, "Oh, darling, I can see you now as a kid at home on my lap" - and I immediately forgot the surroundings, and we started dreaming and dreaming and then I felt so free; and he has this terrific sense of humour, so it went on so well'.<sup>9</sup> In 1976, Zinzi's poem, 'My Country' was published in *If You Want to Know Me*. Her poetry is about loneliness and the pain and complexities of personal relationships. She writes of 'hating a close friend/only to love a hypocrite/grinning in the moonlight'<sup>10</sup> and of disappointment in love, 'I waited for you last night/I lay there in my bed/like a plucked rose/it's falling petals my tears'.<sup>11</sup> It is also about the suffering caused by racial oppression, and deprivation. She tells of 'a child/ a small White

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<sup>7</sup>*The Lady*, p.99.

<sup>8</sup>'Ode to My Father', *Black As I Am*, Durban: Seriti sa Sechaba and Madiba, 1989, p.22.

<sup>9</sup>*Part of my Soul*, p.136.

<sup>10</sup>'Arriving in a Damp Cold House', *Black As I Am*, p.49.

<sup>11</sup>'I Waited For You Last Night', *ibid.*, p.57.

boy/sitting in a car' and asks why 'when my home was so far/and his so near/I had to walk'.<sup>12</sup> 'Home is Where Sorrow is Born' describes what it is 'to be Black' in urban South Africa. It tells of violence in the township and poverty. Zinzi classifies her poetry as 'a form of protest poetry' stating that she 'felt very much like a victim'.<sup>13</sup> She writes in English but also includes some Xhosa and Zulu expressions.

In 1976 Zinzi's mother was imprisoned for five months in Johannesburg's Fort Prison and Zinzi and her sister stayed with Helen Joseph during the school holidays. Zinzi recalls that they were accepted 'with warmth, happiness and with no strings attached. We felt at last that we had some home again'.<sup>14</sup> In 1977 Zinzi's mother was banished to Brandfort in the Orange Free State in an attempt to stop her activism and her growing popularity with the youth of Soweto. Without warning the police came to her home in Orlando West at night time and loaded furniture and clothing onto the back of a truck. Winnie Mandela and Zinzi 'were dumped in front of a three-roomed shack in Brandfort's bleak African township, a desperately poor and backward place where the people were under the thumb of the local white farmers'.<sup>15</sup> They had no heat, no toilet and no running water. There were no shops in the township and the shops in the town were hostile to African customers. While Zinzi was neither banished nor banned she was subjected to constant police harassment and surveillance. Her friends were often prevented from visiting her and questioned extensively. Zinzi found the experience deeply traumatic. She became severely depressed and wept continuously at night. From prison Nelson Mandela brought an urgent application for an interdict against the security

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<sup>12</sup>Children', *ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>13</sup>Questionnaire completed by Zinzi Mandela, July 1995.

<sup>14</sup>*Herald*, 12 July, 1980. Quoted in *The Lady*, p.111.

<sup>15</sup>*Long Walk to Freedom*, p.480.

police to restrain them from harassing and intimidating her. Winnie Mandela decided that the comfort she gained from having her daughter with her at Brandfort was far outweighed by Zinzi's psychological and emotional needs. Zinzi was sent back to Johannesburg to live with Helen Joseph.

In 1978 Zinzi's collection of poetry, *Black As I Am*, was published and she received the Janusz Korzack Award for Children. She dedicates the book to 'Nelson Mandela in his imprisonment and for Nomazamano [sic] Mandela in her sentence of silence, who suffer as they do for all of us'. Zinzi has not published since. With 'the pressures of motherhood, employment, studies, [and] political activism' she 'ceased to function in a creative manner'. When she does write 'it is not very structured nor is it intended for publication'.<sup>16</sup> Whilst still at school, Zinzi began work as a general office worker in temporary 'jobs wherever' her 'mother was employed'. She worked on education projects for the South African Institute of Race Relations and as an administrator for Operation Hunger. In January 1985, President P.W. Botha announced that the South African government would consider releasing Nelson Mandela on the condition that he gave a commitment that he would not plan, instigate or commit violence to further political objectives. Zinzi read her father's reply to a large public gathering in Jabulani Stadium, Soweto. Zinzi attended the University of Cape Town from 1985 to 1986 where she studied Law. She then went to the University of Witwatersrand to continue her studies in law but did not complete. She has five children. Zoleka, the eldest child, is her only daughter. Her sons are called Zondwa, Sizwe, Bambata and Zwelabo. She married Zwelibanzi Hlongwane in 1992. She notes that she was 'a victim of battering' in a previous relationship and was hospitalised with serious head injuries. She has a strong interest in women's issues and enjoys

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<sup>16</sup>Questionnaire.



community work and television production. She likes piano and guitar. Zinzi intends writing her personal memoirs and co-scripting a film on the life of her mother. She is also planning a television series 'on African role-models resurrected' and hopes to do more work on African heritage and customs.<sup>17</sup> She currently runs a marketing and promotions consultancy in Johannesburg.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

## Emma (Thandi) Mashinini 1929 -

Autobiographer. Emma was born in Rosettenville, Johannesburg where her family lived in domestic worker's accommodation in the backyard of a white family's house. Emma's mother, Joana Mashinini, did some housework for the family and her father, Elias Mholo Ngwenya, worked for a dairy. When Emma was six years old, her family moved to Prospect Township in City Deep, Johannesburg where her mother worked as a dressmaker, sewing clothes for people in the community. Emma attended the City Deep Methodist school in Heidelberg Road, Johannesburg until 1936 when Prospect Township was subjected to forced removals. 'People were forcibly removed from there to Orlando [...] My parents, not wishing to go to Orlando, because it was like a wild forest at that time, chose to go to Sophiatown.'<sup>1</sup> Emma went to the Salvation Army School in nearby Western Native Township and after completing Standard Six attended Bantu High secondary school. She points out that Archbishop Desmond Tutu attended the same school.

Emma recalls that growing up in Sophiatown was a happy time and is grateful to her mother, who, although she was a strict woman, created a loving home environment. Music was important to the family. Emma remembers that in 'the bedroom/dining room we had an organ, and on this my younger sister would play hymns. There was a wind-up HMV gramophone on which my mother would play her Columbia records of African choral music'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>'Life as a Trade-Union Leader', Interview with Emma Mashinini in *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa*, ed. Diana E.H. Russell, London: Virago, 1990, pp. 180-181.

<sup>2</sup>*Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography*, London: The Women's Press, 1989, p.6.

She also recalls that,

There was no separation in Sophiatown of people who were Zulu or Sotho or Coloured or Indian. The only people who didn't live in Sophiatown were whites. My home was next to the veld, as was a white area called Westdene. Like the white children, we only had to cross the road to play in the open, green veld. We didn't realize then that one day we would all be separated and see each other as enemies.<sup>3</sup>

Emma's happiness was shattered when her parents' marriage broke up and her father left home. Due to lack of funds she was forced to leave school before completing her Junior Certificate. She married in 1947, at the age of eighteen and stayed at home as a housewife. Her first child was born in 1949 and thereafter she says, 'it was just babies, babies, all the time. My last baby was born in 1956. I bore six in all, but three died within days of their birth'.<sup>4</sup> She was never told what her babies died of but now assumes it was yellow jaundice. The couple then lived in Kliptown. In 1955 they moved to a four-roomed house in Orlando West but the marriage was having problems and in 1959 Emma walked out. She had found a job as a trainee machinist in a garment factory and remembers her first experience of the rudeness of the white supervisors who were continually shouting, "'Rour jou gat", which means, "Push your arse"'. She recalls the stress of working towards a virtually non-achievable target and at the same time feeling concern for her children at home. 'This is the problem of the working mother: you are divided. You are working because you have to.'<sup>5</sup> She would begin work at seven-thirty in the morning after leaving her children sleeping and catching the train from

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<sup>3</sup>'Life as a Trade-Union Leader', p.181.

<sup>4</sup>*Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*, p.8.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.14.

Soweto at five and get home at seven-thirty in the evening. She would then do the housework and prepare everything for her children for the next day. The church and stokvels<sup>6</sup> were her only support.

Emma was vocal in her opposition to the poor treatment of black workers on the shop floor. She was elected shop steward by her fellow workers, members of the Garment Workers' Union. She saw her promotion as an attempt by the white management 'to make me one of them' and was clear where her loyalties lie. One of the union achievements she remembers is the time 'when we were earning only one penny short of the amount needed to qualify to be a contributor to the unemployment insurance fund'. The workers went on strike and won the increase of a penny because they felt it was their right to belong to the fund. In 1962 the Garment Workers' Union which was an all-woman union, combined with the Men's Clothing Union and became the National Union of Clothing Workers. Emma was elected to the national executive where she served for twelve years. She married Tom Mashinini, a union activist, in 1967. In 1971 Emma lost her seventeen-year-old daughter Penny in a tragic road accident. Emma still feels a terrible devastation and great loss at her daughters sudden and violent death. She says, 'I never speak about it. That's one private thing which I've always thought I shouldn't open up'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* Emma explains a stokvel as a 'neighbourhood group that is very supportive, socially and financially. Many black women earn meagre wages and cannot afford to buy the necessary comforts of a home, so we set up these *stokvels*, where we could pool our resources. You have to be a member to enjoy the benefits of a *stokvel*, and they are properly run. The members decide what is the greatest need [...] the group identifies another pressing need, and so it goes until you find that each person in the group has managed to buy some household gadgets without getting into a hire-purchase contract, which has been disastrous to many housewives' (p.17).

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Emma Mashinini by Cheryl-Ann Michael, Johannesburg, 16 August, 1993.

There were a growing number of strikes in Natal Province during 1973 and a mushrooming of black trade unions. Emma was approached by several people about the need for a black shop-workers union and was convinced of the need for such a union. In 1975 she resigned from her job in the factory to set up the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa.<sup>8</sup> The Union offices were in central Johannesburg. She describes the shock of her first day at work, 'I had come out of a factory of over a thousand workers, with the machines roaring for the whole day, everybody busy, people shouting and so forth, and here I found myself all alone. [...]. There were no formalities to be gone through, I just had to get myself ready to go out and find some members'.<sup>9</sup> She realised that shop-workers were very difficult to organise in terms of gaining access to them as they take their tea and lunch breaks in canteens within the workplace. Emma decided to visit them at their homes after work to talk to them about the new union. She also leafleted workers as they approached their places of work in major supermarkets. She suffered continual police harassment but by 1977 the union had a membership of one thousand and was actively involved in various shop-floor struggles. In 1981 the CCAWUSA was forced to find new office accommodation as the owners of the building would not renew the lease. The Union moved into Khotso House and began work on a project to establish a training centre for its members. Alan Fine, the secretary of the committee organising the project was arrested and Neil Aggett took his place. Then on the 27th November 1981 both Neil Aggett and Emma were arrested. They were taken to John Vorster Square and interrogated. Emma was then taken to Pretoria Central Prison where she was kept in solitary confinement. In January she was taken to Jeppe Police Station, she had lost a lot of weight and was losing her teeth. She was repeatedly interrogated

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<sup>8</sup>Now the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, pp.31-32.

about the trade union centre for worker education and the people involved in the project. It was while travelling in the back of a police van to one of the interrogation sessions at John Vorster Square that she read the headline posters 'Detainee Dies in Cell' and later learnt of Neil Aggett's death in detention. In May 1982 Emma was released. When she returned to her home in Soweto she felt very insecure and nervous. She says, 'I wasn't physically assaulted in prison, but I was psychologically assaulted. I was very ill when I came out. I had terrible backache from sleeping on the concrete floor, and I suffered from a loss of memory'.<sup>10</sup> It was arranged through Amnesty International and the International Labour Organisation that Emma leave South Africa for Denmark where in June she was admitted to a rehabilitation centre for torture victims. Although she feels the centre gave her the best treatment they could, she did not respond well as she missed her family and home desperately. She explains that 'it was very good, very sophisticated and everything but I noticed that, no man, [...] it's not going to do me a lot of good because it's another sophisticated solitary confinement. I could not communicate with the people'.<sup>11</sup> After Emma returned she was admitted to hospital several times. She says,

These attacks of forgetting came on the anniversary of my detention each year. I had blackouts and amnesia every November/December. In 1985, I decided that I should go on leave and not be in South Africa during those months. I visited one of my daughters last year [1986] and it didn't happen, so I think I am outgrowing it. But the doctors say this sort of problem can persist for about ten years. There are others however, who have suffered worse problems than I have as a result of detention.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>'Life as a Trade-Union Leader', p.186.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Emma Mashinini by Cheryl-Ann Michael.

<sup>12</sup>'Life as a Trade-Union Leader', p.187.

Emma continued with her union work although she had been advised by doctors not to do so. Her concentration was poor and she was exhausted. In 1986 she retired leaving a union with a membership of over 80,000, power, influence and a long list of achievements.

As part of her therapy in Denmark, Emma was asked to write about some of her most painful experiences. The centre also taped many of the sessions where Emma talked about her life. Friends encouraged her to write her autobiography. At first she doubted her writing skills and was reluctant to write her life-story but with the continued encouragement of friends she began recording her memories and ideas on tape. These tapes provided the framework and nurtured the confidence necessary to write *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography* which was published in 1989. Whilst Emma was in detention there had come a point where she had forgotten the name of her daughter, Dudu. She recalls that it 'was the most horrible day of my detention. The whole day I could see my baby's face and wanted to call her name, 'Dudu', 'Dudu', but my mind was blank. I couldn't recollect it. "Can a mother forget her baby's name?" I wondered'.<sup>13</sup> The working title for her autobiography was 'Dudu' which reflects the extreme trauma of Emma's detention. One of her main inspirations for writing *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* was the hope that 'many South Africans who had been arrested, detained, undergone solitary confinement and so forth should read it'. She feels it is important to discuss these experiences and for people to know what has happened in South Africa. She also feels it is important to document the lives of women and admires the work of Ellen Kuzwayo and Mamphela Ramphela amongst other South African women writers.

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<sup>13</sup>'Life as a Trade-Union Leader', p.178.

Emma is currently working on a book entitled 'Survival' which focuses on the adversity South Africans have lived through and overcome. Emma stresses her belief that young people must write or history will be forgotten. 'People won't know what happened to us one day if we don't write what is happening!' Emma is driven by a constant awareness of the necessity to struggle against abuse of power. She states, 'I am very sensitive to being dominated by a man, by a white person, by anyone who just wants to dominate my life [...]. People must know that you have a right not to be dominated and overpowered by any other human being'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with Emma Mashinini by Cheryl-Ann Michael



## **Nomavenda (Carol) Mathiane 1944 -**

Journalist, short story writer. Nomavenda was born in Tshidimbini, Venda. Her mother, Zodwa Mavundla, went to Venda with Nomavenda's father, Andreas Khumalo, when he was posted to Tshidimbini as an officer of the Salvation Army. She says,

both my parents were Zulu-speaking and they were thrust into a hostile, foreign land [...]. So when I was born they said, this is the girl from Venda because black people don't just give a child a name because they fancy it. You know, it has to have meaning. So I'm Nomavenda and I was born on Christmas day, so I'm Carol.<sup>1</sup>

Nomavenda is the seventh of nine children in a 'very close and warm family'. Her mother's main interests, 'until her eyesight failed her', were crocheting, knitting and needle-work. Nomavenda also remembers her mother was 'a great singer. She used to sing a lot at weddings. Ya, in fact we've taken after her. Most of us sing'. Nomavenda recalls that her father's main interest was in African history.

Both Nomavenda's parents and her grandmother told her stories when she was young. Her mother would tell her stories relating to their family history. 'Who did what, when. What happened at such and such a time. Why I'm Khumalo. Why certain things are not done in our family because of how my father suffered when he was in the mines.' Nomavenda's paternal grandmother was called:

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Nomavenda Mathiane by Gaele Mogwe, Johannesburg, 27 April, 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

the village newspaper because she knew everything that was going on around. So in my family they say that I have taken after Gogo. Many people say I've taken after her. She was also very politicised. You know she wasn't a Christian and she used to scold my father and my mother for being Christian. So she used to scold them for being Christians because she used to despise white people.

Nomavenda moved with her family to Pretoria where she began her primary education and then to Zululand. When she was ten the family moved to Western Native Township in Johannesburg. 'It was a very political era. It was the Fifties, you know. I saw Chief Luthuli and I saw the ANC people and I thought I knew it all.' In the late Fifties Nomavenda went to Pretoria and commenced her secondary education at Wallmansthal High School. 'It was a very verkrampt area and I guess because of PAC politics, you know PAC was very strong in Pretoria. I got very politicised there.' Nomavenda remembers reading the Bible 'backwards and forwards' at a very young age and writing letters to her father which used to come back with red ink corrections. She has always and still enjoys reading romantic novels but the first book to make an impression on her when she was growing up was *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

After gaining her Matriculation Certificate, Nomavenda did a secretarial course and began working for the X-ray Department at Baragwanath Hospital as a typist. Whilst working she studied part-time with UNISA and gained a diploma in Communications. She says, 'as an African growing up in South Africa you struggle in so many things. You write, you work, you study, you live, work, you go back to school'. In 1970 she worked with a Witwatersrand University student magazine and 'that was when the writing bug got me'. From there she worked as a switchboard operator with *Trust* magazine which was in 'the *Drum* stable'. She explains that 'when they heard that I'd done a diploma in Communications, they gave me a job as a journalist in *True Love*. That was my first job as a journalist.' In 1977 Nomavenda was asked by Denis Beckett to join the *World*, 'a black newspaper that had suddenly become a cult

after the uprising of June, 1976'.<sup>2</sup> She worked as a secretary and a journalist. 'Her copy was not great. Hardly any was used. But she was looking for something; the truth as she saw it and not as she was meant to see it.'<sup>3</sup> The *World* was banned and Nomavenda joined *The Voice*, a Black Consciousness newspaper, where she blossomed as a journalist and columnist. *The Voice* had financial problems and Nomavenda left to work with *The Star* but was very unhappy there. She explains, 'It was a racist newspaper and it continues to be even now. Black people are marginalised and even now they are still marginalised. I don't want to think about *The Star*. It's colonial. Every black person there was suffering.'

It was during this period that Nomavenda divorced. She had married at twenty-five. She recalls, 'We were just in love. I mean, I didn't think beyond love.' Coming from a large family with brothers and sisters who were always generous, Nomavenda found it difficult at first because her husband would not give her money. She says,

I had to improve myself. To get a good job. I'm grateful to this man because if he had left me in my ways I'd probably be still married to him and I'd be as fat as a pig and I'd know nothing but because he was such a stingy person I had to do something about my situation. Marriage is so difficult for black, for us black women because we have to be superwomen. We have to work and we still have to raise our children.

After her divorce and her unhappy experience with *The Star* newspaper Nomavenda went to Zimbabwe for nine months and stayed with friends. 'I was just visiting. Just sitting there. Just wallowing in my misery.' She returned to South Africa and joined *African Business*

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<sup>2</sup>Denis Beckett in his Introduction to *Beyond the Headlines: Truths of Soweto Life*, Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1990, p.viii.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

magazine where she was editing the 'Black Farmer' and 'Black Manufacturer' sections. She describes the work as 'interesting because in the sense that I got to know African business; men and their business. So now I've got contacts.' In 1986 she began working for *Frontline* which was seen as an alternative magazine. She feels that it 'was critical of everything and it was saying give the ANC a chance but it was also critical of black organisations'. In 1990 the magazine was sold to *The Star* and Nomavenda again worked as a journalist for this newspaper. Disenchanted, she left in 1991 and joined the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy to work in Durban. She says, 'as a Zulu-speaking person I didn't quite know and understand Natal's politics and I wanted a way in which I could get to grips with what was going on there'. She missed Johannesburg life, her friends and children, and returned to do freelance work on magazines including *Femina*, *Sideline* and *Beeld*. She joined *Business Day* in 1994.

Nomavenda's book, *Diary of the Troubled Times*, is a collection of essays about township life in South Africa during the Eighties. It was published in America with the encouragement of American readers who had noticed her stories in *Frontline*. A similar collection was published in South Africa in 1990 entitled *Beyond the Headlines: Truths of Soweto Life*. The stories are written from the perspective of a journalist and a discerning black woman who is critically aware of the complexities of the society in which she lives. She is not an outsider. Her essays are autobiographical. She is the first-person narrator. However, the narrator is not central. The collection is not about Nomavenda. It focuses on her neighbourhood, on the commuters she travels to work with everyday, on the people she knows and meets. She brings her society to the reader through her experiences of the violence, injustices, oppression,

humour and pathos. She says of the book:

It deals with the Eighties. It deals with a period - that painful period in African history. The Seventies - you know people died in 1976; died at the hands of the police; at the hands of white people. But the people who died in the Eighties - it was at the hands of the black people and I just cannot reconcile with that because for me as I was growing up my politics was very clear. It was them and us. But the Eighties changed all that, where one found black people as enemies of other black people.

The collection includes a story about the Mandela football club in Orlando West and the community's response to 'the boys as a terror to the neighbourhood'.<sup>4</sup> Nomavenda explains, 'I was the first one to write about Winnie's thing. If I was a man I'm sure I would have died. I just wrote about the Mandela football club. I was the first one to sit through a kangaroo court which she ran and I came back and wrote about it.'

Nomavenda published a short story called 'Stan' in *Staffrider* under the name of Carol Mathiane. She says, 'Over the years until Steve Biko, Black Consciousness, I used to go as Carol. Then I changed to use my real name, Nomavenda.' Her short stories, 'The Smouldering of Ma-Tshepo', 'Labour Pains', 'Pontso' and 'The Matric Ball' have been anthologised in various publications. Nomavenda would now 'love [to] quit writing as a journalist and concentrate on books. For instance I'd like to look at the PAC; what went wrong. I'd like to look at where we are going as black people'. She is critical of attempts to rewrite black history that unquestionably romanticise African traditions or limit the perspective to dominant, political party propaganda. She has completed the first draft of a romantic novel

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<sup>4</sup> 'The Fire and the Football Club', *Beyond the Headlines*, p.95.

where she explores relationships between black, middle-aged men and women. She finds black women's experiences of 'relationships with men very painful and very straining' and says, 'we seem to be operating from different levels'. She feels strongly that black women should be given the opportunity to develop reading and writing skills and hopes to contribute in the future to making this goal more of a reality.

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Nomavenda Mathiane has published reports, articles, essays and columns in various South African newspapers and magazines including *Trust*, *World*, *The Voice*, *Femina*, *Frontline*, *African Business*, *The Star* and *Sideline*. She has also published articles in the British newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Scotsman*.

## **Juby [Zubeida/Jubeda] Mayet [also published as Sharon Davis] 1937 -**

Journalist and short story writer. Juby was born in Fietas (Vrededorp), Johannesburg. Her mother, Janap Sallie, worked as a seamstress, a housewife and a butcher's assistant.<sup>1</sup> Juby's father, Moegammat Sallie Sallie, was a carpenter, cabinet maker and artist. Juby attended the Johannesburg Indian Girl's School in Fietas and Newtown Coloured School. She recalls, 'I was fourteen when my mother asked me what I wanted to do. I told her I wanted to be a writer. She thought I was "nerts". My father too didn't want me to be a writer.'<sup>2</sup> While still at secondary school Juby entered a short story competition run by the *New Age* where she gained a place alongside established authors like Richard Rive. She says, 'I wrote it [the story] at the time of the dreaded Immorality Act. A white guy falls in love with an Indian chick. They are caught by the cops [...]. Instead of facing the humiliation of having his private affairs dragged before the public, the guy commits suicide'. Ruth First called Juby for an interview following the competition results and the story was published. After completing Standard Eight, Juby attended Johannesburg Teachers Training College and obtained her Primary Teaching Certificate. But she did not choose to take up a career in teaching. She explains,

I was in my second year when during the holidays I went to the *Golden City Post*. I started doing a bit of writing, reporting. The second week I made the front page with Lewis Nkosi. We did the story together. It was about a missing child. I was by-lined. They offered me a job as a reporter. My mother and father refused. I hadn't finished at college. I only had six months to go. They convinced me to sit for the last exam and then said I could decide.

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<sup>1</sup>Juby's mother's maiden name, Sallie, is the same as her married name.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Juby Mayet by Gaelle Mogwe, Johannesburg, 29 July 1993. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

The *Golden City Post* told me to come and see them after the last exam. I waited. Jim Bailey and Dolly Hassim went to see my mother. They wanted me to come and work for them. So I started on the 9th of December, 1957 as a cub reporter.

Juby wrote under the name of Sharon Davis which she explains is 'from the Bible [...], the Rose of Sharon [...] and Davis I took from Sammy Davis Junior'. She describes how as a new reporter she was 'terrified':

I was introverted [...], really shy to sit down face to face with people and ask them personal, intimate details about themselves. Arthur Maimane, the news editor, wanted me to go on a job. I was scared and asked him if there wasn't anyone else who could do it. He just started yelling at me, 'If you want to be a fucking reporter, get out there and be a fucking reporter!'

There were few women and fewer black women in journalism. Juby worked on the *Post* with Bessie Head, who she says, 'wasn't easy to get along with' and Dolly Hassim, 'Cecil's secretary. She started writing her own column.' Marion Morel, a model 'working in Cape Town' also did a bit of writing. Juby was not intimidated by the fact that journalism was a profession dominated by males. 'I was equal. I was treated as an equal. I didn't have problems. It was exciting and fun.' She had a regular column called 'Sharon's Gang' and also contributed to the 'Betty Human' column in *Golden City Post* and the 'Dear Dolly' column in *Drum*. 'I was the agony aunt and I was "Pat Baker" - the cookery column [...]. I had to sift through millions of jokes that readers sent in for the column, "Gammatjie Jokes".' Juby's writing style differed from her male colleagues in that her 'reporting was straight'. Her 'feature writing was closer to their style but still different. Their style was racy [...], tsotsi'. She remembers the editor of *Drum*, Dave Hazlehurst, comparing her writing to that of *Rand Daily Mail* writer, Paul Irwin, and moaning, "Jesus, Sharon, the way you write, one can't cut



the article. It just flows so nicely". It was a compliment. That style comes from reading. I've always read. I love reading'. Juby likes John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway and James Hadley Chase. She says, 'I love horror, Stephen King. I don't like Mills and Boon stuff.'

Juby married Essop Adam Mayet in 1958 and balanced a hectic career with motherhood and home-making. 'I have eight children. Six sons and two daughters. I wanted to just have boys; a football team, but it didn't work out that way.' At a time when there was little, if any, debate in South Africa around women's issues, Juby's journalism reflects her concern that 'women must stop thinking that they are mere mothers. Women should know they can be equal and do anything they want to do in life. Everything!' In her article, 'It's Fast Becoming a Woman's World!', she writes that 'It's been a long time coming but an exciting change is taking place in our Non-White society, right under the noses of our domineering menfolk. Everywhere you look women are emerging from behind their greasy aprons.'<sup>3</sup> She addresses some of the problems faced by a professional working mother in 'It's Nice to Have Me Back Where I Belong'. She writes,

Praise the gods that be, I've gotten over that little craze! Yes, I mean the one where I was going to be the perfect housewife, good mother, wonderful cook, etc. I'm back where I belong - in the office, amidst the general bedlam. And sister, am I happy! So I go home to a stream of dirty, crying, hungry and tired children waiting to be washed, soothed, fed and put to bed. So I go home to a husband who says, "I'm hungry-what's for supper?" And my standard reply: "Let's have scrambled eggs!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>'It's Fast Becoming a Woman's World', *Post*, 8 July 1962, p.25.

<sup>4</sup>'It's Nice to Have Me Back Where I Belong', *Post*, 13 December 1964, p.14.

Juby also wrote for *Drum* magazine. Her article 'Let Me Book My Place in Space!' criticises the all-male space programme. She writes,

First it was that handsome Gagarin, then came Sheppard, followed by Titov. After Titov came Grissom - and now it's Glenn. They're all MEN! And they left us women out in the cold in all this orbit-in-space business - because to them we are nothing but the creatures who cook their food, do their washing and bear their children. I say it's unfair.<sup>5</sup>

In her article 'The Facts About Nico Loubseher' Juby reports on the life and execution of an accused rapist. She was the only reporter to get into Death Row and interview the prisoner. She says, 'I lied. I said I was a relative. They let me in. It didn't work the next time I tried it.'<sup>6</sup> Her article 'The Pub and You' provides housewives with tips on how to keep husbands at home.

In June 1976, Juby's husband was killed in a car accident. She left *Drum* in 1969 and went to work for Thompson Magazines until 1974 when she returned to *Drum*. She also wrote for the *Sowetan Sunday Mirror* where she had a column called 'Madispecs'. In 1977 Juby joined *The Voice* where she continued to demonstrate her concern for women's issues with articles such as 'Sally's Theme: Love Thy Neighbour' which profiles Sally Motlana. While working with *The Voice* Juby became Deputy Chief sub-editor, a first for women journalists in South Africa. As a member of the Writers' Association of South Africa and a founding member of the Union of Black Journalists, she wrote for the WASA house journal, *Asizuthula*, the *Bulletin* of the UBJ, *Kwasa* and *The Worker* which was compiled by Jon Qwelane and

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<sup>5</sup>'Let Me Book My Place in Space', *Drum*, April 1962, p.57.

<sup>6</sup>From notes taken by Gaelle Mogwe during a discussion with Juby Mayet, Johannesburg, 11 August 1993.

issued by The Media Worker's Support Committee. In her article 'Taxi Turn' she agrees that life 'as the great Can Themba once wryly observed, is a bastard' and adds, 'living in South Africa compounds the felony. Or, to put it more delicately, life in this compartmentalised country is a bigger bastard'.<sup>7</sup> She goes on to describe some of her most recent every day experiences of Apartheid including how in a terrible hurry to honour an appointment she was forced to 'play Chinese' at a 'Blankes-Alleen' taxi rank. She says, 'I was concerned about injustice and Apartheid. I wrote about these things. I was detained in 1979 from May to October. They put me in "No.4", (the women's prison in Johannesburg). They were afraid [...], they were threatened by writers and journalists'. When Juby was released from prison she was served with a five-year banning order. She recalls,

We were all served the order on the same day but they couldn't find me. I wasn't at home. I was at Soweto or at the Union of Black Journalists' Office. My sons were worried for me. One phoned me to tell me. One came to the offices with tears in his eyes to tell me that men were looking for me. I told him not to worry. I knew that if they wanted to find me they would find me and they did.

Juby was restricted to the magisterial district of Johannesburg. She explains, 'I couldn't enter newspaper offices, factories, any place where there were people. I could only mix with my immediate family but it didn't worry me or depress me. The day I was banned I phoned my newspaper buddies and we had a big party'. Not being able to work did depress Juby. She found it difficult to support and care for her family with imprisonment and constant police surveillance and harassment. It was only through the help of friends and a woman called Alinah Ramothello that she was able to cope. 'I cannot imagine what the last twenty years of

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<sup>7</sup>'Taxi Turn', *Bulletin*, 1976, p.8.

my life would have been like if Alinah hadn't been with me and my family.'<sup>8</sup> It was during the time that she was banned that Juby wrote her poem, 'Freedom... A Dedication' which was published in *The Worker* under the pseudonym of MmaBatho wa Mayetha. It celebrates her release from prison, life and love, and asks,

to fight for your beliefs, to stand up  
and be counted  
for the rights of those you care for  
yet what does it amount to?  
what a sad world  
what a mad world  
what a beautiful world  
when those prison gates open, and you see  
trees once again -  
what a world<sup>9</sup>

Juby's banning order was lifted after three and a half years. She recalls, 'They changed the laws after that. A lot of my friends were banned again under the new laws.' She worked for *The Voice* for a year but as she explains 'a lot of issues were banned. They folded. I had to find a job'. She was hired by a five star hotel in Johannesburg as Floor Supervisor. 'I had to check whether the cleaners had done their jobs properly and if necessary I had to see to the details myself, shining the taps.'<sup>10</sup> She worked there for two and a half months but 'couldn't stand it' and left. 'I went to work for some attorneys. I was typing and answering the switchboard.'

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<sup>8</sup>Letter from Juby Mayet to Gaele Mogwe, 8 March, 1994.

<sup>9</sup>'Freedom...A Dedication', *The Worker*, November 1980, p.2.

<sup>10</sup>Letter from Juby Mayet.

Juby has avoided political affiliation with any one group. She says,

I am what they call a sickly humanist. I believe we should love one another. There should be more tolerance [...], tolerance of different beliefs, cultures. Less violence. Less killing[...]. I'm not religious. I don't believe in dogmatic religion. Religious rules are made by men on earth. I do believe in some kind of god[...]. I'm rebellious at heart.

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Juby Mayet has published features, articles, reports, columns, poems and stories in the *Golden City Post*, the *Post*, *Drum*, *Asizuthula*, *Bulletin*, *Kwasa*, *The Worker*, the *Sowetan Sunday Mirror* and *The Voice*. The following bibliography is limited to works cited in this entry.

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**Lizeka (Noxolo) Mda [also published as Noxolo Goniwe] 1964 -**

Short story writer and journalist. Lizeka was born in Umtata. Her mother, Dorothy Zanyiwe Ntshanga, came from the district of Ngcobo in the Transkei. Lizeka says, 'We know very little about my mother's family actually. It's terrible but anyway my mother was trained as a teacher and she stopped teaching when she got married.'<sup>1</sup> Lizeka's father, Mda Mda, was a lawyer. The family lived in Butterworth where Lizeka started her primary education. When she was seven her parents decided to move to Willowdale to open a shop. 'It was very, very, very rural'. Lizeka went to Willowdale Primary School and then to Luvunda Primary where she completed her Standard Seven. Her mother helped her with her school work. 'She would look at what we'd done at school and she would fill in the gaps and she would make sure I understood the things and there were always books at home, so she made sure I read books.' Lizeka read the Xhosa and English school books her mother had used during 'her teaching days'. Lizeka's mother was 'a very good storyteller'. 'I'm number five of my parents' children and then after me comes the only boy. We grew up with three cousins. So she used to tell us stories late at night. You know around the fire and many of them were scary and many were long stories that she had to tell over days and days and you had to finish your housework before she can tell you the story. It was wonderful.' Lizeka's older sister, Thobeka, used to bring her books. 'That's when I discovered Enid Blyton. I read Noddy, every Famous Five, every Secret Seven.'

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Lizeka Mda by Gaele Mogwe, Johannesburg, 20 January 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

In 1975, Lizeka's cousins went to join their parents and she was left with a large part of the household chores. She felt very lonely and pressurised by her mother. 'We fought. I don't know why but anyway I think that is when my relationship with my mother sort of went wrong. So going to boarding school was wonderful. I was out of the house and she was out of my hair.' In 1977 Lizeka went to boarding school at Buntingville. The subjects she studied included Xhosa, English, Afrikaans, History, Maths and Biology. She particularly enjoyed History and English. 'I was good at English and my teacher, my English teacher, especially my Matric teacher, he was a drunk man, a drunk white man, he used to circulate them [her essays] in the staff room.' Lizeka enjoyed studying Shakespeare and also remembers Buntingville was the place where she first came across Mills and Boon and James Hadley Chase. After completing her secondary education at Buntingville, she decided that she would like to study computer science at university. 'When the results came out, my Physical Science and Mathematics grades were dismal'.<sup>2</sup> Lizeka's sister convinced her that she would be better suited to studying journalism. She applied to the University of Rhodes but was unable to obtain the special permit needed to study at a white university. In 1980 she went to Fort Hare and studied English, Politics, Sociology and Psychology. There were boycotts and strikes on the campus and the students were eventually sent home and told to reapply. Lizeka returned to the University although her sister and cousins refused. She then decided that she didn't want to continue there and phoned her father asking him to fetch her. 'My father never judged us. I think that was very good of him because he was part of the New Unity Movement and he had been harassed, you know, by the police and even when

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<sup>2</sup>*Sometimes When It Rains: Writings by South African Women*, ed. Ann Oosthuizen, London and New York: Pandora, 1987, p.182.

Transkei became independent, then it was Matanzima's people. He never tried to influence use. I've always been grateful to him.'

Lizeka again applied to the University of Rhodes in 1981 and was accepted to study Journalism. In 1983 she obtained a vacation job with the *City Press* where she was by-lined for the first time for a report she did on a train crash in Hammerskraal. She did not enjoy newspaper work. 'I just didn't like this idea of a train crash [...], you'd get sent to look at the victims and talk to survivors.' Her preference was for feature writing. In 1985, after completing honours in Journalism and Sociology, she began work with *Upbeat*. It was an educational magazine for teenage children where she wrote features on varied topics but concentrated largely on environmental issues. In 1987 her short story, 'Let Them Eat Pineapples', was published in the anthology of South African women's writing, *Sometimes When It Rains*. It is a story based on some of her observations of rural life in Willowdale. It describes the greed of land developers and corrupt chiefs who trick rural people out of their fertile land, the migrant labour system and its effects on the women who stay behind and the extreme poverty that forces women to look for jobs in the cities. After developers have taken her only piece of land the narrator tries to find other sources of income. She finds that she is unable to support her children and getting deeper and deeper into debt. She discovers that her husband is living with another woman in Johannesburg and that there is no hope of her receiving support from him. She then decides that she must leave her children with her friend, Novumile, and go to work in East London. Novumile suggests that she should look for 'a kitchen job in the white areas' but the narrator rejects the idea choosing instead to look for work on the pineapple farms. She justifies her decision by stating, 'I only went as far as



Standard 1, and not Standard 7 like her. What on earth would I do in a white woman's kitchen? What about English? Never! It's definitely pineapples for me.<sup>3</sup>

Lizeka worked with *Upbeat* until 1988 when the British Council sponsored her on a one-year trip to England to study children's literature. As part-fulfillment of the programme requirements she wrote a teenage novel about a young girl in Soweto whose parents separate. The novel is unpublished. Lizeka returned to South Africa feeling a little homesick and hoping to find a job in the children's literature section of a publishing company. 'I wrote to many publishing companies while I was still in England actually and none of them wanted to give me a job.' After further disappointment she was offered a job with *Tribute* magazine and despite some hesitation began to work there in February, 1990. In 1992 she left *Tribute* to work for the women's magazine, *Femina*, in their Johannesburg office. *Femina's* main office was in Cape Town and the Johannesburg office had a staff of about ten. Lizeka enjoyed the experience of working in a small office where staff members operated with relative independence from the main office.

In 1993 while she was still employed by *Femina*, Lizeka was awarded a World Press Institute Fellowship to travel around the United States. She spent a month in Minnesota and stayed with a family who farmed pigs. 'It stank like hell but [they were] such wonderful people.' She went canoeing near the border with Canada. 'It was such fun. We were bitten by mosquitoes. I never thought there were mosquitoes in America.' She spent a week attached to a small-town newspaper and then travelled to San Francisco, Dallas and Miami spending about a week in each place. On her return to South Africa, her first experience was with a

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<sup>3</sup>'Let Them Eat Pineapples', *ibid.*, p.126.

traffic officer who was both sexist and racist. She wrote an article for *Femina* about the incident and received a negative response from readers who accused her of seeing racism where it did not exist. The editor asked her to write a reply. Lizeka wrote a reply which stated that from her experience as a black woman growing up in apartheid South Africa she was more than able to identify both racism and sexism when she came across them. The editor asked her to tone down the piece but Lizeka refused and it was never published. In February 1994, her article, 'A Matter of Privacy' appeared in *Femina*. Lizeka draws on her experience of the American pro-choice and pro-life movements and describes Americans' ongoing reactions to the Roe versus Wade Supreme Court ruling and the legalisation of abortion. Her article, 'Ombudswoman at Work', is a profile of Elizabeth Modiegi Dlamini-Kumalo, Nedcor's ombudswoman and affirmative-action manager. In 'Afrochic' she remembers, 'when I was growing up in the rural Eastern Cape there was a clear line dividing those who sent their children to school and were seen as progressive and generally better and the rest, who were seen as backward, illiterate and inferior. The distinction was in the style of dress. *Amaqaba* were the 'pagans' who wore *amabhayi*, the traditional ochre-dyed garments of the Xhosa, while *amagqobhoka* went to church and wore dresses, skirts and trousers'.<sup>4</sup> She goes on to describe the new South African consciousness that openly values the 'African idiom' as it is expressed in traditional and modern African outfits. It is a consciousness that looks for alternatives to European and American role models, and the likes of Henry M. Stanley, an American journalist, who wrote over one hundred years ago that there 'are fifty million people beyond the gateway to the Congo and the cotton spinners of Manchester are waiting to

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<sup>4</sup>'Afrochic', *Femina*, October 1994, p.91.

clothe them [...]. And the ministries of Christ are zealous to bring them, the poor benighted heathens, into the Christian fold.'<sup>5</sup>

In 1994 Lizeka left *Femina*. 'Many things happened but mainly I got tired of writing for white women which is the primary audience for *Femina*. At first I thought it would be fine, you know, I mean they are women, I'm a woman, you know, we have similar things in common but in the end they were white South African women and especially after the elections I just thought I couldn't be wasting my talent writing for these people.' She returned to *Tribute* where she became Features Editor and writes on a wide variety of concerns including health. Her feature, 'Forever Friends', tells the story of Disebo Matli who when she heard that their family friend, Alexander Mokoena, needed a kidney, offered hers without hesitation. Doctors had only recently consented to kidney donations from living people who are neither relatives nor spouses and this was the second such transplant in South Africa. The article begins, 'It is human to offer sympathy when a friend falls ill, but it takes profound compassion and untold selflessness to voluntarily go under the surgeon's scalpel and offer an organ as valuable as a kidney to a friend.'<sup>6</sup>

Lizeka would like to write more fiction. She is concerned that Xhosa culture is disappearing and would like to see the development of literature in Xhosa. She hopes to write children's books in the future.

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<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, pp.91-92.

<sup>6</sup>'Forever Friends', *Tribute*, October, 1994, p.88.

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'Forever Friends', *Tribute*, October 1994, p.88

### **Short Story**

'Let Them Eat Pineapples', *Sometimes When It Rains: Writing by South African Women*, ed. Ann Oosthuizen, London and New York: Pandora, 1987

## Nontsizi Mqgqwetho 18[?] - 19[?]

Poet and essay writer. Nontsizi is believed to be one of the earliest published woman poets in Xhosa. She was from the Tamara, near King William's Town in the Eastern Cape.<sup>1</sup> Her mother, Emma Jane Zingelwa, came from the Cwerha clan, and her father was a member of the Chizama clan. It is thought that her family were associated with the Moravian Mission Society. She is known to have contributed poems to the King William's Town-based newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, during 1897. In December, 1922, Nontsizi's poem, 'Umpanga ka Mama' appeared in the Chamber of Mines weekly newspaper, *Umteteli wa Bantu*. It is a long poem, mourning the death of her mother who 'with blistered feet' did her rounds 'praying for the sick'. She writes, 'The light of her love/ Cascaded like willows/ edged with lilies/ sustained by water' and laments 'Death, you have no heart'<sup>2</sup>. The poem is signed 'Yimbongikazi Yakwa Chizama' where the suffix 'kazi' has been added to 'imbongi' to signify that she is the female praise poet of the Chizama and that she is aware that she is appropriating a traditionally male domain.

Nontsizi's next poem, submitted from the Crown Mines in Johannesburg, was published by *Umteteli* in October, 1923. It is pointedly entitled, 'Imbongi uChizama' - the praise poet (male) of the Chizama - and draws on the oral traditions of the imbongi to endow the editor of the paper with the respect accorded royal families and heroes of the past. Nontsizi makes reference to the warriors of Hoho who fought in the war between the Ngqika and Ndlambe Xhosa; one of the first wars to arise from political divisions between the Xhosa in

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<sup>1</sup> I was unable to locate the dates and details of Nontsizi's birth and death.

<sup>2</sup> 'Umpanga ka Mama', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 2 December 1922, p.6. Translation by Motlalepula Matome.

the face of Settler pressure from the Cape. She also cites the praises of the Xhosa king, Sandile, who led the Ngqika and was killed in the War of Ngqayecibi, 1877-78; the last frontier war. With what seems to be a tone of ironic self-deprecation, she comments on the corrupting influences of urbanisation telling the editor,

Go, we'll follow:  
Your house has produced  
No traitors  
Go, we'll follow:  
As for us, our house has produced  
No female poet;  
The poet who rouses the court  
And censures the king is always male.  
Go, we'll follow!  
Female poets first appeared  
In this land of thug and booze.<sup>3</sup>

Her poem, 'Maibuy! Afrika! Awu!', was published in *Umteteli* in December, 1923 under 'Yimbongikazi Nontsizi Mgqetho'; the female poet Nontsizi Mgqetho. She takes up the enduring call of pan-African black resistance, 'Mayibuy' iAfrika' - Africa Come Home! She criticises her fellow Africans for their lack of unity, for sitting on the fence and selling out, for 'living like locusts, each one for himself', for drinking, placing so much emphasis on money and for forgetting their traditions. She says 'Every nation fleeces you,/ They come from the North, they come from the South,' and points out that Africa is in fact still here. 'She's nowhere else/ Look how the grass continues to sprout./ Look at the springs still bubbling

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<sup>3</sup>'Nkosi, mHleli woMthetheli wethu', 'Nontsizi Mgqwetho: Stranger in Town' by Jeff Opland, *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature*, ed. Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1995, p.164. Opland acknowledges that all translations from the poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho are based on translations prepared by Phyllis Ntantala.

with water./ Look all about, everything in its place!’ She insists that before Africa can Come Home, ‘You must come home!’.<sup>4</sup>

In her poem, ‘Ufikile!’, published in *Umteteli*, 5 January, 1924, Nontsizi celebrates 1923 as a quiet and peaceful year. She welcomes 1924 but warns that there should be no mistake, ‘We Africans travel well armed,/We modern poets don’t lounge about’. She adds,

You’re welcome, 1924;  
New poets, reputations untried,  
Must strut their stuff today  
And tickle African fancies.  
Oh! Hear the *Drummond Castle*<sup>5</sup>  
Of the house of Chizama,  
Beast with antelope guile.  
Mercy!<sup>6</sup>

Nontsizi’s poems often contain references to herself; the female poet ‘Of the house of Chizama,/Beast with antelope guile’. In ‘Phula-phulani Makowethu!’ published in *Umteteli*, 12 January, 1924, she begins, ‘Peace, Nontsizi, renowned for your chanting’ and attempts to reassure herself that ‘No elephant finds its trunk clumsy’. She says of herself, ‘The nation knows you, lofty she-python,/ The poets’ clique avoids you’<sup>7</sup> and adds defiantly, ‘Wugqethele Mgqwetho lo mhlaba kaPhalo’ - Turn the land of Phalo<sup>8</sup> upside down, Mgqwetho! The juxtaposition of the verb ‘ukugqwetha’ and her surname Mgqwetho is seen as typical of the verbal dexterity of the imbongi. Jeff Opland describes the poem as ‘typical

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<sup>4</sup>‘Mayibuye! Afrika! Awu!’, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 8 December, 1923, p.4.

<sup>5</sup>Nontsizi refers to herself here as the *Drummond Castle*, an ocean liner on the Union Castle Line.

<sup>6</sup>‘Nontsizi Mgqwetho: Stranger in Town’, *op.cit.*, p.165.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>8</sup>Phalo is a celebrated ancestor of the Xhosa.

of *izibongo*' with the 'litany of nominally based praises referring to the subject of the poem' and feel that there is little to distinguish the diction of this poem from an oral *izibongo* [...] although she is communicating through the printed word, Mgqwetho uses kinetic and aural images'.<sup>9</sup> The poet is working towards an acceptance of her fate and trying to be at peace with herself. She is a woman with 'match-stick legs all scratched/ From prophesying in clumps of thorns'. She does not fit into the traditional gender expectations of an ideal wife. Her poetry has 'put paid to pleasantries' and she writes,

Peace, mother duck with news of Africa,  
Ungainly woman with ill-shaped frame.  
Oh, Nontsizi, African river moss,  
With bow-legs like yours you'll never marry !<sup>10</sup>

Nontsizi continued to write poetry and short pieces of prose for *Umteteli wa Bantu* until 1929. Her writing illustrates her active involvement in resistance politics and offers strong criticism of white oppression and of the failings of black leadership in fighting against this oppression. Describing a 1919 anti-pass demonstration on the Rand she writes,

Cops on horseback charged us down, at full tilt, like bats out of hell.  
Our leaders took to their heels before those horses reached the Fort.  
They made no bones about their fear, saying they'd been pounded by  
the cops at Fordsburg the day before. They just left us there in the  
mess they'd invited us to.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>'Nontsizi Mgqwetho: Stranger in Town', *op.cit.*, p.168.

<sup>10</sup>Translated by Motlalepula Matome.

<sup>11</sup>*Umteteli wa Bantu*, 13 December 1924, p.6, as cited in 'Nontsizi Mgqwetho: Stranger in Town', *op.cit.*, p.172.



She speaks as a committed Christian who both rejects her traditional past as heathen but at the same time rejects the culture of the people who brought Christianity to Africa. In her poem, 'Ingxoxo yomGinwa kumaGqobhoka!', the narrator speaks with the voice of a traditional Xhosa person, referred to as 'A Red Blanket', and says,

You Christians are suckers for every fad,  
You discarded skin garments and dressed up like whites.  
Your ears ring for white man's booze,  
But whites won't touch a drop of yours [...]  
You have no love, you have nothing at all,  
And yet you proclaim a God of love.

It ends with the narrator stating, 'If you should ever approach us again,/ We red blankets will roast you like meat./ But of course I don't wish to imply/ That the word of God is devoid of truth./ Mercy!'<sup>12</sup> It appears through her poetry that Nontsizi was a committed to the idea of manyano - women's unions of the churches - which encouraged a certain religious and economic independence and female solidarity. She defends women against the charge that by attending prayer union meetings they are neglecting their duties at home. She also demonstrates support for the rural church women in Herschel and Qumbu who, due to rapidly rising prices of commodities after World War I, mounted a systematic boycott of trading stations in the area. The women worked closely with Iliso Lomzi<sup>13</sup> in mounting school boycotts and other forms of passive resistance in relation to the issue of land registration and

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<sup>12</sup>'Ingxoxo yomGinwa kumaGqobhoka!', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 24 November 1923, p.4, translated by Motlalepula Matome. Also cited in 'Nontsizi Mgqwetho: Stranger in Town', *ibid.*, p.177.

<sup>13</sup>Literally translates as 'Eye of the Nation', often translated as the Vigilance Association, In 1886 Enoch Mamba first wrote to the Chief Magistrate to inform him of the formation of this political association. It was seen as a movement open to all Africans in the Transkei and its earliest aims were to frame recommendations to district councils, the General Council and government.

taxation. In her poem, 'Manyano amaFela-ndawonye', published in *Umteteli* in July 1924, Nontsizi calls for unity between the Manyano women's groups and the more recently formed, Amafela,<sup>14</sup> pointing out that they are both struggling for a common purpose. She explains that 'Manyano are the shield/to ward off the white man's arrows' and calls the Amafelandawonye to 'join the chorus/ Though your sister wears a blanket,/ stand shoulder to shoulder with her/ Till the hills of the Orange swivel'.<sup>15</sup> By 1925 many of the women had split with their parent churches and were adopting separatist and Africanist positions, some were influenced by Garveyism. What started as a fight on specific issues became a generalised resistance against those seen to collaborate with the state and against white domination.<sup>16</sup> Nontsizi writes, 'I'm going to rumble and rumble again/ Like thunder above Umthatha'.<sup>17</sup> It appears, however, that after 1926 her publications dwindle and the tone and content of her poems reflect increasing disillusionment. By 1930 she seems to be silent.

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'Imbongi uChizama', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 23 October 1923, p.8

<sup>14</sup> During their meetings the women vowed they would die together and they became known as 'Amafelandawonye' or 'Amafela' - The Diehards.

<sup>15</sup>'Manyano amaFela-ndawonye', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 6 July 1924, p.5.

<sup>16</sup>For a more detailed history of the Amafelandawonye see Chapter 7, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*, eds. William Beinhardt and Colin Bundy, London: James Currey; Berkeley: University of California Press; Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.

<sup>17</sup>'Manyano amaFela-ndawonye', *ibid.*, p.5

'Ingxoxo yomGinwa kumaGqobhoka!', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 24 November 1923, p.4

'Maibuyee! Afrika! Awu!', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 8 December 1923, p.4

'Ufikile! Udubul' esendlwini bachol' into emnyango! Kuse beyifanisa (New Year)', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 5 January 1924, p.5

'Phula-phulani Makowethu!', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 12 January 1924, p.5

## **Article**

'Yintsomi yooNomeva-Wasp', *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 13 December 1924, p.6

A bibliography of Nontsizi Mgqwetho's published work is forthcoming in a book with the working title 'The Sorrow that Seizes Your Country: The poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho', edited by Jeff Opland.

## **Gcina Mhlophe [also published as Nokugcina Sigwili] 1958 -**

Short story writer, playwright and performer. Gcina was born in Hammarsdale near Durban, in Natal. She was named Nokugcina at birth because she was the last born in a large family. Her mother, Nomanina Shezi, came from Mount Frere in the Transkei and was renowned for her singing. She was employed as a domestic worker. In 1960 she decided to return home to the Eastern Cape and Gcina was taken in by her father's family. Her father, Thomas Mzikayise Mhlophe, worked as a chef and an electrician. His elder sister, whose children had died and whose husband had left her, took care of Gcina. She became a grandmother to Gcina who called her Gogo.<sup>1</sup> It was Gogo who first introduced Gcina to the wonders and values of African folk tales, firing her imagination with flying tortoises, small crocodiles and Nanabulele, a precious, dangerous, beautifully coloured animal that generally minds its own business. Gcina recalls, 'I used to lie in bed and imagine it sitting peacefully under the surfaces of the water with rainbow colours floating'.<sup>2</sup> Amidst a garden filled with flowers Gogo taught Gcina that she must not hurt any living things as all living things have feelings. She lived with Gogo and attended Hammarsdale government school until she was ten.

In 1968 Gcina's mother suddenly reappeared and took her to the Eastern Cape where she had to switch from Zulu and learn her mother's language, Xhosa. She had moved from an urban to a rural situation. She attended Mtshazi Higher Primary School in the Transkei from 1969 to 1975 and began to withdraw into books. 'I was not the happy, young, falling-in-love child I had been. Books became my best friends. I just read and during that time I used to dream a

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<sup>1</sup>Gogo in Zulu refers to a grandmother. She may be the father's mother, older sister or an older woman who assumes this status.

<sup>2</sup>In 'Love With Words', *Nu Focus on the Arts*, February 1993, p.51.

lot and visualise some of the things I read in the books.<sup>3</sup> After Mtshazi she went to a Methodist boarding school, Mfundisweni High School. 'I have a vivid memory of the day I started. I was at the boarding school in Umfundisweni and I thought I was the ugliest girl in the whole school. I looked at my legs and they were not right, and my ears were wrong, and my voice was terrible. I used books to hide in.'<sup>4</sup> Gcina studied *Wind in the Willows*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Man For All Seasons*, Joyce and Yeats. She also read some Afrikaans and Zulu literature. She particularly admired A.C. Jordan's writing. '*Inggumbo Yeminyanya*, it's a love story, it's history, he's the Shakespeare of the Xhosa language!' The school pastor, Mr Fikeni, persuaded Gcina to join the choir telling her that her voice was resonant. 'I didn't know what it meant, but I thought "it's a good word, I'll join the choir".'<sup>5</sup> One long weekend the pastor invited Gcina to his home in Tsolo to meet his family. While she was visiting she attended an important meeting of the elders with Mr Fikeni and was overwhelmed and inspired by the narrative powers of the praise poet who performed at the gathering. His use of language, music and history in singing praises of the chief and people had a direct impact on Gcina's life and writing. 'He shook my hand. I remember his sweaty hand holding mine and I felt he'd baptised me as a poet. That's when I decided that's what I want to be. But I'd never in my life heard of women praise poets. So I kept my dream a secret for quite a number of months after that.'<sup>6</sup> The experience inspired her to write her first poem in Xhosa. She

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<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Taken from the unpublished version of 'The Number of Girls Growing: Gcina Mhlophe interviewed by Dennis Walder'. Publication forthcoming in *A Contemporary Theatre Review*, special edition on South African drama today, ed. L. Goodman.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>'In Love With Words', p.51.

remembers, 'It was such an exciting feeling. I immediately stood up and read it aloud and decided I liked my voice and that maybe my voice was made to read poetry with dignity'.<sup>7</sup>

Gcina completed her Matriculation in 1978 and went to live with her sister in Johannesburg. She continued to write and published an essay entitled 'Men are Always Women's Children' and two poems, 'Persecution' and 'The Building Fell' in *Staffrider*. She then got a job where she worked 'exactly thirty seven days for this woman'.<sup>8</sup> She kept a diary and wrote a story called 'My Dear Madam'. An extract was published by *Staffrider* in 1980 and the full story appeared in the anthology, *Reconstruction: Ninety Years of Black Historical Literature*, later in 1981. It begins with the narrator stating that 'On 24 February 1980 I was employed as a domestic servant. I had to start work at 7.30 a.m. which meant that I had to wake up at 5 a.m. every day to catch the bus'.<sup>9</sup> The story details the rapid decline of an apparently friendly relationship between the domestic servant and the seemingly liberal 'Madam' when the domestic servant refuses to call two white male visitors 'Baas'. Gcina wrote most of her poems and stories whilst sitting in a 'Non European' public toilet in the city. This was the only private space she could find to write. Her short story, 'The Toilet', written in 1980, renders a painful account of her early experiences of Johannesburg. She writes, 'Sometimes I wanted to give up and be a good girl who listened to her elders. Maybe I should have done something like teaching or nursing as my mother wished. People thought these professions were respectable, but I knew I wanted to do something different, though I wasn't sure what. I thought a lot about acting'.<sup>10</sup> Gcina found temporary work in a clothing factory and after meeting someone

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<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>'The Number of Girls Growing', *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>'My Dear Madam', *Staffrider*, 3, 4 (December 1980/January 1981), 11.

<sup>10</sup>'The Toilet', *Sometimes When It Rains*, ed. Ann Oosthuizen, London: Pandora, 1987, p.1.

from the Press Trust who liked her voice, was trained and worked as a newsreader with the group. After six months she left and took up a scholarship in film making in 1981. She was then asked to join the staff of *Learn and Teach* where she was the only black journalist and 'did a lot of running around the townships doing interviews'.<sup>11</sup> Maishe Maponya, who was then with the Allah Poets, asked Gcina to audition for a part in his play, *Umongikazi*. She got the part and the play opened at the Market Theatre in September 1982. In 1983 Gcina toured Europe with *Umongikazi* and the following year she played the lead in Barney Simon's *Black Dog, Inj'Emnyama* at the Edinburgh Festival. In 1986 she made her film debut as Gracie in *A Place of Weeping* and in 1987 she won an Obie Award for her part in Barney Simon's play, *Born in the RSA*. She wrote and acted in her own play, *Have You Seen Zandile?* for which she won the Jefferson Award for Best Actress in 1988.

*Have You Seen Zandile?* is written in a mix of English, Xhosa and Zulu and based on Gcina's youth. It 'was born out of looking back at everything, totally everything, put down on paper no matter how painful'. It looks at the intimacy between a young girl and her grandmother, the school system in South Africa and relationships between men and women. In writing the play Gcina tried to understand her mother who died in 1984. She recalls,

I came back from the funeral and all kinds of things woke up inside my chest [...] I was full of anger for my mother that she didn't become my friend. She had died without being my friend, you know, because we had so many differences. I was looking through those memories, searching for good things and also trying to understand that she went through difficult times [...]. So I was searching through my mother's baggage too. I wanted to be at

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<sup>11</sup>'The Number of Girls Growing', *ibid.*

peace, and I wanted her to rest at peace. I did not want to remember her with hatred.<sup>12</sup>

In 1989, Gcina wrote and directed *Somdaka* at the Market Theatre where she had been appointed Resident Director. The play is about a young man who wants to stay in the countryside. 'He appreciates the beauty of Mount Frere and wants to create work there, work that honours his manhood. It's the opposite of *The Hungry Earth*, which just shows people stripped of their manhood.' Her plays have been criticised for not being overtly political. She feels that writing about the personal is political, that the individuals she writes about are the people who make up 'the masses'. 'My writing centres around people more than the movements.'<sup>13</sup> In her short story, 'Nokulunga's Wedding', Gcina tells of an arranged marriage. It begins, 'Mount Frere was one of the worst places for a woman to live. A woman had to marry whoever had enough money for lobola and that was that. Nokulunga was one of many such victims'.<sup>14</sup> Gcina has also written books and stories for children. In 1989, *The Snake with the Seven Heads* was published. It is written in the style of an oral tale and tells of Majunza, a singer and dancer. A wicked woman asks Majunza to sing at her grand-daughter's wedding but Majunza cannot because of an earlier commitment she has made to sing at another wedding. The wicked woman turns Majunza's husband into a three-headed snake. *The Queen of the Tortoises* published in 1990 begins when the tortoise had a shell as smooth as an egg. In 1992 *The Singing Dog* was published and in 1994 *Hi Zoleka!* was published in English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa. Gcina believes that children's stories in Africa should reflect the continent's cultural heritage and specific contexts. 'Black children are taught in

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<sup>12</sup>Interview with Gcina Mhlophe by Cheryl-Ann Michael, Johannesburg, 30 August, 1993.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>'Nokulunga's Wedding', *Lip from Southern African Women*, eds. Susan Brown, Isabel Hofmeyr and Susan Rosenberg, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983, pp.82-86.



schools about Snow White and The Three Pigs, but there is a wealth of other tales that I want to share with the children, both traditional and new ones.<sup>15</sup>

Gcina is now concentrating on storytelling. She likes 'the fact that storytelling can cross the boundaries of religions and all the differences that we have'.<sup>16</sup> She performs in South Africa and overseas and has established a drama group called Zanendaba where she trains new storytellers who perform and conduct workshops, often making up their own stories, and stimulating the creative talents of the participants. She is specifically concerned by the 'shortage of women, especially black women, that are involved in the arts' and blames colonialism for damaging the art and storytelling structures that traditionally belonged to women. 'In the olden days the arts were in women's hands, the art of storytelling for instance, then with the migrant labour system, they took the men to the cities to work, many were killed and women had to forget about recreation and look after their homes and families making sure everything didn't break apart while the men were away'.<sup>17</sup> In June, 1994 she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Open University in England for her contributions to the arts and the educationally underprivileged.

Gcina has been labelled storyteller, actress, playwright, director and poet and although she does not object to labels, she does not see her writing as separate from her performing. She says,

When I do not write, I am not happy! No matter how wonderful other aspects of life can be. My writing was from the beginning influenced by oral poetry, storytelling and traditional singing, and

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<sup>15</sup>*Sowetan*, 27 March, 1993, p.12.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Gcina Mhlophe by Cheryl-Ann Michael, Johannesburg, 30 August 1993.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from Gcina Mhlophe to Gaelle Mogwe, 1993.

that has stayed with me all these years and it has been a solid basis to who I am. I love languages. I see beauty in the use of words both written and spoken.<sup>18</sup>

After having lived for a long time in Alexandra Township, she now lives in Berea in Johannesburg where, for the first time, she has a room of her own in which to write. Lack of private space for writing has always been a problem. Now she finds that she has 'too little time to be quiet and listen to her creative spirit.'<sup>19</sup> Gcina enjoys reading and particularly likes the works of Isabel Allende, Nawal El Saadawi and Sembene Ousmane. She makes her own clothes. 'I like to be different. I might buy a regular top from a chain store, but I will add embroidery to make it mine. I'm very aware of being a South African and what is typically South African appeals to me. I pick and choose from the different cultures.'<sup>20</sup> She also enjoys going to art galleries and museums. She has an adopted daughter called Nomthandazo Mhlophe.

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<sup>18</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*ibid.*

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**Boitumelo (Johanna Makgwele) Mofokeng [also published as Boitumelo and Boitumelo Makhema] 1959 -**

Poet and Journalist. Boitumelo was born in Naledi, Soweto. 'My parents were living in a shack. They were still developing the townships. So just weeks or days before I was born they were told, look...you're going to move into that house[...]. I was born into a proper home, not a shack. That is why the name Boitumelo, which means joy'.<sup>1</sup> Boitumelo's mother, Dorcas Makhema, 'is a domestic worker' and her father, Jackson Makhema, 'is an ordinary worker labourer'. Boitumelo grew up and went to school in Soweto. In 1976, at the time of the student uprisings, she was attending Thomas Mofolo Secondary School, doing her Standard Eight. She recalls,

We were listening to our teachers [...] I must tell you, I was doing about four subjects in Afrikaans. I loved Afrikaans because I had good teachers from primary school. So I didn't have a problem. I was doing general mathematics in Afrikaans, history in Afrikaans, Geography in Afrikaans so at the end of the day when 1976, June 16th came, there was these meetings held, we didn't see what was wrong with what we were doing but we supported the idea. We went for it. That's when we discovered the real things because we started engaging in discussions. We started reading. We saw some of the placards for the first time...things started being triggered into our minds[...]. We started understanding what had happened to So and So's child. They've gone into exile. The word, exile never existed in my mind before Seventy Six and the things of house arrest and things. We could not finish our school in 1976/7. Schools that were administered by the Department of Bantu Education. That was the cause of my anger.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Boitumelo Mofokeng by Gale Mogwe, Johannesburg, 9 August, 1993. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

It was at this time that Boitumelo 'began writing protest poetry'<sup>2</sup> and in 1977 she joined Medupe Writers Association which was later banned. From 1978 to 1980, she attended Turret Correspondence College where she did her General Certificate of Education and attempted her Matriculation. She explains that 'the going was tough and I think the political consciousness also was driving us more into being activists than doing our school work'. She did not complete her studies.

Boitumelo has three sisters and two brothers, one of whom was killed in a car accident. She remembers her brother as her role model and 'a source of inspiration. He was a driver at the *Rand Daily Mail* group of newspapers' and would bring journalists home and introduce them to the family. Boitumelo wanted to be a teacher but explains that 'when I saw the uprisings I said which child am I going to teach? I myself boycotted the same system of education. Am I going to be teaching somebody in that system?' When her brother died, Boitumelo decided she wanted to be a journalist. 'I just said to myself. I'm going to the newsroom, damn it, and I'm going to make it!' In 1981, she joined *The Sowetan* as a women's page feature writer. She recalls that she was 'somewhat privileged because it was very rare for people with lower education to go into media'. Working for *The Sowetan*, Boitumelo discovered advertising and joined an advertising agency where she was employed on the development of a black marketing unit. In 1984 she moved on to a marketing research company where she trained interviewers. She worked briefly for a black women's magazine and in 1988 studied at business college for a Diploma in Journalism. She joined the South African Council of Churches in 1989 where she is now editor of *The Regional Mail* and the internal newsletter. She gained her Matriculation through correspondence in 1992 and in 1993 began

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<sup>2</sup>*Women in South Africa: From the Heart - An Anthology*. Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1988, p.90.

pendence studies with University of South Africa for her BA degree in Communications English. She was a member of the Managing Committee of *Speak*, an alternative zine for women, and chairperson of the English Literacy Project Trust.

Boitumelo sees her writing as being largely influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement and the political upheavals of the Seventies. Her poems, 'A Mother's Cry' and 'A Mother's Lament', are examples of what are 'tagged Protest Era Writings'.<sup>3</sup> A mother laments unsafe living conditions, the death, imprisonment and exile of her children and her extended family under apartheid. She consoles herself with the knowledge that her children 'had hope/ Only death would be harmed but never the spirit'.<sup>4</sup> Apart from her poem, 'Didimala', written in English, Boitumelo's poetry is written in English. She feels it was necessary to write in English because protest poetry targeted a wide and international audience in a quest for universality but she also points out that 'at the end of the day one realised that we are not writing along with the masses [...] it was a conscious effort to write in English but [we are] not conscious that we are not writing for our people as well. Although I'm saying that there is no justification for writing in English'. She would now like to produce work 'in our own language'. Boitumelo has not consciously drawn on oral traditions in her writing. She recalls that her mother would tell them stories that she had learnt at school 'before the introduction of Bantu Education 'but it was not a special situation like going to the farms, to the villages where your granny would do it around the fire, no, no, no, at home in the township she used to do it and it was interesting'. She says, 'it is only now that one is beginning to discover

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Interview completed by Boitumelo Mofokeng, 10 August 1993.  
*Making the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*, ed. Cecily Lockett, Cape Town: AD  
Press, 1990. p.233.

where one comes from and say, Wow! Wow! So that's how valuable that time was [...]that contribution was'.

Moving onwards but not divorcing herself from Black Consciousness, Boitumelo 'ventured into ANC ideology through women's work.' She is involved with the Federation of Transvaal Women and has 'developed a feminist approach in writing about women's issues, demands, concerns rights and experience'.<sup>5</sup> Her writing has focused specifically on the situation of domestic workers. 'My mother is a domestic worker - a subject of my writings. I have seen how she was always reluctant and very submissive in addressing workers issues with the Madam. Several of my aunts are domestic workers as well, so one is surrounded, brought up a child of a domestic worker.' Boitumelo dedicates her poem, 'A Domestic Worker's Plea' to Roseline Naapo, a poet and domestic worker for seventeen years before becoming an organiser for the South African Domestic Worker's Union.<sup>6</sup> 'Inside a Domestic Worker (in the 80's)' tells of a woman seeking employment. She can do general household cleaning, laundry and ironing, cooking and baking, baby-sitting, answer the phone, read and write and she loves pets. When asked by the Madam how much pay she wants, she answers, 'a living wage.' The Madam closes the door with the comment, 'No, sorry you are over qualified.'<sup>7</sup>

Boitumelo has publicly criticised the lack of encouragement and exposure received by black, South African women writers. She is particularly critical of *Staffrider* magazine and writes, 'With due respect to *Staffrider* and Ravan Press publishers, I would like to use the example of their most recent achievement - a compilation of works they have published in the past

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<sup>5</sup>Questionnaire.

<sup>6</sup>'A Domestic Worker's Plea' was written in 1987 and is to date unpublished. Copies of unpublished poems were given to Gael Mogwe by Boitumelo Mofokeng.

<sup>7</sup>'Inside a Domestic Worker (in the 80's)' was written in 1987 and is to date unpublished.

decade'.<sup>8</sup> 'Do you want to tell me the works of women writers who started with *Staffrider* ten years ago were not good enough for reproduction in that collection?'<sup>9</sup> 'Many of those who wrote for *Staffrider* lacked previous experience of writing but they were a new breed whose work had spontaneity, truth and authenticity.'<sup>10</sup> 'How dare they choose to see men's work and works of Nadine Gordimer[...] like we were never there.'

Boitumelo feels that she is now able to write more about her personal life experiences and is strongly influenced by religion through her work with the South African Council of Churches. This is reflected in her poems, 'Covenant with Women of the World', 'I Spent my Life'<sup>11</sup> and 'A Poem for Myself'.<sup>12</sup> She would like to continue reading her poetry to the public and hopes one day to publish a collection of her work. She has a daughter, Ntshadi and a son, Reikanne, and is divorced after seven years of marriage. She says of her personal philosophy, 'I do not want to blame others for my failures neither do I want my success to depend on others. It is this belief that has spurred me on through my experiences of education crises, career development, job experience and marriage.'

Damn it! Take it from me  
I am a woman  
I am a worker  
I am a warrior  
I am a writer.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Boitumelo is referring to the special issue, *Ten Years of Staffrider Magazine: 1978-1988*, 7, 3 and 4 (1988).

<sup>9</sup>'Women Worker Writers: Breaking the Silence', in *Buang Basadi: Conference of Women and Writing*, Congress of South African Writers Transvaal Region, [n.d.], p.6.

<sup>10</sup>'Where are the Women?', *Current Writing*, 1 (1989), p.41.

<sup>11</sup>'Spent my Life', was written in 1991 and is to date unpublished.

<sup>12</sup>'A Poem for Myself' was written in 1991 and is to date unpublished.

<sup>13</sup>From the unpublished poem, 'Did you Know a Woman is Called all Sorts of Bad Names that Start with "W"?' by Boitumelo Mofokeng.



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## **Makhokolotso Albertina Mokhomo 1929 -**

Poet. Makhokolotso was born in the Ficksburg district of the Orange Free State in South Africa. Her paternal grandparents were Mafona and 'Mamatli Mokhomo and she is of the Letebele. She began her primary education at Malehloa Farm School in Fouriesburg and later attended Clocolan Bantu United School in the Orange Free State. After completing her primary education she went to school in Lesotho where she attended Maseru Intermediate School and then Basutoland High School in 1946. It was while she was at secondary school that she became interested in Sesotho novels and poetry and developed a love of writing. The Mosotho writer, B.M. Khaketla, taught Makhokolotso at Basutoland High School and remembers that, 'It was during this time that she showed that she was talented at writing poetry. We tried to blow the tiny spark that kindled so that it could spread even more'.<sup>1</sup> In her poem entitled 'Mophato O Phahameng wa Lesotho' (Basutoland High School) she praises the school, calling it 'a hawk amongst birds'. She writes,

It is the heaven of Thesele with its cool shade.  
Young men are working hard at their books,  
They suck the marrow of the cow where it is fat,  
They suck the milk of the cow where it is sweet,  
They are doing wonders on the plateau,  
They are building a monument to education in Mejametalana,<sup>2</sup>  
They are fresh and shiny like three-year old calves in Spring.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B.M. Khaketla, 'Introduction', *Sebatso*, Johannesburg: Educum Publishers, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Mejametalana is another name for Maseru.

<sup>3</sup>'Mophato O Phahameng wa Lesotho', *Sebatso*, p.31, translated from Sesotho into English by Y.M.'s Language Services, Roodepoort, South Africa.

Following secondary school in Lesotho, Makhokolotso studied nursing at Pretoria General Hospital. She then went on to specialise in midwifery studying at Baragwanath Hospital. She also attended the Kalafong College of Nursing in Pretoria. With her nursing qualifications she gained employment in different hospitals throughout South Africa. These included the Odendaalsrust Provincial Hospital and the Non-European Clinic in Germiston. She later took up a post at Edenvale Hospital and then worked with Natalspruit Hospital before deciding to return to Ficksburg where she was offered a job with the Ficksburg Municipality Clinic.

Makhokolotso married Mareka Molotsi with whom she had three children; two girls, Emma and Malebina, and a boy, Stephen. Her life was marred by tragedy when her husband was killed in a car accident. She again married and her second husband, Mr. Lekena, died while trying to rescue someone who was drowning in a lake. Makhokolotso became active in community issues and is a member of SANTA and the welfare organisation, Phutha Mahae. She is also a member of the Lesotho writer's organisation, LESIBA (Quill).

In 1953 Makhokolotso published a collection of poetry entitled *Sebatatso* (Recommendation). The work in general expresses a deep love for Lesotho and the pain of living in racist, urban South Africa. In her poem, 'Bodibeng ba Mahlomola' (Abyss of Sorrow), Makhokolotso describes the plight of Basotho living in South Africa and comments on the divide-and-rule tactics of tribalism. She writes, 'Today we have become slaves,/ We are suffering in the land of the Boers,/ We suffer at the hands of the Black Europeans,/ A Xhosa man pushing me like a dog'.<sup>4</sup> The narrator is torn by a longing for her home in

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<sup>4</sup>'Bodibeng ba Mahlomola', *Sebatatso*, p.23.

Lesotho. She cannot sleep. The stars, the moon and the sky become her friends as she lies night after night scared to close her eyes for fear of nightmares and obsessed with thoughts of the birds that 'fly to Lesotho, my home,/ They fly in haste for the warmth of the high mountains,/ Missing home, the home of peace and prosperity'. She tells how she misses climbing the mountains,

And watching the streams flow,  
Listening to the sound of water  
Cascading down the glittering gorges;  
Those mirrors of Thesele.  
Oh, I have come to the wrong place!  
I am digging pigweed for my father,  
I am not here for long, I am only passing by  
For my heart stayed behind in Moshoeshoe's Land,  
Land of bees, Land of luxury,  
Where maidens bathe in fresh milk.<sup>5</sup>

Her poems, 'Sello sa Basotho' (Lament of the Basotho) and 'Sewa sa Lesotho' (Plague of Lesotho), deplore the 'medicine murders' which she feels have given Lesotho a bad name and made it vulnerable to attack from outside forces. In 'Moratuwa - Lerato La Me' (Beloved - My Love), the narrator tells of her love for a man who was adored by his peers during initiation. Maidens smeared their faces and waited patiently for this 'lion' to notice them. He is light-skinned like 'Seilatsatsi' (one who has not been in the sun). His eyes are as clear as a recently confined woman. He has strong limbs and his face is as smooth as that of a snake which has just shed its skin. When he sings rock-rabbits admire him from their rocky hiding places. The narrator tells of how,

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<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.28.

The day he began to rule my heart,  
The day he first taught me of love,  
I was a young woman overwhelmed and dreaming,  
Dreams which came in the middle of the day.  
My voice disappeared  
My voice disappointed me and  
I became dumb with pride,  
With tears of joy flowing down my face like water falls.<sup>6</sup>

Makhokolotso feels that she has gained inspiration in her writing from the works of B.M. Khaketla, K.E. Ntsane, B.K. Taoana and 'Masechele Khaketla. She also admires the work of the writer, Thomas Mofolo, and in her poem, 'Kgopotso ya Mofolo, "Mongodi"' (In Memory of Mofolo, 'Mongodi'), she mourns his death, writing,

At his grave we the scribes pray,  
We pray to the gods to help,  
To give us the wisdom to write,  
To sing songs and enchant the nation.<sup>7</sup>

Makhokolotso believes that young people 'who are talented in writing should learn from older writers to ensure that the continuity is not broken and that the granaries of literature are replenished'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>'Moratuwa-Lerato La Me', *ibid.*, p.30. Translation from Sesotho to English by Gael Mogwe.

<sup>7</sup>'Kgopotso ya Mofolo, "Mongodi"', *ibid.*, p.41. Translation from Sesotho to English by Y.M's Language Services, Roodepoort, South Africa.

<sup>8</sup>'Albertina Makhokolotso Mokhomo', *Mabalankwe ka Bangodi*, D.J.M. Ngcanga, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1989, p. 107. Translation from Sesotho to English by Nhlanhla Maake, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

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## **Bernadette (Sizakele Ismei) Mosala 1931 -**

Short story writer. Bernadette was born in Dannhauzer, Natal. She spent the early part of her childhood on her paternal grandparents' farm where she remembers they grew crops, raised cattle and had a very large orchard. Her grandmother 'knew every tree in the orchard. If you stole an apple, she could say someone has stolen an apple'.<sup>1</sup> Bernadette remembers that her grandfather suffered from severe asthma which she believes was caused by the harsh conditions he endured while 'working for the Boers'. He purchased the farm vowing never to work for Boers again in his life and became an extremely religious man. Bernadette's daily routine included attending his morning prayer sessions. She used to tend the cattle and loved riding the donkeys. She recalls that she had 'a very happy childhood' there.

Bernadette's mother, Lesai Ntombela, was trained as a teacher but gave up her teaching career when she married. She lived on the farm with her parents-in-law and 'was a very active and constructive home builder'. Bernadette recalls that she was an able gardener and good with small stock. She also recalls that her mother was a member of a club, organised by Doris Paton, and that she would sit knitting garments to send overseas to British soldiers fighting in the Second World War. Bernadette's father, Simon Buthelezi, was a school teacher who worked in different, sometimes remote places. 'Eventually he wanted my mother to come along with him so he says to his mother, "I'm going to leave Sizakele with you" and Granny said, "No ways, I don't have a back to carry any child". So my dad mounted a horse and went to my maternal grandmother.' Bernadette left the farm and Virdreit Primary School and went

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Bernadette Mosala by Gaelle Mogwe, Johannesburg, 25 April, 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

to live with her maternal grandmother in Kiekeel where she completed her primary education. Bernadette enjoyed reading from an early age and was fond of Zulu books, particularly Violet Dube's collection of stories, *Wozanazo: Izindaba zika Poshozwayo*. She describes how one day she was so absorbed in her reading that she forgot the one-gallon container of water she was heating on a brazier. The water boiled over, 'the coals went shhhh and it splashed on to my lap, scalding me'. Bernadette also enjoyed the traditional tales that both her grandmothers told her and loved it when due to a lack of books her primary school teachers wrote stories on the blackboard. Bernadette attended St. Lewis Bertrand's Catholic School where she boarded. She then went on to study at Inkamana High School. She says that for 'Blacks, going to boarding school was the only route' to obtaining an education. She feels that the options have since widened and she would no longer recommend boarding school as an ideal. She went to St. Mary's Institution in Roma, Lesotho and then on to Pius XII Catholic University where she completed her degree in English. She continued her education at St. Francis College, Marianhill where she did her teaching training.

In 1956 Bernadette took up a position as an English teacher with St. Thomas' College in Johannesburg. She left after two months. 'I resigned. I couldn't take the nuns. [...] Actually I didn't resign, I just walked away and got a job in the township.' She taught at Mmusi High School in Pimville, Soweto but didn't enjoy the experience. She describes one incident that contributed to her unhappiness at the school,

Quite a number of the students in the Matric class were either a little bit older than me or my age. The principal said to them, "She is your age, you can propose love to her." I got into the class and they were funny. I didn't know what was wrong. Fortunately I had a cousin in the class, so lunchtime I asked, "What was wrong with you today?" He laughed and eventually he tells me that this is what they were told.



Bernadette then joined the staff of Fred Clark school which was to later become Morris Isaacson. She taught English there for over fifteen years. In 1960 she married and has three children: two daughters and a son.

In 1972 Bernadette went to England where she studied for a Masters Degree in English and Theatre at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She returned to start up an early-learning community centre in Soweto. 'I was teaching English through activity and drama.' She began to worry that the teachers in surrounding primary schools would not be equipped to deal with the children who were passing through the centre and decided to run teachers' workshops 'to familiarise them with what these kids were doing'. Two years after establishing the centre, she left to work for the South African Council of Churches as senior director of the development cluster. Her work entailed a great deal of travel to rural areas where she conducted development workshops largely centred on the community, home and family. She recalls that most of the workshops concerned women as:

the people who get anything going are women, not men, and they started gardening, they started sewing projects. I remember one community received a donation from Germany, they bought a tractor, a plough, and a year later they were producing all kinds of vegetables for market.

Bernadette was very concerned about the inequalities in education brought about by Bantu Education. She wanted to contribute to redressing the balance and began to think of possible ways to improve educational opportunities available to black students. 'In 1983 the results were very bad [...]. Then I started a weekend programme in Soweto to give supplementary classes to students; Matric, Standard Nine and Ten.' In 1986 the school, called the Educational Programme Centre, moved to Fordsburg and was able to operate on a full-time

basis. It moved again to Mayfair and has recently combined with the Foundation School and taken up new premises in Melville. 'The students have playing fields and much more space now.' Bernadette is director of the Educational Programme Centre and teaches at the school. She is interested in applying new teaching methodologies and making English Literature more accessible to those who are second languages speakers of English or who have not been given the chance to develop English communication skills. She believes that many,

of our children fail matric, not because they have not studied or not prepared but because they fail to put on paper what they have in their heads. So I concentrate a lot on developing writing skills. We do a lot of peer editing, publishing in class and cross-age tutoring which tends to help with communication skills.

Bernadette first started writing as a response to the growing politicisation of both teachers and students of the 1970s. She explains that she 'taught some of the student who were active. TsieTsi Mashinini was a student of mine, was in my drama group' and adds, 'ya, in 1976 I was detained'. Her poems were 'all lost because when they came to arrest us, they collected all my writings and I never got those back'. She chooses to write poetry in Zulu and feels that 'many really beautiful words in Zulu are getting lost'. She finds it difficult, however, to write longer passages in Zulu and recalls, 'I was trying to write something in Zulu and I found I was throwing in a lot of English words but when I write in English, I don't throw in Zulu words. I can't explain why this is so'.

In 1987, Bernadette's story, 'A Notion of Sisterhood' was published in *Sometimes When It Rains: Writings by South African Women*. It tells of 'two young women, Jean Finney and

Tizzy Khumalo'<sup>2</sup> who are room-mates at Witwatersrand University. Jean is white and comes 'from Sandton in the northern suburbs of the city'. Her family are comfortably off. 'Tizzy's home was in Soweto'.<sup>3</sup> Within the confines of the Campus and academic life, the two develop what appears to be a close friendship. They attend a conference and Jean supports Tizzy against the racist attacks of a group of white women. But once they both leave university the friendship begins to show strain. Jean applies for a high-paying position with a multinational firm,

The advert for the job had stressed 'a good understanding and working relationship with blacks' [...]. At the interview Jean experienced no problem whatsoever; management was overjoyed with her. What impressed them most was the statement Tizzy had prepared on their relationship.<sup>4</sup>

Tizzy finds a job with the Child Welfare Society and although the offices are 'right in the centre of town her responsibility was among black children only. This bothered her a great deal. At the university she had taken the same courses as other students. Social work was social work for her without any colour connotations'.<sup>5</sup> Her salary is so low she cannot afford to rent a house in Soweto. Jean buys a house in Rosebank. The two grow further apart until Jean demonstrates a complete disregard for her friend. Tizzy feels hurt and realises that she has just been a pawn in Jean's ambitions. She finally rejects Jean, saying, 'you are

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<sup>2</sup>'A Notion of Sisterhood', *Sometimes When It Rains: Writings by South African Women*, London and New York: Pandora, 1987, p.70.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.79.

white and I am black. That's what matters in this country and it looks like life can never be lived on a human level'.<sup>6</sup>

Bernadette would like to retire and write full-time. She is currently working on a novella. It is a story based in Soweto and was 'stimulated by the time when we had a lot of army boys in the townships'. She is also working on a collection of one-act plays for schools and a text book on *Macbeth*. 'We are throwing out what doesn't hang together and making it more accessible for our students.' In 1991 she received the French Palm D'Academie in recognition of her community work. She says of her achievements that she takes after her father who was an academic with very strong principles and a very frank person. 'He would say anything that he felt he should say to you whether it was going to hurt you or not. I remember my mother saying I had taken after him and she said, "The world can take nonsense from a man but not from a woman".'

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<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.85.

**Short Story**

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## **Maud (Gugu) Motanyane 1951 -**

Journalist and short story writer. Maud was born in Nigel, east of Johannesburg. Her mother, Sarah Musa Masondo, was a schoolteacher. 'My mother always worked, even with eight children. There was no question that if you're a woman you don't work.'<sup>1</sup> Maud's father, Oliver Mangaliso Ndimande, worked as a clerk on the sub-Nigel mine. With both parents working and as the third child, Maud assumed responsibility in the home at an early age. She remembers a childhood of looking after younger children and sharing. 'The chores were shared [...]. We had to share everything, clothes, everything.' Maud attended primary school in Nigel. She recalls that 'storytelling was a big thing. My friends told stories all the time. They were the only entertainment we had.' She enjoyed English lessons, writing essays and reading educational comics and books at school including *Alice in Wonderland*. She remembers that they only read 'white books. There were no black books.'

In 1964, at the age of thirteen, Maud was sent to Inkamana Catholic Convent, a boarding school in Vryheid, Natal. From 1967 to 1968 she attended St. Augustines, Dundee where she did her Matriculation. She feels that attending Catholic schools taught her control and gave her a solid educational grounding but knocked a lot of the spontaneity out of her. She was taught 'good English as in the Queen's English and that's also part of knocking spontaneity in a way'. In 1972, Maud obtained a diploma in Library Science from the University of Zululand. She married soon after and worked as a librarian in Tembisa Library. She detested the library 'because it was a hole in the wall that had no books and low salary'. In 1974 she started

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Maud Motanyane by Gaelle Mogwe, Johannesburg, 20 January, 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

working for *The Star* newspaper in their library. 'It was a newspaper library and used by journalists of course and one interfaced a lot with journalists and that's where my interest in writing came from.' At a time when it was difficult for black women to gain such positions, Maud applied for training, went before an interviewing panel and was accepted as a cadet in *The Star's* training school for journalists. She believes she should thank her mother who set the example with her philosophy that with determination she could achieve anything she wanted. 'For example, when everybody else didn't have an account in the pharmacy or in a shopping centre, she just would have it. Like her way of communicating and talking would open doors for her.' Despite her determination, Maud had to work to develop the confidence to become a reporter. 'Fortunately I had a mentor. I always try to find someone I can lean on and she became a very good friend of mine. She's much older than me. Barbara Ludman, an American friend of mine. She was a female journalist in the newsroom. So I would write my story then she would read it, thrash them out before they got to the editor.'

In 1978, Maud moved from *The Star* to work for Barclays Bank. 'They approached me and they were opening at the time of the Sullivan Code of Conduct. The companies were getting black people in and I just thought it would be an interesting change.' She found the work lacked stimulation and felt that she was just 'window dressing', a token black woman who looked and sounded right. 'I was interfacing with the black community [...] giving them [the bank] lists of top black people to invite to dinner.' Maud left after only five months and went to work for the *Post* which was part of *The Star* group. She edited the *Sunday Post* magazine. In 1979 after a short period with *The Post*, she went back to *The Star* and stayed until 1986 despite the various problems she experienced there. 'It wasn't a newspaper that

aimed at black people' and Maud had to learn to report from the perspective of white South Africans. 'So that was very taxing. Good training because you learnt to identify your audience and provide it with what it wants but it's not necessarily what you want to write about. But also they had better resources in terms of the library, in terms of cars, in terms of everything, so it was a better place to be professionally.'<sup>1</sup> In 1983 she was chosen as one of the fellows of the World Press Institute, St Paul, Minnesota, and spent several months travelling in the United States. In 1986 she joined *Tribute* where she became editor. While she was still with *Tribute*, her short story, 'Two Minutes', was published in an anthology of writing by South African women, *Sometimes When It Rains*. The story is based on Maud's experience of Catholic boarding school. The first-person narrator has a friend called Tosh. Both girls are taught by Sister Marietta that 'boys come second after witches and ghosts as the deadliest poison for little girls'; that it takes 'less than two minutes for a boy to ruin a girl's entire life'.<sup>2</sup> At eighteen, when they leave the school, the girls swear that if either one of them ever sleeps with a man they will write or telephone to report that they have 'finally fallen'. The narrator looks back on her life and laments that even as she goes to bed with her husband every night, Sister Marietta's voice rings in her mind. 'He will take you and use you and throw you away like an empty shell.'<sup>3</sup> The story ends with her wondering if she will ever be able to untangle the knot in her heart and mind that prevents her from enjoying uninhibited and equal sexual relations with a man. She wonders if her friend, Tosh, is 'plagued by the same anguish' or if perhaps she is 'still pure'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>'Two Minutes', *Sometimes When It Rains: Writings by South African Women*, London and New York: Pandora, 1987, p.11.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.18.



In 1990 Maud left South Africa for France where she lived just outside Monaco. It was 'a broadening experience. I wouldn't immigrate to France. If I were to chose a country it wouldn't be my first choice of country to live in because I think the people are too insular and I basically don't like to be an outsider.' She has continued to write for *Tribute*. Her column, 'A Letter Home', offers South African readers a seemingly personal account of her varied overseas experiences. In her piece, 'One Month Down and A Lifetime to Go' she celebrates the South African elections. 'Daily, I welcome myself into the world of the franchised. Being a member of an oppressed group has become burdensome. I am the first and probably the last apartheid victim to live in my corner of the South of France. On that basis, schools, churches and clubs have invited me to give talks.'<sup>5</sup> She goes on to complain about the 'European who has never been to South Africa' and their idea that as a member of the oppressed majority, black South Africans must 'be permanently angry and sad'. She revels in her new-found pride at having a national anthem to sing and a flag that she readily identifies with and adds, 'Now I enjoy *koeksisters* without feeling I am selling out'.<sup>6</sup> In 1994 Maud moved to Holland. In the 'The Naked Eye' she observes some Dutch attitudes to nudity and confronts her own attitudes. She describes how she grew up with the impression that bodies were 'something to be hidden, something extremely private'. She remembers her early exposure to nakedness as consisting of relatively rare glimpses of girls changing at her Catholic boarding school, and an old lady who was seen to be mad or a witch because she would 'take off her clothes and run stark naked down the streets' of the township. So in Holland it came as quite a shock to Maud to see her next-door neighbour in the yard 'serving breakfast to her husband in her birthday suit' and 'except for a cigar dangling from his mouth,

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<sup>5</sup>'One Month Down and A Lifetime to Go', *Tribute*, June 1994, p.12.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*

the husband was also starkers'. It came as a greater shock to see the couple turn and happily wave good morning to her as she peered from her window. A few visits to nudist beaches, where there were an assortment of bodies, 'huge torsos sprawled like beached whales. Mamas and papas, children and young adults', helped Maud with her inhibitions.<sup>7</sup> The article ends with a more exposed, worldly Maud, who can now look at other people's naked bodies without being embarrassed if they happen to catch her looking.

Maud likes to keep fit and exercises regularly. She would like to explore and develop her spiritual side and 'become a better person'. She wants to now reflect on her life and 'put a lot of things into perspective, things that I was angry about and try and understand them'. She feels that bringing up teenage children has been one of the greatest levellers in her life. 'It has helped me to love unconditionally, to realise that actually my point of view is not necessarily the correct point of view. There is another side to each story.' Maud speaks Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans, English 'and a bit of French and a bit of Dutch now'. She has always written in English. She would like to travel and perhaps live in Holland for a while longer but remain connected to South Africa. She hopes to continue writing fiction and would like to write some autobiographical pieces. 'The kind of writing that appeals to me is the Maya Angelou type of writing.'

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<sup>7</sup>The Naked Eye', *Tribute*, October 1994, p.14.

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## Lauretta (Gladys Nozizwe Duyu) Ngcobo 1931 -

Novelist, editor and essay writer. Lauretta was born in Cabazi, Ixopo, Natal, the first girl in a family of four. Her mother, Rosa Fisekile Cele, had a difficult time with the birth. 'On the night of the second day, my grandfather, who knew the white doctor personally, had managed to persuade him to venture into the black reserve, by night, to save the life of his elder daughter and her unborn child. And so he did.'<sup>1</sup> Lauretta grew up in a rural setting and values this experience, especially her exposure to oral literary traditions where poetry informed all occasions. 'It is performed to honour kings, to welcome newly born babies, and to rock them to their sleep. It is sung at weddings, at funerals and at war. It even heralds peace.'<sup>2</sup> She remembers her mother relenting in family arguments and reciting poetry at the door way of the 'great house', 'the maternal family line first, followed by the paternal line'<sup>3</sup> until the grandmother would nod her head in concurrence and the argument would be over. Lauretta comes from a family of storytellers. Her great-grandmother composed poetry about her own painful life as the least loved wife of her husband's four wives. She also composed family poetry where she made special contributions to each child in the family. Lauretta used to cry as a baby. 'Apparently I had a very sharp voice [...]. My poetry imitates the honey bird which is very insistent.'<sup>4</sup> Lauretta's great-grandmother also narrated episodes of Zulu history and her mother would tell her African folk tales.

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<sup>1</sup>'My Life and My Writing', *Kunapipi*, Special Double Issue Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing, 7, 2 and 3 (1985), 83. Lauretta Ngcobo has published two articles entitled 'My Life and My Writing'. One published in *Kunapipi* and republished in *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, eds. K. Petersen and A. Rutherford, Oxford: Dangaroo Press, 1986 and another published in *Let It Be Told*, ed. Lauretta Ngcobo, London: Virago, 1988. The two articles are different.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>'Interview with Lauretta Ngcobo' by Anissa Talahite, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1, 3 (1992), 317.

When Laretta was seven years old her father, Simon Shukwana Gwina, died. Both he and Laretta's mother were teachers. Laretta's mother became the sole breadwinner in the family. Despite the difficulties, she was determined that all her children would be educated regardless of their gender. 'The public openly condemned us, girls, who "demanded" the same privileges as boys. In a family where mother had never made us aware of the preferences, the remarks were not only hurtful, but created a throbbing consciousness of one's burdensome value.'<sup>5</sup> Laretta attended primary school in Webbstown and Nokweja. In 1944 she left for a boarding school run by American missionaries in Dumisa and then in 1946 went to Inanda Seminary. Whilst at home, she had gained a knowledge and interest in English literature and history from her mother. 'My mother got me interested in her favourite writer, Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*. Her stories became my favourites too. From her I learned about Henry the Eighth. I was very fond of Thomas Hardy and his stories of rural England and I liked Charles Dickens.'<sup>6</sup> Laretta enjoyed school but it was here that she began to sense a 'silent disapproval of the barefoot life-style and art that was part of my whole way of life', that 'the borrowed culture of city girls' was the dominant ethos and she was caught in a 'tug of warring cultures'. She began to feel a 'disfigurement of outlook, a mutilation within', a conflict that had 'persisted even against the most arduous efforts to strike a balance'.<sup>7</sup> In 1950 Laretta attended the University of Fort Hare and obtained a BA in Psychology and Zulu Language and Literature. She also studied for a postgraduate University Education Diploma. Fort Hare had a 'ratio of thirty-five women students to five hundred men in those days. In some classes the preference given to male students was disarming'.<sup>8</sup> Laretta began

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<sup>5</sup>'My Life and My Writing', *Kunapipi*, p.85.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from Laretta Ngcobo to Gaele Mogwe, June, 1993.

<sup>7</sup>'My Life and Writing', *Kunapipi*, p.85.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid*.

work as a teacher in Pietermaritzburg in 1954 and then took up a position as a scientific research assistant for the CSIR from 1955 to 1959. In 1957 she married Abednego Ngcobo and went back to teaching in Durban in 1960.

Lauretta has always enjoyed writing and wrote a number of articles and books which she discarded or burned mainly because of an assumption that nobody would be interested in reading anything she had to say, 'not the men,, not the white people'.<sup>9</sup> She states,

I don't think I know why I write, I just know I must. I scribble a lot that I know will never be read by anyone, for since I was a little girl by conditioning, I never expected anyone to read anything that I wrote, outside my classroom assignments. I feel the need to communicate with myself. It is a duty to myself. Yet, by its very nature, writing is an outgoing channel of communication, no matter how private.<sup>10</sup>

She points to the Bantu Education Act of 1953 as the greatest limitation on Black writing in South Africa. Cut off from the mainstream of world literature 'which could otherwise act as a model and an inspiration. I have shared these limitations with all Black South Africans whether male or female'.<sup>11</sup>

Lauretta's husband was imprisoned in 1960 for his political activities in the PAC. In 1963 Lauretta was forced to leave South Africa. 'I learned that there was a plan to have me arrested. It was the month of May. I had to escape and leave my two children with my mother. I decided to leave at once: the next day, at five in the morning, the police burst into

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<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>10</sup>'My Life and Writing', *Let It Be Told*, ed. Lauretta Ngcobo, London:Virago, 1988, p.134.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p.135.

my house to get me. I made it by the skin of my teeth.<sup>12</sup> She spent the first six years of her exile in Swaziland and Zambia where she worked as a teacher. Her children were later able to join her in Swaziland. The family moved to England in 1969 and Laretta began teaching in London at Tufnell Park Primary School.. She then taught at Lark Hall Infant School where she became Deputy and then acting Head. She also wrote spending 'hours pinning my episodes together at the seams. I cannot think of a more time-consuming way to write[...]. I had no time limit to my expression and no deadlines to meet.'<sup>13</sup> In 1987, her novel, *Cross of Gold*, was published and suddenly time became very important. She was invited to talk and write essays on a wide range of subjects. She questions,

why people think I should know about or hold views on so many varied subjects[...]. I had to read a lot more widely. This factual diet does little for my creativity - especially considering how limited time is between my teaching job, my "factual" reading and speechifying and creativity. What I need as a writer, more than anything, is time.<sup>14</sup>

*Cross of Gold* is told from the perspective of a young, male activist, Mandla. The women characters suffer in silence and isolation. The only active, strong woman, Sindisiwe, dies in the first chapter of the book. Reflecting on the many questions that came from women readers, Laretta realised that, 'I was busy with gender issues but it hadn't occurred to me that the book was not about me, was not about Sindisiwe, it was about a man!'.<sup>15</sup> She feels that

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<sup>12</sup>Interview with Laretta Ngcobo by Itala Vivan, August, 1980, *Between The Lines II*, eds. Eva Hunter and Craig Mackenzie. Grahamstown: NELM, 1993, p.99.

<sup>13</sup>'My Life and Writing', *Let It Be Told*, p.139.

<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>'Interview with Laretta Ngcobo' by Anissa Talahite, p.317.

this was a product of her socialisation and began to think of her construction as a rural, black South African woman growing up with the migrant labour system and the absence of men. 'I was brought up by women. They were strong, independent and silent [...] it was inescapable that I should turn out very much like them: fertile and rich from within but silent or barren from without.'<sup>16</sup>

In 1987 *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* was published. Laretta edited the collection of essays, stories and poems which aims to 'embody a largeness and a continuity'<sup>17</sup> extending beyond conventional race and gender stereotypes. She includes a detailed introduction, an essay on her life and writing and an extract from *Cross of Gold*. In 1990, her second novel, *And They Didn't Die*, was published. Laretta had decided 'that I hadn't written about women successfully, but at the same time I knew all about women. As I had shared so much of their pain, it could be that that was one of the reasons why I could write a different story in *And They Didn't Die*'.<sup>18</sup> She presents active women characters and portrays the solidarity and strength that binds rural South African women. It is through the life of Jezile, a young rural woman, that we are made aware of women's suffering under apartheid and the migrant labour system. Traditional Zulu power structures, especially that of the mother-in-law and patriarchy are also problematised in what is a tragic yet tender tale of deep love, human strength and resilience. Her children's story, *Fiki Learns to Like Other People*, published in 1993, is based in Southern Africa and aimed primarily at children learning English as a second language.

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<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p.317.

<sup>17</sup>'Introduction', *Let It Be Told*, p.1.

<sup>18</sup>'Interview with Laretta Ngcobo' by Anissa Talahite, p.318.



Lauretta taught Black Women's Literature on a part-time basis in the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University of London. She has given numerous lectures in Britain, the United States, Italy, Holland, Sweden, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe where she spoke on the problems of women in publishing at the International Book Fair. Lauretta has published various essays, beginning with political essays under the name of Nomzamo. Her article, 'Four Women Writers in Africa', was published in *South African Outlook* in 1984. 'Black African Women Writers' was published in *Cambridge Journal of Education* in the same year. She asserts,

In our modern world, when women assert their right to self-determination and self-definition, it has become urgent for the African woman to write, to reverse the long established opinions and beliefs that are prevalent today. It has become imperative for our schools to approach African women with enlightened curiosity. It is in the classrooms of our changing world that people must learn about the African women from the authentic voices of the African women themselves.<sup>19</sup>

In 1985 *Kunapipi* published 'The African Woman Writer', a speech given by Lauretta at the African Writers' Conference in London in 1984, and an essay entitled 'My Life and Writing'. 'The Plight of Exiles' appeared in *African Concord* and in 1990 'Black, Female, British and Free' was published in *For a Change*. For many years Lauretta was president of ATCAL, the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African and Associated Asian Literatures. 'We sought to persuade the Department of Education and Science through the inspectorate, to introduce in to the various syllabi some text books from these rich literature sources.'<sup>20</sup> She is

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<sup>19</sup>'Black African Women Writers', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 14, 3 (1984), p.17.

<sup>20</sup>Letter, June 1993.

also a founder member of the African women's organisation, Akina Mama Wa Afrika which produces the journal, *African Woman*.

Lauretta feels strongly that 'African writing should draw more from the African traditions of the oral culture. I have not done much myself in this way but I feel it ought to be the way my writing goes'.<sup>21</sup> She would like to write fictional works based on the lives of some of Southern Africa's women leaders and spiritualists. After thirty years in exile, she has now returned to South Africa and lives in KwaZulu.

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<sup>21</sup>*ibid.*

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**Sankie Dolly (Ndlovukazi) Nkondo [also published as Rebecca Matlou] 1951 -**

Sankie was born in Sophiatown, Johannesburg. Her mother, Emma Gabaza Mthembi, was a domestic worker and her father, Elson Cata Sgwavula Mthembi, worked as a chef with the Chamber of Mines. She was two years old when her family was forcibly removed under the Group Areas Act from Sophiatown to Meadowlands in Soweto where she, her three elder brothers and one sister, grew up and went to school. Sankie says, 'I come from Soweto. The ghetto, the jungle. You learn to survive there. If you allow yourself to be bullied, you spend the rest of your days paying off protection fees. And so you toughen up; you become a product of your environment.'<sup>1</sup> Sankie's political awareness grew from her early experiences of poverty and the oppressive actions of the apartheid state in the Sixties. She matriculated in 1970 and with financial support from her siblings attended Turfloop<sup>2</sup> where she obtained her teaching diploma in 1973 and graduated in 1976 with a Bachelor of Arts in Education. At Turfloop Sankie's political awareness was largely influenced by the Black Consciousness movement. Her contemporaries at university included Cyril Ramaphosa, Matthews Phosa and Patrick Lekota.<sup>3</sup> In response to the student uprisings of 1976, Sankie decided to turn her back on a teaching career where the only option was to work for the Department of Bantu Education implementing a system of education she totally opposed. She became a bank punch-card operator and an active member of the ANC underground. She also began writing

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Gevisser, 'The Poet with a Politician's Instincts', *The Weekly Mail and Guardian*, January 20-26, 1995, p.27.

<sup>2</sup>Now University of the North.

<sup>3</sup>At the time of writing Cyril Ramaphosa holds the post of ANC Secretary General, Matthews Phosa is Eastern Transvaal Premier and Patrick Lekota is the Free State Premier.

poetry as an expression of her frustration and anger, and her early experience of political struggle.

In 1977 the state clamped down on all opposition, causing thousands of black students and young activists to flee South Africa. Sankie crossed the border into Mozambique and later into Tanzania where at twenty-six she began a life in exile that was to last almost twenty years. In exile she began work as a radio journalist for the ANC's Radio Freedom and after training in Germany, she became a journalist and a literacy teacher for Umkhonto we Sizwe. During this time Sankie wrote under the pseudonym of Rebecca Matlou. Her poem, 'Solomon Mahlangu Addresses his Gaolers' was published in *Sechaba* in 1979. 'Solomon Mahlangu', 'This Path', 'Nostalgia', 'The Storm Within' and 'A Soldier at War' were published in the anthology, *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*, in 1980. The poem, 'This Path', encourages the 'child of the soil' to 'ride the lion's back and hold the mane' in the quest to 'balm the people's tortured heart/and bid the sod to seed freedom'.<sup>4</sup> In 'The Storm Within' a child in exile asks her mother to thud the ground, shrill her voice and dance to the sound of the drum that is conquering the monster:

dance and mock him  
dance mother and mock him  
dance and show the scorn  
with the swoop of your backside.<sup>5</sup>

'A Soldier at War' celebrates the history of struggle against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. The soldiers of liberation are 'the children of the spear' who have taken up the

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<sup>4</sup>'This Path', *Poets to the People*, London: Heinemann, 1980, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup>'The Storm Within', *ibid.*, p.124.

'tradition of Isandhlwana' where Cetshwayo's forces defeated the British. The children of the spear 'shall battle to retrieve [...] the fishes that swim in the Orange' and the 'trees that fruit on our own ground'.<sup>6</sup>

Sankie left Tanzania in 1980 and went to live in Zambia where she edited the ANC women's journal, *Voice of Women (VOW)*. She joined the ANC Women's Section and became a member of the executive committee. She then joined the ANC's Department of International Affairs (DIA) and worked as an ANC administrator in Sweden from 1983 to 1984. Her short story, 'One Never Knows' earned an honourable mention in a continental women's writing competition and was included in the anthology, *Whispering Lands*, published in Sweden in 1984. Poffy, the female protagonist in the story, lives with her daughter in Soweto. She is a single parent because her husband has left to join the armed struggle. She receives messages from her husband and gradually becomes involved in the ANC underground with its political intrigues, dangers and tension. Sankie is writing against 'the ideology that has dominated African literature [...] which relegates the woman to a passive role'<sup>7</sup>. She creates Poffy as a strong, courageous and active woman who is not exempt from the pain of insecurity and alienation which she must bear alone. In 1986 Sankie became administrative secretary to the ANC mission in Nigeria and in 1989 she was appointed head of the mission in Bonn. She took over a particularly difficult post and was seen to significantly improve the troubled relations between the ANC and the German government, transforming the mission into one of the ANC's most effective. She recalls that,

When I began to receive multiparty South African delegations in Bonn, I began to understand that it was possible to return home. And my mind wandered back to my childhood, to my friends and

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<sup>6</sup>'A Soldier at War', *ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>7</sup>'Depictions/Stereotypes of African Women in Literature' by Sankie Nkondo, unpublished paper delivered at the New Nation Writers' Conference, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, 3 December, 1991.

school and family, and I began to imagine how we all would function as a liberated people.<sup>8</sup>

In October 1993 she returned to South Africa to serve as deputy head of the ANC's Department of International Affairs.

Sankie contributed to *Malibongwe: ANC Women - Poetry is Also Their Weapon*, published in 1982, and in 1989 her short story, 'One Never Knows', was published for the second time as the title story in the anthology of Black South African women writers in exile. In July, 1989, Sankie attended a conference at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe where writers, cultural workers and literary critics from different political perspectives came together. The main emphasis was on gathering people who were working inside South Africa, many of whom were Afrikaans writers, to meet writers in the ANC who were in exile. When asked to contribute her views on women writers in South Africa, Sankie explained:

because of the situation we come from when we talk of the South African woman writer, we are forced to talk in racial terms, not because we want to, but because the situation we come from has demanded that we look at ourselves in racial terms. But [...] as we develop, we want to make sure that in future we will be talking of the South African woman writer as a South African woman writer, without having to refer to colour.<sup>9</sup>

In 1990 COSAW published a collection of Sankie's poetry entitled *Flames of Fury*. The poems deal with themes of commitment, courage, exile, loss of comrades and hope in the struggle for liberation and the imagery reflects the harsh and violent reality of racist

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<sup>8</sup>'The Poet with a Politician's Instincts', p.27.

<sup>9</sup>'Women Writers in South Africa', *Crossing Borders: Writers Meet the ANC*, ed. Ampie Coetzee and James Polley, Taurus: Bramley, 1990, p. 122.

oppression and war. There are many heroes including Bambata, Cetshwayo, Moshoeshoe, Dadoo, Neto, Mondlane, Oliver Tambo, Vuyisile Mini, Ruth First, Mxenge and Mahlangu, and there is a sense of the strength gained from their contribution to the struggle. In the poem, 'Voices from the Trench', the 'soldier-poet' questions traditional aesthetic expectations relating to art:

I do not have the leisure  
to wander along aimless paths  
to wallow in literary art creations  
I have not been blessed with the time  
to ponder over words of language.<sup>10</sup>

This 'soldier-poet man-woman-father-mother-son' must 'write of the gallant [...] heroes' and 'sing songs of praise and dire providence for those who stand up to be counted' and 'letters of love and hope and faith [...] for the citizens who are on perpetual vigil'<sup>11</sup>. Sankie feels that 'being in the Liberation Movement for more than seventeen years' has influenced her writing with its links to Black Consciousness and Lusophone revolutionary poetry. She adds, 'working from African countries was an inspiration' especially in the way she incorporates 'the African idiom' in her work.<sup>12</sup> She explains that writing 'was a way of dealing with my emotions while in exile'. With her return to South Africa she has found that her hectic schedule doesn't leave time for writing but 'if the feeling comes, I write it down on a little piece of paper and put it away'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>'Voices from the Trench', *Flames of Fury*, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1990, p.14.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>12</sup>Letter from Sankie Nkondo to Gaelle Mogwe, 31 July, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Mike Behr, 'Safe as Houses?', *Fairlady*, 3 May, 1995, p.72.



Sankie became a member of the ANC's National Executive Council and after the April elections in 1994 was appointed to the new Cabinet as Deputy Minister of Welfare. In January 1995, following the death of Joe Slovo, she was appointed Minister of Housing, a portfolio seen as pivotal to the success of the new democracy. She notes that there is a huge housing backlog and that 'housing is a prime delivery area where government would like to see success' but feels that sound policy structures must be in place before major construction begins.<sup>14</sup> She describes one element of the housing plan, the Masakhane campaign, aimed at restoring a culture of payment in communities where under the apartheid system boycotts became a lifestyle. She spends time in the field convincing communities that paying rent, bonds and service fees is the only way to restore investor confidence in the low-income housing market and claims that 'Masakhane has a high success rate because we are going back to people with whom we have worked before and appealing to their reason'. Sankie believes that government should communicate and debate with the communities 'and reach conclusions that are mutually respected'.<sup>15</sup>

Sankie is now divorced and has taken on the surname Mthembi-Nkondo. She lives with her mother and her daughter, Lulama Ntongas. She enjoys listening to music, reading and cooking, an art she learnt from her late father. She would like to try her hand 'at short story writing' but has no time at the moment. She has always written in English but finds that when 'thoughts come within an African setting, expressing them in English can be limiting'. Sankie finds that 'the culture of the working class is very rich. I learn a lot from it. It is full of life and expression. It is close to my life'.<sup>16</sup> She says that she is 'from a

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<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, p.74.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>16</sup>Letter from Sankie Nkondo to Gaele Mogwe.

background where you don't blow your own trumpet' and sees herself as 'an average South African' who cannot be separated from her community.<sup>17</sup> She explains her dedication to this community:

When I first started coming back to South Africa, whenever I'd go home to Meadowlands, I'd ask someone to come with me, because I couldn't take the face of suffering that would confront me. There were twins across the road from us, who were born when I was about 12, and I used to look after them, I look at faces that look older than me, because of poverty, because of drink. When I first went home, I tried to find out what had happened to Ma Julia, to Ntati Simon, to Cookies. And the tape would unwind: he was stabbed when crossing from Dube station, she got shot outside the hostel, he's a hobo now. I might be a cabinet minister now, but because the rest of them in Meadowlands didn't have my opportunities, my achievement belongs to them.<sup>18</sup>

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## Phyllis (Priscilla) Ntantala 1920 -

Short story and essay writer, autobiographer. Phyllis was born at Duff Mission, Idutywa District, Transkei. Her mother, Ida Noyi Balfour, a teacher and dressmaker, died when Phyllis was only four years old. Her father, George Ndabakayise Ntantala, took over the care of his four daughters. He was a civil servant in the Land Offices and then became a farmer. 'I came from a family of the landed gentry in Transkei, the kulaks of that area.'<sup>1</sup> It was Phyllis' father who instilled a sense that she and her sisters 'were the equals of everyone else and should never take second place to anybody, including men'.<sup>2</sup> Phyllis was very close to her father and sees him as not only playing the role of parent in her life but of a teacher and best friend. 'The best moments of my life were with him.'<sup>3</sup> Phyllis attended the Duff Mission School and at twelve went to Healdtown boarding school. She is critical of her primary and secondary schooling for its 'Eurocentric' emphasis and the way it deliberately contributed to the 'deculturation process of African elites'.<sup>4</sup> She remembers an incident where she was to imagine herself at Euston station, one foggy morning in London: 'With such brainwashing it is a miracle we did not all become sell-outs and collaborators.'<sup>5</sup> Phyllis gained her first insights into South African history and politics from her father's knowledge of the South African Wars of Dispossession. At fifteen she was awarded a Transkeian Bhunga Scholarship to attend Fort Hare. With over two hundred male students, 'there were only nine women [...] at my arrival. This number had increased to thirty at my departure'.<sup>6</sup> She was taught Latin by

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<sup>1</sup>Phyllis Ntantala, *A Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1992, Preface, p.viii.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Phyllis Ntantala to Gaele Mogwe dated 8 March 1994.

<sup>5</sup>*A Life's Mosaic*, p.30.

<sup>6</sup>Letter dated 8 March, 1994.

Professor Jabavu, whom she admired, and English by Miss Beatrice Dorothy Tooke, who 'loved literature and made it live. I remember, after reading *A Tale of Two Cities* with her, how the events that led to the French Revolution became so real'.<sup>7</sup>

After having obtained her teacher's diploma, Phyllis took up the offer of a teaching post at the Bantu High School, Kroonstad in the Orange Free State in 1939. It was here that she learnt Sesotho and developed an appreciation of the songs of Pulumo Mohapeloa and the works of Thomas Mofolo. She also became aware for the first time of urban hardship and the extreme injustice of the race laws which created such suffering. 'In the rural areas the community support systems which existed in traditional African society had not completely broken as they had in the urban areas.'<sup>8</sup> In 1940 Phyllis married A.C. Jordan whom she had known at Fort Hare. In 1944, A.C. Jordan took up the post previously held by Prof. Jabavu at Fort Hare. Phyllis recalls her initial reaction to the University environment:

Having been out in the field teaching in a school in a poor urban community, I was already alienated from the African educated elite. Our struggles as teachers in the Orange Free State had brought this about. By the time we got to Fort Hare I could no longer identify with the elitism of the Fort Hare professionals.<sup>9</sup>

She began to reject and distance herself from the complacency and elitist attitudes she found characteristic of many African professionals. She writes, 'The few Africans who taught on the staff at Fort Hare were the most frightened people I ever had the misfortune to meet. They were not happy about discrimination there, but they spoke of it in whispers, for fear of

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<sup>7</sup>A Life's Mosaic, p.71.

<sup>8</sup>Letter dated 8 March, 1994.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*

losing their jobs. Racism was rampant in the staff lounge'.<sup>10</sup> In 1945 Phyllis took up a teaching position with Lovedale. She was faced with some opposition as she explains, 'All the wives of the teachers at Lovedale and Fort Hare were shocked. Wives of teachers and other professionals in the Cape Province did not go out to work in those days. They stayed at home, to look after their homes, husbands and children [...] I was breaking a Cape tradition'.<sup>11</sup> One year later, A.C. Jordan was appointed Lecturer in African Languages at the University of Cape Town, becoming the first black South African to hold a full staff position in a predominantly white university. For the first five years of her life in Cape Town, Phyllis remained at home raising her four children, Nandi, Ninzi, Pallo and Lindi. She did not feel the same impatience to go out and work that she had felt while living in Alice.

Phyllis became involved with the Cape African Teacher's Association. Her experience with the Orange Free State African Teacher's Association made her critical of what she perceived to be the apathy and elitism of the organisation which she attributes to the fact that most of its members had been trained by 'Ivy League' institutions. She refers to schools such as Lovedale, Healdtown, St Matthews and eMgwali Training School for Girls in the Cape, Adams College and Marianhill in Natal and says:

Those Eurocentric schools, of course, drew most of their students from the African middle class [...]. And, incestuously, this black middle class intermarried. As a result, most of them never were exposed, after their education, to the hardships that most Africans suffered. Or, if they did, most were too concerned with their own private well-being to be concerned with the mass of black South Africans. Consequently most of them remained staunchly elitist. I was too. But, my experiences in the Orange Free State disabused

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<sup>10</sup>*A Life's Mosaic*, p.122.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p.126.

me of any notions that my fate was not intrinsically entwined that of other black South Africans.<sup>12</sup>

Phyllis applauded and was actively involved in CATA's decision to confront the Nationalist Government's measures to introduce Bantu Education and to boycott the Van Riebeck Celebrations. She was also active in the Teacher's League of South Africa and the Society of Young Africans.

In 1957 Phyllis wrote a moving article entitled 'African Tragedy' for the magazine, *Africa South*, which focuses on the sufferings of African men and women forced off their land by apartheid land acts. Phyllis describes how they are left to starve on overcrowded, infertile and over-grazed reserves or forced to work for a pittance in the cities where they find themselves homeless and without possessions. She writes of families that are split by the migrant labour regulations; where men are torn away to seek work in the cities and women are left behind to rear children 'burying one baby after another and lastly burying the husband - that lover she had never known as husband or father'.<sup>13</sup> Those in the urban areas suffer the deep degradation of living like animals in hastily built, unsafe shelters that are periodically flooded and destroyed. The voice of Mrs Dumani adds poignancy to the feeling of futility. After three of her children died in infancy due to poor living conditions, she says, 'I sometimes feel thankful I have no children; it is really heart-breaking to those who have children and have to run around in the cold with them on their backs, carrying them around as a cat carries its young in its teeth'.<sup>14</sup> Phyllis' second article, 'The Widows of the Reserves' was published in *Africa South* in 1958 and anthologised in Langston Hughes' *An African Treasury* in 1961.

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<sup>12</sup>Letter dated 8 March, 1994

<sup>13</sup>'African Tragedy', *Africa South*, 1, 3 (1957), 59.

<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, p.65.

It tells of the women who are left behind to cope with the harsh conditions of the reserves where 'each day is like another - one monotonous song of droning flies, sick babies, dying stock, hunger, starvation and death'.<sup>15</sup> Under influx and pass laws they are restricted from entering the urban areas. Those that do manage to enter and find a job are tied down to unbearable service conditions where employers have the right to cancel their permits and have them endorsed out of the area without notice. Her essay 'An Abyss of Bantu Education' appeared in *Africa South* in 1960. It describes in detail the workings of a system called 'Education for Slavery'.<sup>16</sup> Phyllis has also translated various works including I.B. Tabata's *The Boycott As A Weapon* from English to Xhosa, prose and poetry from Rhubusana's *Zemk' inkomo maGwalandini* into English and two of A.C. Jordan's unpublished Xhosa poems into English.

Phyllis attended the University of Cape Town from 1957 to 1958 and gained a Diploma in Native Administration. She then worked for the Institute of Race Relations in Cape Town. After the killing of protesters in Langa and Sharpville in 1960, a state of emergency was declared and 'people disappeared into thin air'.<sup>17</sup> It was Phyllis' assignment to comb the police stations, courts and townships in an attempt to trace those reported missing. After the State of Emergency was lifted in 1960 arrests increased and 'the state machinery was set into motion to crush any protest on the part of the people'.<sup>18</sup> It was decided that it would be best for the family to leave the country. A.C. Jordan was refused a passport and was forced to leave the country without one, thereby forfeiting his right to return. He took their youngest son,

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<sup>15</sup>'The Widows of the Reserves', *Africa South*, 2, 3 (1958), 13.

<sup>16</sup>'The Abyss of Bantu Education', *Africa South*, 4, 2 (1960), 42.

<sup>17</sup>*A Life's Mosaic*, p.175.

<sup>18</sup>*ibid.*, p.182.



Lindi, with him. Phyllis, Nandi and Pallo left later on exit permits for England leaving their daughter, Ninzi behind. The family then settled in the United States. In her autobiography, *A Life's Mosaic*, Phyllis expresses the pain of exile, the humiliation of racial discrimination and the continued harassment they suffered as black, politically active foreigners in the United States. She describes the anguish of separation from their son, Pallo, who was 'endorsed out' of the country. Phyllis was to suffer the pain of A.C. Jordan's death from lung cancer in 1968 and the death in 1970 of their daughter, Nandi, who was hit by a car in California.

Phyllis regrets 'that in almost all societies women are defined and are made to live vicariously through their fathers, husbands and even sons'.<sup>19</sup> She illustrates a determination to affirm her own voice and experience as a black, South African woman activist and writer. At the same time she does not negate her mothering experiences and testifies to a proud and resilient determination to provide her children with support through periods of dislocation and demoralisation. In 1984 she published 'Black Womanhood and National Liberation' in *Sechaba* where she recognises and discusses women's place in the liberation movement. In 1986 she wrote an epic poem in Xhosa, 'Ah! Rholihlahla!!' in praise of Nelson Mandela which was published under her Xhosa name, Nogqaza-we-Jojo in *Mandelamandla*. Her autobiography, published in 1992, speaks from a complex sense of identity constituted by her middle-class background and position as a member of South Africa's educated black elite, and her experiences and observations of the injustices of South Africa's race laws. Whilst her values and concept of self have to a large extent been engendered within a powerful patriarchal context, there is also the strong bonding with her father, who brought her up to believe in equality in relation to men. Her personal experience as a black, South African woman links into the social, economic and political history of South Africa and offers compassionate insights. Writing of her country, South Africa, she says, 'It is my home, the

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<sup>19</sup>Letter dated 8 March, 1994.

place where my roots are, and I love it. This is what is so painful. Even now it is still my hope that I'll go back to live there. It is the only place where my soul can find rest and peace'.<sup>20</sup>

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### **Poem**

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<sup>20</sup>*A Life's Mosaic*, p.189.

## Natalie Victoria [Ntombencane] Nxumalo 1910 -

Novelist. Natalie was born in Natal, the last child in a large family. 'I had six sisters and four brothers.'<sup>1</sup> Her mother, Mary Anne Nene, looked after the family and the home. Natalie recalls,

Unfortunately my mother was not educated. She looked after her family you know but funny enough being uneducated, our brothers and sisters were all educated except for those that died at a young age. She was interested but she could neither read nor write. She was a friendly mother. She used to tell us stories.

Natalie's father, Thomas Xaba, was a teacher catechist. He died when Natalie was twelve years old and the family found it very difficult to survive financially. 'My mother was a very poor woman. So the missionaries they helped me a lot. [...]The missionaries took me over.' Natalie lived on mission stations and attended KwaMazimela mission school and KwaMagwaza higher primary school. She obtained her secondary and teaching qualifications at St Chad's College, Ladysmith. It was at St. Chad's that she met and became friends with the writer, Violet Dube. Natalie then began teaching 'with the Sisters of the Society of St. John the Divine' in Natal and Violet 'was teaching further down Mooi River way'. They often met when travelling to and from their teaching posts. Natalie read Violet's collection of short stories, *Wozanazo*, published in 1935, and was very impressed with the work. 'I asked Violet how did you happen to write this book and she said, "well you have to inspire yourself", [...]

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Natalie Nxumalo by Gaele Mogwe, Emhlabulweni, Natal, 22 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

and then I started writing. She's the one that encouraged me to write.' In 1936 Natalie married James Alfred Walter Nxumalo who later became a well-known writer of fictional and educational texts in Zulu. Her brother, A.T. Xaba, is also an established Zulu author and her nephew, O.E.H.M. Nxumalo is a Zulu poet, novelist and collector of folklore. Natalie's novel, *Ubude Abuphangwa*, was published in 1936 by Shuter and Shooter.<sup>2</sup> It was the first known published novel by a black South African women writing in Zulu.

In the Preface to *Ubude Abuphangwa*, Natalie thanks her husband, her brother and her friend, Violet Dube, for encouragement, inspiration and for having influenced her 'to make a contribution to writing aimed at preserving Zulu national heritage, language and culture'. She writes, 'The aim of this booklet is to support, help and encourage the boys and girls who are going to be parents of the nation in their efforts to be patient and brave in order that they succeed in their endeavours'.<sup>3</sup> She explains that the book is supposed to assist in the guidance of Zulu children who no longer have access to traditional Zulu guidance structures:

When children are schooling they forget that they belong to African homes and they forget that they are still young. You find a girl of twelve years is already pregnant whereas with our African people there were stages. When you were at the age of say from five to seven you were just somebody, nothing but a small pin that must be taken care of and thereafter when you go to school you were told that you are going out to learn. You've got an empty head. You are going into the unknown and this is a foreign something that you have never had before. Our work was oral work and nothing but oral work. We were told tales, isinganekwane, you know, stories, fables and so on and when we sent out to school, we were told we had to concentrate on these.

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<sup>2</sup>Natalie Nxumalo explains that *Ubude Abuphangwa* is a Zulu proverb that approximates in English to the proverb 'Rome was not built in a day'.

<sup>3</sup>Unpublished translation of *Ubude Abuphangwa*, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1957, from Zulu to English by Bongi Muthwa, SOAS, London. Preface.

The novel presents a morality that is based on both traditional Zulu and Christian values and a respect for both cultures. She is 'very fond of Christian teaching' and the teachings of her Zulu tradition. She states that 'whatever we can still glean of our national heritage we must hold on to and cherish. There is no nation that has ever given up on its traditional values, unless those values are to be ashamed of because they are not in line with western civilisation and religion'.<sup>4</sup>

*Ubude Abuphangwa* is based on Natalie's own life story. It is about a young couple, Mdelwa and Ntombisi, who marry but fail to have a child. After five years have passed, Mdelwa's relatives encourage him to find another wife but he does 'not lose hope despite pressures from the family. He trusted that they would have a baby'.<sup>5</sup> A blind evangelist and her friend come to the house by chance one day seeking shelter. The evangelist prays for the couple and preaches the virtue of Jesus. Months later Ntombisi becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl. Mdelwa goes to thank the evangelist who asks that the child be called Maria and that the family convert to Christianity. The child is baptised Maria Nompumelelo. Nompumelelo suffers some ill health as she is growing up, but with the help of traditional medicine she recovers. Her father dies when she is young and her mother struggles to educate her. Nompumelelo receives a bursary to further her education because of her diligence and intelligence and qualifies as a teacher. She gains a teaching position and pays back all those who have contributed to her education. She then marries Mlungisi Hlatshwayo, an old school friend. The moral is clear. The road to the top is not easy. Young people should endeavour to achieve an education and a valued position in society.

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.3.

Once they have achieved this they should then think of marriage and not before. Children should value their future.

Like her friend, Violet Dube, Natalie chooses to focus on the education of African women. Nompumelelo is a 'good Christian' who achieves an education and a teaching position. The sister in charge of the young women at the teacher training college tells them, 'My girls you should always remember that you have come here to acquire knowledge and power so that when you leave this place you are able to live independent lives and transmit your knowledge to others'.<sup>6</sup> Nompumelelo's story is representative of changing attitudes towards the education of African women and their expected role in society. There is, however, no mention of her continuing her career as a teacher once she marries. 'It took some time before Nompumelelo went back home for the first time after her marriage. She only went visiting after she had given birth to her first son. Everybody was happy to see her back again. She was now looking big as if she had settled well in her role of a married woman.'<sup>7</sup> Nompumelelo respects her parents and Zulu customs. 'A person who has no faith, no education and no respect towards their parents does not have any strength. In this story these three factors are interdependent: the home, the school and trust in God.'<sup>8</sup>

There are many positive descriptions of Zulu customs and traditions and Natalie draws on Zulu proverbs and oral tradition throughout the novel. She describes bigamous family structures without offering obvious value judgement. She believes polygamy 'was quite alright' in the days when a man's wives 'all had to respect the first wife as their senior mother

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<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*

come what may' but that in more recent times the first wife often finds herself neglected and humiliated. She does though counter polygamy with the alternative 'Christian' approach to marriage exemplified by Mdelwa who does not take a second wife even though he is being pressured to do so.

Natalie wrote another manuscript which was refused by publishers and then lost. She explains that the publishers rejected her work because she 'spoke about ghosts. They said there are no such things as ghosts.' She tells of how she helped her husband to write his first novel, *UZwelonke*, published in 1950, and of the 'story that I gave to my husband'. The story is 'basically about the Nxumalos, my husband's people.<sup>9</sup> The old man was a wagon driver. He owned a wagon. He used to go and fetch goods and so forth. So I talk about that. He had a courtship with a Xaba woman. That was myself but instead of my own life I related my mother's life.' Natalie speaks of another book. 'I wrote, *UShingana ka Mpande*. It is studied at Standard Five. It's the life story of one of the royal family sons. He was Shingana.'<sup>10</sup> She describes how she met one of Shingana's sons who told her the history of his father and the family and how:

It was in Seventy Six when I wrote that book *Shingana* but it is not my name that appears there. We are a group. O.T. [her nephew], my husband and another party. I think they helped us because they said it wasn't lengthy. It was short. So they criticised it in that way. So I had to get other people to help to make it a bit longer.

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<sup>9</sup>J.A.W. Nxumalo, *UZwelonke*, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1950.

<sup>10</sup>J.A.W. Nxumalo, *UShingana ka Mpande: Namanye Amaqhawe*, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1961.

Referring to *Ubude Abuphangwa*, Natalie says, 'the book is still there and I'm glad they've told me they will try to expand it [...] but in a better way with modern ideas and so forth. So they said that I shouldn't be surprised that when it's next published, we shall be a group of writers.'<sup>11</sup>

Natalie speaks Zulu, English and some Sesotho. She prefers to write in Zulu. She has always been very fond of reading and must read before sleeping at night. She remembers reading many Zulu books at school and *King Solomon's Mines* by Rider Haggard.. She enjoyed reading 'history books and short English stories'. She feels happy to be a writer and proud of her achievements. It is her experience of South Africa and Africa in general, that 'women are thought of as minors most of the time' and when a woman tries to progress in life she is often met with opposition. She remembers she was sitting her first grade teaching exams when one of the inspectors there said,

'Oau! Mrs Nxumalo, there must be something wrong with your mind. All the way from Dundee to come and write. Do you get time to study? Is there time to waste?' and I said, 'Well, I'm trying to expand my knowledge because I must try and grow with the times'. So he said, 'Ooff!'. Fortunately I was the only one who passed.

Natalie was a member of the YWCA. She also took an interest in the Daughters of Africa movement and especially admired Mina Soga. She believed very strongly in 'trying to help other women to rise'. She is still actively involved in community work with women. She states that she has never been political but that she has always been involved with women's

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<sup>11</sup>A revised version of 'Ubude Abuphangwa' appears in the reader, *Masihambisane*, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1995.



groups. She is surprised by the politics of today where 'they all fight' and believes that in her day women's groups never came to loggerheads. 'That's why I always say that we shouldn't involve men'.

Natalie has one son, one daughter and grandchildren. She believes that mixing with different groups of people has for her been important to her personal growth, that she has learnt a great deal about other people through her community work and subsequently about herself. 'You realise yourself, where you stand and you start changing.'

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**Amelia Blossom Pegram [also published Blossom Pegram, Amelia House and Amelia Blossom House] 19[?] -**

Short story and essay writer and poet. Amelia was born and grew up in Wynberg, Cape Town.<sup>1</sup> Her mother, Evelyn Minnie West, looked after the children and home. She was an avid reader who encouraged Amelia, her two sisters Naomi and Maud, and her brother Owen to read. Amelia recalls that her mother's sisters also 'spent a lot of time sharing literature' with them. 'At home we learned to recite and poetry was important.'<sup>2</sup> Amelia's father, Henry Bowman Pegram, was a postman. Both parents placed importance on their children's education. After completing her secondary education, Amelia studied at Hewat Training College where in 1954 she received her Teacher's Certification. From 1955 to 1957 she taught at Kensington Central School in Cape Town. She then took up a position with Wesley Training School where she taught English. While still teaching she embarked on part-time study at the University of Cape Town and in 1961 gained her Bachelor of Arts Degree in English and History. She left Wesley Training School to teach at Grassy Park High School for four years.

In 1963 Amelia decided to move to England. She found a position with Archbishop Sumners school in London where she taught for three years. In 1965 she completed a course with the London Teachers Centre on new approaches to the teaching of reading and working with the disabled. She took up a teaching post with Stockwell Manor Comprehensive School in London in 1966, and in 1968 moved on to Norwood Girls Secondary School. In the same year she completed a course on teaching English as a second language with the Urban Studies

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<sup>1</sup> Amelia does not wish to reveal her date of birth.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Amelia Blossom Pegram to Gaele Mogwe dated 15 October, 1995.

Centre in London. In 1970, while still teaching at Norwood Girls Secondary, Amelia attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama for part-time studies in the performance and teaching of drama. She began writing as a response to increasing political oppression in South Africa and her poems 'You are Born in a Coffin' and 'Mark My Birth' were published under the name of Blossom Pegram in *The Literary Review: South Africa* in 1971. In 1972 she married and began to publish under her married name, Amelia House. She and her husband moved to Kentucky in the United States where their daughter, Melanie Jean House, was born. Amelia began teaching with Fort Knox Community Schools. In 1977 she received an Master of Arts degree for several short pieces of fiction, including her short story, 'Conspiracy'. In the same year her poems 'Truant', 'Exile', 'Burials', 'White Reply', 'Melanie' and 'Sunrise' were published in *The Gar*, and 'Waiting Wives' and 'Melanie' appeared in *Inside the Turret*. In 'Exile' she writes,

Exile  
is not leaving  
capetown  
or coming to  
kentucky  
or being in london  
paris or rome  
but knowing  
there is no easy going  
back.<sup>3</sup>

The narrator in 'Melanie' tells her 'child of darkness' that she 'must keep burning/ to help in the/ struggle/ to make/ blackness right'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>'Exile', *Our Sun Will Rise: Poems for South Africa*, Washington D.C: Three Continents Press, 1989, p.54.

<sup>4</sup>'Melanie', *Echoes Across a Thousand Hills*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994, p. 19.

Amelia began to teach part-time at the University of Louisville while continuing to teach in the Fort Knox Community Schools system. In 1978 she published an article entitled 'The Language of Oppression' and her poem 'For South Africa' in *The Gar*, and her poems 'Sunrise', 'Hard Labour', 'Exile' and 'Deliverance' were published in *Staffrider* magazine. In 1979 Amelia published the article 'A Matter of Commitment' in *Présence Africaine* where she considers the work of Black South African poets in exile in the U.S.A. She believes that with their exile in common and no possibility of returning to South Africa under apartheid, the poets have 'a certain sense of purpose and special awareness' and that they are committed to the liberation struggle and freedom in Africa. She is careful, however, not 'to reduce the poems to mere propaganda tracts'. She writes, 'Perhaps what sustains all South African poets is the conviction that they will one day return to South Africa as true South Africans'.<sup>5</sup> In the same year *Staffrider* published her short story 'Awakening', which tells of police brutality in South Africa.

Amelia has devoted many years of research to the lives and works of Black South African Women writers. She compiled some of the biographical and bibliographical data she had collected and published *Black South African Women Writers in English: A Preliminary Checklist* in 1980. She explains that this book 'I published so long ago was part of a much larger work. It was a starting point and I have been amazed how useful the checklist has been to so many scholars.'<sup>6</sup> In 1980 Amelia's poem 'Birth of the Blues' appeared in *Inside the Turret*, the poems 'Resettlement', 'Red Accident', 'We still Dance', 'Grandmother' and 'Reflections' were published by *The Gar*. 'Red Accident' describes the meeting point of the

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<sup>5</sup>'A Matter of Commitment', *Présence Africaine*, 109, (1979), 107-108.

<sup>6</sup>Letter dated 15 October, 1995

'warm Indian Ocean' and 'cold Atlantic' and the idyllic play of dolphins twisting and turning in 'submarine frolics' and 'submarine silver blues'. The mood changes as

sub  
marine  
white light  
nu  
clear  
explosion  
seaweed  
slides  
twisting  
dolphins.<sup>7</sup>

The poem 'Grandmother' tells of the old woman who sits 'Madame Defarge-like' to watch 'the freedom-fighters'/ hanging/ but/ reserved her seat/ for the next hanging.../ of/ the hangman'.<sup>8</sup> In 1980 *Staffrider* published her article, 'A Special Page for Women?', where Amelia contributes to the debate on *Staffrider*'s decision to start a section dedicated to women's writing. She writes,

Some women feel that they should not be set aside from men.  
Others feel that there is a need for the woman's point of view.  
[...]In the struggle for equality there has first to be the recognition of  
existence. A special section for women is a necessary first step.<sup>9</sup>

In a later issue in the same year, *Staffrider* also published her poem, 'Mr White Discoverer'. The poem begins with the woman narrator angrily accusing Mr White discoverer of covering

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<sup>7</sup>'Red Accident', *Our Sun will Rise*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>'Grandmother', *Our Sun Will Rise*, p.37.

<sup>9</sup>'A Special Page for Women?', *Staffrider*, 3, 3 (1980), 46.

his shame by tying her 'sunkissed breasts' and dancing out of step. It ends with her demanding, 'Mr White discoverer/ cover/ your shame'.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, 1980, Amelia was listed for the Black Arts Celebration Kwanza Honours in recognition of her published work.

Amelia likes to perform her poetry with music and dance accompaniments. She explains that:

the performance of poetry infused my writing. I have read my work with jazz groups and now read with percussion, guitar and flute. The problem has always been, how to present on paper what I do in performance. This is an impossibility. I am now being pressured to record performances.<sup>11</sup>

In 1983, Amelia's short story 'Conspiracy' was published in the anthology of African women's writing, *Unwinding Threads*. The story looks at the pain and brutal degradation suffered by couples who dared contravene the Immorality Act. It begins with a statement of the law in force: 'Immorality Act: 1957 Session of Parliament increased the maximum penalty for illicit carnal intercourse between whites and non-whites to seven years imprisonment. It has also become an offence to conspire to commit an act.'<sup>12</sup> In 1986 Amelia published the chapbook, *Deliverance: Poems for South Africa*. The title poem, 'Deliverance', states that 'Like a woman gone/ beyond her time,/ My country/ you amble on/ We can no longer/ wait for nature's course/ We must deliver/ You/ with force'.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, a collection of her

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<sup>10</sup>'Mr White Discoverer', *Staffrider*, 3,4 (1980), 2.

<sup>11</sup>Letter dated 15 October, 1995.

<sup>12</sup>'Conspiracy', *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa*, ed. Charlotte H. Bruner, London: Heinemann, 1983, p.142.

<sup>13</sup>'Deliverance', as cited in *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*, eds. Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy, London: B.T. Batsford, 1990, p.541.

poetry, *Our Sun Will Rise: Poems for South Africa*, was published by Three Continents Press. The poems describe the suffering caused by racial oppression and the struggle against South Africa's apartheid regime. 'Boss Birdwatching' depicts the capture of 'the Bikobird' and how the police 'Clip his wings/ reduce his size/ pluck his feathers'.<sup>14</sup> In 'Return', the narrator tells how she has left her heart in many countries but that she has only one home and yearns to return to claim her 'place in South Africa's sun'.<sup>15</sup> Amelia also co-edited an anthology of writings entitled *Nelson Mandelamandla* which was published in 1989. Her collection of poetry *Echoes Across a Thousand Hills* was published in 1994. Some of the poems are dedicated to women who have been prominent in the South African struggle, and women as caretakers. In 'Winnie', Winnie Mandela is portrayed as a 'Sparrow against the wind/ she flew/ four forward/ three back/ buffeted/ tossed on the currents/ she flew into the wind/ persevering'.<sup>16</sup> Through the poem, 'Evelyn', Amelia speaks to her mother and says, 'In celebration/ of your life/ In thanksgiving/ for the memories/ a candle burns'.<sup>17</sup> In 'Sarah' she remembers her grandmother calling out, 'Get back to bed now, child./ Just because you're quiet/ don't mean I can't see you'. The child goes back to her room and reads under the bed covers only to hear her grandmother demanding, 'Put that book away./ Turn off that flashlight./ You'll spoil your eyes.' The narrator concludes, 'Granny could see through/ walls and blankets/ and/ me'.<sup>18</sup> Amelia feels that her work is informed by 'family and religious

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<sup>14</sup>'Boss Birdwatching', *Our Sun Will Rise*, *ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>15</sup>'Return', *ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>16</sup>'Winnie', *Echoes Across a Thousand Hills*, p.14.

<sup>17</sup>'Evelyn', *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>18</sup>'Sarah', *ibid.*, p.7.

experiences' and that it 'has moved from the South African center to a more international focus'.<sup>19</sup>

Amelia's dramatic presentations include 'You've Struck a Rock' which premiered in 1988. It depicts the lives of six women activists: Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hammer, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Albertine Sisulu and Lilian Ngoya. The play 'We Were There Too - Women in the Struggle' was performed at the Kentucky Centre for the Arts, MEX Theatre and 'Women at the Cross', a passion play, was presented at various churches in Louisville, New York and Ghana in 1992. Amelia is currently working on the publication of letters her aunt wrote to her from the Cape. She continues to write and perform poetry and has recently been awarded a grant by The Kentucky Foundation for Women to go to Cape Town to carry out research into women and slavery. She is writing a fictional story with the working title of 'By the Waters of' which is based on the research.

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<sup>19</sup>Letter dated 15 October, 1995.



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## **Sobhna Poona 1963 -**

Poet and short story writer. Sobhna was born and grew up in the multi-cultural Warwick Avenue Triangle in Durban. Her mother, Lorette Prince, is of French-English descent and her father, Keso Poona, is of Indian descent. Sobhna explains, 'My parents were one of the early cases of mixed marriage'.<sup>1</sup> It was a relationship that was not accepted by the state and the Immorality Act constantly cast a shadow over the family. When Sobhna was eleven years old, her mother chose to change her race classification from White to Indian. Sobhna was also re-classified and the 'Roman Catholic Christian names' of Jacqueline Prince that she had been given at birth were changed. 'I was able to choose my own name - my name I have now.' Sobhna has four brothers. Her mother is a housewife and her father was in the potato business, buying direct from the farmers and selling to the markets. 'Growing up I would go on the blue bus for the whites. My brothers are darker than I am so they weren't allowed. I was accepted in a white school and they weren't because they were darker. It was a strange experience growing up but I think with me I've never allowed it to affect me.' Sobhna spent a lot of time reading. She recalls that:

I read everything. I read the Hardy Boys. I used to digest a Hardy Boys a day. I never read a Nancy Drew in my life. Anything I could get, you know, any book and Agatha Christie [...]. I used to walk with books in my hand. Wherever I was I'd have a book in my hand. My folks would freak out. You know growing up in traditional Indian homes at ten years old you had to cook and clean and iron and wash and do everything, you know, so at twelve when I was sitting with books in the lounge it was like horror of all horrors, you know, you should be in the kitchen. So throw those

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Sobhna Poona by Gael Mogwe, Durban, 9 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

books away. So with that kind of thing I had to fight very hard to be able to get books. I mean I used to duck with my books to read.

She particularly enjoyed reading myths and legends from different cultures including Indian, Japanese, Egyptian, Greek and Roman. 'I used to have all these comic strips. The Indian myths and legends. I had comic strips and I used to read comics as well, lots of comics.'

Sobhna went to St. Augustine's Primary School, Durban in 1969 and remained there for two years. She then attended Springfield Hindu Primary School for a year and finished her primary education at Hindu Tamil which 'doesn't exist anymore'. She matriculated at Durban Indian Girls Secondary School in 1980. She remembers that she enjoyed writing poetry and short stories in both English and Afrikaans when she was at primary school and that she won her first poetry competition when she was thirteen. After she left high school she decided she no longer wanted to write in Afrikaans for political reasons and she 'didn't have anything to do with the language after that.' In 1981 she went to the University of Durban-Westville where she completed her BA. She did 'the English and Drama Majors, Classical Studies, Oriental Studies and History.' Sobhna then obtained a teaching diploma from Natal University in 1984 and completed an Honours Degree in Drama at Durban-Westville in 1985 where she majored in alternative theatre, dance and choreography. She then went on to read for a Master's Degree in Drama at the University of Rhodes in Grahamstown which she completed in 1990. Sobhna's family was against her going to university. 'My Dad didn't want to hear anything about it.' With the help of her head of department she managed to convince her parents and found work teaching to help pay her way. 'I've always done what I wanted to do. [...]. My parents didn't want me to study but I mean I went for it. After my BA, my Honours was paid for by the Human Sciences Research Council. My Master's was paid by the HSRC. So financially, you know, it's been on my own and I've always worked while studying.'

Although Sobhna has a strong drama base and a love of the theatre, her main career focus has been teaching English as a second language. She taught English at Isipingo Secondary School in 1985 but resigned after two months. 'I didn't like the bureaucracy. I hated the whole school set up.' She then chose to teach at technical and correspondence colleges. In 1988 she went to Johannesburg where she worked on various projects including a women's collective, teacher education programmes, trade union and worker programmes. She explains that 'a lot of work was drama-based in terms of using role play, drama ideas, taking the teaching out of the class room, taking the teaching from behind the desk and in front of the chalk board'. In 1990 she began teaching part-time at Sastri Technical College in Durban which has recently changed its name to Cato Manor Technical. In 1991, whilst continuing her part-time teaching at Sastri, she designed and implemented bridging programmes for English as a Second Language at the Durban Technikon where she is now the Study Skills Counsellor at the Student Counselling Centre.

Writing for Sobhna was at first a very personal experience. She says her 'work was never written with the intention of publication or the intention of it being read by anybody else'. She won a poetry competition run by the BBC in the late Eighties and a *New Nation* writing competition. In 1989 her poems 'Exiled', 'The Day' and 'I Have Lost You' were published in *Siren Songs*, an anthology of South African women's poetry. 'I had never even thought that I was good enough, but my friends have been tremendous. It was more through their urging and support that I eventually got the courage to submit poems for publication.' *Words on a Blank Page*, Sobhna's first collection of poetry, was published in 1990 by Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers, the first publishing house to dedicate its lists to Black South African women's writing. The poems in the collection express 'loneliness, isolation, deception and the painful

realities of relationships'.<sup>2</sup> Many are intensely political and express anger and resistance towards South Africa's apartheid system. In 'Say No Black Woman' she appeals to black women to 'say NO!' when 'they tear down your home/and take away your bread and shelter/in an attempt to break your spirit'.<sup>3</sup> 'Broken Sunlight' tells of the frustrations and loss of hope of a woman imprisoned by oppressive power structures where 'they chain my legs/and rape my body/with my hands tied/behind my back/they trap my mind'.<sup>4</sup> Her second collection of poetry, *In Search of Rainbows*, was published later in the same year by Skotaville Publishers and nominated for a CNA literary award in 1991. It is dedicated to 'the little boy in my heart, and for all the children in the Warwick Avenue Triangle'.<sup>5</sup> Sobhna writes of her adolescent and early adult emotions and experiences which are intensely reflective of women's position in society. Her poem, 'Bitch' recalls that 'they tormented me/shamed my existence' and called 'me names'. She narrator lists some of these names - 'whore', 'madwoman', 'lesbian' 'witch' and 'frigid screw' and states 'i was afraid/ i was not ashamed/ i was not selfish/ i would not love/ i could not love'.<sup>6</sup> In 'He Treats Me' the protagonist laments that 'he treats me/like a whore/he loves me/he comes/then he goes'.<sup>7</sup> She feels that feminism has been a major influence on her work. 'I am a feminist, and firmly believe in a non-racist, non-sexist democracy. I write about my experiences as a woman, and about the forces of oppression, prejudice and related sexism'.<sup>8</sup> In some of her later poems, written in 1993, Sobhna addresses issues of female sexuality including women loving women:

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<sup>2</sup>Foreword to *Words on a Blank Page*, Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1990.

<sup>3</sup>'Say No Black Woman', *ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>4</sup>'Broken Sunlight', *ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>5</sup>*In Search of Rainbows*, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1990, p.v.

<sup>6</sup>'Bitch', *ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>7</sup>'He Treats Me', *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>8</sup>Foreword to *Words on a Blank Page*, Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1990.

i often wonder  
how  
we fell in love  
the first time  
we met  
our first words  
touch  
kiss  
you jolted  
by your discovery  
i kissed away  
your tears  
but  
you were ashamed  
because I  
was a woman too.<sup>9</sup>

Although she doesn't feel that any one writer has influenced her work, Sobhna singles out Ntozake Shange and Virginia Woolf as writers she particularly likes. Sobhna's style of writing is characterised by a spontaneity that she would like to preserve. She says,

The way I write flows straight from my head. I don't edit my work. I don't rewrite my work. I don't restructure it. I structure it as it comes out of my head. So a completed poem is one completed thought and that's it. I never touch it again. I've never altered my work[...]. I majored in dance and choreography, the whole free style thing and I think a lot of my work stems from that.

Sobhna has completed another collection of poetry and says, 'I've got quite a few short stories which I want to publish which haven't yet been typed. They're sitting in a hard cover note book which I would like to get out at some point.' She would like to choreograph her writing for the stage and work 'with bodies, working with multi-media. I've always wanted to work with bodies. I mean that's been my passion, to take bodies and do things with them on stage.'

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<sup>9</sup>Untitled, unpublished poem given to Gaelle Mogwe by Sobhna Poona. .

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*In Search of Rainbows*, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1990



## **Christine Qunta [also published as Christine Douts] 1952 -**

Poet and essay writer. Christine was born and spent her early childhood in Kimberley. When Christine was four years old she was sent to live with her maternal grandparents in Bonteheuwel near Cape Town. Her parents divorced a year later and Christine remained with her grandparents until she was in her early teens. She notes that her 'mother had eleven brothers and sisters. They were and still are a very close-knit family.' As a young teenager she went to live with her mother in Cape Town. Christine says of her mother,

She spent most of her early life as a domestic worker for Whites. When I was in high school she spent some time working as a tea lady for a furniture shop. Most of the time that I lived with her she was a housewife. My mother died in 1989 from smoke related lung disease and poverty. I could not go to her funeral because I was in exile. I am and will always be bitter.<sup>1</sup>

Christine attended Arcadia High School in Cape Town. She began to write poetry at high school in response to the political situation. She feels she was greatly influenced by two of her teachers who tried in very difficult socio-economic and political circumstances to offer the students hope and demonstrate that there were ways out of the vicious cycle of poverty and social degradation that surrounded them. She explains, 'They tried to make us aspire to achieve in spite of all this. I'll remain ever thankful to them for instilling that in us.' Christine was expelled from Arcadia High in 1968 during the first school strike in the Western Cape. She remembers searching for a new school along with the rest of her class-mates so that they could finish their matriculation. Many of her friends became disillusioned and lost all

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Christine Qunta to Gaelle Mogwe, 21 February, 1996. Subsequent quotations are from this letter.

enthusiasm for education but Christine managed to keep going and complete her matriculation.

Christine was drawn to the Black Consciousness Movement which she says 'made such impeccable sense and still does. It gave us a sense of who we were and helped us to formulate a response to oppression.' She became active in the Movement in 1972 and served on the regional executive of both South African Students Organisation (SASO) and Black People's Convention (BPC). She points out that she was 'one of only a few women that were active in the Western Cape region. In other regions women were some of the brightest and most active members.' In 1973 there was a major crackdown on the Movement with bannings, detentions and killings. In 1974 Christine was detained for a short time. On her release she realised that open political activity was not possible and went into exile in Botswana. She hoped to go for military training but remained instead in Botswana for two years until she was offered a scholarship to study in Australia by the Australian Council of Churches and left in late 1977. An anti-apartheid organisation organised the funding and one of the conditions of the scholarship was that Christine work to mobilise Australians against the South African system of apartheid.

Whilst still in South Africa, Christine was encouraged by the poet, James Matthews, to publish her poetry. In 1974 eight of her poems, 'To You', 'Come! My Brave Warrior', 'Sounds of the Night', 'They Jumped on Him', 'Evening is Sweeping', 'My Township', 'Dear God' and 'Uhuru Day', appeared in the anthology *Black Voices Shout* which was edited by Matthews. In 1979 her poem 'Come! My Brave Warrior' was published in *The Gar* in the United States and in the same year her first collection of poetry entitled *Hoyi Na! Azania: Poems of an African Struggle* was published in Australia. Christine was prompted to begin working on the material for the book *Women in Southern Africa*, while she was in Australia. She felt that

African women were being misrepresented and that the Western feminist 'furore about female genital mutilation' brought this into sharp focus. She says, 'they [Western feminists] thought they had to rescue a pliant and subdued female population from the barbarism of their African culture'. She hoped to counter what she saw as seriously flawed feminist debates by presenting in the book a more informed analysis and clearer perspectives on the socio-political and legal positions of African women. As editor, Christine gathered biographies, interviews and articles from African women and wrote introductions for the various African countries represented. She remembers that 'it took such a lot of trouble gathering the papers that I decided never to undertake such a project again. But it was worthwhile'. *Women in Southern Africa* was first published in 1987. It begins with Christine's article, 'Outstanding African Women, 1500 BC - 1900 AD'. She writes, 'the recorded involvement of African women in state administration and military defence planning dates back about four thousand years, to the civilian rule in Egypt of Nebet'<sup>2</sup> and goes on to present the lives and achievements of such women, including Queen Hatshepsut, Queen Candace, Queen Nzinga and Nehanda.

Christine completed a degree in law in 1981 and then worked in Australia for a year before returning to Botswana. She explains that 'due to pressure from the white South African government, my husband was expelled from Botswana in 1988'. The family then moved to Zimbabwe. Christine found it difficult to write poetry in exile. She thinks the reason was that she was 'removed from the source', but in 1985 she started writing again. The resulting poems were published in 1990 as a collection entitled *Heroes and Other Treasures*. There are

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<sup>2</sup>'Outstanding African Women, 1500BC - 1900AD', *Women in Southern Africa*, ed. Christine Qunta, London: Allison and Busby, 1987, p.23.

poems written in memory of African leaders including Mangaliso Sobukwe and Zephania Mothopeng, and poems of love, travel and the struggle against racist oppression. The collection is characterised by a strong attachment to the philosophy of Black Consciousness. In her poem, 'Song of Isis', Christine pays homage to the 'daughter of sky-goddess Nut/ and earth god Seb' with her 'sparkling brown eyes/ and majestic black skin'. Of Isis's image 'they carved the virgin Mary/ bleached and distant' but the goddess reassuringly states,

I remain  
in my original dark splendour  
in my shrines  
in Italy  
in Spain  
in Poland  
where thousands  
pay homage to me  
I am Isis  
Queen of Queens  
Goddess of Goddess  
I carry within me  
the wisdom of our ancestors [...]  
Worship me!<sup>3</sup>

Christine admires Chinua Achebe and Toni Morrison. She says, 'they embody my ideal of what a writer should be - a skilled craftsman (or craftsperson!) and a patriot'. She feels her writing has been directly influenced by Bessie Head whom she met through James Matthews. She read *Maru* and *A Question of Power* and 'was literally bowled over by such excellent and intense writing'. Head's use of light and darkness struck a chord in Christine who consciously adopted similar concepts in some of the poems in *Hoyi na Azania*. Christine later found Head's views to be too metaphysical and vague. 'I had begun to study Marxism

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<sup>3</sup>'Song of Isis', *Heroes and Other Treasures*, Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1990, p. 21.

seriously and became more precise in my world view. I became friends with Bessie. We lived in Molepolole and she in Serowe and I sometimes visited her. She remains a very fascinating person well after her death.'

Since the publication of *Heroes and Other Treasures* in 1990, Christine has not written poetry. She feels that she will now only write academic non-fiction work. She explains the motivation behind her non-fiction writing saying,

I believe Africans must be able to articulate their own reality rather than foreigners doing it [...] No matter how well-meaning foreigners are, they cannot accurately interpret that reality. It is not a healthy situation. A few white scholars have attacked me for this stance, but I am vindicated by the response of Africans to my writing. In any case I do not care too much about such responses, since I understand only too well the real motivation behind such attacks. To control our own destiny we must begin to speak for ourselves both as women and as Africans. Anyone who opposes such a fundamental right, can surely not have the interest of African people at heart.

Christine returned to Cape Town to live in 1993. She worked for two years as a legal advisor in Sanlam, a major financial institution. She then set up her own legal practice specialising in corporate law and intellectual property. Her book *Who's Afraid of Affirmative Action: A Survival Guide for Black Professionals* was published in 1995. She felt that the affirmative action programmes of the new South Africa were skewed in that they largely focused on acclimatising Whites to the presence of Blacks in corporate situations and little attention was given to the culture shock that Black professionals were experiencing in attempting to adjust

to White corporate situations. She writes that:

The relations of domination and subjugation which have existed in the wider political arena in this country have been reproduced in the corporate environment. While political struggles have changed the political environment, it is not easy to change the ownership of corporations. Africans simply do not have the economic clout required for this. So, in a sense, the corporate world will continue to mirror the old society for some time yet. Different ways of dealing with this problem need to be devised.<sup>4</sup>

In relation to writing, Christine talks about the great difficulties faced by African writers attempting to publish in South Africa, the main problem being the lack of publishing outlets. She believes that now more than ever there exists a major intellectual vacuum in South Africa and points out that 'there is presently only one Black publishing house, Skotaville. The White publishing houses including the liberal ones, only publish works that are ideologically acceptable to them'. She finds this very discouraging but feels she must struggle against this situation. She insists on continuing her writing even though as a mother of two daughters and a professional, it is not easy to find time and, as she states, 'it is also very lonely and often friends and colleagues find my seclusion strange because there is no tradition of writing here'.

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<sup>4</sup>*Who's Afraid of Affirmative Action: A Survival Guide for Black Professionals*, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1995, Preface.

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## Portia (Mpho) Rankoane 1962 -

Poet and short story writer. Portia was born in Soweto and lived with her parents and maternal grandparents in White City Jabavu. 'When my grandfather died, we had to vacate the house we were living in. During the days of apartheid when a man died in the family you had to [move].'<sup>1</sup> The family, along with Portia's grandmother, then moved to Meadowlands. Portia's mother, Christinah Rankoane, is now a pensioner. She has always enjoyed listening to stories on the radio, which she prefers to television. She loves music and is an ardent member of her church. Portia's father is called Abraham Rankoane. He was a textile worker for many years until he was retrenched. He then worked for a waste collection company where he suffered chest injuries when a waste bin fell on his chest. Portia says, 'my father and I never saw eye to eye. He was hostile towards his family and drank every day'.<sup>2</sup> She remembers weekends:

When he came home and found us in front of the T.V., he would go straight to his bedroom, close the door and switch off the main switch that was in his bedroom. And the whole house would be in darkness. We always used a torch to light our way around us as no one would dare go in the bedroom to put the lights back. There was no peace at home. But we survived somehow, because of my mother, she was a strong woman.<sup>3</sup>

Portia grew up and went to school in Meadowlands. She recalls that, 'My brothers used to buy love comics, *See, Love me Tender* and *Double Features*, and they used to hide them

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Portia Rankoane to Gael Mogwe dated 3 November, 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this letter unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Portia Rankoane to Gael Mogwe dated 20 February, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*



from me. Every time they went out, I'd search until I found them. Reading them was my greatest pleasure.'

She 'was hooked on comics' and loved reading James Hadley Chase novels and Danielle Steel's *Passion's Promise*. She remembers enjoying Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and is particularly impressed by the Russian novelist's 'unique style of writing'. Portia first started writing when she began secondary school.. She would write long letters and messages to fictional people.

I remember one day I wrote a love letter and forgot it in my English book. The next day I submitted my home work forgetting the letter inside. The teacher found the letter and asked me about it. I denied all knowledge of the letter. I enjoyed sending out written messages, maybe because I couldn't express myself verbally. By the time I was fifteen I started keeping a diary till I was twenty two.

Portia completed her Standard Nine in 1980. She then completed a computer course in 1982. In 1986 she began to study music and discovered opera. She explains that 'slowly I became hooked on opera and that did miracles to me. Every time I listened to it my mood changed. I'd feel like flying sometimes it made me wish I was a ballerina.' She says the problem with her love of opera is that 'people think I'm weird and living in a strange world'.<sup>4</sup> *Don Giovanni* is one of Portia's favourite operas. She found opera a great inspiration to her writing but did not have confidence in her work. It was only after reading South African women writers including Miriam Tlali, Gcina Mhlophe, Sobhna Poona and Nadine Gordimer, that she began to think of the possibility of publishing. In 1988, Portia published a collection

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<sup>4</sup>Questionnaire completed by Portia Rankoane 25 August, 1995.

of poetry entitled *Moment of Truth*. Her poems present the perspective of a young, urban black woman dealing with frustration and despair. In the poem 'One Day' the narrator asks 'How long should we wait for that "ONE DAY"/ I'm afraid we cannot wait forever for that day/ Pain and torture lie across our path/ Does it mean there will never be a "ONE DAY"?'<sup>5</sup> The poem, 'Love', begins, 'It's just a fantasy that always goes along with pain/ Depriving you of your last happiness'.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, Portia's poems, 'We, the Family' and 'Reality' were published in *Women in South Africa: From the Heart - An Anthology*. 'We, the Family' expresses relief that 'when the day dies' the family is still together and states 'all we want is living space/ all we want is unity and peace/ because internally we care'.<sup>7</sup> 'Reality' presents a grim scene where the narrator relates that she never knew reality until the day she woke to find herself 'in despair, hopeless and confused'. The world that she wants has crumbled, 'the dark sky brings pain and nightmares [...]. Yet hope and trust must never die'.<sup>8</sup> Portia explains that she writes poetry to draw lessons for herself and her peer group. 'Often we have felt hurt and been frustrated by life and circumstances. I hope others will also be consoled by my poetry'.<sup>9</sup>

Her poems 'The Worker' and 'Living in Town' appeared in *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry* in 1990. 'The Worker' tells of a black woman who travels 'the dusty road to Johannesburg' in search of work. She has to work to educate her kids. 'It's hard work, it is strenuous and back breaking', housekeeping, looking after the family's

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<sup>5</sup>'One Day', *Moment of Truth*, Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1988, p.14.

<sup>6</sup>'Love', *ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>7</sup>'We, the Family', *Women in South Africa: From the Heart - An Anthology*, Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba, 1988, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup>'Reality', *ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>9</sup>'Portia Rankoane', *ibid.*, p.104.

small child and their dog, ironing and washing the car. 'All that for a drop in the ocean, a pittance/all that and it is not even enough for school fees/not even enough to keep the wolf from the door'.<sup>10</sup> 'Living in Town' describes how

It was a nightmare  
Living among them  
Using the same lift  
Sharing the same block  
The green eyes dug deep in my back  
They said it all-  
'Black fool you belong to Soweto'<sup>11</sup>

Since leaving school Portia has been employed in various posts including working for an insurance company, selling houses, working in a beauty parlour and selling educational toys. In 1993 she participated in the Market Photographic Workshop and began to work as a freelance photo-journalist. Her story 'Too Dark to Tell' was published in 1994 in *Like a House on Fire: Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography from South Africa*. It is a short piece of writing that aims to provide a record of an incident in Soweto which, like many other such incidents, would pass by unpublished and 'no one would realize what happened there, what it was really like'<sup>12</sup> The narrator is visiting her cousin in Killarney. 'There was a funeral nearby for Mercury Beki (22), killed by hostel dwellers on his way home from school.'<sup>13</sup> She is standing in the kitchen preparing lunch when she hears a loud noise and screaming and injured youths burst into the house. One of the youths describes how they

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<sup>10</sup>'A Worker', *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*, ed. Cecily Lockett, Cape Town: AD. Donker, 1990, p.361.

<sup>11</sup>'Living in Town', *ibid.*, p.361.

<sup>12</sup>'Too Dark to Tell', *Like a House on Fire: Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography from South Africa*, ed. The COSAW Women's Collective, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1994, p.158.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, p.156.

went to the graveyard to bury their friend and 'cops came to search our vehicles'. They then walked back to the house where the funeral was continuing and were standing outside talking, when

A white mini-bus stopped and two men got out. One was wearing a long coat. He took out a gun and shot toward us. People were screaming and splitting everywhere and then I heard this loud bang in my ears [a hand grenade]. [...] I looked near the pots and saw the old woman who was helping - flung on the fence, dead.<sup>14</sup>

Portia writes about daily life in urban South Africa. She is concerned by the suffering of the men and women around her and writes because she does not 'want to see anyone in pain. I want to say something to them. I can't say it verbally'.<sup>15</sup> She feels her writing includes some elements of South Africa's storytelling traditions. Portia says that it has not been easy to find publishers for her material and that she cannot rely on writing to earn an income. She finds it very difficult to make time for writing when she is working. She hopes to begin a full-time, three-year course in music in 1996. She is currently writing a novel and hopes in the future to combine her photography with creative writing. Portia is a single mother with two sons, Lerato and Atlega. She lives with her mother in Meadowlands.

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<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>15</sup>Questionnaire.

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### **Short Story**

'Too Dark to Tell', *Like a House on Fire: Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography from South Africa*, ed. COSAW Women's Collective, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1994

## Jayapraga Reddy 1948 -

Short story writer, autobiographer and playwright. Jayapraga was born and grew up in Durban. Her father, Charm Reddy, was a driver and her mother, Isperi Reddy, devoted her time to the home and caring for Jayapraga and her brother who were both born with spinal muscular atrophy. She took great pains to ensure her children went to school and would help Jayapraga, who was confined to a wheelchair, up and down the hill that led to Clareville Primary School. Jayapraga remembers the journey, 'everyday from here down that road. It was difficult. Down that steep hill. Now that I think about it, it was horrible.'<sup>1</sup> Jayapraga's mother was determined that her children should live full lives like any other children. She saw education as a means to overcoming the problems their disability presented in relation to them leading independent adult lives. 'Mother gave us a very normal upbringing and we were exposed to everything - music and literature, people and crowds, outings and functions.'<sup>2</sup> Jayapraga's grandmother also played an important role in her childhood. Jayapraga recalls that:

Like my mother, she also felt strongly that education was the key to freedom and independence for the disabled. Once someone asked her what the point was of my wanting an education - what could I do with it? She answered with confident pride: 'She will write books'. I've always loved old people and find them a storehouse of information and interesting memories.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Jayapraga Reddy by Gaelle Mogwe, Durban, 11 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>'An Interview with Jayapraga Reddy' by Annemarie van Niekerk, *Like a House on Fire: Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography from South Africa*, ed. COSAW Women's Collective, Johannesburg: COSAW Publishing, 1994, p.69.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p.70.

Jayapraga's grandmother and mother would tell her stories about what life was like for Indian families who arrived in South Africa as indentured labourers and about 'lovers running away together'.

Jayapraga did most of her secondary education by correspondence. Both her grandmother and mother noticed that she enjoyed reading and studying English and they encouraged her to write. She remembers enjoying Russian writers including Chekov, Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn, and the English writers Graham Greene, D.H. Lawrence, Somerset Maugham and H.E. Bates. She later discovered other writers who influenced her considerably. She particularly liked Ngugi and Achebe, Anita Desai and Naipaul who 'brought a newness to literature' based on their varied experiences. Jayapraga sees herself first and foremost as a South African writer and not as an Indian woman writer, but would like to see more South African Indian writers, particularly women, telling their own story. 'I thought I should seek to do this; to attempt to experiment in that way because you know, you could see Naipaul. He was writing about Indians in the West Indies and that created a whole new picture for me and it struck me why can't we do the same?'

The first story Jayapraga wrote was a children's story 'about a forgotten tube of toothpaste' which she sent to the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC). She enjoyed writing short stories and was first published in 'the local Indian paper'. In 1973 the BBC World Service broadcast her story, 'Love Beads', and in 1976 they broadcast 'A Gift for Rajendra'. In 1980, *Staffrider* published 'The Slumbering Spirit', 'a completely true story' based on the experiences of a friend. It tells of a young 'Coloured' boy, called Terry, who makes friends with Miss Anderson, an old white woman. His mother frowns on the relationship warning,

'Never trust a white. They worry about their own skins, not the next man.'<sup>4</sup> Terry does chores for Miss Anderson and Terry's sister looks after the old woman as she is dying. After Miss Anderson's death, Terry is given her old, arthritic dog. His family find it unbelievable that 'she did not even leave' them 'a pot plant!'.<sup>5</sup> Terry wants to tell his family that they are wrong, that Miss Anderson gave him 'something more precious than anything material'. She gave him 'time and friendship'. She awoke his 'slumbering spirit to mutual sharing and communication and sympathetic understanding. And that was something he would carry with him for a lifetime.'<sup>6</sup> A year later, in 1981, *Staffrider* published 'A Gift for Rajendra'. The story deals with the feelings of betrayal and humiliation experienced by an old, home barber who loses the custom and hospitality of his community to a younger man offering modern service from a shop. He finds hope in a mother and her son, who is confined to a wheelchair. Jayapraga published 'Market Days' in 1982, 'The Love Beads' in 1983 and 'The Spirit of Two Worlds' in 1987. 'The Spirit of Two Worlds' focuses on the conflict between a mother and her daughter-in-law. It is a sympathetic study of an old woman's discovery that 'her matriarchal authority had its limits' and that the traditional roles of wife and daughter-in-law; 'things her generation had cherished and valued were being replaced' by different values. Her daughter-in-law insists on wearing modern clothes, short hair styled in different ways, learning to drive, working and finally living in a separate home with her husband. The birth of a child, however, assists the spirit of the two women's worlds to merge in a new beginning. In 1987, Jayapraga published a collection of short stories entitled *On the Fringe of Dreamtime*

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<sup>4</sup>'The Slumbering Spirit', *On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1987, p.120.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.120.



*and Other Stories*. The stories were written at different times over a period of sixteen years. They are 'human relation stories' that present South Africa as 'a land of a myriad contrasts. There is no "typical" South African way of life. In this collection I've tried to reflect that.' She states that inspiration for the stories came 'from life itself. Ideas occur in many different ways. A pretty woman glimpsed on the street, something overheard in passing, an incident, an item in the newspaper. Indeed, "Snatch the Wind I Run" had its origin in a newspaper item on a Coloured boy who won the jackpot.'<sup>7</sup> The boy, Gregory, goes home with his Seven Hundred Rand winnings clutched tightly in his fist. Once home, there is a stench of stale cooking. It is hot and airless. He is confronted by a drunk man who, as the relationship is not stated, may be his father but is probably his mother's lover. The man brutally grabs the money from Gregory and begins to beat him up with the mother standing by watching. Gregory finally stabs the man. He learns that dreams are 'most elusive and fragile things' They are 'like the wind. No man could hope to snatch the wind.'<sup>8</sup> Another of the stories in the collection, 'Friends', points to the intricate and complex intersections of race, class and gender. An Indian woman begins to feel trapped in wife and mother roles she perceives as oppressive and restrictive. She rebels in various ways against the negative aspects of these roles. She is, however, quite unable or unwilling to acknowledge her own cruelty and the oppressive position that she assumes in relation to her African maid and the maid's daughter.

Jayapraga has tried writing stage plays and took up script-writing when the SABC commissioned her to write an Indian television drama called 'Web of Persuasion'. She wrote a second script for the SABC entitled, 'Release the Wind'. She has completed her

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<sup>7</sup>Foreword, *On the Fringe of Dreamtime*.

<sup>8</sup>'Snatch the Wind and Run', *On the Fringe of Dreamtime*, p.35.

autobiography, *The Unbending Reed*, which has been accepted for publication by Skotaville Press. She is currently working on a novel based on the tales her mother and grandmother told her when she was growing up. She is also working on another collection of short stories. Jayapraga believes *Staffrider* played 'a very important role in encouraging new writers'.<sup>9</sup> but that there is a need for 'more outlets and especially for writers with new work. The SABC, I have sent so much work. I'm talking about TV but they are not budging'. She believes television should be doing more to encourage the production of local drama representing the different cultural and linguistic aspects of South African society.

Jayapraga's writing has recently been hampered by the effects of her spinal muscular atrophy. 'It destroys your muscles slowly over the years. It moves slowly and then suddenly one day you'll find that you have problems doing something that was so normal. So at the stage I'm at now I have problems with writing. It's affected my speech muscles. There are worse moments. I don't feel like talking. My muscles cramp up and make it difficult. Swallowing, I have to be so careful what I eat or I tend to choke.' Jayapraga has tried using computers but finds that they block her creative flow and require a similar physical effort to using a pen. She has considered talking into a tape recorder but apart from the difficulties she faces with speech, is daunted by the thought of having to develop 'a whole new style'. In this respect she admires the achievements of Stephen Hawking who is 'so frail' but has accomplished so much 'with the aid of modern technology'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>An Interview with Jayapraga Reddy', p.72.

<sup>10</sup>Letter from Jayapraga Reddy to Gaele Mogwe, 2 October, 1994.

Jayapraga hopes that the New South Africa will learn to value and promote its various cultures and languages. 'In schools South African works should, for example, be made prescribed reading instead of always pushing to the forefront works by overseas writers.'<sup>11</sup> She hopes that South African writers will open their horizons to new creative possibilities and stresses that 'what is essential to every writer must be a love of people'.

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<sup>11</sup>Interview with Jayapraga Reddy', p.74.

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## **Heather Robertson 1964 -**

Poet and journalist. Heather was born in Durban. She grew up in Red Hill, 'a so-called Coloured suburb' of Durban and was constantly aware of the way communities were divided and often 'isolated and cut-off' by apartheid.<sup>1</sup> 'There was a railway line between the Coloured areas and opposite there's a White area and then sort of a road dividing the Indian area.' Heather's mother, Barbara Dawson, is interested in child welfare and runs a home for abandoned children. Heather feels that her early politicisation was largely through her mother's involvement in political issues. In 1976 her mother 'was involved with a group of women who protested at the appropriation of houses in certain areas in Durban and they used to be fighting day and night against the local councillors'. Heather's father, Leslie Ivan Robertson, is a medical doctor. He had friends who 'belonged to the Communist Party and they would stay at the house'. He would hide them and help them to leave the country. Heather remembers being sent by her father to post some letters. 'I walked into the post office and walked into the wrong side and they kicked me out.' When Heather told her father of the incident he responded by explaining that there was nothing wrong with her, that it was the system that was wrong. She feels that she adopted her father's outlook from quite an early age. She also remembers going with her mother to Woolworths and being told by the white shop assistant that trying on the clothes was forbidden because 'I would dirty' them. Heather was very close to her maternal grandmother who was a 'great storyteller'. She was a white woman who left Johannesburg for Cape Town in the 1920's and fell in love with Heather's grandfather who was 'a crippled man'. She was then 'kicked out of her family'. She

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Heather Roberston by Gaelle Mogwe, Johannesburg, 13 January, 1995. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise specified.

used to tell Heather stories about her life in Cape Town before the National Party came into power and about the fun she used to have when the boats came in with sailors.

Heather attended St Augustine's Primary School from 1971 to 1978 where she felt a sense of annoyance at being forced to sing 'Die Stem', the national anthem, and 'having to raise the flag at school'. It was a government school run by Catholic nuns who were 'humanitarian but they wouldn't shake the earth [...] they taught good values'. Heather enjoyed her English lessons and read Enid Blyton, Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. She explains that these books were 'all we had'. She wrote stories and began to write poetry. She attributes her love of writing partly to her early love of reading. In 1979 she went to Parkhill Senior School where she completed her secondary education. She participated in the school boycotts of the early 'Eighties. 'I believed that we should have been out with what was happening in the rest of the country, students getting arrested, people getting arrested. So we were out at school but I missed learning and also I didn't like the attitude. People would just run off into the bushes and go and fuck, you know, and that was it. I just felt that this is not the alternative. You got to do something different. Then we started getting ANC literature off people but there wasn't any leadership. It was a vacuum and it was just like fifteen-year-olds doing their stuff.' Again Heather enjoyed English as a subject and particularly liked one English teacher called Miss Hornsby who introduced her to African writers and Marxism. 'The history teacher was also very good in the sense that if you asked something he would go and get a book from the university and say here, there's a different story here.' Whilst she was still at secondary school, Heather had a girl friend who introduced her to feminism and *Spare Rib*.

In 1983 she went to the University of Natal on a special permit for black students and obtained her BA. There were very few black students and she found the experience very alienating. In 1986 she was accepted to do honours in English at the University of Natal and

chose black theatre in South Africa as her research topic. 'I was the only black student there. We were forced to do Chaucer and I couldn't bring myself to actually sit in that room with these really grey professors [...]. It was like dead and there was just so much happening. I just dropped out.' Heather then spent six months looking after her grandmother who was very ill. After her grandmother died Heather went to work in the St Thomas Home for abandoned children. On her mother's insistence she then went to the University of Cape Town and studied for a teaching diploma. In 1987, while still studying, she worked as a freelance journalist writing for the arts section of *South* until 1988 when she gained her teaching diploma and began teaching at Steenberg Senior Secondary, 'the real arse-hole of Cape Town'. She found it difficult to deal with the bureaucracy at the school and became disillusioned with trying to show the children that there was more to life than joining a gang or falling pregnant at fourteen and having babies for 'a lot of them did anyway despite whatever. There was very little hope.' She joined the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) as the regional co-ordinator and found the work stimulating with workshops in the townships and monthly poetry readings. Her poems, 'Once Upon a Moonbeam', 'There's a Boy Somewhere', 'BLACK THINGS', 'Songs of Freedom', 'Under the Sun', 'i am complete' and 'African Sunrise' were published in 1988. 'BLACK THINGS' is a sharp, despairing comment on crime. The young men are in Karam's cafe, 'warm in the haze of stompie-ways and pacman machines'. The first-person narrator is standing behind a counter, 'free as a koeksuster' and 'twisted sweetly'. They hear the 'pavement crack'. Tsotsis have swiped a passer-by's Friday pay, 'fucked him up till he flopped on the street'. The narrator offers us her thoughts:

I say a man is neither man nor dog  
Face down in the dust

There were no brothers nor bitches when the moon collapsed  
Just blood and blackness  
Big Blackness of our street  
And a horrible, hollow black nothing  
That dangles from a cuphook in our souls.<sup>2</sup>

Heather was awarded the Ingrid Jonker Award for her poetry. After working with COSAW for one year she went back to work for *South* as a journalist. She then joined the *Sunday Times* and worked for two years as an investigative journalist contributing to the 'My Word' and 'North to South' columns and the 'Metro' section. In 1991, *Under the Sun*, a collection of her poems, was published. The poems are fresh. The patois, cultures, colours, heat and sensuality of South African life are mixed in a weave of the personal and political. There is anger, awe and dry humour. Girlies who 'like poking fun/with a dildo/in the eye/of the beholder',<sup>3</sup> a drunk cockroach with 'babbelaas-breath and stinkcheese-toes'<sup>4</sup> and a sunspark that 'was but a meteorite/that soon blew out/when you went about your business/being a man'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1993 Heather joined *Tribute* as a journalist and edited the arts pages. Her features include, 'Heart of Darkness', an investigative report on the Mitchell's Plain serial killer known as 'the Station Strangler', and 'In Search of Brenda', an article on Brenda Fassie, South Africa's 'queen of pop'. In 'SA's Road to Mecca' Heather goes to the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, a 'frontier town where unemployed British immigrants were imported to defend the empire against the Xhosa'.<sup>6</sup> She wanders amongst the ghosts of Piet Retief and Colonel

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<sup>2</sup>'BLACK THINGS', *Utterings in the Garden*, Athlone: COSAW, 1988, p.4.

<sup>3</sup>'Ode to the Girlies', *Under the Sun*, Plumstead: Snailpress, 1991, p.23.

<sup>4</sup>'The Cockroach and the Moon', *ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>5</sup>'Meteorite Desire', *ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>6</sup>'SA's Road to Mecca', *Tribute*, October, 1993, pp.61-62.



John Graham and runs a critical eye over that which the 'country's creative sparks' have to offer. After rejecting the 'influence of exiles' as 'dated, misplaced and poorly constructed', she finds productions that dance, mime and mock their way to her heart as 'pure story-telling - the way it happens in the street'. But it is the voice of Sibongile Khumalo and her 'exquisite blending of classical pieces by Bach and Handel with rousing African traditionals and jazz'<sup>7</sup> that finally confirms the abundance of hope ahead. Heather has fought to give coverage to gay rights and the abortion debate. In 'Still an Activist', she interviews Simon Nkoli, 'one of South Africa's best know gay activists'.<sup>8</sup> 'We are here. Listen to Us' gives voice to the stories of black, gay South Africans. The views of 'South African political leaders, such as Winnie Mandela, Ruth Mompati, Strini Moodley and Benny Alexander', that homosexuality is not part of African culture are rejected.<sup>9</sup> But so is the idea of an essential gay identity in South Africa. Heather is always questioning, 'always trying to see what's below the surface'. She likes to question power and celebrates the ordinary. 'I try to go beyond the hype.'

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<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>8</sup>'Still an Activist', *Tribute*, August, 1994, p.52.

<sup>9</sup>'We are here. Listen to Us', *Tribute*, August, 1994, p.54.

## Poems

'Once upon a Moonbeam', 'There's a Boy Somewhere', 'BLACK THINGS', 'Songs of Freedom', 'Under the Sun', 'i am incomplete', 'African Sunrise', *Utterings in the Garden*, Athlone: COSAW, 1988

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Heather Roberston has published articles, reviews and columns in *South*, *The Sunday Times* and *Tribute*. Only articles cited in this entry are included in this bibliography.

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'Still an Activist', *Tribute*, August, 1994, pp.52-53

'We are here. Listen to Us', *Tribute*, August, 1994, pp.54-57

## **Agnes (Elizabeth) Sam 1942 -**

Short story and essay writer, poet and playwright. Agnes Sam was born into an extended family in Port Elizabeth where her paternal grandfather was at the head and his four sons and their four wives and all their children lived together. Agnes had three sisters and three brothers and grew up in North End which was an area in Port Elizabeth that consisted of 'about four streets of houses. Just four short streets and we all knew each other.'<sup>1</sup> It was a multi-cultural area where as Agnes puts it:

People spoke Indian languages, they spoke Afrikaans and English. It was very mixed [...], Afrikaaners and the Jews and the Muslims and Malays, Indians, Coloureds, the poor Coloured people, you know, it was not a middle-class, well-to-do suburb or anything like that. There were skollies living at the bottom of the road, people smoking dagga. They gambled on a Friday night. It was in that environment that I grew and saw a lot.

North End was later re-classified as a white area under the Group Area's Act and the family was forced to move. Agnes's mother, Margaret Chinnian, was a housewife who took a keen interest in rugby. 'She knew all the players, the English side and the Australian side.' She was also 'interested in sewing. She sewed all our clothes and she did a lot of cooking and baking, a lot of vegetarian dishes. My mother read, you know, all these romantic novels.' Agnes remembers that her father, Anthousa Sam, was very gentle. He was 'not a disciplinarian at all. We never beat our children. We would play in the street with all the children and my mother telling us stories.'

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Agnes Sam by Gaelle Mogwe, Port Elizabeth, 13 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

Agnes was brought up as a Catholic. Her parents and her grandparents were baptised Catholics. Her great-grandparents were also Catholic. Growing up she realised that her surname was not a typically Indian surname. She explains,

I do know that the Catholic Indians have other surnames. They don't have Indian surnames and [...] I realised that they might have been changed and I found a document; one of our family documents that had my great grandfather's name on it which was longer, that was Veeraswami. I talked to someone from India and it's a very old South Indian name.

In 1956 Agnes went to St. Monica's Primary School, a Catholic school in the South End. She was an avid reader. 'I was ten when I read *Jane Eyre* and I loved *Jane Eyre* and I still love *Jane Eyre* [...]. I know *Lorna Doone* was one of the books I read and I used to read all my father's books, detective, crime, Agatha Christie and I read all my mother's series and novels. I just read everything I could lay my hands on.' Agnes attended St. Thomas Secondary for two years and then went to Southern High, a state-run school, where she completed her secondary education. She recalls that 'the state schools were very different to the Catholic Schools. Well, there were no nuns for one thing. There were no nuns. I was a very rebellious child. I was always in trouble with the nuns...at some stage I realised that the nuns were treating us differently to the way they treated white girls [...] I realised the racism that was going on'. In 1960 she went to Lesotho where she attended Pius XII University College in Roma. She did not want to study in South Africa as 'there was no separate university for Indians' when she matriculated and 'the Separate University Bill was already in force'.<sup>2</sup> Her

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<sup>2</sup>South Africa: Guest of Honour Amongst the Uninvited Newcomers to England's Great Tradition', *Kunapipi*, 7, 2 and 3 (1985), 93.

subjects included pre-medicine, physics, chemistry and psychology. In 1963 she gained her Bachelor of Science degree and in 1964 she went to Zimbabwe and studied for a post-graduate teaching certificate. She then went to Ndola, Zambia and worked for the Ministry of Education as a science and maths teacher at Kasenji Secondary School and later Chifuba Secondary School. Once she knew she was having her first child, she decided to stop teaching. She had three sons in quick succession and set up a pre-school in Ndola where she 'taught children to read and write'. She also wrote educational articles for school children for the *Zambian Sunday Times*. Agnes lived in Zambia for ten years. 'We had been in Zambia a long time but we were still South Africans. We weren't Zambians and we didn't want to come back so we decided to go to England.'

Agnes expected to find employment as a teacher and once in England she applied for 'qualified teacher status' and regrets that 'the Department of Education and Science withheld this from me "for the time being" while granting it to some other South Africans. The effect on me was one of tremendous loss of self-confidence'.<sup>3</sup> She decided to further her education and attended the University of York where she obtained a BA Honours in English in 1978. It was while she was studying at York that she completed her first major piece of writing. It was called 'What Passing Bells'. Influenced by the Soweto uprisings, Agnes experimented with newspaper headlines and snatches of conversation to create a narrative poem 'suggestive of a fractured society, of people in an apartheid system isolated from each other. It combined poetry and prose. Its purpose was to frustrate the reader's need for continuity because this is precisely how we are frustrated in our understanding of the South African situation.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p.95.

After completing her degree in English, Agnes tried to find work as a teacher but 'two degrees and a teaching certificate made no difference to my prospects in the job market'.<sup>5</sup> She eventually accepted work as a secretary in a large firm which was a negative experience mainly due to racism and male dominance. In 1984 she decided that she would work full-time on her writing. She completely revised the 'What Passing Bells' manuscript, wrote an article on prejudice in education and three short stories. She explains that each of the three stories 'is associated with a European work of art. I had in mind an African in exile wandering through the galleries in Europe and reminded of situations at home. "Poppy" is associated with "Field Poppies", "The Seed" with Van Gogh's "Old Woman in a Field" and "The Dove" with Picasso's "Child and Dove".'<sup>6</sup>

Agnes feels that her attempts at publication were frustrated at various levels. 'One publisher's representative asserted very firmly that Black women write autobiographically. A Black woman experimenting with language and form has no business writing.'<sup>7</sup> She feels that she was a victim of what she terms 'the South African thing':

if you send something in and you're South African, they look for a South African reader and of course nobody knew me. I was in York. I was not part of COSAW; all these other movements, and so it was set aside [...] when I realised it I insisted I didn't want a South African reader and I finally got that done with Heinemann.

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<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*

In 1989 her collection of short stories, *Jesus is Indian*, was published in hard-cover by the Women's Press. Heinemann took on an eight-year world paperback licence for the book in 1994. The collection reflects on life in exile through such pieces as 'Poppy', 'The Seed', and 'Child and Dove'. It also explores the history and experiences of some of South Africa's mixed-cultural communities with the main emphasis on an Indian perspective. Agnes explains in the Introduction that after her grandfather's death while they were sorting through his papers, they discovered that her 'great-grandfather was shanghaied as a child from India to South Africa in the nineteenth century. The discovery brought with it the immediate realisation that the history of Indians in South Africa was suppressed'.<sup>8</sup> In her story 'And They Christened It Indentured Labour' she offers some wry insights into this history,

And when they survived cholera, dysentery and typhoid, and after they resisted the impulse to throw themselves into the Indian Ocean, and they finally arrived at their destination, to be given in bondage to a master of indentureship - only then they understood, as clearly as they could not write their names, that although they belonged to a master, and could not move anywhere without that master's permission, they were certainly not slaves. For slavery had been abolished. A bond is a man's word.<sup>9</sup>

The title story of the collection, 'Jesus is Indian', points to a young girl's discovery of the complex and seemingly conflictual mix of cultural and religious mores that contribute to the formation of identity and characterise life in mixed communities. Agnes explains that the story is based on 'a mixture of some of my impressions of being at a Catholic school'.

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<sup>8</sup>Introduction, *Jesus is Indian*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1994, p.1.

<sup>9</sup>*Jesus is Indian*, p.130.

Agnes has published various articles on women and racism. In her article 'British Universities and Black/Asian Candidates', she comments on prejudice in university admission procedures. 'South Africa: Guest of Honour Amongst the Uninvited Newcomers to England's Great Tradition' describes her difficulties in finding employment as a teacher in England and the problems she faced as a Black woman writer. Her play 'Dora' was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in August, 1990 and 'The Tyranny of Karma' was broadcast in February, 1994. Her poem, 'Third World Children Dreaming' was published by Birmingham Arts. It begins:

Third World Children Dreaming,  
Wide-eyed, but won't come out to play,  
Hop scotch with me on Shifting sands,  
Won't skip rope, won't touch hands.  
Innocence, in and out the dusty rhyme  
Blameless, the First World story line.<sup>10</sup>

Agnes returned to South Africa in 1994 to work as a temporary lecturer in English at Vista University in Port Elizabeth. She then took up a position with the reporting section of the Eastern Cape Legislature in Bisho. She is working on a radio play and hopes to write a novel now that she is back in South Africa. She is also researching her family history which she hopes to write into a book 'but just for the family really'. She feels

[I]t is essential for all South Africans, if we are to recuperate from the disease which apartheid spread amongst us, to appreciate that our history was not one of conquest, I searched for some answers regarding Indians, always aware I might unearth details best left forgotten. It is my hope that others will take up the wider

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<sup>10</sup>'Third World Children Dreaming', *People to People*, 18 (1992), 3.



implications in relation to the other racial groups excluded from South African history.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Introduction, *Jesus is Indian*, p.2.

**Poems Published**

Extract from 'What Passing Bells', *Let It Be Told*

'Third World Children Dreaming', *People to People*, 18 (1992), 3

## Suzan (Limakatso) Sefatsa 1930 -

Playwright. Suzan was born in Lebabalasi. Her parents, Mr and Mrs Motjeane, moved to Bloemfontein where Suzan attended school up to Standard Six. She was an only child. Her father died when she was young and she grew up with her mother. After completing her secondary education she stayed at home to care for her mother who was ill. From 1950 to 1952 she attended the Strydom Teacher Training College in Bloemfontein and completed a teaching diploma. The school was then situated where the Pelonomi Hospital is today. In 1953 Suzan began teaching at primary level and in the same year she married Mr Sefatsa. They had two children, a boy and a girl. Tragically, their son later died. In 1970 Suzan became Principal of Lejweleputswa Primary School in Meadowlands, Soweto, where she lived until 1986 when she moved to Senekal in the Orange Free State to teach.

Since her school days Suzan has been interested in reading Sotho literary works. She particularly enjoys the writings of Ntšeliseng 'Masechele Caroline Khaketla. She feels there is a need to promote literature in African languages, especially amongst the youth. She is a long-time member and secretary of LESIBA (Quill), the Southern Sotho writer's organisation. Her first book, *Pakiso*,<sup>1</sup> written in Sesotho, was published in 1979. It was later prescribed by the Department of Education and Training for Standard Eight pupils in secondary schools. Set in a traditional, rural village, it tells of the problems that the practice of polygamy brings upon a family. The play depicts a patriarchal, subsistence-farming community where women must cope with their domestic chores, including collecting firewood, fetching water, looking after the children and cooking, as well as carrying

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<sup>1</sup>'Pakiso' translates from Sesotho to English as 'to annoy or spite'.

out their work in the fields. The first act introduces the main character, Sehloho, who arrives home very drunk in the early hours of the morning. He bangs on the door expecting his wife, Malimakatso, to open it but she has had enough and decides to ignore him. He then goes to his mistress, 'Malenka, who runs a shebeen. She also decides to ignore him and pretends to be asleep. He is furious and wanders off into the night, falls into some water and remains there unconscious until daylight. When he eventually arrives home he is in a terrible state and Malimakatso is reprimanded by Sehloho's brother,

My sister-in-law you know very well that you got married into this family in day light, with all of us as witnesses. We assume that you are a mature woman and we expect you to demonstrate this maturity in the way you treat your husband. Whatever time he comes home at night, you are obliged to respond to his knocking and open the door. He is the head of this family. In fact he owns this family. <sup>2</sup>

Sehloho revenges both his wife and his mistress by making 'Malenka his second wife. The two women do not get along and live in constant misery. During the funeral of a neighbour the other women in the community convince Malimakatso to accept 'Malenka and the two women become friends. They share their problems and unite against Sehloho who responds by taking a third wife. This wife turns out to be a thief who steals all the family possessions. Malenka, who is now worse off than when she married Sehloho, decides to leave, Sehloho realises the hurt he has caused his wife and children and is repentant, Malimakatso forgives him and the play ends on a harmonious note.

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<sup>2</sup>Pakiso, Johannesburg: Educum Publishers, 1985, p.12.

*Pakiso* is characterised by dry humour using Sotho colloquialisms and wry observations of many of the problems faced by married women. Suzan has also chosen to use simple allegory in naming some of the characters. For example, Sehloho signifies cruelty which is reflected in his behaviour towards women. The name of the neighbour, Thuso, means help. He helps the family overcome their problems.

Suzan still lives in Senekal and is secretary of LESIBA.

### **Bibliography**

#### **Book**

*Pakiso*, Johannesburg: Educum Publishers, 1979

## **Tumi (Mmabatho Elizabeth) Sephula 1959 -**

Poet. Tumi<sup>1</sup> was born in Natalspruit. Her mother, Mary Kaars, was a nurse, which Tumi explains 'was typical of women at that time. You only had two options; teacher or nurse'.<sup>2</sup> Her father, Moshoeshoe Sephula, 'originates from Lesotho' and is a minister for the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a musician. Tumi spent most of her time with her maternal grandmother. She says, 'My mother was determined her children were not going through Bantu Education, so she worked her butt off for us'. Tumi attended primary school in Kimberley and was then sent to boarding school in Aliwal North until the age of twelve when her mother and father moved to England. Tumi's mother worked at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead and then went to New York to earn money to provide for the family and ensure her children's education. Tumi says that her 'mother was very unhappy in the marriage'. Tumi attended La Sainte Union Convent in Hampstead until in 1974 her mother committed suicide in New York. Tumi explains, 'She went into a shop and bought a gun and shot herself. My mother died on my birthday, the 20 April. It was horrible, horrible. April is always a horrible month for me'. Tumi is very sad that she never really got to know her mother and misses her very deeply. She remembers that when they were together, her mother would tell her stories 'about her family and about her life'. These stories are now very important to Tumi.

Tumi attended Barnet College from 1975 to 1976 where she studied for her General Certificate of Education. She then completed her 'A' Levels and from 1978 to 1981 attended

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<sup>1</sup>Tumi is the shortened form of the name Boitumelo.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Tumi Sephula by Gael Mogwe. London, 11 April, 1996. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

the Guildhall University, City of London to obtain a degree in Politics and Government. She then studied at the London School of Economics in 1983 and obtained a postgraduate diploma in Personnel Management. She went on to work in personnel management on local government community programmes in London. She was dismissed by the Borough of Lambeth and took the case to court winning a verdict of unfair dismissal. She says, 'It was at that time that I started writing, saying things the way I wanted to say them'.<sup>3</sup> Tumi feels that writing has been an essential part of her life since she was young. She recalls, 'I was always writing to my grandmother and to my mother in New York. I liked writing essays in school. I've always written. I've kept my grandmother's letters. I treasure them.' She sees Steve Biko as someone who has had a great influence on her writing and general outlook on life. '[I]n terms of what he wrote and the things he said. He demanded the right of people to be free in their own country. This affected me a great deal.'<sup>4</sup> Tumi belongs to an African-Caribbean writers group called Rhythm Writers. The group performed as a support act for Toni Morrison when she was promoting her novel, *Jazz*, at Bloomsbury Theatre in London. Tumi sees Toni Morrison as one of the most important influences on her work.

Tumi has performed her poetry at various venues in London including the Battersea Arts Centre, 'Africa '95' celebrations in Brixton, the Commonwealth Institute and the Africa Centre in Covent Garden. The performance at the Africa Centre was to celebrate the elections in South Africa. Tumi read her poem 'Terrorist Bride' in support of Winnie Mandela. She feels that 'the estranged wife of President Mandela' has been given short shrift

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<sup>3</sup>Chuks Iloegbunam, 'The Songs of Tumi', *West Africa*, 3-9 July, 1995, p.1055.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

and that people have chosen to forget Winnie Mandela's long years of suffering. Tumi writes:

People came to me to say  
'Hold up this flame!'  
Symbolise 'The Struggle'  
What struggle?  
I had my struggle.  
I soon learned.  
Tall white men uniformed in blue suits and hats,  
visited me in the night,  
telling me where I can go and where I can't go.  
Allowing me ten minutes of his tender touch  
That's how I understood  
I am the terrorist bride.<sup>5</sup>

Her poem 'I Wonder' was published in *West Africa* magazine in 1995. She explains the background to the poem:

I caught a train in the general atmosphere of the hustle and bustle of the annual festive season. But I was touched by the sight of a man I had seen so many times in London Bridge Station while hustling to get to work. And now six or seven years later, I see the man again. He is wearing exactly the same clothes, looking more dishevelled, a lot older, bald. I just felt that I had to say something because at that particular time when most of us were feeling particularly happy, this poor man was in a greater state of disrepair.<sup>6</sup>

In her poem, 'My Bum and I', The narrator talks to her bum saying, 'We've been together/ a long time/ you and I'. She proceeds to tell of the times she has tried squeezing her bum into a 'tight size 10 little black number' in an attempt to suffocate it completely. She considers

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<sup>5</sup>Unpublished poem 'The Terrorist Bride' given to Gaele Mogwe by Tumi Sephula.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*



'fatty globule suction' but then realises, 'Cha!/ it would be like/removing my two eyes'. She dreams of a wide-hipped, Egyptian queen who smiles and says,

Girl,  
Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder.  
Sister,  
you are the chosen one.  
Carry the Kilimanjaro mountain  
as your gift.  
Wear it with pride and style.  
This is how you shall be known.<sup>7</sup>

Her poem 'Thoughts for my Friends' will appear in a forthcoming anthology of writing by 'Rhythm Writers' called *Symphonies of the Soul*. Tumi was married briefly and has a son called Mpho. She lives in Tottenham, London and is currently working in mental health as an Employment Development Officer.

## **Bibliography**

### **Poem**

'I Wonder', *West Africa*, 3-9 July, 1995, p.1055

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<sup>7</sup>Unpublished poem 'My Bum and I' given to Gaelle Mogwe by Tumi Sephula.

## **Mavis Smallberg 1946 -**

Poet and short story writer. Mavis was born in Lansdown, Cape Town. Her mother, Elizabeth Joyce Petersen, was a factory worker, domestic worker and housewife. She loved gardening, playing the piano and sewing. Mavis remembers her making pretty Christmas dresses and little baskets of eggs at Easter which were hidden in the back yard. She says, 'I think she would have been very much more creative in other spheres if she had been born in a different time because she was very imaginative in stimulating our imagination [...]. I really appreciate it'.<sup>1</sup> She remembers her mother would tell 'the most amazing stories' in Afrikaans about the history of the family and ghosts. Mavis's father, Vincent Smallberg, began work as a clerk and then became a wagon builder. His 'family had a blacksmith, so he built the wheels and after that he worked in a workshop with car parts, clutches and then he became ill and didn't work for a long time. He had a sort of a night watchman job at the training college and then he died in 1982'. He enjoyed reading and had 'a wide range of books on yoga and chickens and dogs. He used to breed dogs.' He was also interested in cycling and loved jazz. 'In the mornings before he went to work he used to play his Fats Wallers and stuff.' When Mavis was four years old, her parents were fortunate in that they decided to sell their house in Lansdown and move to Crawford where they purchased a house on a large plot of land and 'started growing flowers to sell'. Not long after Lansdown was declared a white area and along with their neighbours and community, they were faced with the traumas of forced removal.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Mavis Smallberg, Cape Town, 19 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

Mavis went to Thornton Road Primary School where she enjoyed reading in both Afrikaans and English. She then attended Alexander Sinton High School. She liked English as a subject and remembers in Standard Eight she was particularly impressed by an anthology of poetry, recalling:

It was a little green book and it had all the sort of classic people in it, you know, like Wilfred Gibson and Matthew Arnold and a little bit of Barret Browning and we had this wonderful teacher who maybe in retrospect she was a bit lazy because she didn't analyse those poems which we were supposed to do. She had this glorious speaking voice and she would sit at the desk and just read these poems to us and we would sit there listening and we would just say read another one, read another one and she would tell us stories.[...]. I loved those poems and I memorised them and I used to say them at home in the mirror.

In 1963 Mavis matriculated and was very disappointed when she did not get into teacher training college. She had great difficulty finding a job and decided she would like to train to become a window dresser. She went to Cape Town Technical College to register for a course only to be told that it was only for whites. 'By that stage I was so disheartened, disappointed, when the man told me I just burst into tears. He directed me to somebody else in Coloured Affairs who then found me this job at Stuttafords.' Mavis worked as a clerk in the department store and although she enjoyed meeting new people and earning a salary, she found the work tedious and frustrating. In 1965 she was accepted into Hewat Training College and in 1967 she completed her teaching diploma. Her first teaching appointment was at Bridgetown East Primary School in Cape Town. 'That was wonderful. I think those were the best teaching years. I taught mainly physical education and it was just great seeing that physical development of the children [...] they were just so responsive.' In 1974 Mavis left her job at Bridgetown and went to England to study dance and choreography. She enjoyed her studies immensely but found it difficult to survive financially. She found an evening job in

a light bulb factory where she worked from six to ten at night. After completing her studies, Mavis went with a German friend to Holland and supported herself by taking cleaning jobs.

In 1976 Mavis returned to Cape Town and began teaching at a school in Manenberg. It was amongst the political unrest of this period and the dismal surroundings of Manenberg that she wrote her first poems. She says, 'It was so depressing. It was terrible and so I wrote a poem which was entitled "Walking to the Bus Stop" in Manenberg and it was just sort of atmospheric about Manenberg.' She was happy when she was allocated a classroom to teach creative dance because her pupils began to respond to her teaching in a positive way. Previously they were unresponsive, very self-conscious and would 'do funny things outside in the open with parents hanging over the wire'. Unfortunately the classroom was vandalised. She recalls that 'Vandals broke in a lot at the school and the windows were broken and one day somebody shat on the stairs and I wrote a poem about that, "On the way to the Dance Class".' In 1977 Mavis left Manenberg to teach at Roggebaai Training School. Here she taught 'teachers who only completed up to Standard Eight' and later when the school was upgraded to a college she taught students who had completed matric. She also began a correspondence course with UNISA to study for a BA. In 1982 the College closed down, she gave up her studies and took a position teaching English at Garlandale High School.

Mavis continued to write poetry and explains:

When I really started to write a lot was in 1985. I mean I probably wrote a poem every two weeks or week and it was because of that whole political situation and I meant my poetry to be a reminder of what had happened. I meant it to be a record which was maybe different from a historical record or a newspaper record and I know people have got problems with that.

She began to perform some of her pieces at political gatherings and a venue called the Creative Space. When performing her poetry she likes to include singing, dance and music in the presentation. She writes most of her poetry in English but says,

I am influenced by Afrikaans because my mother was Afrikaans-speaking but my father was English-speaking and we grew up speaking English but you can't avoid speaking Afrikaans and so my Afrikaans is a Kaaps Afrikaans, it's not like proper. At the time that I was growing up the Afrikaans that I spoke wasn't acceptable, definitely not to be published.

In 1988, Mavis's poems, 'Women' and 'Written Response to a Record Review of "District Six, the Musical"', by David Kramer and Taliep Petersen' were published in *Utterings in the Garden*. In 'Women' she calls women all over the world to summon their 'moral strength', 'caring and nurturing qualities' and 'patience' to 'give birth to a new nation'.<sup>2</sup> 'Written in Response' angrily challenges a review written by Frank Heydenrych in the *Cape Times* where he refers to 'Coloureds' as 'an independent race group'. She asks, 'ever hear of the/Khoi-San, Frankie Boy?' and goes on to point out 'Now THEY were independent, man/they roamed this land/as free as birds' until

your skelm fathers came  
to screw them up  
to screw them down  
to screw them right into  
the blerrie groun'  
an' all that screwing, Frankie boy  
led to us, a lekka mix

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<sup>2</sup>'Women', *Utterings in the Garden*, Athlone: COSAW, 1988, p.15.

who were, like you said  
bulldozed out of District Six.<sup>3</sup>

In November of the same year Mavis participated in the Transvaal COSAW conference on women and writing where she read some of her poetry 'For Gilly Nyathele (Aged Twelve)', 'For Our Mothers', 'Watchout, There's a Policeman' and 'Funny Thing about Words or Sorry, I'm Not Allowed to Say That' were later published in the conference booklet, *Buang Basadi*. In 1989, her poems, 'A Birthday Unwished' and 'Cape Spring Afternoon (1986)', appeared in *Siren Songs*, an anthology of women's poetry, and in 1990 her poem 'June' was anthologised in *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*. 'June' tells of a woman called June who is imprisoned and tortured. She is finally taken to hospital because the wardens know that she 'could not be kept alive inside that cell'. The courage that she has displayed all along culminates in her accusing and identifying her torturers, and finally, after telling the full horror of the story, she breaks down in front of her friends and cries. Her friends begin to sing and 'echoes of the people's song' permeate the air of the Cape Flats night. Mavis's short story, 'Till We Meet', appeared in *Staffrider* in 1991. It is a story told through the eyes of a woman. She was close to a man who is now in exile. She thinks of him and talks to him as she attends his father's funeral and meets his brothers, relatives and family friends. In 1992, eleven of her poems were published in *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry*. The collection includes 'For James Matthews' which was written after Mavis read Nadine Gordimer's *The Black Interpreters*. The poem has a cynical tone and questions Gordimer's claim that some writers are poets and others are not; that a poet is 'a

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<sup>3</sup>Written in Response to a Record Review of "District Six, the Musical", by David Kramer and Taliep Petersen', *ibid.*, pp.32-33.

writer of verse' and a poem is 'a metrical composition especially of elevated character'. It begins, 'So James Matthews is not a poet' and asks what then is a poet? What then is a poem? What then is she who identifies with and values the 'un-poet' and the poems that are not poems because they 'do not have an "elevated character"?'<sup>4</sup> She is critical of 'the literary types' who value poetry according to very narrow aesthetic criteria. Mavis's poem 'Agreement' was also published in 1992 in *A Snake with Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*. She focuses on the detention of young black children who 'are shoved in a cell' where there are:

no spring flowers, no bright sky  
no books, no pictures  
no family  
nobody

only buttoned brass  
popping questions  
popping heads.<sup>5</sup>

Mavis admires many African-American women writers including Maya Angelou. She draws her inspiration from her community and surroundings in Cape Town and writes first and foremost for the people in her community. In the past, she did not see the need to concentrate on publishing her poetry and gained satisfaction from reading her work to people who identified with it and enjoyed it. 'I like that kind of sharing thing and I feel very pleased when people say that was really nice.' She now feels that it is necessary to publish as she

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<sup>4</sup>For James Matthews', *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry*, ed. Andries Walter Oliphant, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1992, pp.130-133.

<sup>5</sup>'Agreements', *A Snake with Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*, ed. Barbara Schreiner, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1992.

would like teachers to use her work in schools and children to read her poetry. She writes with the aim of raising awareness in her audience but states that 'sometimes I just write the poems for me. I like to read them and I like to have them.' In 1983, Mavis took leave from Garlandale High School and went to the University of the Western Cape to complete her BA with English and History majors. She is annoyed that the history of the black populations of the Cape has been suppressed and distorted. The need to develop alternative understandings and values in relation to history was made obvious to her when she began to teach Khoi history to Standard Six pupils. She tells of how her students 'were very interested and they listened but two seconds after I'd finished speaking their hands shot up and they said, Miss, my father was Scottish and Miss, my father was this and whatever'. Mavis hopes to write stories for young teenage children which re-tell the history of the Khoi and the Saan and the development of what is still often referred to as the 'Coloured' community. 'I think it's just such a nice way of introducing ancestry to people because they don't have it or they've denied it.' She also hopes to write a collection of short stories based on the tales her mother used to tell her.

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'Agreements', *A Snake with Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*, ed. Barbara Schreiner, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1992

### **Short Story**

'Till we Meet', *Staffrider*, 9, 4 (1991), 39

## **Venitha Soobrayan [also published as Veni Soobrayan] 1960 -**

Biographer and essay writer. Veni was born and grew up in Durban. She first lived in the suburb of Springtown which 'was an area built by the city council. It was a housing scheme for working-class people'.<sup>1</sup> She has fond memories of her early childhood. There was a strong sense of community in the neighbourhood and Veni 'had lots of friends, children from every household'. Both her parents were active members of the neighbourhood temple and her grandfather was the caretaker of the area. She explains, 'He used to collect rents. It afforded me a sense of status, being the granddaughter of the caretaker'. When Veni was seven, her parents built a house in Reservoir Hills and the family moved from Springtown. She found it difficult to adjust as the houses 'were few and far between. They were far apart. You couldn't sort of just go to anybody's house and play in the afternoon. You had to get permission from their parents and it was very different and very difficult'. Veni's mother, Muthamma Pillay, left school after completing Standard Four and worked as a domestic worker.<sup>2</sup> At eighteen she entered into an arranged marriage with Veni's father, Moonsamy Pillay. At a time when it was not common for 'Indian women to work outside the home', on her own initiative she established a depot which took in washing for a laundry. She learnt dressmaking which she incorporated into her business and she learnt to drive. At the same time she looked after the children and ran the home. Veni is aware that she took her mother for granted while she was growing up. She recalls, 'My father was the main presence at home and I was far more influenced by him'. He was a communist, affiliated to the Unity

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Veni Soobrayan by Gaelle Mogwe, Durban, 11 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>Her maiden name was the same as her married name.

Movement and passed on many of his principles and philosophies to Veni. She was proud to say that she was a communist and an atheist and is guided by his basic beliefs that 'there has to be justice in the world and that everybody has the right to have a home and that sort of thing and if there's rich, there has to be poor'. She admires her father for his honesty and finds 'it extremely difficult to be dishonest in any sort of significant way'.

Veni attended Arayasamaj Primary School in Springtown until the family moved to Reservoir Hills when she went to A.D. Lazarus Primary School. She enjoyed primary school and worked hard but her enthusiasm for school work waned when she went to Reservoir Hills High School and discovered she was more 'interested in boys'. She also discovered and was impressed by D.H. Lawrence's work and particularly liked Simone de Beauvoir whom she says, 'was quite a hero in my eyes'. Veni remembers feeling slightly isolated during her school years because of her family's political involvement and her own political views. It was during this period that she began writing short stories but she did not consider the possibility of publishing her work. After matriculating at Reservoir Hills High, Veni went to the University of Durban Westville where she completed her Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1980. She majored in English and Philosophy. She describes herself as 'a very poor undergraduate student' in the sense that she rarely attended lectures. She was actively involved in the education boycott of 1980 and 'spent a lot of time running from the police'. She wrote her final exams 'without actually having attended university for most of the year'. In 1981 Veni married and took the surname Soobrayan. She and her husband moved to Johannesburg and Veni began a correspondence course for a teaching diploma with UNISA. She completed the course while working full-time, firstly as a trust administrator for the Standard Bank and then as an administrative clerk for a fashion company. Her clerical duties included keeping records of sale, balancing books and costing garments. They did not like living in Johannesburg and

in late 1982 moved back to Durban. Veni took up a teaching post at Nilgiri Secondary School in 1983 where she had been for over eleven years. She teaches English and has taught computer literacy as a filler when she didn't have enough English classes.

Veni did an Honours Degree in English by correspondence with UNISA which she completed in 1987. She enjoyed studying Shakespeare but preferred modern British and American literature, especially the module on women writers. She discovered the writings of Marilyn French and Lisa Alther, both of whom she admires. She also admires Olive Schreiner's writing and sees her as 'a woman far beyond her times' who spoke of a feminism that is still relevant today. In 1988 Veni represented the Natal Organisation of Women at the COSAW Transvaal Region Conference on Women and Writing. The paper she presented at the conference, 'Images of Women in the Media', was published in *Buang Basadi*. It examines popular magazines directed at black and white women, and analyses the stereotyping of women through advertising. In 1990 Veni took a year off from school teaching and studied full-time for her Masters Degree at the University of Natal. She says, 'It was the first time I felt that I enjoyed study and I felt that I explored my potential to study. Other times I was just writing exams'. She then did a one-year course in second language teaching with the English Language Education Trust where she learnt how to identify and contend with the mixed abilities of classes consisting of students who use English as a first language and students who use English as a second language. In 1993 Veni obtained a research award from the organisation, Research in Education for Southern Africa (RESA). RESA was initially set up by the ANC in exile and aimed to train education policy-makers. Veni was nominated for the award by the South African Teachers' Union of which she is an active member. She went to the University of London where she was taught education research methodology and did her field work in India and Singapore. Her research focused on the status of English in post-colonial countries and the decolonisation of South African English.

Veni's first book, a biography entitled *Yusuf Dadoo*, was published in 1993 as part of the 'They Fought for Freedom' series by Maskew Miller Longman. This series, written in

uncomplicated English, 'tells the life stories of southern African leaders who struggled for freedom and justice'.<sup>3</sup> It attempts to reclaim a history which has largely been ignored or suppressed. Yusuf Dadoo was a leader in the Transvaal Indian Congress, South African Communist Party and the ANC. Veni found that in writing the biography she was forced to think about the role of the biographer in creating a character and in making decisions on which life details to include and exclude. She says,

My problem is that to some extent it's an uncritical way of writing history, if you're writing a biography of someone who is a political leader and whose history we want to reclaim in this particular period. On the whole you want to present a positive picture of this person's contribution and there would be negative personal things that you may not bring to the fore because of your greater objective.

The biography takes the form of a story where Veni introduces conversations and events 'that didn't necessarily take place historically but which lend [...] an angle on the character'. She feels that the creation of such a narrative is an effective way of presenting history and emphasises that the biography is historically accurate in terms of major political events and Yusuf Dadoo's role in them.

Veni has grown up with an acute consciousness of 'not being white and certainly being black. I've never considered myself Indian in the sense that I was in any way peculiar from other black people on the Continent. I've never thought of India as my home or a place that I want to go. [...] I'm South African.' Now in the new South Africa she feels it has been made difficult for her to readily identify as part of the black majority and for the first time sees

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<sup>3</sup>Back cover, *Yusuf Dadoo*, Pinelands: Maskew Miller Longman, 1993.<sup>4</sup>

herself as being a minority. She says that 'being a minority is a very disillusioning thing'. She points to historical reasons and explains that in the Eighties, when the UDF was prominent, Natal Indians were very dominant in the Organisation because 'the violence hadn't hit them and they were able to organise'. In the late Eighties, early Nineties, antagonism and accusations of Indian dominance rose to the fore and many Indian activists 'just went into their homes [...and] there is a fear to get involved in organisations'. She feels that it will be some time before these antagonisms are cleared.

Veni is aware that in the last ten years she has become more and more appreciative of her female friends and developed closer bonds with them. She sees her childhood and early adult life as being relatively free of personal experiences of oppression relating to gender. 'I think I really began to appreciate what it was to be a woman after I got married and it sort of came in very harsh ways and very difficult ways and I think I've sort of translated that consciousness into something very positive.' She hopes to write fiction that draws on women's everyday experiences and her interaction with her women friends.

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## **Victoria (Nombulelo Mermaid) Swartbooi 1907 - 1937**

Novelist. Victoria was born in Emgewe, Nqamakwe District. She was brought up as a Christian and attended the Methodist School at Emgewe where her father was Principal. She completed Standard Six at the school and in January 1924 began her teacher training at Emgwali Training School. Miss J. MacGregor, Principal of Emgwali Training School describes Victoria as a 'diligent and conscientious student [...], true to the tradition of her home, she interested herself in all that was highest and best in her school life and took part in the work of the village Sunday schools, Bible study circles, etc.'<sup>1</sup> She passed her examinations in 1926 and went on to study at Healdtown. In 1928 she gained her Junior Certificate. In January, 1929, Victoria was appointed as a teacher to the staff of Emgwali Girl's Practising School. Miss MacGregor gives her view of Victoria's contributions to the school:

Her work lay mainly with the senior girls of the school to whom, in addition to the ordinary class subjects, she taught Domestic Science. In dealing with this subject she kept before her the conditions of Native homes, and strove to show how, with the limited means at the disposal of most Native women, these conditions might be improved and a higher and healthier standard of living reached.<sup>2</sup>

Victoria also participated in the Wayfarer-Guide Movement. She was the sub-leader of a group of Sunbeams. She also continued her work with the church. 'Each Sunday saw her

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<sup>1</sup>J. MacGregor, 'The Late Miss Victoria Swartbooi', *The South African Outlook*, 1 November, 1937, p.267.  
<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

with a band of young girls marching out to “feed the lambs.” Sunday schools were her chief care’.<sup>3</sup>

Victoria’s novel, *uMandisa*, was published by Lovedale Press in 1935.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Miss MacGregor, the Lovedale Press write:

We have carefully considered Miss Swartbooi’s MS. U-Mandisa. While it is not of exceptional merit, we are willing to publish. Its tone is good, and the simplicity of the story may make an appeal to Native readers. We have the feeling that we ought to publish it in as cheap a format as possible, so that Native people, who are so generally impoverished at the present time, may have no difficulty in purchasing. We might, by printing an edition of 10,000, keep the price between 6d and 1/-. We are willing to publish on a royalty basis, and would give the author a royalty of 10% on the sales of the first edition.<sup>5</sup>

In the preface to *uMandisa*, Victoria writes that she has chosen to write in simple, colloquial language to make the novel accessible to young people. She hopes to encourage youth to ‘aspire to great things’. The object of the novel is to share with the reader her experience of student life, and teaching in a rural school which she describes as ‘a fulfilling life serving others’.<sup>6</sup> The novel portrays the life of Mandisa, a young Xhosa woman, emphasising the value of Xhosa family life and tradition, Christianity, Christian education, high morals and self-discipline. The main characters are women and the story begins by celebrating the birth of Mandisa, a girl child. Mandisa’s grandmother says to her daughter-in-law, Mandisa’s

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<sup>3</sup>L.W. Tshiki, ‘The Late Miss V.M. Swartbooi’, *Umthunywa*, 10 November, 1937, p.12.

<sup>4</sup>*uMandisa* is a Xhosa name which translates into English as ‘the one who brings joy’.

<sup>5</sup>Letter from Lovedale Press to Miss MacGregor dated 28 August, 1993. MS 16415, Cory Library Archives, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

<sup>6</sup>Translation from Xhosa to English by Nontobeko Mofokeng, *uMandisa*, Lovedale: Lovedale Press, New Edition, 1975, Preface, p.2.



mother, 'My Child, I would like my granddaughter's name to be Mandisa. It gives me great pleasure that you have been blessed with a baby girl because I only had boys'. Mandisa's mother accepts the tradition of the grandmother naming the child but adds, 'we also need an English name so that the teachers have no problem calling her. We have great expectations for this child of ours and expect her to obtain high school education.'<sup>7</sup> Mandisa's parents then choose the 'English' name of 'Blossom' for their daughter as she is the flower of the household and will be the flower of the nation. Mandisa fulfills her parents' expectations and successfully completes her education to become a teacher. The story ends by advising young women to go out and obtain an education. It extols the Africanist politics of a return to Africa with the call 'Mayibuye iAfrika!' and summons the daughters of Africa to 'continue to fight and develop Africa the land of your birth. If we all do our bit and do not rest on our laurels we'll all be able to say "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" - God Bless Africa.'<sup>8</sup> *uMandisa* is told in the third-person and through a series of letters from Mandisa to her family and friends. Xhosa fables and short poems are also woven into the narrative.

Victoria was engaged and planned to marry in December 1937. However she suffered a sudden and severe attack of tuberculosis and died on the 23 September, 1937, four days before her thirtieth birthday. L.W. Tshiki writes, 'She was a talented writer. It is quite certain that if she had lived longer "V.M.S." would be added to the list of popular African novelists. Thus she has opened a new way to our African women. May more follow her example.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Translation of *uMandisa*, New Edition, Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1975, p.4.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>9</sup> L.W. Tshiki, 'The Late Miss V.M. Swaartbooi', *Umthunywa*, 10 November, 1937, p.12.

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## **Gladys Thomas 1935 -**

Poet, short story writer and playwright. Gladys was born in Salt River, Cape Town. Her maternal grandparents came to South Africa from Ireland and lived in Sea Point, Cape Town. Gladys's mother, Dorothy O'Riodan, was disowned by her white family when she became friends with some 'young girls of the Coloured community'<sup>1</sup> and began a relationship with Gladys's father, John Adams. She explains, 'So that's how I'm Mixed [...]. Mixed parentage. My mother had an Irish card and my father was Coloured'. Gladys's mother was a housewife and for a while a wet nurse. 'These rich, white women had babies and they didn't want to feed them on their breast and then they hired these wet nurses.' Her father was a blacksmith. 'He made carts and horseshoes and so on.' Gladys's early life was spent in Salt River until her mother left. She gave 'me to my father at such a young age, you know. I feel very emotional. I think if I stayed with her I would have lost my head like she did. I think she lost her head. She was going out dancing and having a glorious time, you know, and that type of thing. So my father didn't like that. He got a bit cross about it. He wanted her to be with me and not with all her friends.' Gladys was taken in by her father's family who lived in Lakeside. Her surname was changed from O'Riodan to Adams, her father's surname and the name of her adoptive family.

Gladys loved school and did well in her studies. She attended the Dutch Reform school in Main Road, Retreat up until Standard Six when she was forced to leave and take up work in a factory. She says,

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Gladys Thomas by Gael Mogwe, Oceanview, 1 August, 1994. Subsequent quotations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.

I was still growing and I worked in a factory already. I actually really hated the factory. One of the family's sons got married and they brought a daughter-in-law into this house where we were staying in Lakeside and she didn't like me. She took me out of school which was quite unnecessary. She nagged so. She complained so that I had to get out of school and she said I can go to work.

Gladys left the factory when she married Albert Thomas. She was eighteen. She explains,

At that time you had to be twenty-one before you could do what you liked. So because my card was Mixed I had to go to a judge in Cape Town with my husband to say that I will forever now be a Coloured; to change my identity because of this Mixed card [...] you can find out how this Apartheid had tortured people and put them through dramatic events like that.

Gladys lived with her husband, daughter and two sons 'amongst the mountains and the trees in Simonstown' where they could see the ocean and 'in the summer evenings the children used to go down to the harbour and catch fish. Everything was beautiful.' In the early Seventies the area they were living in was declared a white area, the family was uprooted and forced to move to Oceanview. She recalls, 'There were no trees or anything. This township was just sand and little, funny, brick houses going up'. It was in response to forced removals that Gladys wrote her first poem, 'Fall Tomorrow', where the pessimistic and bitter voice warns,

Don't sow the seed  
Don't paint a wall  
Tomorrow it will have to fall  
Let the dog howl and bark  
Tomorrow he will  
Sleep in the dark  
Let the cock crow

Let the hen lay  
Tomorrow will be their last day.<sup>2</sup>

She felt anger and hurt at the way her community had been humiliated and how their standard of living had been lowered so violently. 'What was more hurtful to me was when the people's furniture couldn't go into these apartments [...] the places were too small. So your furniture couldn't get in the doors, man. You had these old fashioned cupboards, wardrobes and they just had to chop it up or throw it away.' Gladys sent her first poem to her friend, James Matthews, who wrote back saying, 'write a few more and I'll also write some and we'll bring out a book'. The book, *Cry Rage*, co-written by Gladys Thomas and James Matthews, was published in 1972 and promptly banned. Gladys continued to write about the pain of forced removal and the suffering caused by apartheid. In 1981 *Staffrider* published her short story, 'The Rose Patterned Wallpaper', which describes the forced removal of a young couple. A year later 'The Promise' appeared. It tells the bleak story of a young girl, Marie Klaasen, who leaves the Swartland to work for some white people in the city. Her parents only allow her to go because the white people promise to send her to night school. The promise is broken and Marie is set to face a future of deprivation and abuse. In 1986 Gladys published *Children of the Crossroads* where she gives voice to the dispossessed children of the township after it was bulldozed. Her poem, 'The Same Face' was published in *Book of Protest* which was written and compiled by women in Cape Town and dedicated our children of South Africa. Gladys campaigned for the release of the 'Wynberg Seven', students who were imprisoned in Pollsmoor on charges of 'public violence'. She published *The Wynberg Seven 1987*. It is a collection of essays, poems, photographs and stories based on interviews with the families of

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<sup>2</sup>'Fall Tomorrow', *Cry Rage*, Johannesburg: Spro-cas Publication, 1972, p.74.

the children. In 1987 her poem, 'Children of Oceanview' was published in *Utterings in the Garden* and her short story, 'One Last Look at Paradise Road' was published in the anthology of South African women's writing, *Sometimes When it Rains*. In 1988 the poems 'Reflections of an Old Worker or the Ballad of the Power over my Body' and 'Mandela's Birthday Thoughts' were published in *Buang Basadi*. One year later her poem 'Let My People Go' was anthologised in *Nelson Mandela Amandla*. She has attended many writing conferences and readings including the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and events in Germany.

Gladys became involved with the Peninsula Dramatic Society and began writing plays. 'Now We Are Not Alone' focuses on the crossing of the colour line, 'David and Dianne' deals with a couple who contravene the Mixed Marriages Act and 'Men Without Women' looks at the separation of migrant workers from their families. Her play, *Avalon Court*, won first prize in the 1990 Bertrams V.O. Literary Award. It is set in the courtyard of a block of council flats ironically named after the Avalon Cinema that once stood in District Six. Avalon is by legend supposed to have represented an earthly paradise. The building and the characters portrayed are based on Gladys's experience of the forced removal of her community and life in Oceanview. It is subtitled 'Vignettes of Life of the "Coloured People" on the Cape Flats of Cape Town' and is written in the everyday language of the community which includes a mix of Afrikaans. She explains, 'We mix language when we talk. We can speak Afrikaans and English. This is the English I speak and everybody can understand [...]. I'm not going for the great English, like when you send your work over to London, they send it back - you must write in proper English'. *Avalon Court* comments on poverty, sexual exploitation, racism of varying kinds, police corruption and a determination to survive and laugh despite the oppressive conditions of Apartheid. In 1991 Gladys and her husband started a theatre group

called Getwize Players which was committed to developing an interest in theatre amongst the young people of the townships of Cape Town's southern suburbs. Gladys also initiated a children's drama programme in Oceanview. She published *The Spotty Dog* which is a collection of stories for and 'based on the children in the community'. In 1992 her poem 'Mothers' Voices' and her short story 'Venetia and Dee' were published in *A Snake with Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*. 'Mothers' Voices' calls for the release of children in detention and 'Venetia and Dee' is based on the stories of the two young women amongst the 'Wynberg Seven'. The story begins with Venetia sitting in the sewing room in prison. She says,

Today I spent my seventeenth birthday here in a cell at Pollsmoor Prison. Dee, my best friend, is in a cell at the end of the corridor. Imprisoned with us are five young men all jailed for so-called public violence. The prison is crowded with political detainees and so we know that we are not alone in the struggle. But soon a very special prisoner will be spending his seventieth birthday here after more than twenty-five years in prison. All of us know that Nelson Mandela is the most famous person here.<sup>3</sup>

Gladys's stories take some time to form in her mind. She then types the first draft and revises her work numerous times. 'I do it over and over and I add things but I don't get up at seven o'clock in the morning or six o'clock to sit in front of the typewriter.' Her preferred genre is the short story which she sees as 'a small piece of life'. Her short story, 'The Collectors' was anthologised in *Like a House on Fire* in 1994 and a collection of her short stories is forthcoming. The stories are mainly about the struggle against apartheid from women's

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<sup>3</sup>'Venetia and Dee', *A Snake with Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*, Johannesburg: COSAW, 1992, pp 127-128.

perspectives. She has the strong belief that 'The main people in our lives are the mothers and the women, you know, because without women there can be no family, there can be no life. Women are so important. I feel that's why all my characters are women.' Her writing was often characterised by anger, pessimism and harsh realism. As she said in 1985, 'There is not time in South Africa now for fairy stories'.<sup>4</sup> She is now conscious that she is writing hope into her stories and says, 'Everybody's coming building the New South Africa. Nothing's really changed but people's attitudes have changed. It's not so hopeless.' Gladys is currently writing her autobiography. She is grateful and happy that she has 'the talent to bring the message of the struggle to people' through her writing. She says, 'I am proud of myself coming from a factory and writing with my background, without an education. I'm proud coming from a factory and writing.'

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Gladys Thomas by Michael Doman, *Cape Herald*, 7 December, 1985, p.9.



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## **Miriam (Masoli) Tlali 1933 -**

Novelist, short story and essay writer, and journalist. Miriam was born in Doornfontein, Johannesburg. Her father, Moses Molefi Tlali, died when she was still very young and left the family a large collection of books. He was a school teacher and 'distinguished himself as being one of the first ever Africans to be appointed as headmaster of a high school in the Orange Free State'<sup>1</sup>. Her mother, Moleboheng Lepitse, kept the books in a large trunk and would often bring them out and speak to Miriam about African writers such as 'Sol Plaatje, Alan Soga, Tengo Jabavu, Thomas Mofolo'.<sup>2</sup> She eventually gave the books to Miriam saying, 'You are just like your father. [...] I think you are the one of all my children who has got him in you. So I think you must keep these books'<sup>3</sup>. Miriam grew up in Sophiatown. She recalls that she was

very quickly introduced into the separate, or the very precarious, kind of existence that you were subjected to as a black child. For instance, I would go with my mother into town and then when we were there we were conscious of the fact that you must not occupy certain chairs, you must not walk into certain shops. There were all these labels, 'Europeans Only', 'Nie Blankes'.<sup>4</sup>

She attended St. Cyprian's Anglican School in Sophiatown and Madibane High School in Western Native Township where she matriculated. 'We used to write essays and mine would be read to the class, several times and I was very good at writing.'<sup>5</sup> Miriam sees her mother

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<sup>1</sup>C.V. and Biographical Details given to Gaele Mogwe by Miriam Tlali.

<sup>2</sup>'Remove the Chains' by Miriam Tlali, *Index on Censorship*, 22 June 1984, p.25.

<sup>3</sup>'Miriam Tlali interviewed by Cecily Lockett, Johannesburg, 4 September 1988', *Between the Lines*, eds. Craig Mackenzie and Cherry Clayton, Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1989, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Gaele Mogwe, Cape Town, 16 August, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

and grandmother as very strong women. Her grandmother, 'I think she might have been round about 40', stopped doing the household chores and went and trained as a traditional doctor. 'There was a whole ritual of becoming a so-called "witch-doctor", something very intricate at that time, very time consuming, and very demanding. So she went for that, and in spite of her husband's criticisms.'<sup>6</sup> Her mother was involved in political activities against the apartheid system but she grew tired of it and decided to leave for Lesotho which had just gained its independence. She started her own business there with a small restaurant. Miriam's mother encouraged her in her education and emphasised the importance of self-development and independence. Miriam remembers her mother 'was very concerned about women's development and was generally very conscious of women's issues' and believes this has influenced her own approach to life and writing.<sup>7</sup>

Miriam wanted to become a doctor. 'I was on the waiting list for admission to medical school. I went into the arts in the meantime.'<sup>8</sup> She received a student grant and studied African Administration, which was the only course open to her, at Witwatersrand University. After two years of study, she decided to take up the opportunity to enroll at the medical school of the University of Roma in Lesotho. One year later she was forced to give up her studies due to lack of funds and she returned to Johannesburg. She went to secretarial school where she studied 'bookkeeping and typing and got a position in a furniture shop'.<sup>9</sup> During this period she married Mr Lehutso and had two children. She says of the time, 'I was a young woman, and I was going to have an ideal home, an ideal life, that kind of thing. [...].

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<sup>6</sup>'Miriam Tlali interviewed by Cecily Lockett', *op.cit.*, p.81.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Gaelle Mogwe.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Jean Marquard, The Jean Marquard Papers, A1849/C4.1, William Cullen Library Archives, University of Witwatersrand.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*

But it wasn't to be that way'.<sup>10</sup> Miriam was forced to leave her job at the furniture store so that she could devote herself to caring for her mother-in-law who was terminally ill. 'I nursed her right up until her death, four years later. Whenever she groaned or called out I went to her right away. And the rest of the time I sat at a forty-year old Remington and worked on my first novel.'<sup>11</sup> In 1969 she completed *Muriel at Metropolitan* which is based on her experiences as a clerk. She says, 'It is autobiographical. It's real material, real happenings. I used some of the things unchanged.'<sup>12</sup> Miriam found it difficult to interest a publisher in the work until six years later, in 1975, Ravan Press published the novel. She explains, 'I didn't call it "Muriel at Metropolitan". It was changed. I had called it "Between Two Worlds".'<sup>13</sup> Apart from changing the title, Ravan Press also drastically edited the manuscript asking Miriam to cut out over five chapters. 'For a long time I refused to give my permission, until one day my own mother said she probably wouldn't live long enough to see my book. That was when I agreed.'<sup>14</sup> Longman then negotiated with Ravan Press for the international edition of the novel and published a fuller version of the original manuscript in 1979. The international edition attracted the attention of the South African Censorship Board and both editions of the book were banned in South Africa.

Even though Miriam enjoyed writing at school, she never considered the possibility of becoming a writer. She feels that the two years she spent at Witwatersrand University, where 'we had teachers who encouraged us to think for ourselves, to be critical, and to question

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<sup>10</sup>Miriam Tlali interviewed by Cecily Lockett', *op.cit.*, p.82.

<sup>11</sup>'Interview with Miriam Tlali' by Mineke Schipper, *Unheard Words*, ed. Mineke Schipper, London: Allison and Busby, 1984, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Gaelle Mogwe.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>'Interview with Miriam Tlali' by Mineke Schipper, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

what we read' helped her a great deal to gain the confidence she needed to write about the inequalities and suffering that surrounded her.<sup>15</sup> She explains that she wrote *Muriel at Metropolitan* because 'I could see that white women where I worked understood very little about the humanity of blacks'. Through the novel she attempts to 'raise the consciousness of people about prevailing situations and problems. The pen is mightier than the sword. What we read in the papers isn't enough. A story reaches even further'.<sup>16</sup> Told from the perspective of Muriel, a black woman clerk, the novel offers insight into the power structures and economics of apartheid in day-to-day relations between the employers, employees and customers in a hire-purchase furniture and electronics store in urban South Africa.

Miriam is one of the founding members of *Staffrider* magazine, established in 1978. The magazine provided a forum for black South African writing at a time when most avenues of publication were closed by the apartheid regime. Many of her short stories and articles appear in the magazine and for some time she compiled a regular column called *Soweto Speaking*. After writing *Miriam at Metropolitan*, Miriam was approached by many people who had stories they wanted to tell but were asking 'but how do I tell it?'<sup>17</sup> *Soweto Speaking* emphasises the importance of experiential narratives and invites all readers to speak of their lives. There is an account by 'ex-priest, (Rev.) Tsolo of the African Methodist Church' how they were 'kept in a camp by the British "to protect them from the Boers" during the Anglo-Boer war'<sup>18</sup> and of his experiences as a young priest in the remote mountains of Lesotho. Mr X, an unlicensed fresh produce and poultry vendor, talks about his previous job as a driver

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<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Jean Marquard.

<sup>17</sup>'Soweto Speaking to Miriam Tlali', *Staffrider*, 1, 1 (1978), 2.

<sup>18</sup>'Soweto Speaking, Rev. Tsolo speaks to Miriam Tlali', *Staffrider*, 1, 3 (1978), 2.

for the United Tobacco Company where he worked for over forty-five years. Now that he has retired he earns a living selling fresh produce and tells of the difficulties of avoiding the police and health inspectors who patrol Soweto. 'I still have two children to clothe, feed and "teach" (educate). [...] I'll be happy if I can find a place to sell vegetables and fruits. Even if I must stand on the pavement in front of a shop. I don't mind. Shop rentals are so high.'<sup>19</sup> Miriam has worked as a freelance writer for '*The Reader* (a paper in easy English) mostly sold in Soweto, *The Post* and *The Voice*'. She has also written for the women's magazine, *Femina* and *Straight-Ahead International*.

Miriam's first opportunity to travel overseas came when she was invited to attend the International Writing Program in Iowa in 1978. 'It was then that I was able to travel to cities such as San Francisco, Atlanta, Washington D.C. and New York where I met many writers, lectured and ran numerous workshops.'<sup>20</sup> She also visited London, Germany and Egypt.

She remembers that her first encounter with 'London was like walking into Charles Dickens and Thackeray'.<sup>21</sup> In 1980 Miriam's second novel, *Amandla*, was published by Ravan Press and promptly banned in South Africa. The story centres on a family living in Soweto and depicts student political organisation and protest within the context of the 1976 uprisings. As her books were banned it was impossible for her to make a living from her writing. She found employment as 'a so-called "saleslady" with a cookware firm in Johannesburg'. She tells how she 'used to go from house to house in Soweto and other black townships selling pots. Although this job was dangerous, difficult and frustrating, it enabled me to meet many women and to share ideas and experiences with them.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 'Soweto Speaking, Mr X. Unlicensed Fresh Produce and Poultry Vendor', *Ten Years of Staffrider 1978-1988*, eds. A.W. Oliphant and I. Vladislavic, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, p.356.

<sup>20</sup>Miriam Tlali - C.V. Biographical Details.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Jean Marquard.

<sup>22</sup>Miriam Tlali - C.V. Biographical Details.

In 1984 *Mihloti* was published. It is a collection of fictional stories, journalistic articles, interviews and travelogues which focus on the lives of black women under apartheid. There are interviews with the political activist and president of the ANC Women's League, Lillian Ngoyi, a 'stalwart fearless heroine', and Leah Koahe, a dressmaker in Soweto, thoughts on Miriam's first journey overseas and a description of her harrowing experience of arrest, along with many other people who had gathered at the YWCA in Dube to catch a bus to Steve Biko's funeral. Miriam uses the Tsonga word, mihloti, meaning tears, as the title to her collection to represent the pain and extra dimensions of exploitation associated with being black and being woman. She recalls, 'My grandmother used to say, "To say woman is to say pot; to say woman is to say broom". She was also defined that way.'<sup>23</sup> In the Preface to *Mihloti*, Miriam writes,

I have had to shed tears. As a child, I had to shed them for my grandmother who had to till the soil with me on her back; to scrape the earth with her bare hands and build a mud-house in which to cook for us. [...] I shed tears for my beautiful mother who had to struggle alone. [...] Mihloti...teardrops...Masolinyana (my name)...The tears burn my eyes and drip down to the paper before me. I have to shed them.<sup>24</sup>

In 1984 Miriam was awarded a grant which was to enable her to stay for six months in Holland and to write full-time. 'For the first time ever since I started writing, I had the opportunity to devote time exclusively to writing.'<sup>25</sup> She was commissioned to write the play *Crimen Injuria* which was performed in Holland. She also wrote her fourth book, a

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<sup>23</sup>Interview with Miriam Tlali by Gaelle Mogwe.

<sup>24</sup>Preface, *Mihloti*, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1984, p.xv.

<sup>25</sup>Miriam Tlali - C.V. Biographical Details

collection of short stories called 'Footprints in the Quag' which was published as *Soweto Stories* in England by Pandora Press in March, 1989. It appeared in 'South Africa in August 1989 under the original title, "Footprints in the Quag".<sup>26</sup> The stories explore different types of oppression and subordination experienced by urban black South Africans. They reveal the distress caused by pass laws, police harassment, corrupt government officials, marriage problems, oppressive traditions and poverty. They demonstrate the sacrifices that are involved in choosing to fight for a better way of life. 'Mma Lithoto' tells of the frustration and pain of a woman suffering in her marriage. She seeks help from her remaining family and 'those "laws" that our ancestors have left us with' but there is no recourse and she finds herself trapped.<sup>27</sup> 'Fuduua' describes the humiliating situations women face when they travel on peak-hour trains and the courage, solidarity and resilience that they draw upon to cope with such incidents.

Miriam has been actively concerned with the development of writing by black South Africans from the time of her involvement in *Staffrider* to her association with Skotaville Publishers which prioritises the publication of works by black writers. She is especially concerned with assisting in the advancement of black women writers and helped organise the group called 'Women in Writing' which published a weekly column in the *City Press*. The poet Boitumelo Mofokeng remembers that Miriam 'opened her doors to many of us, to use her house for women writers' workshops and to use her resource library'.<sup>28</sup> Miriam voices her regret that writers' workshops and meetings are dominated by young men and remembers asking them,

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<sup>26</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>'Mma Lithoto', *Soweto Stories*, London: Pandora Press, 1989, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>Boitumelo Mofokeng, *Buang Basadi: Conference on Women and Writing*, [n.p.]: COSAW Transvaal Region [n.d.], p.10.



'where are your sisters, your mothers and your aunts? And they usually say, they are busy cooking, they want to stay at home to cook.' She believes that to counteract this imbalance young people should be raised to share the same duties. 'If the girls do the dishes, the boys should also do the dishes, sweep the floor and so on.'<sup>29</sup>

Regarding her future plans, Miriam says, 'I'm a writer and if there is anything that you breed, it's ideas but putting them into practice is another matter. I've had a novel in mind now for a long time.' At the moment her time is taken up with academic writing and conferences.

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'Amandla', *Staffrider*, 3, 2 (1980), 37

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<sup>29</sup>'Images of Women - Discussion', *ibid.*, p.61.

'Mma Lithoto', *Raising the Blinds*, ed. Annemarie van Niekerk, Cape Town: AD. Donker, 1990

'Metamorphosis', *The Penguin Book of South African Short Stories*, ed. Stephen Gray, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993

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Miriam Tlali has published articles and columns in *Staffrider*, *The Reader*, *The Post*, *The Voice*, *Femina*, *Fair Lady*, *The Classic* and *Straight-Ahead International*. Articles cited in this entry are:

'Soweto Speaking, Rev. Tsholo', *Staffrider*, 1, 3 (1978), 2; also published in *Ten Years of Staffrider 1978-1988*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988

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## Zoë Wicomb 1948 -

Short story and essay writer. Zoë was born and grew up in the Western Cape near Vredendal and Van Rhynsdorp in what she describes as:

a little, remote Griqua settlement. Van Rhynsdorp is know as “The Gate to Namaqualand”. There was a little school but no shop. The men worked on the gypsum mines a few miles away or on white farms, and young women worked in Vredendal and Van Rhynsdorp as servants. People had a few goats perhaps, and grew a bit of maize and pumpkins.<sup>1</sup>

In a community which did not have a high incidence of literacy, Zoë had the advantage that both parents were literate in Afrikaans and had taught themselves English. Zoë remembers that when she was about six years old, the family got a radio and her mother would listen to the news in English and articulate the words after the newsreader. Her parents saw education and acquisition of the English language as a way out of the racial exploitation and oppression which surrounded them. They encouraged Zoë and her brothers in their schooling and taught them to speak English as well as Afrikaans. Zoë's father, who was a schoolteacher, wrote poems from time to time. He encouraged Zoë when she began writing poetry in Afrikaans at around nine years of age and carefully edited her work. Zoë was sent to an English-medium school in Cape Town and remembers her mother showing her book of

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<sup>1</sup>Zoë Wicomb Interviewed by Eva Hunter - Cape Town, 5 June 1990', *Between the Lines II*, eds. Eva Hunter and Craig Mackenzie, Grahamstown: The National English Literary Museum, 1993, p.81. Subsequent quotations from this interview are indicated by a page reference in the text.

poetry to the Afrikaans teacher. She recalls that a few weeks later the teacher 'made a humiliating reference to one of the poems, a sentimental rhyme about loving Beeswater, my home. I vowed never to show anyone my poetry again.'<sup>2</sup>

After completing her secondary education, Zoë attended the University of Western Cape where she gained her Bachelor of Arts Degree. As an undergraduate, she wrote 'a poem or two in English' (p.81) but stopped writing poetry entirely when she left South Africa in 1970 and began studying English Literature at the University of Reading in England. She says,

the subtle British racism made me feel that it would be presumptuous of me to write and even to speak - what I had to say was of no interest to my teachers; perhaps they feared I would go on about South Africa - so that I was thoroughly and successfully silenced by the English education system. (p.83).

One of the reasons Zoë left South Africa was due to an increasing sense of alienation 'which was not entirely to do with apartheid' (p.87). She chose to continue living in England taking on various teaching appointments including teaching English at secondary and university level, and lecturing on Black Literature and Women's Studies. It was during this period of teaching and looking after her young daughter, Hannah, that after 'immense effort' she found her voice again and began writing short stories. She explains that her preference for the short story form was:

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<sup>2</sup>As cited in 'Notes on Contributors', *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing*, ed. Charlotte Bruner, Oxford: Heinemann, 1993, p.200.

dictated by both material conditions and my fear of writing. Working at that time without the legendary room of my own, always prepared for the interruptions of a young child and for other legitimate claims of the kitchen table, the short story, after a day's teaching, seemed more manageable and somehow less presumptuous to tackle. I found its limitations, both in length and subject matter, attractive.<sup>3</sup>

Her collection of short stories, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, was published by Virago Press in 1987. The stories construct a biography of the main character, Frieda Shenton. She is not always central to each story, and in one story does not appear at all, but the stories connect and the narrative remains relevant to the construction and understanding of Frieda's life and her society. Although sequential, the stories do not follow a strictly linear portrayal of the life story but sometimes move in circles and through different realities to present Frieda's changing awareness and complex identity. The book is seen by Zoë 'as a compromise between novel and short stories' and 'the gaps between the stories as an integral part of the work'.<sup>4</sup>

Frieda is from a Griqua community in rural Namaqualand. The first story in the collection, 'Bowl like Hole', points to her budding awareness of the existence of an intricate, exploitative racial hierarchy, as embodied in the actions of the white mine manager and the admiration her parents have for him. 'When the Train Comes' presents adolescent Frieda's fragile sense of her gendered, racial and class identity. She is given the opportunity to attend the prestigious St Mary's school in Cape Town, 'now open to non-whites' and the time has come for her to depart. A group of boys gathered near the railway station cause her to reflect self-consciously

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<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

on her appearance. She states, 'I am not the kind of girl whom boys look at. [...] Their eyes leap over me, a mere obstacle in a line of vision. I should be pleased; boys can use their eyes shamelessly to undress a girl'.<sup>5</sup> She looks at her hands; 'at the irrepressible cuticles, the stubby splayed fingernails that will never taper. [...] betraying generations of servants'.<sup>6</sup> Frieda is upset when one of the boys suggests that she is 'selling out' by attending a white school. She begins a journey that will create in her an independence from the boys, her community, her mother tongue and her class and racial background. It is also a journey of alienation. The title-story, 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town', is perhaps one of the most poignant moments in this journey of alienation. Frieda finds herself pregnant with the child of her white lover, Michael. Marriage between black and white is illegal and she chooses abortion as the only way forward. When asked if she is 'Coloured' by the 'middle-aged white woman' who is to perform the abortion, Frieda wonders if the woman's eyesight is defective. She then realises that it is her 'educated voice' that has blinded the woman. She also realises that she has 'drunk deeply of Michael, swallowed his voice' but that he has not swallowed her voice in return. She denies that she is 'Coloured' and the white woman assures her, 'you can trust me. No Coloured girl's ever been on this sofa.'<sup>7</sup> After having attended university in Cape Town, Frieda leaves for England, a period that is not described in the book and constitutes one of the gaps. After some time she returns to her home country, missing her family, friends, the landscape and weather but it is not easy for her. She must come to terms with the complexities and ambiguities that make up her identity.

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<sup>5</sup>'When the Train Comes', *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, London: Virago Press, 1987, p.21.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.79.

Zoë continued her studies taking Literary Linguistics at the University of Strathclyde. In 1988 she began writing for the *Southern African Review of Books* and became a member of the editorial board. In her article 'COSAW Calling' she reviews a range of new publications from the Congress of South African Writers. She remarks that 'not all the contributors have the linguistic capital needed for effective communication' but believes that by including such poets in their collections COSAW encourages the acquisition of 'writing as a tool for improving literacy'. She praises COSAW for allowing people 'to speak for themselves, an issue raised by Ari Sitas in "A Nightmare to Avoid" where he warns against the elitism of scribes who insist on speaking for those deemed incompetent'<sup>8</sup>. Zoë discusses the role of orality in written poetry and points out that 'aspects of orality, even in high literacy culture, can never be completely lost'. She adds, 'The political project of reclaiming a culture arrested and hybridised by colonialism cannot be seen as simply a return to tradition'.<sup>9</sup> African literary traditions may be seen to liberate poetry from the shackles of imposed standards just as the poet who uses oral devices in new political and historical contexts may be seen to liberate oral poetry from a traditional role. She ends the article with a comment on academic and class-associated aesthetic valuations of literature: 'We may not want to put some of these poems up on our bourgeois noticeboards, but do we have the right to put them down?'.<sup>10</sup> In 1990 she published an article entitled 'To Hear the Variety of Discourses' in *Current Writing* where she points to the multiple and sometimes contradictory perspectives that can pervade feminist and political discourse. Her article 'An Author's Agenda' appeared

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<sup>8</sup>'COSAW Calling', *Southern African Review of Books*, 3, 2 (1989/90), 18.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, p.19.

in the same year in the *Southern African Review of Books*. She situates herself as a writing subject and states,

As a writer, I do not have an agenda. But like everyone else I write from a political position, as, amongst other things, a South African and a black feminist. This position informs my writing just as my material situation as teacher, mother, or member of a nuclear family affects my practice.<sup>11</sup>

In 1991 Zoë returned to South Africa and took up a lecturing post in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape. In the same year two of her articles, 'Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture' and 'An Author's Agenda', were published in *Critical Fictions*. In 1993 her article 'Topological Transformations: Culture Beyond Color' appeared in *Transition*. Her short story entitled 'Another Story' was also published in 1993 in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary South African Short Stories*. It tells of an old woman, Deborah Kleinhans, 'a spinster', who has worked most of her life as a house-keeper 'in white house-holds' around Kimberley.<sup>12</sup> Sarah Lindse, a relative previously unknown to Deborah, teaches history at university in Cape Town and is constructing the Kleinhaus family history. She traces her Great Aunt Deborah in Kimberley and invites her to Cape Town. The two talk about stories of the family's past and Deborah advises the younger woman to 'forget about stories of old times'.<sup>13</sup> On her first night away from home, Deborah is rudely awoken by police who have come to arrest Sarah. She offers 'to make a nice pot of coffee [...]'. If the policemen burst rudely into the house, well, she was brought up decently. Sarah

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<sup>11</sup>'An Author's Agenda', *Southern African Review of Books*, 3, 3 and 4, (1990), 24.

<sup>12</sup>'Another Story', *The Penguin Book of Contemporary South African Short Stories*, ed. Stephen Gray, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993, p.61.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, p.71.



shouted at her but she knew how a civilized person should behave'.<sup>14</sup> But then with the Sergeant's voice resonating in her ear, Deborah Kleinhans suddenly takes each cup and in a final act of anger and rebellion pours the coffee into the sink. Zoë has continued writing academic pieces, including 'Motherhood and the Surrogate Reader' published in *Gendering the Reader*, 'Postcoloniality, Postmodernism and the "Coloured" Condition' in *Writing South Africa* and 'To Hear the Variety of Discourses' in *South African Feminisms*. 'Reading, Writing, and Visual Production in the New South Africa', the text of her 1995 Arthur Ravenscroft Memorial Lecture, delivered at the University of Leeds, was published in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* in 1996.

Zoë now lives and teaches in Glasgow.

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## AFTERWORD

It is not the purpose of this research to make generalisations relating to Black South African Women Writer's lives and works. The survey aims to provide a means by which, with further research, generalisations may be constructed and used to further contribute to knowledge. However, to satisfy what may be interpreted as an uncomfortable lack of generalisation, I will briefly describe some of my subjective reactions to the research process and the findings. I was deeply touched and gained a great deal emotionally from the very positive and warm responses I received from all the women I interviewed. I found each woman dealt with what often could only be described as debilitating life experiences, under the system of apartheid, with strength, an incredible sense of purpose, optimism, faith, a strong sense of belonging to their immediate community and the humor and humanity that come with love and respect for life. It was clear that each woman had struggled in their own way against the heavy odds of becoming a victim to an extremely oppressive political system and had emerged or was still emerging as a survivor. This does not mean that they were not wounded in the process or that they do not carry scars.

I found the issue of community was important to both the lives and writing of the writers. Most writers wrote with their community in mind and many were influenced by events and stories that came from their communities. This is perhaps where oral tradition was most powerful. Many women were told folk tales and family and community histories as children by their mothers, grandmothers or other relatives. This provided them with amongst other things, the will to create and tell stories in response to and despite their surroundings, and certain recognisable elements of style and structure. Some women said they were not directly

influenced by oral tradition which they perceived as a grandmother or aunt sitting around the fire telling tales to children, however, these women did often draw on other aspects of oral culture and tradition such as the political slogans that were current in the community at that time, the rhetoric of traditional praise poetry and a reliance on oral presentation and aural reception to achieve the maximum effect from their work. This is an area where generalisation is dangerous and there is an obvious need for detailed research into the gender, cultural, geographical specifics and meaning of oral and written literatures, their characteristics and the ways in which the two categories so often cross over.

When interviewing women another general point that struck me was the very fine line between describing one's identity as positive self-affirmation and falling into the trap of apartheid style classifications of race, language and ethnicity. The women I spoke to were very careful not to classify themselves using the terminology of the 'old' South Africa. As the process of establishing identity outside the apartheid order has only just begun, they were also often unable or unwilling to name themselves. I adopted this approach in my presentation. For example, if a woman told me she went to an Indian school or that she wanted to reclaim Zulu literature, I included this information in the entry but I did not attempt to classify women based on this information. Many readers may find this uncomfortable but in many ways I rejoice at this discomfort and feel that it is a positive dynamic. The naming of identity amongst the many different South African communities, including language, gender, cultural and ethnic groups, is another very wide area for future research in the 'new' South Africa.

The survey aims to redress the silences and imbalances that surround Black, South African Women Writers and their texts within the existing South African literary canon as it has been shaped by publishers, academics and past government education policies. It is not seen as a completed, perfect or static work but as a living seed that I hope will continue to grow

through the work of future researchers. I was forced to omit some Black South African Women writers because of lack of information, and because of the process of exclusion explained in the introduction. Both these reasons relate largely to time and financial restraints imposed on doctoral research of this nature. I am hopeful that others will follow up this aspect of the research and provide biographical and bibliographical information on the following women writers: Zora T. Futshane, Liziwe L. Tsotsi, E.B.T. Setidisho, Joyce Jessie Gwayi, Joyce Florence Chrestophene Mkhombo, B.O.M. Ntuli, Beverley Jansen, Susan Mabi, and Gertrude Fester. There are facts I was unable to obtain and perhaps inaccuracies that will later be discovered through more detailed research. I hope that this survey will spawn its own revision and that revision will spawn further revision.

Carole Boyce Davies writes that 'at each arrival at a definition, we begin a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions'.<sup>1</sup> While this applies to the survey as a work that may continue to grow within the designated format of a reference source, it also applies to the investigative parameters and aims of the research. I hope that the theory and methodology that has been applied in the collection of data, reading of the women's texts and contexts, and the presentation of the material contribute to providing a reference resource which will assist future researchers to explore and theorise that which resists, decentres, transforms and operates beyond the limitations set by established hierarchical polarities of race, class, language and gender biases. For example, I hope that references provided in this survey will act as stepping stones to explorations of the complexities, intersections and varied uses of oral and written forms in women's cultural production. That such explorations would thoroughly interrogate the received definitions,



value judgements and often forced separation of oral and written literatures. I hope that the references relating to the lives and texts of the early women writers will lead to an exploration of a writing which negotiates, both colluding and actively resisting, missionary, colonial and traditional patriarchal contexts and adds exciting dimensions to the concept of postcolonial writing. Equally many of the references provide leads to an exploration of women writing of political struggle which extends beyond the received perception of male nationalist struggles. I would like to see an exploration of the definitions and values of 'popular and functional' and 'intellectual and aesthetic' art and a further understanding of the discourse on 'black aesthetics' which arises in many of the entries. I hope for a return to the original texts, many of which are in African languages, and the development of a greater critical awareness of Black South African Women's writing within the different language and cultural contexts. There are many possibilities for future research that resists, decentres, transforms and operates beyond the limitations set by established hierarchical polarities. I hope that in exploring these possibilities, future researchers will not be afraid to develop and value theory which articulates the logic and practical realities of South African contexts. That they will develop ways to look beyond the notion that theory must adopt the privileged language and formats often dictated by western academia.

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p.5.

**APPENDIX A (Sample Questionnaire)**

QUESTIONNAIRE : A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS

NAME OF YOUR MOTHER AND/OR FATHER Mother - Rosa Gwina (nee Cele)  
She is 90 yrs of age now. Father - Simon Gwina (died when I was 8)

OCCUPATION OF MOTHER/FATHER Both teachers.

YOUR PLACE AND DATE OF BIRTH Webbstown (CABAZI), in the district of  
IXopo in Natal. Born 13-9-1931

NAME GIVEN AT BIRTH LAURETTA GLADYS NOZIZWE BUYU GWINA

SUBSEQUENT NAMES (Marriage, etc) NGCOBO

NAME/S USED FOR PUBLISHING LAURETTA NGCOBO. Although  
I did write political articles when I first came into  
exile under the name of Nomzamo (NOMZAMO)

WHERE DID YOU GROW UP In the rural part of the country  
where I was born. I left it for boarding school at  
the age of about 12, - (Dumisa, Inanda, Fort Hare)

WHERE HAVE YOU LIVED AND WHEN In South Africa I worked at  
Pietermaritzburg (1954, Durban 1955, Pretoria 1956-57,  
Johannesburg '57-59, Durban 60-63; Swaziland 63-65,  
Zambia 65-67, Great Britain (London 1969-1993) -  
WHERE DO YOU LIVE AT PRESENT London.

EDUCATION (Giving dates, institutions, levels & subjects)

Primary - Webbstown + Mokweja 1937-1943.  
Intermediate (Between Primary + Secondary) - DUMISA SCH;  
1944-1945; Secondary + High School: INANDA SEMINARY  
1946-1949; FORT HARE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE: 1950-1953.  
GRADUATED - PSYCHOLOGY + LITERATURE (ZULU + ENGLISH)

CAREER/WORK HISTORY TEACHER IN SOUTH AFRICA 1954-1955,  
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ASSISTANT (for CSIR) 1956-1959.  
TEACHER IN SOUTH AFRICA 1960-1963; IN SWAZILAND  
1963-1965; IN ZAMBIA 1965-1969; TEACH IN GREAT BRITAIN  
1970-1990. DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER AT LARK HALL INFANTS SCH  
1975-1988; ACTING HEAD TEACHER 1989-1990.

PRESENT OCCUPATION RETIRED

MARRIAGE DETAILS MARRIED 1957 TO AB NGCOBO (ABRONEGO  
BHEKABANTU)

DO HAVE CHILDREN (Gender, Ages, Names) \_\_\_\_\_

THREE GIRLS (ADULTS)

WHEN DID YOU START WRITING I have always enjoyed writing  
but my first published work was in 1981.

WHAT LANGUAGES DO YOU WRITE IN English (but have one  
unpublished work in Zulu).

AWARDS RECEIVED Non so far - only nominations.

INTERESTS (Other than writing) Politics.

PERTINENT LIFE DETAILS YOU WOULD LIKE INCLUDED \_\_\_\_\_

For a few years I taught on a part time  
basis at the University of London's EXTRA MURAL  
DEPARTMENT. I was teaching BLACK WOMENS  
WRITING.

PLEASE PROVIDE A LIST OF YOUR PUBLISHED WRITING

PLEASE PROVIDE A LIST OF YOUR UNPUBLISHED WORKS (Plays, Oral Poetry, etc.)

Published Works:

CROSS OF GOLD 1991  
LET IT BE TOLD 1988

unpublished:

FIKI LEARNS TO LIKE OTHER  
PEOPLE (Childrens Book. will  
be coming out end of 1993) by

Please forgive the scribbled nature of this response.  
I'm in a desperate hurry. The:

#### A DESCRIPTION OF YOUR WORK

1. WHAT ARE THE INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE MOULDED YOUR WRITING? PLEASE REFER TO THE INFLUENCES OF PARTICULAR WOMEN/MEN, GENDER, CULTURE, PLACE, CLASS, RACE AND/OR RELIGION WHERE YOU FEEL THEY ARE RELEVANT.
  2. DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS BELONGING TO A PARTICULAR TRADITION OR AS INCLUDING ELEMENTS OF A TRADITION IN YOUR WORK?
  3. WHAT DIFFICULTIES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WITH YOUR WRITING?
  4. WHAT CHANGES HAS YOUR WRITING UNDERGONE?
  5. DO YOU HAVE ANY NEW PROJECTS IN MIND AND WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT?
1. I was very much influenced by my mother + aunts + uncle who were very good story tellers. My Great Grand mother was a very creative person. She composed many poems that have filtered down the family. When I grew up my mother got me interested in her favourite writer Montgomery of ~~Ann of the Green Gables~~ ANN OF GREEN GABLES fame. Her stories became my favourites too. From her I learned about the history of Great Britain (Henry the Eighth<sup>etc</sup>). I was very fond of Thomas Hardy and his stories of rural England. I liked Charles Dickens.
  2. I feel strongly that African Writing should draw more from the African traditions of ~~the~~ Oral Culture. I have not done much myself in this way but I feel it ought to be the way my writing goes.
  3. Writing in English is no easy task. On the other hand, writing away from the source of my <sup>inspiration,</sup> ~~country~~ which is my country has not been easy. It meant I could only write about the past which was my experience and could not be involved in the burning issues & events of the ~~day~~ present.
  4. NO Changes yet.
  5. I may write about the past of Africa. I am very interested in our ancient<sup>3</sup> history and the women in that past. I hope to write about one of these women ~~with a name~~.

**APPENDIX B (List of journals in which primary work is published)**

**List of Journals and Newspapers in which Primary Work is Published**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Africa South</i> (?)                         | <i>Goodwill</i> 1951 (South Africa)                     |
| <i>African Business</i> (England)               | <i>Imvo Zabantsundu</i> (South Africa)                  |
| <i>African Concord</i> (England)                | <i>Inside the Turret</i> (United States)                |
| <i>African Writing Today</i> (United Kingdom)   | <i>The Journal of Commonwealth Literature</i> (England) |
| <i>Agenda</i> (South Africa)                    | <i>Kunapipi</i> (Denmark)                               |
| <i>Asizuthula</i> (South Africa)                | <i>Kwasa</i> (South Africa)                             |
| <i>Bulletin</i> (South Africa)                  | <i>The Literary Review</i> (United States)              |
| <i>Cambridge Journal of Education</i> (England) | <i>Matatu</i> (Germany)                                 |
| <i>City Press</i> (South Africa)                | <i>Minority Voices</i> (United States)                  |
| <i>Classic</i> 1968 (South Africa)              | <i>The New African</i> (England)                        |
| <i>Concord</i> (England)                        | <i>New Classic</i> (South Africa)                       |
| <i>Confrontation</i> (United States)            | <i>People to People</i> (England)                       |
| <i>Contrast</i> (South Africa)                  | <i>Présence Africaine</i> (France)                      |
| <i>Dokumente, Texte und Tendenzen</i> (Germany) | <i>Post</i> (South Africa)                              |
| <i>Drum</i> (South Africa)                      | <i>The Reader</i> (United States)                       |
| <i>Fair Lady</i> (South Africa)                 | <i>Rixaka</i> (Zambia)                                  |
| <i>Femina</i> (South Africa)                    | <i>The Scotsman</i> (Scotland)                          |
| <i>Frontline</i> (South Africa)                 | <i>Sechaba</i> (England)                                |
| <i>The Gar</i> (United States)                  | <i>Sideline</i> (South Africa)                          |
| <i>The Guardian</i> (England)                   | <i>South</i> (England)                                  |
| <i>Golden City Post</i> (South Africa)          |   |

*South African Outlook* (South Africa)

*Southern African Review of Books* (United Kingdom)

*Sowetan Sunday Mirror* (South Africa)

*Speak* (South Africa)

*Staffrider* (South Africa)

*The Star* (South Africa)

*The Sunday Times* (South Africa)

*Thinker Review* (United States)

*Transition* (United States)

*Tribute* (South Africa)

*Trust* (South Africa)

*Umteteli wa Bantu* (South Africa)

*Upbeat* (South Africa)

*Upstream* (Canada)

*The Voice* (South Africa)

*Wasafiri* (England)

*The Worker* (South Africa)

*World* (South Africa)

*Writers' Notebook: COSAW Natal Journal*  
(South Africa)