THE WISER TRANSCRIPTS

Compiled by Tinashe Mushakavanhu

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The WiSER Podcast

Format: Individual episodes Length: 22 episodes, 15-20 minutes each Listen on: <u>Apple Podcasts</u>, <u>Spotify</u>, or any other podcast app or streaming service The members of the Podcast Group at WiSER are Sarah Nuttall, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, Isabel Hofmeyr, Bronwyn Kotzen, Mpho Matsipa, Achille Mbembe and Tinashe Mushakavanhu.



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* In this batch of transcripts WiSER scholars and fellows through their research projects reflect on the contributions, archives and post-death influence of historical, cultural, political and literary figures.

INTRODUCING THE WISER TRANSCRIPTS

In 2020, WiSER launched The WiSER Podcast, with great success. The series profiled the work of academics, writers and artists based at the Institute in engaging, nuanced and highly listenable ways. Born of the historic nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, The WiSER Podcast took the work of the seminar room and gave it a more fully public life. It reached listeners across the African continent and in numerous parts of the world. By the end of the year we had reached more than 10 000 people—how many seminars would that have taken!

As a result of the reception of The WiSER Podcast last year, we have decided to release a series called *The WiSER Transcripts* which makes the released podcasts available in text, for ease of reference and citation. Each several weeks, we will release a batch of 4-5 transcripts. These will arrive alongside our new series of The WiSER Podcast for 2021, which will be a thematic series based on WiSER's work and its collaborative networks and institutions across many contexts.

Thank you to everyone and enormous thanks too to all at WiSER who have contributed to The WiSER Podcast and made it such a pleasure to produce, so precious an archive and so good to listen to. Enjoy reading these short, sharp, incisive and cutting edge texts drawn from lively, committed, critical thinkers in Southern Humanities research.

Professor Sarah Nuttall, Director, WiSER

DAMBUDZO MARECHERA THE STORY DOCTOR TINASHE MUSHAKAVANHU

DAMBUDZO MARECHERA THE STORY DOCTOR¹ TINASHE MUSHAKAVANHU

MARECHERA: I like to write the kind of thing which describes things people take for granted because I think original thinking can only come when we have discarded the idea of taking anything for granted. In that sense that is why, for instance, I usually attack people's ideas of morality, precisely because morality is one of the things taken for granted by the majority of citizens-that 'this is not done'; that 'this is not permissible'; 'this is impossible'; 'this is not done'. And I try to write in such a way that I short-circuit (you know like in electricity), I short-circuit people's traditions and morals because once you've done that, only then can they start having original thoughts of their own; and in a sense stop thinking in an institutionalized way. Then if they stop thinking like that and they look in a mirror, they will see how beautiful they are and can realise those impossibilities within themselves, emotionally and intellectually. That's why you know, most of what I've written is always being disruptive or destructive. For me that slow brain death can only be cured by this kind of literary shock treatment.

MUSHAKAVANHU: Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera became an instant star with the publication of his first book, The House of Hunger, published to critical acclaim in 1978. He wrote the book while living in a tent or a squat, but then perhaps he did not, or as James Currey puts it in Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature, Marechera developed his own life story with the self-regarding obsession of an actor. Everything to do with him had a touch of mythology, whether it was throwing plates and cups to his hosts at the Guardian Fiction Prize ceremony; or travelling without a passport between countries and continents; or the persistent fiction of his permanent homelessness.

After a decade of confounding critiques and foes, and leading an erratic lifestyle, he was dead at thirty five. I want to read

his death as a moment of radical praxis in the Zimbabwean imaginary. But who is Dambudzo Marechera? I never met him. He died when I was four years old and has always been an enigma.

I recently discovered a set of old letters sent to the Dambudzo Marechera Trust between 1987 and 1992. They were deposited at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. These letters foreground the subjectivity in Marechera's conflicted legacy. Marechera's own person embodies celebrity and politics; spectacle and radicalism; universality and selfaggrandizement. What endears him to a generation of readers is his refusal to offer his answers or present static identities for his fictional characters or even for himself.

(1) This was broadcast as Episode 6 on 4 June 2020 on what would have been Dambudzo Marechera's sixty eighth birthday.

EM wrote:

"DAMBUDZO MARECHERA TRUST 3 TOIL DON'T SPOIL AVENUE SOOTHE ME DON'T SOOT TOWNSHIP P O REVELATION, REDEMPTION

Dambudzo is our Prophet. I pray to him. I mean that I am continuing from where he left off. So far I have compiled four of my books, 'House of Sorrow', 'Toil Don't Spoil', 'Threats Will Not Stop Us', and 'Take Courage'. I am writing because Africa and Africans must be free. I am Bantu. My God is black. God is a living man. A man who says God is in the sky is a spy. Dambudzo Marechera is not dead. Men shall not prosper if they suspect and never respect our Prophet Dambudzo.".

For a long time I associated the National Archives of Zimbabwe with the bureaucracy of government and viewed it as an unwelcoming security zone. My early visits were all focused on accessing the Marechera papers or what remains of them.

The more I kept visiting and requesting materials, the more items went missing. When I told friends about the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of materials, many suggested that the institution has a general suspicion of researchers and censures information.

It was in one of these visits that I first saw a pink folder that the real import of Marechera's influence revealed itself. The folder contained a pile of hundreds of handwritten letters neatly pressed together. My researcher's instinct to take notes was forgotten. Their melodramatic structure and rhetoric disturbed the stable meanings I held. It is precisely the melodramatic attributes and intimate details of these letters - with their expressions of psychic pain, longing, desire, frustration, boredom and the material details of the correspondence of private lives - that now makes them irresistible, intimate public archives.

The letters all seem directed to Marechera himself. The correspondents feel comfortable talking to him. They know he will never scold them for what they have to say. He understands. Marechera is an ordinary person like them who is constantly harassed by the State and the security apparatus. Through these private correspondents, the writers share their frustrations with the government. Most of them are school drop-outs or absconded to join the war and came back to no jobs, or unwelcoming families. These children liberated Zimbabwe - the 'Dream Children', as Yvonne Vera called them. After the war, they were expected to grow up quickly and join the army of nationbuilders. There were no systems created to deal with the traumas of war.

A lot of young people returned from the war suffering from post-traumatic disorders. They had stories and nightmares, and didn't know how to share them or where to turn for help. The government bureaucrats weren't concerned. Marechera decided to be the 'Story Doctor', who provided an outlet for people to vent their pent-up emotions.

He opened a small office in the city centre. The office was minimalistic. It had no furniture. There was a phone in the corner. Marechera had decided to build a healing platform outside the official system. He understood the sickness that was around him that could only be cured throughstorytelling. The writing surgery operated for four days before it was shut down by government agents. At least one thousand young people consulted Marechera.

They turned to him who they knew as the resident philosopher in Harare's nightclubs and bars. They eagerly identified with his iconoclasm. To them his was a fearless voice that undermined every kind of complacency and hypocrisy. After his death, there's a level of confidence bestowed to the guardians of the Dambudzo Marechera Trust who are seen as a direct link to Marechera. As intermediaries they are assumed to have direct access to the writer and expected to pass his messages and in return relay Marechera's responses.

X wrote:

"Listen, I had the nerve to write straight to you since you seem to be the only person who knows about Dambudzo. Oops! I don't like to repeat calling his name but believe me, his voice haunts me day and night. It sounds he wants me to finish his work that he didn't manage to before. Hang on, I'm coming. These thoughts are pouncing on me savagely.

The Dambudzo Marechera Trust P O Box A595 Avondale, Harare Zimbabwe The Post Office Box replaced Dambudzo Marechera, and in this form he became a site of consciousness and a place of memory-making. Avondale Post Office is a catalyst in the re-configuration of Marechera's new post-death identity. Before the COVID-19 pandemic halted travel and forced the closure of international borders, I made a quick trip to Harare. I wanted to visit the old Avondale Post Office, but to my dismay it has since been demolished. In its place is a popular chicken-grill. The postmaster now occupies a backroom in the new complex.

Even though there is a confidential aspect to letter-writing, which makes it a perfect medium to communicate dissent and defiance, there is still a level of paranoia that persists. Some of the letters are signed anonymously. The letter writers fear interception by the government. These anxieties around surveillance or the limited freedoms after freedom of expression characterized Zimbabwe in the 1980s and provoked concern about the dissemination of private information. The letters, notwithstanding the climate of fear, became expression characterized Zimbabwe in the 1980s and provoked concern about the dissemination of private information. The letters, notwithstanding the climate of fear, became a mode of self-analysis and provide psychological and political insights of the times.

DAMBUDZO MARECHERA THE STORY DOCTOR TINASHE MUSHAKAVANHU

EM wrote:

"Never before have I encountered an author so seriously dedicated to his pen and voice as the late Dambudzo Desperate Marechera. He remains my luminary in my poetic endeavor, his courageous denunciation of few of the first citizens an undying inspiration to me. These are the bigots now coming to the foreground dead and alive because of their sins, who kept Dambudzo well underfoot to his death."

GG wrote:

"As you know that after the death of Dambudzo Marechera, being the origin or originator of modern custom of true freedom of the mind, encouraging many young writers to burst out through the flames of writing spirits, most people were left sickened, lonely and pained by the sickness, disappearance and death of Marechera. I found out that Marechera Freedom of the Mind Speech is a tradition to follow."

From the perspective of the speculative enterprise, Marechera's death was a necessary death, a death that has had movement; a death that created an unprecedented schism in the Zimbabwean imagination. For the political class it was good riddance, but for themultitudes of young people Marechera's death was the awakening. It was a new type of death that refused to be killed; a death which served meaning. Marechera's transcendence to the afterlife became an expression of the radical new logic, a speculative process. His death is the moment he is born again. Every utterance of his name is a recreation of who he was, or who he should have been. He changes with every memory, every retelling. If Dambudzo Marechera had not existed, Zimbabwe would have invented him.

MARECHERA: In many ways there isn't really a future for Zimbabwean Literature. If it is going to be officially defined, I think it will simply die away. I mean, people will just stop writing. I mean if the Government actually prescribes what people should write, I think we will just stop writing. But if the Government realizes (like most intelligent Governments), if the Government realizes that there must always be a healthy tension between the writer and his society, the writer and his nation, then we have a tremendous future because you see, even though we fought the same revolution all together, all these people in this city who were of course on our side (I mean on the Revolution side), even though we fought on the one side, we do not have one particular view. That's why for instance I usually in a childish way simply protest by saying that "Look you guys ..." (I mean when they arrest me), "I'm just a writer. I'm not carrying guns against you. Why don't you just leave me alone to write my books in any way I want?" A pen is not a gun. A gun will actually kill somebody, but a pen can stimulate thought."

Tinashe Mushakavanhu is currently a postdoctoral fellow at WiSER. He holds a PhD in English from the University of Kent. His books include Reincarnating Marechera: Notes on a Speculative Archive (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2020) and This Man is Dangerous: Marechera's Harare (Jacana Media, 2021).

AN ABSENT PRESENCE: WRITING NONI JABAVU'S LIFE MAKHOSAZANA XABA

AN ABSENT PRESENCE: WRITING NONI JABAVU'S LIFE² MAKHOSAZANA XABA

JABAVU: I am by no means the only author who, on being introduced to new acquaintances is so often asked, "How do you find time to write? And the inspiration? Aren't you lucky? Believe me, if I had the time, I would write. My life is so interesting. Tell me, how did you start?" What I find is that when I'm socializing with fellow authors, most of us just don't know how to answer such triple barreled questions. Because the real reply would be, "Do you read books, because that's how authors keep their fires burning?" But that would be unkind, even rude to say so. The fact is, all writers are omnivorous readers. What I myself do is to read and reread a few favorite novels, and some old and new autobiographies. My favorite old novels are two by Arnold Bennett, his Old Wives Tale and his Clay Hanger. Arnold Bennett astounds me by his ability to study with such detail and convey with such sympathy, the entire span of the long lives of his characters, and in such clear, simple English. An autobiography I loved long before I ever met its author and became one of his friends, is the one by Robert Graves, called Goodbye to all that-beautifully written.

XABA: This podcast is about Helen Nontando Jabavu, one of South Africa's foundational writers in English. She was born in 1919 and died in 2008. I will start with a question that I get asked often: "What first drew you to Noni Jabavu?" In 2001, I was doing what I love, browsing through books in a secondhand bookstore in Melville when I saw her first book, Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts.

I was really surprised to see a book written by a black South African woman, whose name I had never heard, because I had been an avid reader since my teenage years. Although I was a little irritated by this, I was also excited by the fact that the book had been published as far back as 1960.

That publication date was significant for me because it was an assertion that black women had been writing for much longer than I was aware of at the time. The second surprise came as I read the book. The detailed conversational style in which this memoir is written made me feel as if I was being shown my parents' lives. Until then, no single book had given me that feeling and experience.

The third surprise came in the following year, 2002, and happened as I was just sitting at my desk working. I received an email from Tembeka Mbobo who was the director of an organization called Women in Writing that she ran out of Soweto. In this email addressed to many of us, she wrote,

"Noni Jabavu is returning home soon. I have drafted the attached funding proposal to the Department of Arts and Culture. Please read it and comment."

I had just assumed that a writer of a book published in 1960, was already dead. So this email really surprised me. The fourth surprise was also in this email. Tembeka pleaded with us:

"Please help us track down Noni Jabavu's relatives so we can inform them about her return."

That then, was the very first time that I started asking questions about Noni's life. The little bit of research I had conducted online and through asking friends, committed readers and scholars yielded very little on her life.

Soon, I forgot about it. I also missed the ceremonial welcome event at the O.R. Tambo Airport that Tembeka organized for Noni while on transit to East London because I was out of the country. Noni Jabavu returned to South Africa from Zimbabwe on the 5th of May 2002, accompanied by a Zimbabwean writer Nqobile Virginia Phiri and she became the first resident at the Lynette Elliot Frail Care Home at Number 23 Allenby Road in East London, where she lived until her death in June of 2008.

Two years after Noni's return in 2004, I was in my first year of the MA in Creative Writing when we were given an assignment to write an essay on, 'A day in the life of ...' Of course, I chose to write about the 5th of May 2002 – the day of Noni's return to South Africa. Research towards this essay led me to write an essay whose narrative arc was question upon question, upon question, as there was very little information to find on Noni's life.

I called it 'Noni Jabavu Returns Home' and Tembeka Mbobo, Nqobile Virginia Phiri and Lynette Elliot were eager interviewees but they also knew very little about Noni's life. For my research in the following year, I decided I would start work towards a biography on Noni because I could no longer ignore this loud and present absence. I titled my thesis of three biographical chapters, 'Journeying with Jabavu'. Those first five years constitute the first phase of my research towards a biography of Noni Jabavu.

I now want to share a summary of Noni's biography in the form of her cultural and literary contributions and give examples of her work.

Noni, the Radio Broadcaster

She began her career as a broadcaster with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in January of 1942. Founded in 1922, the BBC began a major project in 1941, recruiting women to work on radio as engineers, broadcasters and producers, because men were off to war. A new program, 'Women's Hour', also started in 1942. Noni did not, however, work on a full time basis at the BBC. She worked on and off from 1942 to 1963 and in those two decades, she worked on a varied range of programmes.

For instance, in 1950, she was responsible for a music program which was part of the Women's Hour that she called, 'These Women Make Music'. Noni had been studying music at the university when World War II broke out, so her choice of program is not surprising. In 1950, she interviewed Cleo Brown, the pianist; Lil Hardin Armstrong, a singer and director of her own orchestra; Mary Louw Williams, a composer and arranger; Ethel Waters, a cabaret singer; and Lena Horne.

Noni, the Author of Two Memoirs

Noni's first memoir *Dawn in Colour: African Contrasts,* was published in 1960 by John Murray in London, and reprinted a few times in the same year. In 1961, 'Drawn in Colour' was translated into Italian and published in Milan. The following year it was taken up by an American publisher, St. Martin's Press in New York. In her author's note to 'Drawn in Colour', Noni wrote:

"I belong to two worlds with two loyalties: South Africa where I was born and England where I was educated. When I received a cable sent by my father from home in South Africa, I flew back there to be amongst my Bantu people, leaving my English husband behind in London.

Later that year, he and I went to live in East Africa to be near my only sister who had married out there. I have told here something of my background and circumstances since this is a personal account of an individual African's experiences and impressions of the differences between East and South Africa in their contact with Westernization."

A sequel to 'Drawn in Colour' called *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life*, was also published by John Murray in 1963 and it too was reissued in America by St. Martin's Press. It was only in 1982 that the 'Ochre People' got a South African edition, when it was published by Raven Press. This second book is in three parts that she called 'Middledrift', 'Confluence Farm', and 'Johannesburg'. Let me give you a taste of her writing from the last section, Johannesburg, page 186. She is relating the story of a visit to Johannesburg from her seat inside the train:

"Voices around began to rise, swell into a hubbub: Sesutho, Xhosa, SeTswana, Zulu and mostly Afrikaans. The people were becoming excited, the journey almost over. They pointed out landmarks to one another with animation. I felt out of it, not interested. The train drew into Park Station, my heart began to pound. I went into the corridor and leaned out of a window to scan the faces of the crowd on the platforms, saw scores, black, white, brown, lifted up, preoccupied, they in turn, scanning ours as the train passed.

I noticed that even Africans were unsmiling. They were not passing the time of day by joking with those standing next to them as people deed at country stations. This was the cold anonymity of the Golden City, eGoli, e eRautini; I had arrived. The train slowed right down. I became absolutely filled with terror. Then I saw a woman wave to me. It was my cousin, Sis Tandiswa and I thanked God."

Noni, an Editor of a Literary Magazine

In 1961 in London, Noni became the editor of a literary magazine called The New Strand. The original 'Strand Magazine' had been founded in 1891 and closed down in 1950. When the resuscitated version, The New Strand appointed Noni, she became the first woman, the first black person and the first person who was not British by birth to edit the magazine. She started work in September 1961, and titled her editorials as 'From the Editor's desk'. Her first editorial in December carried her vision for the magazine and I quote, just one paragraph:

"My ideal contemporary Strand would sizzle with satire, Peter Ustinov: 'Lilt with elliptical political grace'; James Cameron: 'Short stories, in my opinion are not the weapon to deal with current life. The very idea of a short story nowadays is too leisurely lethargic, tired. Current times call for the racy, the vivid, the snappy. Short Stories are just not with it. They have had their day'."

Noni wrote five editorials for The New Strand magazine from December 1961 to April 1962. What fascinated me the most about editorials is just how self-reflective and inward-looking they were. Noni was acutely conscious of her role as a responsible editor, and what it meant to support the Writers who contributed to this magazine.

Lastly, Noni The Newspaper Columnist

While living in Kenya in 1977, Noni came to South Africa for an extended visit, as she was conducting research towards a biography of her father, DDT Jabavu. Donald Woods, the editor of *The Daily Dispatch Newspaper* in East London invited Noni to write weekly columns for the newspaper. These were called 'Noni on Wednesday'. The interview that opens this podcast was conducted by the SABC in 1977. The themes in these columns are travel, music, reading, writing, family and class.

Makhosazana Xaba has published three poetry collections, compiled and edited five anthologies and is the 2014 co-winner of the SALA Nadine Cordimer Short Story Award for her collection, Running and other stories. She has twice been a Writer in Residence at WiSER and is currently a Research Associate at the Institute working on a biography of Noni Jabavu.



WINNIE MANDELA THE POLITICS OF REFUSAL SHIREEN HASSIM

WINNIE MANDELA THE POLITICS OF REFUSAL³ SHIREEN HASSIM

Winnie Madikizela Mandela is an inescapable figure in South African politics and history. No other woman occupies the place in South African politics that Winnie Madikizela Mandela does. She transcends political parties, generations and ideologies. Every South African, it would seem, has their preferred version of Winnie - that single name that signals the intimacy of the relationships people across the world imagine they have with her, a sense of knowing her, not only in the world, but in their own lives, as perhaps the representation of themselves. Whether that is their most powerful freedom loving selves, or the part of the self that is most unwanted, most shameful, most hard to come to terms with.

It's not surprising that many South Africans cannot be neutral in their views on her, placing her either as an icon of resistance, the Mother of the Nation, or as an unrepentant and violent woman, a kind of Lady Macbeth. These binary ways of reading Winnie are rooted in political signaling. They are a kind of shorthand of where the speaker fits into the landscape of South African politics. Both sides have a clear position on the balance of forces between structure and agency. She is either morally correct, therefore full of agency, or she is an exploited victim of her circumstances and cannot therefore be held accountable.

Winnie Mandela's life, like that of all heroes and villains in history, raises the large questions about the human condition: those having to do with the ability to transcend suffering, the ethical dilemmas of whether, when and how to respond to evil, how to exercise individual and collective responsibility, and the distinction between fact and truth. How might one understand such a figure? The question that every writer on Winnie Mandela faces is this: Do you come to redeem her or to damn her? Two writers, Njabulo Ndebel and Sisonke Msimang, have approached Winnie as familiars – as members of a family.

Njabulo Ndebele approaches and then retreats from the familiar, placing her instead in the vastness of historical figures. Sisonke Msimang on the other hand, bravely steps into the intimate space between mother and daughter, as mother and daughter, excavating from our own experiences of both these statuses, to try to get under the skull and into the heart of Winnie and to use the imaginative possibilities of direct address. By putting herself right into Winnie's life. She dramatically reveals the tenseness, brittleness and tenderness of Winnie's life. Sisonke wanted, needed, to resurrect the best parts of Winnie for the future, providing a decisively usable ancestor for young feminists.

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(3) In Episode 4 of Season 2 Shireen Hassim and Sisonke Msimang discussed the life, politics and legacy of Winnie Mandela. This was broadcast on 25 September 2020.

Njabulo Ndebele, on the other hand, distances himself by writing Winnie lyrically as an incarnation of the Greek mythological Penelope. I used a more pedestrian and obvious distancing strategy. I read her as I would any political figure, and began by asking what shaped her ideas and her actions. As a feminist scholar, I also asked what the connections are between her private and her public lives. These are simple questions, and yet they remain startling questions. After all women have been so misrecognized and misrepresented in the national archive as figures whose status derives from their fathers, husbands or sons, and whose actions therefore must be understood within a separate feminized - one might say maternalized strand -of politics that is secondary to the main plotline. And was Winnie, after all, no more than the wife of Nelson Mandela, who would she be without him? Well, who are women without men? Do they have ideas? Can they act? If they are always victims, do they have moral responsibility? Winnie is a usefully inconvenient figure, the kind of feminist scholars relish, one who does not neatly occupy the moral ground that she claims, or in which she is located or indeed to which she is relegated. To treat Winnie Madikizela Mandela as just another political figure enabled me to approach her with the analytic tools one might use for any political leader. I began by trying to understand her within the fullness of her life as someone with a political purpose who crafted a role for herself, and took the opportunities that arose to make a revolutionary life.

Using Elleke Boehmer's frame for thinking about the male heroic nationalist figure, I plotted the ways in which one might see after her life, the construction and imposition of a linear narrative, of a genealogy for a female heroic nationalist. I could trace, by these devices offered by Elleke Boehmer, the ways in which the life of a female leader was legitimated metonymically with that of a male leader as symbolically necessary and inevitable. This frame illuminated how the nationalist script of 'mother of the nation' could be both a bridgehead for a political life, as well as its cracking point. One could plot the overcoming of childhood hardships through the literal and metaphorical journey from small village to city, the sublimation of suffering of self into suffering of and on behalf of the nation, and the fulfillment of destiny. Tantalizingly from the academic's point of view, Winnie's life could be traced as a series of textual interventions, and self-inventions, from her book, Part of My Soul Went with Him, to her work with Fatima Meer on a biography of Nelson Mandela, Higher than Hope, to 491 Days (her prison memoir). In this construction of a life by myself of course, but most especially by Winnie, what is illuminated is how few spaces there were for women to lead struggles against colonialism and apartheid. What struggles there were tended to be as the helpmates of political leaders or as the leaders of separate organizations for women. Winnie had ambitions beyond those. She became politically active almost as soon as she arrived in Johannesburg at 17 years of age, studying to be a social worker.

Meeting, falling in love with and marrying Nelson Mandela, of course, dramatically changed her life. But this can't be separated from her own activism. After all, Nelson was already married to Evelyn when he met Winnie. Evelyn did not choose a political life, quite the contrary. So something else was happening here that cannot be ascribed simply to being the wife of the leader of a revolutionary movement. In fact, Winnie saw herself as being as much a revolutionary as Nelson in the decades that followed. She joined in the peaceful activities of the ANC Women's League, but also in the underground movement and in Umkhonto weSizwe, the ANC's armed wing. She saw herself as a soldier, and she acted as one.

She was not spared by the state, and the combination of her marriage to a highprofile leader and her own independent and fierce activism, combined to invoke intense scrutiny and intrusion by the security forces. Her gender did not protect her from direct violence, nor did she seek to use it as a shield. In 1969, she was held in solitary confinement for 491 days, during which she was brutally tortured and came close to suicide. She emerged from prison traumatized and so dissociated that her response for the subsequent decades centered on articulating the necessity of a violent response to the state's brutalities. She drew close to the post 1976 youth who are becoming increasingly disaffected with leadership exercise from afar from exile, or from underground.

The 1980s were a bleak period in South African history when the state and liberation movements faced off in battle. Unequal in military weapons or in access to the institutions of power, the ANC and the newly formed United Democratic Front clung instead to moral power. They did it with great difficulty under conditions that were not amenable to arguments for restraint. And there's no doubt that Winnie Mandela made it even harder, as she positioned herself on the side of youth activists becoming increasingly enraged by the state and impatient with their leadership. She grew in popularity during this period, becoming close to the street and increasingly outside of authority structures of the ANC, MK and the UDF. Urging the use of violent methods, she alienated many of her former allies. The worst effect of this was her complicity in the violence wrought by her private team of bodyguards, the Mandela United Football team in Soweto, by her implication in the death of a child, the activist Stompie Seipei, and her friend Dr. Abubuakr Asvat, and her infamous homophobic defense of her actions in supposedly saving Stompie from someone she termed a pedophile.

Her legitimacy was indelibly marred. Winnie's politics, many felt, had become unrestrained. Being outside of the ordinary processes of accountability (and these existed, even in the underground) created numerous problems both for Winnie herself and for the anti-apartheid movements. Political violence, however, nobly WINNIE MANDELA THE POLITICS OF REFUSAL SHIREEN HASSIM

intentioned, can run dangerously out of control if not contained within at least some forms of normative authority and restrained by collective organizational discipline. And so it was with Winnie. In this respect, she became convenient, it must be said, for the apartheid state. They planted opportunities for her to make mistakes, and they goaded her excesses in ways that she most never likely quite understood, lures to which she fell prey.

The paradox of this period is that the moral claim that apartheid was a crime against humanity was advanced globally to a significant extent by invigorating the figure of Nelson Mandela as the epitome of the noble leader of a noble cause. Winnie and Nelson became the figurehead, the personification of the struggle of South African people. It was a project that absolutely depended on Winnie as the other pole of the romanticized relationship between Nelson and Winnie, a metaphor for the nationalist relationship between leaders and people of the heteronormative vision of the fusion between family and nation.

But there's also no doubt that in responding to Winnie in the late 1980s, the ANC and the UDF drew on the gender double standard that de-legitimized her by casting her as the punitive mother, the rogue element. This lasted well into the early 1990s. It was Nelson who, after his release, sought to redeem her, bringing her back into the fold, and giving her a role in the post-apartheid government.

Tragically, private trauma and public irresponsibility collapsed into each other once again. The marriage could not withstand what imprisonment and torture of both of its partners had done to it. Winne herself could not submit to the discipline of life as an elected official, with responsibilities and having to follow rules. She erred, misstepped and once again found herself outside the party fold.

But she also exposed her anger at the moderation of the revolutionary ANC into the liberal democratic government. She succeeded, indeed, in making the TRC not a break with the past, but a perpetrator of abuse that stood in a long line of police, informers, torturers, deceiving lovers, and lawyers who were sent to discipline her. And by doing that, by making that performative act at the TRC, she stood as the sentinel for the radicals who see in the transition to democracy a defeat of the revolution, not its victory. Winnie's cachet stems from this position, that was articulated so clearly, in this moment, at the height of the country's romance with the new democracy, that the past could not be easily contained, and certainly not erased.

She stood credibly or not, for the virtues of a community violently treated by apartheid and colonialism, for remembering the crimes that for many remain

WINNIE MANDELA THE POLITICS OF REFUSAL SHIREEN HASSIM

unhealable and for whom justice is cast in terms other than those offered by the TRC. She stood for rejecting the act of reconciliation as the foundation for moving forward. She stood against the representative politics of the post-apartheid state, which she saw as a social pact aimed at drawing a line under the past, and thereby forgetting it.

In the shadows, unresolved, or the ongoing questions of individual complicities, of collective delusions and fears, the fantasies that violence can successfully be met with violence, whether indeed her own past is healable for the victims of her actions, for what to do when the revolutionary dreams came up against realpolitik. Perhaps at the end, one might reflect that this was actually the kind of role quintessentially occupied by women in nationalism, the memory keepers, who carry grief and anger and hope, the time travelers who simultaneously look backward to bear witness to the past and forward in hope to the future.

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WINNIE MANDELA AN INTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY SISONKE MSIMANG

WINNIE MANDELA AN INTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY⁴ SISONKE MSIMANG

I am so pleased to think together in this way with colleagues and friends who live across and between South Africa and Canada and Australia, settler societies all of them. And I am grateful for the opportunity to record these thoughts in a moment that is defined by the radical constraints of COVID on the one hand, and the radical if evasive possibilities presented by the American Black Lives Matter movement on the other. If ever there was a person who embodied the kinds of contradictions that have up-ended 2020 it is Winnie Mandela. And so in many ways, I have felt her spirit hovering over this year of uncertainty: as activists have marched in America, statues have been toppled in Europe, and as unemployment figures have ballooned in our beloved South Africa.

In the first part of this series, Shireen Hassim sketches a biography of Winnie Mandela's political life. And I want to build on this and to map out the ways in which Shireen and I address similar themes about Winnie Mandela, but approached them in fairly different ways. And I want to outline my approach to Winnie Mandela as a subject and to talk about the idea of 'intimate accountability' which is how I framed the process of writing and thinking about Mam' Winnie when I decided to write the Resurrection of Winnie Mandela in 2018.

I decided to write a book about Winnie Mandela in the immediate aftermath of her death in April 2018, because I was so shocked by the responses to her passing. I shouldn't have been, but I was. Suddenly it seemed that our national conversation was filled with the hatefulness of a generation of racist white South Africans whom frankly I had forgotten existed - those who had never accepted the legitimacy of black majority rule. It felt as though they wanted to deny her dignity. Even as she was in the midst of the sacred act of dying, there seemed to be no reprieve from their anger and vitriol.

In the days after she died, I was reminded that South Africa had changed far less than I had imagined. It seemed as though all that had remained unresolved, since the end of apartheid was once again in the foreground. And it wasn't just conservative, old white men. Older black men like Thabo Mbeki and Mondli Makhanya seemed incapable of even for a short while, respecting her life's work, and seeing her as a woman in full rather than as the archetypal fallen woman. She was subjected to the ridicule and scorn that is heaped onto women who are too noisy, too public, too messy and too aggressive. And yet, she was also a hero to so many young women who were themselves messy and loud and sexually liberated.

(4) In Episode 4 of Season 2 Sisonke Msimang and Shireen Hassim discussed the life, politics and legacy of Winnie Mandela. This was broadcast on 25 September 2020.

And so in an attempt to feel my way out of the shock, and perhaps as a way of trying to understand how we had arrived at a moment of such profound rupture, in which she was so deeply beloved, and so overwhelmingly hated, I decided to write about her. Shireen's work on Winnie Mandela was certainly the scaffolding onto which I clambered as I wrote, the scholarly work I leaned on most heavily as I tried to respond to a public moment that felt wildly out of control. Shireen's work and in particular, an excellent essay called 'Winnie Mandela: A Life of Refusal'. It's available online or for free if you just want to Google it. This essay provided me with crucial language, it gave me an analytical frame. Indeed, the very term refusal was incredibly helpful, because Winne didn't just resist, many of us resisted. Winnie Mandela simply refused, and she did so frequently.

In some ways, I was intimidated by the scale of the task of writing about her. The subject herself is larger than life. Often as I wrote, I thought about her displeasure and wondered what she might think of the liberties I was taking. I was also aware that Winnie Mandela had been the subject of much important thinking by other feminist scholars. And I wondered if there were too many Winnie Mandela books. There were of course also her own words: Part of my Soul Went with Him, published in 1984 and 491 Days her prison memoirs which were published in 2014. What more might I say, given the intense interest of so many feminist academics, and of course, there was the erudite and always compelling Njabulo Ndebele's book, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* which was important, but felt as though it might have represented another time, another era.

I have heard some chatter in the last few years about the fact that there are so many other important figures in South African history, so many other women to write about, and yet Winnie takes up so much space, and while I understand the sentiment, it is also the case that with every new book that is written about Nelson Mandela or Abraham Lincoln, it is apparent that there are intellectual merits to considering their legacy. No one justifies writing about big men, and yet significant interest in one woman is always deemed too much. So in the end I wrote about her, and mainly I did so because there wasn't yet a book that did what I wanted to do with her life, with her story.

In her reflections in part one of the series, Shireen notes that Mam' Winnie's story is full of private trauma and public irresponsibility, and this is certainly the case. From the perspective of a storyteller, the emotional highs involved in trauma and irresponsible behaviour are crucial for moving a plot along and so I am, of course attracted to this. But my deeper attraction to Winnie is less about trauma and drama, and much more about her steadiness. I wanted to examine how she both challenged and confirmed the myth of the strong black woman. Black women are WINNIE MANDELA AN INTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY SISONKE MSIMANG

often expected to bear their traumas in silence. Indeed, the strong black woman isn't simply strong because of the burdens she carries.

The archetype of black woman is strong because those burdens are carried in silence. Winnie's allure for me as a writer, lay in the part of her that was silent. I was curious about the times when her burdens were too large to speak. I wanted to write about the interior life of a woman who was notoriously vocal, and yet, who managed to always hide in plain sight. There is an inscrutability about my Mam' Winnie, which means that although she was instantly recognizable, she remained until the very end, profoundly unknown, perhaps unknowable, like all of us.

So Shireen's academic work on motherhood and nationalism helped to set me on a path that gave me a way of thinking about Winnie that was historicized. And that allowed me to see the lines that she crossed, and the ways that she has always subverted and confirmed stereotypes. And of course, while the intellectual life of a project is important, it's always the arc of the story that intrigues me and that determines whether or not I'm going to take something on as a project.

In any case, ultimately, the deciding factor for me was that I wanted to write a love letter to Mam' Winnie. I wanted to gather her in my arms and literary terms and hold her. And I know it sounds like it, but I don't mean it in a sentimental way. I wanted to embrace her as a way of holding her accountable to myself and to others who admired her. I wanted to engage her without being adversarial, to love her as a starting point, and to move from there into a deeper kind of conversation than is often possible in the public realm.

The power of writing, and of books in particular, is that on the page, and within the covers of a book, one can write all sorts of things that are not so easy to speak out loud. Had I known Mam' Winnie, or had I interviewed her, I might never have had the courage to say aloud what I have written to her in my book. This sort of intimate accountability is, I think, what the TRC had an opportunity to create in the 1990s. But the Truth Commission was so deeply invested in the idea of forgiveness, of reconciliation. Not always, but often, that it let the facts, its search for the facts overwhelmed the truth.

Winnie appeared before the Truth Commission for nine days, and each time she spoke, her voice bristled with rage. There was no space in that process for anyone to hear Winnie Mandela's truth. She was expected to demonstrate contrition because those were the terms of engagement. But she wasn't sorry. How could she be when the TRC sought to create moral equivalence between her actions and those of the apartheid state? She rejected this outright. Her refusal to play that WINNIE MANDELA AN INTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY SISONKE MSIMANG

game, her refusal, in fact to ask for forgiveness in a forum, was seeking to make her sacrificial lamb, a stand-in for all the mistakes made by the liberation forces, provided a defining moment in the life of the TRC.

It also gave energy to a critique of the TRC that has continued to resonate amongst many black South Africans. Her radical refusal at the TRC became a metaphor for so many of our other refusals, her refusal to be seen as a mere wife, her refusal to submit to the will of the apartheid police, her refusal to be consigned to the role of a loving mother, her refusal to forgive, when there were so many grudges to be nursed. In terms of style, I opted to write to Winnie and I wrote to her in the register of the familiar. As a South African woman who grew up in exile, I was sheltered from the harm that the ANC did to communities across the country in the 1980s. And so I don't carry horrible memories.

Winnie Mandela was part of the country of my imagination when I was growing up outside of South Africa, and so I didn't have to reckon with the consequences of her actions in any material way. I was not tethered to the violence that she wreaked on those who never left home. In my writing, I am forever trying to write my way into a place of belonging. I was able to write about Winnie as though I knew her because that has been my lifelong practice to imagine myself at home in the company of loved ones and it continues to this day, this distance now in these COVID times more poignant than it has been in years.

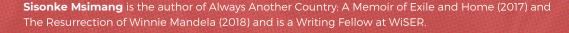
Exile made me a sister outsider of sorts, although not in a strictly [Audre] Lordean way, still, having grown up elsewhere, I am at once a daughter of South Africa and a stranger to her. And so my writing is always refracted through this lens. My writing on Winnie especially so because she was such a uniquely South African political phenom. Where Shireen is able to write with the distance of academia or write into the imagined familiarity of my desire to have been here, I write myself back into South Africa, as though I had always been by Winnie's side, as so many other black South African women were.

Where I'm interested in redeeming Winnie Mandela, Shireen is not, I'm desperate for her to be better than she was and Shireen's work is far more circumspect. She's able to write about Winnie as part of a tradition of women like Winnie who have deployed and subverted matriarchy and motherhood narratives to create more space for themselves in the political terrain.

She explains how Winnie Mandela did something extraordinary when nationalist discourse said women can only be involved in politics as mothers. Winnie agreed and then asked, "What kind of mother would not carry a gun and kill to protect her children?" Winnie refused to be bound by motherhood as a passive idea,

she subverted and pushed and created the space that has allowed so many young women today to be unequivocal in their feminism. As we prepared for the series, Shireen described Winnie as the feminist ancestor of the women of this generation. And I think this is very much the case. And yet, of course, there is nothing easy about embracing Winnie.

She does not always want the intimacy that we seek to foist upon her. Indeed, often in her life, she did not deserve the elevation that we have posthumously granted her. As I write, at the end of my book, *The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela*, in a perfect world, Winnie's place is not on a pedestal, she belongs, I believe, with all of the rest of the sinners who occupy the world around us. In this sense, her resurrection and our desire to make her a hero are both sad and beautiful. Winnie's resurrection is a shining monument to the work of nation building that is still not done. I'm willing then to raise her up for this interregnum. For the long pause between now and the moment at which our society is able to tear down those whose sins were worse. I am prepared to raise her up in the hopes that one day South Africans might ethically and in good conscience, take her down off that pedestal. I look forward to that day.





FACING A YEAR OF CANCELLED WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS, THE WITS INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH (WISER) TURNED TO PODCASTING. THE MAGIC OF THIS PODCAST IS HOW IT FACILITATES THE SHARING OF ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE IVORY TOWER. ITS FORMAT IS SIMPLE WITH ONLY ONE OR TWO GUESTS PER EPISODE KEEPING EACH SHORT AND FOCUSED. THIS ALLOWS FOR DENSE ACADEMIC TOPICS TO REMAIN DIGESTIBLE. WITH SOME OF SOUTH AFRICA'S FINEST MINDS TALKING ON TOPICS RANGING FROM HYDROCOLONIALISM TO MELANCHOLY, YOU'RE ABLE TO DIP IN AND OUT OF DIGITAL LECTURE HALLS AT YOUR OWN PACE.

DAILY MAVERICK