

Malibongwe

Let us praise the women
Portraits by Giséle Wulfsohn



An exhibition
commemorating the
50th anniversary of
the Women's March



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APARTHEIDMUSEUM

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Malibongwe

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In 1990, inspired by major political changes in our country, I decided to embark on a long-term photographic project – black and white portraits of some of the South African women who had contributed to this process.

In a country previously dominated by men in power, it seemed to me that the tireless dedication and hard work of our mothers, grandmothers, sisters and daughters needed to be highlighted. I did not only want to include more visible women, but also those who silently worked so hard to make it possible for change to happen.

Due to lack of funding and time constraints, including raising my twin boys and more recently being diagnosed with cancer, the portraits have been taken intermittently. Many of the women photographed in exile have now returned to South Africa and a few have passed on.

While the project is not yet complete, this selection of mainly high profile women represents a history and inspiration to us all. These were not only tireless activists, but daughters, mothers, wives and friends. *Gisele Wulfsohn 2006*



ADELAIDE TAMBO 1929 – 2007

Adelaide Frances Tsukudu was born in 1929. She was 10 years old when she had her first brush with apartheid and politics. A police officer in Top Location in Vereeniging had been killed. Adelaide's 82-year-old grandfather was amongst those arrested. As the men were led to the town square, the old man collapsed. Adelaide sat with him until he came round and witnessed the young policeman calling her beloved grandfather "boy".

Adelaide worked for the ANC as a courier while studying at Orlando High. At 18, she joined the ANC Youth League and was elected chairperson of the George Goch branch. One of her duties was to open branches of the Youth League in what was then the Transvaal. Later, as a student nurse at Pretoria General Hospital, she started a Youth League branch with the help of people like Sheila Musi, Mildred Kuzwayo and Nonhle Zokwe.

At that time, black women were prohibited from reaching anything above staff-nurse status. Black women were not allowed by law to become nursing sisters. When Adelaide met and married Oliver Tambo, it was decided that one would be the breadwinner and the other the politician. However, her role was to encompass both homemaker and provider, especially in the years of the Treason Trial, which finally saw the closure of the Mandela and Tambo law practice.

Following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the Tambos were requested by the ANC to leave the country so that Oliver Tambo could lead the party in exile. Based in London until the unbanning of all political parties in 1990, she became a founder member of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement and the Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO). She was often a surrogate mother to young people who left South Africa and found their way to London. Most of all she is remembered for organising Christmas Lunches at which exiles would meet each year.

She represented the ANC in Parliament. Widowed in 1993, she lived in Johannesburg until her death of a suspected heart attack at the age of 77 on 31 January 2007. She is survived by her 3 children and their families.

"We mourn the passing away of a close personal friend, a comrade and one of the great heroines of our nation. She was a mother to the liberation movement in exile, and a nationally revered figure in our new nation." Nelson Mandela.



ALBERTINA SISULU 1918 – 2011

Albertina Sisulu was born in the Transkei. Orphaned at the age of 15, as the second eldest, Albertina accepted the responsibility of her siblings: **“I wanted to be a teacher. But conditions would not allow me to be a teacher, so I had to take up nursing, where when you are training you are being paid ... My hope was that ... I will be able to help my brothers and sister.”**

In 1941, Albertina left the Transkei for Johannesburg where she met Walter Sisulu. A great love story was borne which survived prison, detentions and many hardships. They married in 1944, the same year Albertina joined the ANC Women's League. She was a founding member of FEDSAW in 1954. In 1981, she succeeded Lilian Ngoyi as president of the organisation.

She became the sole breadwinner of the family when her husband, Walter, was arrested in 1963 and jailed for life at the Rivonia Treason Trial. She had five of her own children and three adopted children. Concerned that they were growing up without a father and a mother who was constantly harassed, Albertina put them into boarding school.

During the 1980s, Albertina endured several spells in solitary confinement and the additional emotional torture of knowing her children were detained. She once said, **“None of the children in this house has not tasted jail”**. Whilst in jail in 1983, she was elected president *in absentia* of the United Democratic Front (UDF).

Described by journalists as a symbol of courage, fortitude and calm endurance, international heads of state began requesting interviews with Albertina. In June 1989, she was granted a 31-day passport. She set off for the UK to meet with Margaret Thatcher, the first time a British Prime Minister had met with ANC representatives since Lloyd George had met with Sol Plaatje and his party in 1919.

On Friday 13 October 1989, banning restrictions on Albertina Sisulu were finally lifted. A few days later, Walter was finally released from prison. At sunrise on 15 October, a car drew up outside No 7372, Orlando West. A short, grey haired man stepped out. A journalist asked if he was Walter Sisulu. **“Yes, I am, let me see my wife.”**

In 1994, after the first democratic elections, Albertina was elected to Parliament. She served for four years, retiring from politics though remaining active in social causes. On 2 June 2011, at the age of 92, she died at her home in Johannesburg.



AMINA CACHALIA 1930 – 2013

Amina was born in 1930 to the Asvat family in Vereeniging. The family moved from Vereeniging to Newclare, in Johannesburg, where she grew up without any consciousness of colour and race. A move to Fordsburg and a new school made her aware of racial politics.

A South African Communist Party member, Murvy Thandray, was a teacher at the school who took it upon himself to develop awareness in his students. Amina's father, Ibrahim Asvat, died when she was 12 and so it was Murvy Thandray, later secretary of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), who became her mentor.

After school she found a secretarial job, joined the Indian Youth Congress and started attending political lectures. The TIC offered bursaries to South African Indian students to study in India. Amina applied and the secretary of the TIC, Yusuf Cachalia, interviewed her. She won a bursary and also his heart. She was however, denied a passport and remained in Johannesburg. Later they were married and had two children.

During the Defiance Campaign Amina distributed leaflets and recruited volunteers. Her first arrest in 1952 was followed by a series of house arrests and bannings. At one time, due to their banning orders, Amina and Yusuf were in the ridiculous situation of living under the same roof as man and wife but prohibited from speaking to each other.

Involved in work for the Congress Movement, she met Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Hilda Bernstein amongst others. Amina was a co-founder of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), and was elected treasurer, with Lilian Ngoyi as president and Helen Joseph as secretary. She helped plan the 1956 Women's March but was unable to march herself as she was six months pregnant. She was driven to the Union Buildings where she waited for the other women: **"... when I arrived at the Union Buildings at 6am there was nobody there. I sat and waited and then I started seeing women coming and they walked up individually and in pairs, in twos and threes. And they walked up through the garden and the terraces and up the stairs, thousands of them ..."**

Her banning orders prevented her from doing any political work until 1978, when she promptly became active in TIC politics and later in the United Democratic Front (UDF). Amina died on 31 January 2013 from complications after emergency surgery. Her autobiography *When Hope and History Rhyme* was published posthumously.



BERTHA GXOWA 1934 – 2010

Bertha Gxowa was born in 1934 in Germiston Location, on the East Rand, where she spent her early childhood. Her father was a garment worker who was the first black person to work on the cutting floor, work that was previously reserved for white labourers.

Her experiences in Germiston location triggered her interest in opposition politics, because permits were required to move in and out of the location. As a result, Bertha volunteered to be in one of the first group of Defiance Campaigners, who went into Boksburg without permits.

“In those days you had to have a permit to enter the Location. Even though I lived in Germiston Location, I had to have a permit to enter. A group of us went to Boksburg and forced our way in without permits.”

She was arrested for this and spent 10 days in prison after refusing to pay a fine.

Bertha started her working life as an office assistant for the South African Clothing Workers Union. Signing up to join the ANC Youth League during the anti-Bantu Education Campaign in 1953 strengthened her involvement in politics. But her attention quickly shifted to focus on women's issues. In 1954, she became a founder member of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). Bertha travelled the entire country with Helen Joseph, collecting petitions that were to be delivered to the Union Buildings during the Women's March on 9 August 1956. 20 000 petitions were collected.

Between 1956 and 1958, Bertha was a defendant in the Treason Trial and from 1960, was banned for 11 years under the Suppression of Communism Act. In 1990, after the unbanning of all political parties, Bertha was called upon to re-organise the ANC's Katlehong branch.

She was a Member of Parliament and remained actively involved with the ANC Women's League. Bertha's other activities involved chairing the boards of two women's skills development projects *Malibongwe* and *Kwazekwaza*, both committed to the emancipation of women.

On 19 November 2010, at the age of 76, Bertha died in Johannesburg from complications after an operation. **“Mme Gxowa dedicated her entire life to the struggle and to the upliftment of women in South Africa and, in particular, the poorest of the poor.” Premier Nomvula Mokonyane.**



BETTIE DU TOIT 1910 – 2002

Bettie was born on a farm in the Transvaal in 1910. Her mother died when she was 18 months old. This resulted in a boarding school upbringing under the guidance of the conservative Dutch Reformed Church.

She arrived in Johannesburg at 18 where she met trade unionist, Johanna Cornelius. Under Cornelius' guidance, Du Toit involved herself in trade unionism and political activism. Her involvement with the trade unions made her unpopular with both the National Party (NP) and her only brother.

During the strike of the textile workers in 1928, Bettie offered to be an organiser. As a result, she was arrested with four other women and jailed at the Fort. The headline read, "FIVE WHITE GIRLS IN A POLICE PICK UP VAN". It caused an uproar in the white Afrikaner community. After her release, Du Toit committed herself to fighting for the rights of workers, especially white Afrikaans girls that worked under appalling conditions. Du Toit worked side by side with other prominent unionists like Ray Alexander, Moses Kotane and Wilton Mkwayi.

In the early 1950s, she was married to Yusuf Cachalia, the secretary of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC).

Apart from her work as a trade unionist, she was involved in other political activities. She protested the Asiatic Land Tenure Act (Ghetto Act) of 1946 and volunteered for the Defiance Campaign, which led to her banning in 1952 under the Suppression of Communism Act. This prohibited her from taking part in trade union activities for the rest of her life.

Despite banning orders, she founded *Kupegani*, a welfare organisation in Soweto. She had to disguise herself and travel to Soweto at night, but the security police soon discovered her activities. The prospect of long-term imprisonment led her to flee South Africa in 1963. She went to Ghana and worked for Ghana Radio until finally settling in London. While in exile, she wrote *Ukubamba Amadolo: Workers Struggles in the South African Textile Industry* (1978).

She lost her eyesight in 1987 due to an infection and went on to teach Braille to other sight-impaired people. Bettie finally returned to South Africa where she died in 2002.



BIBI DAWOOD 1927 – 2014

Bibi was the third child born to the Dawoods in Worcester in 1927. Her father, Dawood Hadjie Achmat Tembe, was a merchant who arrived in Durban at the turn of the century at the age of 26. He finally ended up in Worcester where he married Bibi's mother, Miriam.

Bibi used to read the newspapers to her father and learned about the apartheid laws. In April 1951, determined to oppose the repeal of the Coloured Voters Act, she assisted with organising a strike. **"The call came from the trade union movement, supported by the left, to stage a one-day strike on 7 May. I then decided to throw in my weight against these unjust laws. I went to the trade union office and volunteered to help organise the strike,"** she writes.

The strike was a success and led to the formation of the Worcester United Action Committee, which joined the Defiance Campaign of 1952. Bibi worked closely with the ANC calling for volunteers. In the same year, she met Ray Alexander, who harnessed her skills to unionise workers. By 1953, she had become a member of the ANC and Ray proposed that Bibi represent South Africa at the Women's International Democratic Federation Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark.

She remembers the excitement of overseas travel: **"I started my journey from Worcester to Johannesburg by train and from Johannesburg to London by air. In London I was joined by 20 other ladies from different parts of the United Kingdom and we travelled to Copenhagen by boat."**

On her way back to South Africa, she visited her grandmother in India where she met and fell in love with Yusuf Mukadam, a naval seaman. It took another six years for them to be re-united in South Africa. When Yusuf's boat docked in Durban, he skipped ship and made his way to Worcester to claim his bride.

Bibi's political activities led to her being charged with treason in 1956, of which she was acquitted. She and Yusuf married in 1961 and had two children, but their happiness was short-lived when Yusuf was arrested for illegal entry into South Africa. Bibi, pressurised by the security police to inform on her comrades in exchange for Yusuf's release, decided the family should leave. She left South Africa with her children on an exit permit in 1968 and was granted full citizenship in India. It took 23 long years before Bibi could eventually return home.

She lived in Worcester until her death on 1 June 2014.



BRIGALIA NTOMBEMHLOPHE BAM

Brigalia was born in Tsolo, in the Eastern Cape, in 1934. She received a formal education in South Africa and completed a teachers diploma in primary education at Lovedale Teachers Training College in 1952. She went on to obtain a diploma in social work and then furthered her studies abroad. She holds an MA in Communications from the University of Chicago, USA.

In 1967, she was recruited by the World Council of Churches based in Geneva to become one of their programme directors with a specific focus on women, youth and human rights. She also served as the Africa Regional Secretary and Co-ordinator of the Women Workers Programme for the International Food and Allied Workers Association in Geneva.

She returned to South Africa 21 years later to take up the post as deputy general secretary of the South African Council of Churches. She remembers how she felt at the time: **“There was a feeling of appreciation and gratefulness that I had been recruited to come home. When one is away from home, one of the greatest fears is to be forgotten.”**

Brigalia serves on many boards of corporate South Africa and educational institutes but she is best known as chair of the Independent Electoral Commission, a position she has held with distinction since 1999.

She has drawn much inspiration from women and, at the Faith Communities Hearings of the TRC in East London, she said, **“We are told that the first human being was in Africa and originated from South Africa. It was a black woman who brought the whole of humanity to its being.”**



NNOSENK ELLEN KATE KHUZWAYO 1914 – 2006

Nnoseng Ellen Kate Khuzwayo was born in 1914 in Lesotho. She grew up on her grandfather's farm in Thaba Nchu, which she inherited in 1930 only to lose it to a white area.

She began school at the age of seven and completed her higher education at Lovedale College. She graduated in 1936 at the age of 22, and embarked on a career in teaching.

In her late 20s, she married Ernest Moloto but the marriage was not a happy one. She gave birth to two boys, and after the marriage ended in divorce, Ellen moved to Johannesburg. Apart from teaching, she did volunteer work with local youth groups. With the introduction of Bantu Education in 1953, Ellen resigned in protest, thus supporting the education boycott.

At 39, she went back to studying and completed a training programme at Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work. Armed with a degree in social work, she began working for the Johannesburg City Council. She later focused on working with youth at the South African Association of Youth Clubs and the YWCA-Dube Centre.

Subsequent to the Soweto 1976 uprisings, Ellen was elected to the Committee of Ten by Soweto residents. She was arrested with the other nine members and detained without trial. She told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in Soweto: **"Sometime I can forgive the National Party for what they did to us as adults, but I can never forgive what they did to our children. They never saw our children as children because their skin was different from their own ... I feel I will go to my grave with this pain in my heart."**

Author of *Call me Woman*, activist, *The Star's* Woman of the Year in 1979, receiver of several honorary doctorates and Member of Parliament in 1994, she died at 91 in April 2006.



FATIMA MEER 1928 – 2010

Fatima Meer was born in Grey Street, Durban, in 1928. Her father, Moosa Meer, was the editor of a weekly newspaper, *Indian Views*. Fatima was brought up in an atmosphere highly conscious of racial discrimination. This shaped her into a tireless defender of the oppressed. She attended the Durban Indian Girls High School and subsequently went to the University of Natal, where she completed an MA in Sociology. She went on to lecture in the Sociology Department of the University of Natal in the 1970s.

Fatima joined the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1946 and established the Student Passive Resistance Committee, which launched her career as a long and tireless anti-apartheid campaigner.

Despite her banning orders, she was one of the founding members of FEDSAW, organised night vigils for detainees without trial, and in 1976 survived an assassination attempt. That same year her son went into exile. She did not see him for another 10 years.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Fatima worked with NGOs, fighting for the rights of shack-dwellers and rural migrants. She headed the Natal Education Trust, which built schools and craft centres in KwaZulu-Natal. Fatima established a string of educational institutions that were aimed at improving the quality of education for Africans.

She is the author of 40 books and during the 1990s continued to dedicate herself to human rights causes. She suffered major setbacks with the death of her son, Rashid, and later her husband, Ismael Meer. In recent years, she too has battled with ill health.

In a paper titled *Women in Apartheid Society* she said, **“As long as racism continues and a people, not a particular sex, is the object of oppression, women will continue to overlook their own discrimination and dedicate themselves to the liberation of their people.”**

Fatima died in Durban on 12 March 2010, aged 81, after suffering a stroke.



FATIMA SEEDAT 1922 – 2003

Fatima Seedat was born in the Strand, Cape Town, in 1922. Together with her twin sister, Raheema Moosa, she became politically active as a teenager. Their father was a trader and their mother a housewife.

The twins were teenagers when they became aware of apartheid. In the early 1940s, Fatima joined the South African Communist Party (SACP) in Cape Town. It was during this time that she met her husband, Dawood Seedat, a fellow communist from Durban. In 1945, she married Dawood and moved to Durban, where she continued her work for the Communist Party.

After moving to Durban in 1945, Fatima joined the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and fully intended to take a stand during the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946. However, being heavily pregnant she had to be cautious. Once her child was born, she felt more able to express her resistance to apartheid – she sat on a white's only bench in Berea Station in Durban and for this received one month's hard labour.

Of this experience in jail she states: “ ... **only when I was inside jail behind those grey walls – then I realised what freedom was, to read about freedom in the books was nothing, you had to go there to understand ... it gives you inspiration to fight more.**”

After being jailed for a second time during the Defiance Campaign in the 1950s, she continued to work for the NIC, recruiting, delivering pamphlets, mobilising people and providing a home for her family. She was a delegate at the launch of FEDSAW, and together with Raheema, went to Pretoria for the Women's March on 9 August 1956.

In 1964, both Fatima and Dawood were banned for five years. In addition, they were listed as members of SACP. Nevertheless, their house continued to be a haven for activists. After Dawood's death in 1970, and the onset of her own diabetes, Fatima slowly distanced herself from political life. She died in 2003 in Durban.



FRANCES BAARD 1901 – 1997

Frances Baard, affectionately known as 'Mabaard', was born in 1901. She was a domestic worker and became an activist focusing on trade unions, gender issues, political and human rights. Her great influences were Raymond Mhlaba and Ray Alexander.

Frances joined the ANC Women's League and later became secretary and treasurer of the Port Elizabeth branch of the League. She was an active organiser during the 1952 Defiance Campaign:

"From the time I joined the ANC we spent a long time organising the women. When I joined there were only a few women there, but after we began to organise - shjoo - soon many women were organised."

At the 1954 launch of FEDSAW, Frances was elected to the executive committee and played a leading role in women's resistance to passes. She was involved in the drafting of the Freedom Charter and later became one of the defendants in the Treason Trial.

A staunch trade unionist, between 1960 and 1969 she was arrested, detained in solitary confinement for a year and banned. When she was finally banished to Mabopane near Pretoria, she was dumped in the veld in the winter cold with only the clothes she was wearing.

During the 1980s, Frances was an active member of the United Democratic Front (UDF), launched in 1983 to oppose the introduction of P W Botha's Tricameral Parliament. She died in 1997.

In an interview with Barbie Schreiner in 1986, she said: **"My spirit is not banned. I still believe in seeing freedom in my lifetime"**.



GERTRUDE SHOPE

Born in Johannesburg in 1925, Gertrude was one of four children. Soon after her birth, her father was employed by an engineering firm in Southern Rhodesia. Gertrude completed her schooling and subsequently did a primary teachers course in Salisbury. She returned to South Africa and trained as a domestic science teacher and, from 1948 until 1954, taught at schools in Natal and Soweto.

At 29, Gertrude joined the ANC. In the same year, the government introduced Bantu Education. She resigned from teaching as part of the campaign to boycott Bantu Education.

With the formation of Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), she was appointed chair for the Central Western Jabavu branch and, in 1965, was elected Transvaal Provincial Secretary of FEDSAW. Subsequent to the Rivonia Raid, she was part of a group of women who worked closely with leaders who had not been arrested. Their role was organising safe houses, safe storage for propaganda material and setting up communication systems and courier networks.

Her own husband, Mark Shope, an ANC activist and trade unionist, had been arrested during the 1960 emergency and subsequently fled the country. For seven years, Gertrude and Mark were separated until she left South Africa in 1966 and finally joined him in Prague a year later. They returned to Africa in 1971, moving between Tanzania, Nigeria and Zambia in official capacities for the ANC.

In 1981, she became head of the Women's Section of the ANC, which acted as the legitimate representative of the ANC Women's League in exile. In the same year, she joined the ANC National Executive Committee. In February 1990, with the unbanning of the ANC, the Shope family returned to South Africa.

At the 25th anniversary of the Women's March, she said in her speech to the Special Committee Against Apartheid, **"... As mothers who bring life to this world we feel highly concerned at the fate to which that same life is subjected: hardships and cold blooded murder in many countries which have become hotbeds of conflict. Our duty is to protect life, because it is very valuable. For without life, there can be no development in this world"**.



HELEN JOSEPH 1905 – 1992

Born in Sussex, England in 1905, Helen Fennell graduated from Kings College in 1927. For three years she taught in India and arrived in South Africa in 1931 where she married Billie Joseph. The marriage did not last, but her love of South Africa and commitment to liberation did. She served as an information and welfare officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force during World War 2 and her subsequent decision to become a social worker, exposed her to some of the realities of South African life.

In 1951, Helen worked for the Garment Workers Union, led by Solly Sachs. As with others, he had a profound influence on her and it was here that she came to see the results of apartheid. Angry at the injustices, Helen became a staunch activist and founder member of the Congress of Democrats.

Appalled by the double oppression of black women, she was a co-founder of FEDSAW and spearheaded the march to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956. Later that year she was one of many arrested for treason and was banned the following year. She was the first person to be placed under house arrest under the Sabotage Act in 1962 and endured death threats, shootings and a bomb. Finally in 1985, her last banning order was lifted when she was 80 years old.

She was a loyal friend and her correspondence with her close friends who were imprisoned shows her devotion and care for their children – Zindzi and Zenani Mandela, Ilsa Fischer and Sheila Weinberg.

Always concerned with other people's loneliness and suffering, she began a tradition in the early 1960s of remembering those in exile, those who had died and those in prison. Christmas day at noon there would be a gathering at her house. During the years of house arrest, people would file past her gate in Norwood, Johannesburg.

She will be remembered for her extraordinary resilience, dedication to opposing apartheid and upholding women's rights. Helen died from a stroke after her final Christmas commemoration in 1992. She is buried in Avalon cemetery in the same grave as her dearest friend, Lilian Ngoyi.

In 1992 she was awarded the ANC's highest honour, *Isithwalandwe*, for her outstanding contribution to the liberation struggle. In paying his last respects to Helen on 7 January 1993, Nelson Mandela said, "**Helen challenged the paternalism of our society and left a legacy that the struggle for the emancipation of women had to be side by side with the struggle to liberate the people of South Africa. She believed that the two processes were inseparable**".



HELEN SUZMAN 1917 – 2009

Helen Gavronsky was born in Germiston in 1917. She never knew her mother, Frieda, who died soon after Helen's birth and of whom she says, **"I first saw a photograph of my mother when I was 55 years old ..."**

Her father, Sam Gavronsky, remarried in 1926 and the family moved to Parktown. Helen was brought up in a traditional Jewish home and went to Parktown Convent. In 1934, at the age of 16, she enrolled at Wits University and studied commerce. She dropped out in her third year and married Dr Moses Suzman, with whom she had two daughters.

She went back to Wits in 1941 and completed her degree. Between 1941 and 1944, Suzman worked as a statistician for the War Supplies Board. In 1944, she started lecturing in Economic History at Wits, but then entered politics representing the United Party (UP) in Parliament in 1953.

Her career with the UP wavered with the introduction of the 1953 Separate Amenities Bill. The UP supported the bill and, when the vote was taken, Helen and another member walked out. By 1959, the young turks in the party had broken away and formed the Progressive Party (PP). In the 1961 election, Helen became the sole representative of the PP in Parliament, a position she held for the next 13 years.

Helen always made a point of seeing for herself. From 1960, she visited prisons and was instrumental in changes for both political and common law prisoners. According to Solomon Musi, an ANC member and Robben Island prisoner in the 1970s, **"People who used to come to the prison frequently were people like Helen Suzman ... After visits by these people the conditions in the prison became better."**

She was a regular visitor to townships, squatter camps and the dumping grounds resulting from forced removals. Gender discrimination, especially towards black women, was one of her high priorities. Inundated with requests for help, she once said, **"My desk is the sad harvest of the seeds of apartheid."**

Not always popular for her policy decisions, especially her criticism of sanctions, she was steadfast and earned the respect of friend and foe. She retired from Parliament in 1989 but not from politics. At her final speech in Parliament, a member of the Conservative Party (CP) was heard to say, **"Daardie Mrs Suzman, sy is darem a grand lady ... That Mrs Suzman is definitely a grand lady"**.

Helen Suzman died peacefully on the morning of 1 January 2009 at the age of 91.



HILDA BERNSTEIN 1915 – 2006

Hilda Watts was born in London in 1915 where she became a member of the Young Communist League. At 17, she arrived in South Africa and immediately became involved with organisations associated with the struggle.

In 1937, Hilda lived in Johannesburg and joined the South African Labour Party League of Youth, which was campaigning for Medical Aid for Spain. This was an international campaign to raise medical aid for anti-fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War. It was during this time she met the dashing architect, Rusty Bernstein. Shared political beliefs and a lifelong love affair followed.

She joined the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1940, and was the only communist elected to the Johannesburg City Council on a whites only vote. She served from 1943 to 1946. Rusty joined the SA Artillery and did service in North Africa and Italy, only to return home in 1947.

Arising out of her involvement in the 1946 Mineworkers' Strike, Hilda was charged with sedition. In 1953, more banning orders were issued against her. Neither of the Bernsteins could attend the Congress of the People in 1955 and were forced to watch the proceedings from a nearby yard.

A founding member of FEDSAW, Hilda was one of the organisers of the march to the Union Buildings in 1956. She contributed articles on South African affairs to newspapers and periodicals internationally, and maintained a long-standing association with the ANC. Both Bernsteins were detained following the State of Emergency in 1960.

Rusty was arrested at the raid on Liliesleaf in 1963 and, while he was in jail, Hilda found ingenious ways of communicating with him, one of which involved notes sewn into shirt collars. Subsequent to his acquittal in the Rivonia Trial, the police were seeking to arrest her. She spent many nights away from home while Rusty was under 24 hour house arrest. When the police arrived one Saturday morning, Rusty yelled to Hilda to leave through the back door. In a radio interview she said, **"I left the pressure cooker on and worried what would happen ..."**

A few days later, after a sad farewell to her children and Rusty, Hilda made her way to Bechuanaland (Botswana) by foot. The family was finally reunited in London in the mid 1960s, where she wrote several books and also became an accomplished artist.

Rusty died in 2002 and Hilda finally returned to South Africa and settled in Cape Town, where she died at the age of 91 on 8 September 2006.



JEAN SINCLAIR 1911 – 1996

Jean Sinclair was born into the Watt family in Germiston in 1911. Her father was doctor on the Simmer and Jack Gold Mine.

In the early 1950s, a group of six United Party (UP) members, including Jean Sinclair, Ruth Foley, Elizabeth McLaren, Tertia Pybys, Jean Bosazza and Helen Newton-Thompson, would meet regularly for discussions. The women were opposed to the Senate Bill which intended to change the constitution in order to remove coloureds from the common voter's role. In 1955, they founded an organisation which they called The Women's Defence of the Constitution. The logo of the organisation was the constitution draped with a black sash. Women, in silent protest against apartheid laws, would also wear a black sash.

The press, which slowly warmed to their organisation, referred to them fondly as the women of the Black Sash. In time, this became the official name of the organisation. Jean was the first national president of the Black Sash, a post she held until she retired in 1969.

SHEENA DUNCAN 1932 – 2010

Jean's daughter, Sheena, was born in 1932 and married architect, Neil Duncan, in 1955. They moved to Harare and, in 1963, returned to Johannesburg with a young family. The South Africa they returned to was in the throws of the Rivonia Trial, bannings and house arrests.

Sheena was looking for an outlet for her own political and social awareness and joined the Black Sash, not because of her mother's influence, but her father's. As a Scotsman, he had always been incensed at what became known as the Highland Clearances, a brutal system of forced removals to make way for sheep farming in the Scottish Highlands in the 18th and 19th centuries. The similarities between forced removals in South Africa and the Highland Clearances were all too apparent and Sheena found two avenues open to her – one was the Institute of Race Relations and the other the Black Sash. She joined both.

Under her leadership, the Black Sash reached a new level of recognition in the public eye. Through its Advice Office, it provided an intimate knowledge of the injustices of apartheid. By means of silent vigils, it brought exposure of discrimination to public attention. **"Everyday I worked there, hurt by what was happening ..."** remembers Sheena. **"I came to understand the endurance of people suffering and finding a way to manage a situation."**

Sheena was the Honorary Life Vice-President of the South African Council of Churches, and Chair and Patron of Gun Free South Africa. She was awarded many degrees and in addition, the Order of the Baobab Silver Class. After battling illness for some time, she died on 4 May 2010.



JEANIE NOEL

Jeanie Sullivan, born in Durban in 1942, was one of 12 children. However, her family was fortunate enough to own property, something that was not common in coloured communities at the time. She attended St Theresa, a Catholic primary school, and when she reached high school she realised that all races were not treated equally in South Africa.

At high school she only had white teachers, which was in sharp contrast to her St Theresa days. The arrival of a coloured teacher gave rise to controversy and confusion in the young Jeanie: **“I used to notice him at lunch-time walking alone, there was a big staff room upstairs but he was isolated behind the hall, they cleared out a storeroom for him ... Then another teacher, a Mr Green, also coloured, arrived. He took me for English, so one day I asked him why he was not in the staff room. Then it came up, he explained they were not white ...”**

To add to this, she and her family were forced to leave their family home when the Group Areas Act came into effect, something that she believes sent her father to an early grave as he lost all his property. She remembers, **“I arrived home from school to find a man saying to my father, this house is not yours anymore, it has now been declared exclusively for the white community.”**

After joining the ANC in the early 1960s, Jeanie became actively involved with underground work throughout the 1960s and 70s, mainly organising safe houses for comrades who were in hiding. In 1975, she started community work with a focus on mobilising women. She was arrested under Section 10 of the Internal Security Act in 1976 and was sent to the Fort prison in Johannesburg. In jail she shared a cell with Winnie Mandela, Vesta Smith and Fatima Meer, from whom she drew sustenance.

In 1984, after many years of struggle, Jeanie started her own catering project. She supported herself by catering for union meetings and congresses. Jeanie currently manages a community youth hostel that was established through the efforts of a group of strong women.



LIZ ABRAHAMS 1925 – 2009

Lizzy Joseph was born in September 1925 in Paarl to a family of eight siblings. Mr Joseph was a butcher, and her mother worked in a fruit factory. Liz was educated at a multi-racial school in Paarl. Ill health forced her father to resign from his job which resulted in the children having to pitch in to assist their mother who had become the sole breadwinner. At 14 years old, Liz joined her mother at the Langeberg canning factory, receiving ninepence for every box packed. Soon this job became full-time.

“We were a knitted family ... I was very interested in other people's lives and their problems. Where we lived was mixed and next to us were two African families and I really liked to go play there.”

Before long she was promoted to the canning section and recruited into the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), organised by Ray Alexander. By the mid 1950s, Liz was elected as the general secretary and her duties included organising branches all the way to the Eastern Cape.

Married in her early 20s, she sadly lost two children and later adopted a daughter. Her marriage itself was a struggle as her husband did not support her political involvement. This informed her belief that, **“Husbands and wives must work together; they must help each other and understand that women have a role to play to uplift the lives of our people in South Africa ...”** After a separation, they did indeed learn to understand each other and he condoned her activities.

Liz was banned for five years in 1964 under the Suppression of Communism Act. She carried on with her work underground but faced continuous harassment from the security branch. Subsequently, she resumed her work in the union, and was involved in the Fattis & Monis strike in 1979.

She retired in 1985, thereafter consulting on union matters and assisting organisations within the United Democratic Front (UDF). This led to further detention without trial in 1986.

Trade unionist, parliamentarian and author of the book *Married to the Struggle*, Liz died in Paarl on 17 December 2009.



MAMPHELA ALETTA RAMPHELE

At the time of the Women's March, Dr Ramphele was nine years old. The third child of two primary school teachers, she was born in 1947 near Pietersburg in the Northern Province.

On completion of her matric, she enrolled for pre-medical courses at the University of the North. In 1968, she was accepted into the University of Natal's Medical School, then the only institution that allowed black students to enroll without prior permission from the government. She qualified as a doctor in 1972. She said, **"It was not the desire to serve which influenced my career choice, but the passion for freedom to be my own mistress in a society in which being black and a woman defined the boundaries within which one could legitimately operate."**

At university she became increasingly involved in student politics. She worked with the South African Students Association, which was formed under the leadership of Steve Biko, a black consciousness philosopher, with whom she formed a long and intense friendship. **"I believe that growing up under apartheid promoted premature ageing,"** she once said, **"One's childhood, adolescence and young adulthood were knocked out of one very rudely."**

In 1975, she founded the Zanempilo Community Health Centre in Zinyoka, a village outside King William's Town. But her detention in 1976 led to her banishment to Tzaneen for seven years. There she continued her work with the rural poor and established the Ithuseng Community Health Programme.

Steve Biko was murdered in detention in 1977. Soon after this, Mamphele gave birth to his son, Hlumelo Biko.

After her banning orders were lifted in 1984, she went to Cape Town to pursue an academic career. In 1996, she was appointed Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town.

In 2000, she was appointed Managing Director for Human Development of the World Bank in Washington DC. An inspiration to all women, she has repeatedly transgressed boundaries and as a woman she claims, **"I had to be outrageous to be heard, let alone taken seriously."**



MANIBEN SITA

Maniben Sita was born in 1926 at Marabastad, in Pretoria, into a family that was politically active. Her father, Nana Sita, who had met and been greatly influenced by Mohandas Gandhi, joined the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) in 1927. In the TIC, the young radicals who called for passive resistance opposed the older, more cautious members, who favoured negotiations.

At the young age of 13, Maniben took a keen interest in politics. She read widely and prepared herself to become an activist. She enrolled for a BA degree with the University of South Africa while doing a teachers course at the same time. She qualified as a teacher in 1957.

Maniben joined the anti-Group Areas Act relocations march to the Union Buildings in December 1963. When the family was given notice to move, Nana Sita defied the order, refused to pay fines and was sentenced to jail terms. Nana Sita died in 1969 and Maniben and her mother, Pemiben, continued to live in their house on Van der Hoff Street in Pretoria until 1976, when they were threatened with expropriation of their property and forced to move to Laudium.

Maniben became active in 1981, when elections were held to give legitimacy to the South African Indian Council. The TIC was revived in 1983, and Maniben became a member. Speaking at mass meetings, she exhorted people to boycott the elections. On election day in August 1984, Maniben sat outside the polling station in Laudium dressed in black. She was a silent sentinel, a reminder to people that these were not democratic elections.

In 1985, Maniben spent 81 days in solitary confinement in Diepkloof Prison. On her release, she continued to participate in protest activities against apartheid. In 1995, representing a ward in Laudium, she was elected to the Centurion Town Council and served as an ANC councillor for five years. She is now retired and lives in Laudium.



PHYLLIS NAIDOO 1928 – 2013

Phyllis David was born in Estcourt in January 1928. Her father was a teacher and her mother a housewife.

At the age of 10, she accompanied her father to a Race Relations meeting in Pietermaritzburg to help serve tea. She describes the following experience which was to leave an indelible mark on her life: **“A woman in charge told me to go and call the ‘boy’. So I went out and looked for a boy and didn’t see a boy but did see a very dignified old lady and asked her for the boy. She said, ‘the boy is my husband’ ... I looked down and started crying ... I was so ashamed.”**

Phyllis joined the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and participated in the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1946. By 1956, she was both a teacher and a student at Natal University (Non-European Section), where she organised a Human Rights Committee at University and helped to raise funds for the Treason Trialists and their families.

It was in the NIC that she met her future husband, MD Naidoo, a staunch member of the South African Communist Party (SACP), and in 1961, she herself joined the Party. She and her husband aided people in the underground and helped those in danger to get out of the country.

As a teacher, she worked with Dorothy Nyembe, Florence Mkhize and Moses Kotane to challenge the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Finally in 1966 she was banned for 10 years and the following year MD was arrested, charged and sent to Robben Island. Her youngest child was two days old at the time and she was left destitute.

Subsequently she was placed under house arrest and decided to study law. She qualified in 1973. However, she had to wait until 1976 when her banning orders were lifted to set up a practice. She fled South Africa for Lesotho in 1977 where she continued to work for the ANC.

In 1984, she went to live in Zimbabwe. While living in exile in Harare, she had to deal with the trauma of the assassination in Lusaka of her son, Sahdan, for his involvement in the ANC. Five years later her second son, Sha, developed post-operative complications and died.

Phyllis returned to South Africa in 1990 and worked as Director of Lawyers for Human Rights. She is the author of several books including the recently published *156 Hands that Built South Africa*, which documents the 1956 Treason Trialists.

She died of heart failure on 13 February 2013 in Durban.



RAY ALEXANDER 1913 – 2004

Born Rachel Alexandrowich in 1913 in Varaklan, Latvia, Ray arrived in Cape Town on 6 November 1929 and decided as she put it, **“to organise the unorganised”**.

Within a week of being in South Africa, she met Cissie Gool, daughter of prominent politician, Dr A Abdurahman and John Gomas, trade unionist and radical leader in the coloured community. At the age of 16, she joined the South African Communist Party (SACP).

After being dismissed from a job for taking part in an anti-pass campaign, Ray embarked on a lifelong career organising black workers into unions. Although she organised workers in various trades, she became synonymous with the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), which she helped establish in 1941.

Her first marriage to photographer, Eli Weinberg, ended in divorce but her marriage to Jack Simons was a long and happy one. She always referred to him as a liberated man. She and Jack were the first whites to join the ANC.

In April 1954, together with Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Florence Mkhize, she helped found the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and participated in the drafting of the Women’s Charter. A banning order issued later in 1954, resulted in her resignation from FEDSAW. A further banning order as a result of her activities with the FCWU, precluded her from joining the 1956 Women’s March. However, she helped to organise the event and was responsible for mobilising the 175 women from Cape Town who attended the march.

In 1961, at the age of 50, Ray was enlisted into MK, where her task was mainly administrative. Constantly harassed, banned and under house arrest, Jack and Ray fled to Zambia in 1965, leaving their three children with relatives.

Ray’s difficult relationship with her children was rooted in her commitment to politics. She said, **“In fighting against public events, I must admit to having neglected my marital and maternal responsibilities,”** and she openly admitted that her children were, **“victims of my obsession with the struggle against injustice and inequality”**.

In 2004, the ANC’s National Executive Committee bestowed its highest honour of *Isithwalandwe* on Ray. She died at the age of 91 a few months later.

In his tribute to her, President Thabo Mbeki described her as, **“an outstanding leader of our workers and people, who spent her entire adult life fighting for the freedom of our people,”** and **“a giant of non-racialism”**.



RICA HODGSON

Born in 1920 into a non-political Jewish family in Johannesburg, Rica Gampel was one of 11 children. A first generation South African, her mother was from Russia and her father from Poland.

Nursing took her from the Johannesburg General Hospital to the Addington in Durban. A wartime romance with a young Hollander resulted in marriage. He was sent to South West Africa and she joined the Air Force and headed for Cape Town. The marriage finally ended in an amicable divorce.

At the outbreak of World War 2, Jack Hodgson, who was to become Rica's second husband, served in the Northern Campaign. He played a leading role in the formation of the Springbok Legion, a militant union of soldiers and ex-servicemen. Its purpose was to ensure that the noble aims of the anti-fascist struggle were carried over into civilian life in post-war South Africa. When he came to Cape Town to address a meeting, Rica met and instantly fell in love with him.

Rica did fundraising for the Springbok Legion, and learned about the ANC, communism and politics within national and international forums. After Jack got divorced from his first wife, Rica and Jack were married in 1945, and had a son. In addition, he was granted custody of his three children, so life in their bachelor flat was somewhat cramped during school holidays.

During the 1950s, Rica worked for the Congress of the People. Her skills as secretary and fundraiser led to her active participation in the Congress of Democrats, the Treason Trial Fund and ultimately to the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF).

Detention and house arrest imposed on both the Hodgsons from the mid 1950s made it impossible for Jack to leave their apartment. Jack nevertheless went on to become the chief weapons expert for MK in 1961. Two years later, MK arranged for them to escape to Bechuanaland (Botswana) and finally to Britain where Rica worked for IDAF – a task which not only involved fundraising but getting money to detainee's families and various lawyers in South Africa.

Her beloved Jack died in 1977 and Rica retired from the fund a few years later at the age of 60. In 1990, she returned to South Africa. Of her return, she said, **"It was an amazing experience, I mean I always knew I would be coming back. I regretted that Jack was not with me - he never doubted for a second that we would return."**



SOPHIA WILLIAMS DE BRUYN

Sophia Theresa Williams was born in 1938 in Port Elizabeth and grew up there. During her higher primary education, she worked during vacations for pocket money. As she did this almost every school term, the workers at Van Lane textile factory singled her out to solve their problems with factory bosses. She later became shop steward, and increased her involvement in representing the grievances of the workers. She continued working in the factory and never returned to school.

Sophia was a founder member of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Her trade union work intersected with mainstream political movements of the day, such as the ANC. It was then that the Coloured People's Congress was formed. In 1955, Sophie was appointed as a full-time organiser of the Coloured People's Congress in Johannesburg. The ANC and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) offered the Coloured People's Congress space in their offices.

Sophia was assigned to work with lawyer, Shulamith Muller. Together with Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Raheema Moosa, she helped to organise women around pass issues. She was one of the leaders of the Women's March to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 and is the only surviving leader of this historical event. **"The Coloured People's Congress did not grow very much in Johannesburg - Benoni was a good base and, of course, Port Elizabeth, but the effects of the Women's March were inspiring to everyone."**

Of her subsequent marriage to Andrew de Bruyn in 1958 she says, **"Andrew was also an activist, but we had to work clandestinely because life was dangerous in the Eastern Cape. We provided a safe house for activists on the run. When Andrew was moved to Lusaka by the ANC, we were separated for six years before our children and I could join him."**

They returned to South Africa after the ANC was unbanned in 1990. Andrew was appointed Ambassador to Jordan and died in 1999. Sophia currently lives in Johannesburg and is Deputy Speaker of the Gauteng Legislature.



VESTA SMITH 1922 – 2013

Vesta Palmer was born in July 1922, the middle daughter of five girls. The Palmers lived on Robinson Deep Mine in Johannesburg, where her father was a clerk and her mother worked as a seamstress. Vesta was educated in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Early recollections of Johannesburg life include her royalist mother's insistence that she dress up to join the throngs in Loveday Street in 1934 to see the Duke of Kent.

She also remembers a constant stream of black leaders at their Robinson Deep house: **"I was born into the ANC. At my home I remember lots of visitors, Dr Xuma, Sol Plaatje, Dr Molema, ZK Matthews, Charlotte Maxeke (Aunty Charlotte) and Aunty Nomsise Ka Seme. My father would talk to them but I never considered it to be anything but social. My father never spoke to me about his politics. It was only much later I realised who these people were ..."**

Pressure from her parents led to her training as a teacher. She left teaching as soon as she was able to and, during the war years, found work in a lampshade factory. It was here that she met Martha Matlhaku who introduced her to trade unions and to FEDSAW. She joined the organisation and went with Martha on the march to the Union Buildings in 1956, an experience she will never forget.

At 25, she was a single mother and two short-lived marriages later, she finally met and married Leslie Smith, a bookkeeper. She learned to type and worked in clerical jobs. In 1979, she found the perfect home for her skills at the Legal Resource Centre in Elizabeth House, Johannesburg, where she remained until she retired in 1995.

Widowed, she lived in Noordgesig, Soweto, and was blessed with 23 grandchildren. She died at 91 on 9 September 2013.



WINNIE MADIKIZELA-MANDELA

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was born in 1936 in Bizana, Transkei. She was the fourth of eight children born into the Madikizela family. She was educated at Bizana and at 16 came to Johannesburg and obtained a degree in social work, after which she took a post at Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto.

At Baragwanath she became friendly with Adelaide Tsukudu (fiancé of Oliver Tambo). The trio were together when she was introduced to Nelson Mandela who was immediately smitten. Although Mandela was still married, he courted Winnie and married her when his divorce was final in 1958. Their courtship and marriage was a romance against the canvas of the Treason Trial, and their life together was cut short in 1962 when Mandela was arrested and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment. Winnie's own life was filled with bannings, house arrest, banishment, jail and the lengthy separation from her husband.

Her education into politics came not only from Nelson Mandela but also Helen Joseph, with whom she shared a warm friendship. Winnie served on the executives of both the ANC Women's League and FEDSAW.

In 1969, she endured 17 months of solitary confinement in Pretoria Central combined with brutal physical and emotional torture. **"What I went through – that personal experience hardened me so much ... There is no way you can talk any language of peace to vicious men who treated defenceless women and children in that manner."**

In 1977, Winnie was banished to the Free State town of Brandfort. The house had no running water, electricity and no real floor. Winnie's resilience provided her with the fortitude to build a life and provide a clinic and a crèche for the people of Phatakahle township.

In 1985, her house in Brandfort was burned to the ground and she returned to Soweto in defiance of her banning orders. During this period, Winnie's defiance, her courage and her fierce criticism of the apartheid regime, earned her the iconic title of 'Mother of the Nation'. However, following the events of the late 1980s, an uneasy relationship developed between Winnie and the political leadership. Finally divorced from Nelson Mandela, she continues to live in Soweto.



ZAINAB ASVAT 1920 – 2013

Zainab Asvat, daughter of Ibrahim and Fatima Asvat, was born in 1922 in Vrededorp. The elder sister of Amina Cachalia, Zainab was very much under the tutelage of her father, whom she accompanied to political meetings from the age of 12.

Ibrahim Asvat supported his daughter's wish to pursue medicine. She completed her degree at Wits University but politics and discrimination dogged her medical training right up to her housemanship and beyond.

In the 1946 Indian Passive Resistance Campaign against Group Areas (the Ghetto Act), Zainab led the first batch of women from the Transvaal to Durban. They set up tents at the corner of Umbilo and Gale Roads in Durban and were joined by others, mainly men. On 16 June, white hooligans overran the camp, stole the tents and blankets and injured some of the women including her. Their commitment was undeterred and they refused to move.

During the 1956 Treason Trial, Zainab used to practise medicine by day and cook by night. The Indian community provided the ingredients and she and her mother cooked meals for the trialists.

In December 1963, Zainab organised a women's march to the Union Buildings to protest against Group Areas relocations and the establishment of the Indian National Council. Mostly Indian women from Johannesburg and Pretoria joined in this march. Unlike the previous marches to the Union Buildings, the women were subjected to violence. The police turned dogs on them and baton charged the protestors. Zainab was subsequently banned for five years.

Granted refugee status by Harold Wilson's Labour government in Britain, Zainab and her children sailed for London and exile in the late 1960s. **"I remained involved with the ANC, we had to keep the organisation alive. I fundraised and cooked for meetings ... for a doctor, I have made a lot of samoosas"**, she quipped. Zainab died in London in 2013.

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