Women’s Words: African Worlds

RENEWING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS AND WOMEN OF AFRICAN DESCENT

DATE: 25-26 AUGUST 2010
VENUE: WINDYBROW THEATRE

Hosted By The Department Of Arts And Culture In Association With The Windybrow Theatre (Pan-African Centre For The Arts)
Minister of Arts and Culture:
Lulama Xingwana

“This pioneering programme features writers and performers of the written and spoken word, from all over Africa and its diaspora. We wish you all a joyous and fruitful symposium”
Minister of Arts and Culture

Lulama Xingwana

The years of struggle as an anti-apartheid and gender activists in various formations such as the United Democratic Front, Member of the Federation of South African Women (1981 - 1991) and as an employee of South African Council of Churches as Director, Women’s Development Programmes (1987) etc prepared Ms Xingwana as a leader and member of parliament for the African National Congress since 1994. Minister Xingwana has served in government as a Chairperson of Parliamentary Women’s Caucus (1999 - 2004) and later played a leading role with women parliamentarians in the SADC region. The Minister also served in the executive as Deputy minister of Minerals and Energy (2004 - 2006) and Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs (2006-2009), prior to her appointment as Minister of Arts and Culture in 2009. Minister Xingwana is a graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand (Bachelor of Science (1986))

Biographical details on panelists and facilitators:

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani (by Asaobi) - Nigeria

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani studied Psychology at the University of Ibadan. Her debut novel, I Do Not Come To You by Chance, won a 2010 Betty Trask award, the 2010 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book (Africa), was a finalist for the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa, and was named by the Washington Post as one of the Best Books of 2009. Born in Enugu, Nigeria, Nwaubani has broken grounds as the only Nigerian writer, currently on the global scene, to get an international publishing deal while still living in her home country. She is also the first writer in the history of world literature to capture the notorious 419 phenomenon in a novel. Nwaubani was the acting editor of élan, the fashion and style magazine of Nigeria’s NEXT newspapers. Her essays and short stories have appeared in NEXT, the New York Times, the UK Guardian, the UK Sunday Express, African Writing, and others.

Arja Salafranca - SA

Arja Salafranca was born in Spain in 1971 and is a South African writer, poet and journalist. Salafranca has had fiction, poetry and essays published in a number of journals and anthologies. Her first poetry collection, A life stripped of illusions, received the 1994 Santam Award for poetry, while her short story, ‘Couple on the Beach’ was a winner of the same award in 1999 for short fiction. Her second collection of poetry, The fire in which we burn, was published by Dye Hard Press in 2000. An anthology of prose and poetry, Glass Jars Among Trees, which she co-edited with Alan Finlay, was published by Jacana Media in 2003. Salafranca is editor of the Sunday Life supplement in the Johannesburg-based The Sunday Independent. Her debut collection of short stories, The Thin Line, was published by Modjaji Books, in 2010.

Elinor Sisulu - Zimbabwe/SA

Elinor Sisulu was born in Zimbabwe. She studied in her home country as well as in Senegal and the Netherlands. As an academic researcher for the Ministry of Labour in Zimbabwe in the early eighties, she published studies of women’s work and development assistance in Zimbabwe. This included a major study for NORAD that was later published by SAPES in a book entitled Women in Zimbabwe. From 1987 to 1990 she worked for the International Labour Organisation on assistance programmes for the ANC, PAC and SWAPO. In 1991, Elinor moved to Johannesburg and until 1998, worked as a freelance writer and editor, and as assistant Editor for SPEAK, a black feminist publication. Her children’s book, The Day Gogo Went to Vole, a story about a child accompanying her grandmother to vote in the 1994 elections, won numerous awards, including the African Studies Association of America Beat Children’s Book Award, and has been translated into 6 major South African languages. Her biography of Walter and Albertina Sisulu, Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime, was published in 2002 and was runner up in the Sunday Times Alan Paton Award, and was awarded the NOVA Award for most outstanding book published in Africa in 2003. Elinor Sisulu is currently advising on projects on democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe.

Ellen Ndeshi Nambila (by Ellen)

Ellen Ndeshi Nambila was born in the remote village of Northern Namibia on 11 November 1963. Nambila’s birth coincided with the beginning of Namibia’s liberation struggle, making the context of her childhood one of colonial wars and apartheid repression. This turmoil would eventually result in her displacement from Namibia at age 12 and for the following 15 years, she lived as a political refugee. Nambila schooled in Angola, Zambia,Gambia and finally Finland where she obtained a M.Sc. in Library and Information Science at the University of Tampere. Namhila has held positions as Researcher/ Librarian at the Social Sciences Division of the University of Namibia (1993-1995), Deputy Director: Research, Information and Library Services at the Namibian Parliament (1995-1999), Director of Namibia Library and Archives Service in the Ministry of Education (1999-2007). She is currently the University Librarian of the University of Namibia. Nambila is the author of The Price of Freedom, her autobiography which was published in Windhoek: 1997; Kalumba Kandola Man and Myth: The Biography of a Barefoot Soldier published in Basel:2005; and Tears of Courage: Five Mothers Five Stories One Victory published in Windhoek: 2009. Ellen is a mother, wife and a professional woman. She is the Chairperson of the National Heritage Council of Namibia (2005-2009) and Vice President of the UNESCO International Advisory Committee on Memory of the World 2007.

Fiona Lloyd - Zimbabwe/SA

Fiona Lloyd is a Zimbabwean arts journalist and media trainer, based in Johannesburg. She was one of the co-founders of WICSA: the Women in Culture in Southern Africa collective, and also the Zimbabwe Women Writers. In the early years of Zimbabwe’s independence she produced a weekly arts & culture radio show, and was a regular arts contributor for the BBC Africa Service. In recent years, she facilitated a radio drama project for prisoners as part of the Arts Alive festival, and trained arts journalists from around Africa in the run-up to the Cape Town Jazz festival. Fiona Lloyd is also an international media trainer, specialising in conflict-sensitive reporting, and human rights journalism. She has worked extensively in South East Asia, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and has also trained people from marginalised communities in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe in media communication skills.
Henrietta Rose-Innes - SA
Henrietta Rose-Innes is a South African novelist and short-story writer. She has published a collection of short stories, Homing, and two novels: Shark’s Egg and The Rock Alphabet. In 2008 she won the Caine Prize for African Writing, for which she was shortlisted in 2007. Also in 2007, she was awarded the 2007 South African PEN award for her short story, ‘Poison’. Her short stories have appeared in various international publications, and her writing has been translated into German, Arabic and Romanian.

Dream Homes; Schnappschusse und Geschichten aus Kapstadt; a collection of short pieces, appeared in German translation in 2008.

While based in Cape Town, she was a Fellow in Literature at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, (2007-8) and has held residencies at the Chateau de Lavigny, Lausanne; the kunst:raum syll quelle, Syll; and the University of Georgetown.

Jayne Cortez - New York (USA)
Jayne Cortez was born in Arizona, grew up in Los Angeles, California and lives in New York City. She is the author of eleven books of poetry and performer of her poems with music on nine recordings. Her voice is celebrated for its political, surrealistic, dynamic innovations in lyricism, and visceral sound. Cortez has presented her work and ideas at universities, museums, and festivals around the world. Her poems have been translated into many languages and widely published in anthologies, journals, and magazines. She is recipient of several awards including: Arts International, the National Endowment for the Arts, the International African Festival Award, the Langston Hughes Medal, the American Book Award and the Thelma McAndless Distinguished Professorship Award.


Cortez is organizer of international symposiums and director of the films “Slave Routes: Resistance, Abolition & Creative Progress” (2009) and “Yari Yari Pamberi: Black Women Writers Dissecting Globalization”. She can be seen on screen in the films: Women In Jazz” and “Poetry In Motion”.

Karabo Kgoleng - SA
Karabo Kgomotsos Kgoleng joined SAtm in 2007 as a presenter of the weekly on-air programme SAtm Literature. For the past two years she has been promoting literature and language, interviewing local and international authors such as Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri and Zapiro. On weekdays Kgoleng hosts SAtm’s Afternoon Talk. She studied science at the University of Witwatersrand and is pursuing a degree in communication science. Her radio career began in 2002 when she joined Radio Islam and Channel Islam International as a presenter. Kgoleng is a popular public speaker and a board member of Alliance Francaise Johannesburg, which promotes art development in the city. She contributes book reviews and opinion pieces for Y-Mag, Al-Huda and OneSixSeven.

Lauretta Ngcobo m - SA
The rural community of Ioopo, where Lauretta Ngcobo was born and brought up, is described in her novel, And They Didn’t Die (1990). She praises the unsung heroines, the rural women, whose struggles and complexities in harsh environments were further compounded by having to deal with the hardships of apartheid. As Lauretta Ngcobo’s husband was at the heart of the struggle against the apartheid regime she consequently was “married” to the political struggles of the South African people. In 1963 Lauretta Ngcobo left South Africa, escaping imminent arrest, and went into exile with her husband and children, moving from Swaziland to Zambia and finally settling in England where she worked as a teacher for 25 years. In 1994 she returned to South Africa where she served as a member of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial legislature. Soon after she left South Africa, Lauretta started writing, but it was not until 1981 that her first book, Cross of Gold, was published. Let it be Told recounts the turbulent thoughts of black women writers in Britain in the 1980’s, told in their own words: Lauretta Ngcobo found writing for children, however, gave her the greatest challenge as a writer. She has also written and published many academic papers, attended many writers’ conferences, delivered papers in various universities and travelled extensively as a consequence. Of her book And They Didn’t Die, Prof Mazisi Kunene writes, “This is the most enlightened and balanced book written by a woman who is African and who understands clearly the circumstances of African women - their history and their personal anguish.”

Loloba Molema - Botswana
Dr Loloba Molema is a senior lecturer in the English Department at the University of Botswana. She was the editor of the Marang Journal of Language and Literature (Gaborone) when it became a refereed journal. She was also one of the editors of Women Writing Africa. Vol. 1: The Southern Region (2003), and is a guest editor of the August 2010 edition of Research in African Literatures (University of Ohio), with focus on Southern African literature outside South Africa. She is the secretary, formerly the chair, of the Bessie Head Heritage Trust (Gaborone) and she has published on Bessie Head, on the introduction of literacy in southern Africa with a particular emphasis on Lesotho and Botswana, and on the “small literatures” of South Africa, including Afrikaans.

Lola Shoneyin - Nigeria
Lola Shoneyin is a Nigerian writer and poet whose first novel, The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives(2009), was received with great acclaim. Her skillful and humorous handling of the often controversial subject of polygamy added to the book’s appeal. Shoneyin’s poetry books have also amassed a wide following, and favourable reviews and includes, So All The Time I was Sitting on an Egg, (her first poetry volume, 1998), Song of a Riverbird and the recently released For the Love of Flight (Feb 2010). This success, however, has not stopped this prolific mother of four, and deputy school principal, to even breathe for a minute’s rest. During July 2010, Mayowa and the Masquerades, a children’s book, was published. She has also published a short story ‘Woman in Her Season’, in 1998. She is married to Olooluk Soyinka, a medical doctor.

Luli Callinicos
Luli Callinicos is a social historian of South Africa. She was involved from the mid-1970s in writing history for adult Black workers with little formal education. She worked first for the Metal and Allied Workers Union and then for The World newspaper in Johannesburg, which was banned in 1977. She was a founding member of the History Workshop of University of the Witwatersrand and also the Workers’ Library in Johannesburg. She wrote the three-volume People’s History of South Africa, a biography of Oliver Tambo, and other books about South African people’s history.
Lynda Gichanda Spencer - Uganda/SA
Ms Lynda Gichanda Spencer is a Lecturer in the Department of English at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She has taught in the field of English Studies at the University of South Africa and Vista University, Mamelodi Campus. She graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa with a Masters in African Literature. Her research interests include Contemporary women's writing. Popular Culture in Africa, African women's writing, East African fiction and African Studies. She is currently working on her PhD which explores contemporary women's writing from Uganda and South Africa. •

Margaret Busby - United Kingdom
Margaret Busby OBE is an award-winning writer, editor, critic, consultant and broadcaster. She edited Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of words and writing by women of African descent (1992), and has contributed to many publications. Margaret is also an ardent campaigner for diversity in publishing, co-founding GAP (Greater Access To Publishing). She is currently patron of Independent Black Publishers (IBP) and a member of the Arts Council's Diversity in Publishing, steering group. •

Masechaba Gloria Moshoeshoe - SA
Masechaba Gloria Moshoeshoe is a South African actress, television presenter, radio host and voice over artist, best known for hosting the talk show The Big Question. Moshoeshoe was born on the East Rand, in Katerheong. She was still studying at Wits University when she first got involved in television. She started off as a sports presenter on the former TV1's Junior TopSport and SABC's ex Astra Sat, a satellite channel. She then moved onto live television with TV education's Tsitsimani, an interactive one-and-a-half hour show filled with interviews with educators, learners, inventors and government. She has presented a number of television programs such as Beyond on 3 and Getting PC. She has also presented TV shows like Morning Live and Motswako, which she also worked on as Producer. Her acting career began in the soapie, Isidingo, where she played no-nonsense newspaper editor, Selpadi Khumalo. She has since played legal eagle Dineo Mbathe - a prosecutor in Justice for All 1 and 2 - and currently hosts Kaya Talk, a Current Affairs and Lifestyle Talk Show on Kaya FM 95.9. Other television shows she has appeared on include Yizo Yizo and Crossing the Line. •

Maureen Isaacson - SA
Maureen Isaacson has been involved in journalism for over two decades. She founded the Sunday Independent's books pages in 1996 and is currently the assistant editor and books editor of the Sunday Independent, where she writes a regular political profile. She previously served as a judge for the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and has published a collection of short stories, Holding Back Midnight. Her short stories have also appeared in several anthologies. A story, called “Spy,” garnered the local vita/scotiaworld /Commonwealth Writer’s Prize and has published a collection of short stories, Holding Back Midnight. Her research interests include Contemporary women’s writing, Popular Culture in Africa, African women’s writing, East African fiction and African Studies. She is currently working on her PhD which explores contemporary women’s writing from Uganda and South Africa. •

Miriam Tlali - SA
Miriam Tlali was born in Doornfontein, Johannesburg in 1933 and grew up in Sophiatown. Tlali enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand, but was not admitted due to the reservation of positions for white students. She later went to University of Lesotho (then called Pius the XII University), of Roma, but could not complete her studies due to financial difficulties. It was her employment as a bookkeeper of a Johannesburg furniture store that prompted her to write her first novel, Muriel at Metropolitan. Completed in 1969, the book was only published in 1975, and subsequently banned in 1979. Tlali was co-founder and a contributor of Staffrider magazine, which aimed at providing an outlet for anti-apartheid creative writing by blacks and penned a regular column, “Soweto Speaking”. Amandla, a novel based on the 1976 Soweto riots, was published in 1980. It was well-received and sold a remarkable successful 9 000 copies in a few weeks, but was banned immediately thereafter. Both novels were translated into several other languages, including Dutch, Japanese, Polish and German. They were unbanned in 1986. Tlali wrote a play, Crime Injuria, whilst on scholarship in the Netherlands, and it was presented both in Holland and the USA. Mihloti is a collection of short stories, interviews and non-fiction and was published in 1984 by Skotaville Press, a black publishing house of which she was the founding member. Footprints in the Quag was published initially as Soweto Stories by Pandora Press in 1989. Tlali was a visiting scholar at the Southern African Research Program at Yale University between 1989 and 1990. In 2001, she was honoured as the first African woman to publish a novel in South Africa by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. In 2005, she was again honoured by the Department as a recipient of their Literary Lifetime Achievement Award. As a member of the Women’s National Coalition, she assisted in drafting the Preamble to the South African Women’s Charter. •

Nokuthula Mazibuko - SA
Nokuthula Mazibuko, writer and filmmaker, was born in 1973 in Soweto, South Africa. She is writer and director of the documentary films Lady Was a Mshoza (1999) and The Gift of Song (2000). Her films on South African writers have appeared in the series Mantswa a Bonona (2005). A writer for numerous educational television and radio programs, she spent two years with the BBC’s African Bureau as a director and producer of news and short features. Ms. Mazibuko has published two novellas for young people, In the Fast Lane (2003) and A Mozambican Summer (2006). She is currently World Literature Residency fellow at George Washington University, in Washington, DC. •

Nosipho Kota - SA
Nosipho Kota is an award winning journalist. In 2001 she won the first ever Eastern Cape Vodacom Journalist of the Year Award for a feature story she wrote on the passing of one of the ANC stalwarts, Oom Govan Mbeki. Again, in 2002 and 2003 she won in the regional competition in the specialist and feature categories. Recently, the O magazine ran a Bailey’s write-in competition where you had to describe your one defining moment. She was one of the finalists in the competition and they had her story published in the December 2007 issue. Kota is also a poet whose work has been published in the following literary magazines, Carapace, Fidelities, Artreach, Writing from Here, Parking Space, New Coin, Botsotso, Timbila, Nobody Ever Said. She has published a poetry collection called Bare Soul. •

Samira Negrouche - Algeria
Samira Negrouche is a French speaking Algerian poet and author, living in Algiers. She is a medical doctor, also working on the organization of literary and poetry events. She is the author of several poetry collections, amongst others: “À l’ombre de Grenade,” 2003; “Iri dense,” 2005 and “Cabinet Secret,” book-work with Enan Burgos, 2007. Negrouche also translates Arabic poetry and has worked on interdisciplinary projects with theatre, video, photography as well as plastic arts. Her last lecture/show “sans précaution” was presented with the Greek singer Angélique Ionatos at the Musée
Seatholo Masego Tumedi - Botswana
Seatholo Masego Tumedi is a lecturer in English at the University of Botswana. Her research interests include media practice, the literary and oral traditions. She is currently chairing a National Working Group on a CODESRIA-sponsored research project titled "A Study of Botswana Biographies: The Dynamics of Human Development".

Shailja Patel - Kenya/USA
Trained as a political economist, accountant, and yoga teacher, Kenyan writer Shailja Patel has swum many oceans: shark-infested currents of corporate London, swirling seas of monastic life, high surf of slam poetry, riptides of global activism. She always returns to her natal waters - the Indian Ocean off the coast of East Africa. Shailja’s poetry and theatre have won awards on three continents, been translated into 12 languages, and toured internationally. Her book, MIGRITUDE, is forthcoming from Kaya Press in October 2010. Her latest play, Bwagamoyo, was selected for the 2010 Sundance Theatre Lab. She is a founding member of Kenyans for Peace, Truth and Justice. Her ground breaking project to train Kenyan activists in advocacy garnered a LEAP grant from New Tactics in Human Rights, one of only seven awarded globally, and is now a fully-fledged social justice fellowship program in Kenya. CNN says Patel “exemplifies globalization as a people-centered phenomenon of migration and exchange.” The Gulf Today (United Arab Emirates) calls her “the poetic equivalent of Arundhati Roy.”

Veronique Tadjo - Ivory Coast /France
Véronique Tadjo is a poet, novelist and writer of books for young people. She is also a painter and illustrator. Born in Paris, of an Ivorian father and a French mother, she was brought up in Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire). She has a doctorate in African American Studies from the Sorbonne Paris IV and has traveled extensively in West Africa, Europe, USA and Latin America. Her work has been translated in several languages. She has written L’ombre d’Imana (The Shadow of Imana, Heinemann AWS, 2000) on the genocide in Rwanda. Her novel Reine Pokou (Queen Pokou, Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2009) was awarded the prestigious literary prize “Le Grand Prix Littéraire d’Afrique Noire” in 2005. As the Crow Flies, her ground-breaking novel was republished by Penguin South Africa in 2009. Her new work, Loin de mon Père (Away from My Father) in May 2010. She is Head of French Studies in the School of Literatures, Language and Cultural Studies of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

Zubeida Jaffer - SA
Zubeida Jaffer has been a journalist for the past 27 years. She works independently from her home in Wynberg, Cape Town and is an Honorary Research Associate of the University of Cape Town’s Centre for African Studies. She holds an MSc degree in Journalism from Columbia University in New York and Bachelor Degrees from Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town. She started her career at the Cape Times in 1980 and also spent a short stint at the Rand Daily Mail in Johannesburg. She has written for a wide-range of publications in South Africa and abroad, earning numerous local and international awards. These include the Muslim Views Achiever Award as well as the Honor Medal for Distinguished Service to Journalism from the University of Missouri in the USA.

She is also the first woman in Africa to have won the coveted foreign journalist award from the National Association of Black Journalists in the USA. Her memoir, Our Generation, eloquently tells the story of her emotional journey through the years of South Africa’s turbulence into a new democracy. Her latest book, Love in the Time of Treason, has been described as a tour de force.

Zukiswa Wanner - SA
Zukiswa Wanner is a writer, a mother, an African, and a woman (in that order and prides herself on playing all roles equally well). A 2007 nominee of the K.Sello Duiker Award for her first novel, The Modams (Oshun 2006), she is also the author of Behind Every Successful Man (Kwela 2008). A prolific writer, she has contributed critical essays, short stories, reviews and articles to OpenSociety, African Writing, Wordsetc, Boobob, Sunday Independent, Sunday Times, True Love, O, Elle, and Destiny. She is also one of the team of writers on SAFM’s radio soapie, and is a blogger for the online literary journal African Writing.