

Malibongwe.

Sono Molefe (ed.).

Durban: Uhlanga Press, 2020. 192 pp.

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On 9 August 2020 *Malibongwe* was launched in South Africa for the first time. This was an historic occasion for two reasons: the launch was virtual because of the lockdown regulations which made gathering in person impossible and this was the first time that this transnational anthology produced by freedom fighters in exile was launched to a South African audience since it was originally published in 1980 in Sweden.

This multivocal edition of the anthology includes the original preface written by Lindiwe Mabuza (Sono Molefe), a new preface by Uhuru Phalafala, an introduction by Makhosazana Xaba and the original poems. Some of the poems are written by women who now find themselves in political positions in post-apartheid South Africa (such as Baleka Mbete and Lindiwe Mabuza), some have since passed away and others no longer write and have disappeared from the cultural and political imagination. The lives of the freedom fighters whose poetry is featured in this anthology beg the question: who is a poet? Makhosazana Xaba (13) refers to the women featured in the anthology as comrades-cum-poets. The idea that women in MK camps—freedom fighters training for an armed struggle—in exile would have been aspiring writers and poets has not featured in the country's understanding of their lives.

In her preface, Phalafala highlights the significance of this anthology by mapping out its transnational life and the resonance it had globally as it was translated into a myriad of European languages. This is the irony of the collection: it was able to have international reach and yet it has taken 26 years since the political shift from apartheid to democracy for the book to be published in South Africa. While it is fitting to celebrate this collection's new season in South Africa, it is also important to hold the celebration together with questions of erasure and why it has taken so long for this anthology to become part of the South African literary landscape. Phalafala's experience teaching Black Consciousness poetry by men for almost seven years left her uneasy and she was "nagged by the silence and absence of women in that unfolding radical moment" (8). This is the nature of erasure in South Africa's academy: an overwhelming presence of writing by men even while the question 'where are the women' has been consistently posed in order to challenge the erasure of women. This anthology is the answer to

that nagging feeling and the challenge to the erasure of women's writing.

The original foreword written by Sono Molefe (Lindiwe Mabuza) in 1982 begins, "Suddenly there are women poets from South Africa." These words seem to be in conversation with the challenges women had in other literary communities. In 1989 Boitumelo Mofokeng had written a review essay in response to *Staffrider's* commemorative edition of its ten-year existence. In her essay she posed the question "where are the women?" (41), because the edition had left out the work and the names of most of the women who had contributed to *Staffrider* in the ten years of its existence. Both Mofokeng and Molefe echo the concern about the ways in which women's writing can fall through the cracks of history making. And, seemingly, Phalafala is doing the same by resuscitating this anthology in 2020.

Even while the tradition of black women's published poetry stretches as far back as the 1920s with the poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho (and further back if oral poetry by women could be traced) there is still a need for every publication of women's writing to be a historical event because of the ever-present danger of erasure. For Xaba, this anthology is particularly important for younger writers and researchers who fall into the traps of recency. This anthology is especially important in this regard because it "excavates the names of poets whose wrinkled hands contemporary Black women poets need to know about and then acknowledge whichever way they see fit." (12) These poems are not only part of the feminist intellectual history and archive but are also part of the imaginative worlds of women who dreamt about the future we now experience.

The anthology includes incisive protest poetry, which is at times sharp and at times tender and heart-breaking. There are six sections in the anthology: "Africa shall be free", "Birth and genocide", "Spirit of Soweto: the ghetto, massacres, resolve", "Women in struggle", "Our men who fought and died and fight" and "Phases of struggle: resolution, exile, perspective, love, call to justice and arms". Each of the poems find resonance with questions about how to make freedom meaningful; questions that continue to plague South Africa. The poems point to the unfinished work of the liberation movement because the past refuses to leave us alone. Lindiwe Mabuza's "Super-women (Grown by apartheid)" invokes the women who "sing the amen of vigilance" (96). This "amen" reverberates into the present and the future. Even while the past refuses to be forgotten, the future is still a possibility, as Ilva MacKay points to in her poem "Mayibuye": "the sons

and daughters of Africa remained hopeful / one day /
some day / our mother will be returned to us” (84).

Work Cited

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Athambile Masola

Athambile.masola@up.ac.za

University of Pretoria

Tshwane, South Africa

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9550-7944>

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