

Township Girls: The Cross-Over Generation.

Nomsa Mwamuka, Farai Mpsaunga Mpfu & Wadzanai Garwe (eds.).

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The award-winning author Panashe Chigumadzi, born in Zimbabwe and raised in South Africa, reviewed this book for the *Johannesburg Review of Books*. Her coda: “*Township Girls*, then, provides a significant first step in documenting some of the good, bad and ugly wrapped up in the under-explored social and cultural histories of Zimbabwe’s transition. The more we document these stories, the greater our ability to reflect on, and demand more of, our world-views in the past, present and future.”

I agree. I want to add the worth-repeating-though-obvious point that “these stories” ought to focus more and more on the lives of women for obvious reasons. Often when countries undergo major political transitions as Zimbabwe and South Africa have in the recent past, the voices, ideas and stories of women tend to sit in the periphery and sometimes are erased

altogether as the male leaders, heroes and later stalwarts occupy the largest space in books, documentaries and archives.

Moyo writes in the foreword to the book that the contributors to *Township Girls* are “lawyers, doctors, businesswomen and other professionals [...]. [M]any were hitherto unpublished authors [...]”. This then is the ultimate value of this book—bringing into the world voices that have been hitherto unheard. Discourses on life narratives as genre are mired in fascinating debates and conversations as those of us keen on this type of own-storytelling have come to learn: “[...] the historically situated practices of self-representation may take many guises as narrators *selectively* engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling” (emphasis in original).

What then have the contributors to *Township Girls* selected to share and in what form? There are 32 contributors whose brief biographies appear on pages ix–xvii of the book. Emelda (Emmy) Musariri’s name and biography appears on page xiv as a continuation of Wynne Musabayana’s biography, and is therefore easy to miss. This is an unfortunate mistake because Emelda happens to be the only contributor who has died (1963–2014) and her name is mentioned in the dedication. There are 31 titles listed numerically on the contents page. “With these hands”, a poem by Chiyedza Nyahuye, is mentioned on the contents page below “Introduction” but does not appear anywhere in the book. Contributor Tsitsi Elaine Tsopotsa’s story is numbered 15 and entitled “British Africans” on the contents page. The story appears on pages 140–7, but her biography is missing from the biography section of the book. The names of the people in the photographs are not cited, let alone the photographers. The publishers declare: “Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher and editors assume no responsibility for *errors or omissions*” (emphasis in original).

I noticed the errors and omissions as I was navigating my way through the book, reviewer-style. For instance, I read each contributor’s biography after reading their story. That was my flow. The missing poem “With these hands” was a disappointment because I rushed to find it after reading the title in the contents page, because my first collection of poetry is called *These hands* (2005 and 2017). It is my sincere hope that for the next edition the publisher and editors will address these errors and omissions.

I now comment on some of the categories of the book. In the poetry category there are three poems: “Raging silence” by Nyasha P. Katedza, “Township Girl

Made Good” by Farayi Mangwende and “19 & 39: A mother and daughter remember” by Nyarai Majuru and Manyara Matambanadzo. The mother and daughter poem is unique for the reason that it tells two stories in one poem. The story in this poem is presented with unusual creativity wherein the mother-daughter bond is not only referred to but also shown in the flow of the poem.

The power in the poem “Raging silence” sits in the language used as it keeps shifting between the loudness of war and the silence demanded of children by their parents. The poem brings to life the reality of war in the ordinary lives of people. The poem ends with a crescendo that makes palpable the impact of war on this family’s life.

The second category is a welcome contribution entitled “Kunaka Kunonakira Anoda Zvonaka Nemworo Chigariro”, written predominantly in Shona by Tambudzai Muzenda. The minimal English I could read introduced war into the narrative, like the others: “We started hearing of violence, the war in Somalia, hunger, Nelson Mandela, mabhunu down south—trying to silence the voice of Africa, Vietnam, Pope and his obsession about sexuality, and talk against female genital mutilation”. Here is an international political potjiekos in one paragraph!

Another category uses the motivational mode throughout the ‘story’ by Geraldine Chengetai Matchab called “My Grinding Truths” in which she shares her four truths about life. A fair number of contributions are written in that direct motivational style, particularly in their last paragraphs. See for instance Runyararo Bertha Faranisi’s “Embrace your idiosyncrasies and enjoy your journey, only you have a deep understanding of where you are now and where you want to be”. Cathrine Chitiyo ends by encouraging everyone not only to record their memories, “but also those of your parents and relatives”.

An interesting category of carefully selected slices of girlhood consists of contributions in which writers choose to focus on one or very few memorable event(s) of their girlhood, as in Spiwe Kachidza-Mapfunos’ “My Life Story: Still Standing”, wherein she remembers Father Giovanni, an Italian Roman Catholic Priest who had a life-changing impact on her.

Other stories go beyond girlhood by sweeping the narration over to adulthood so that instead of reading about one small window into a life you feel that you are reading a broad-strokes summary of a whole life. One story that does this exquisitely is “From Mbaresburg to the BAFTAS” by Xoliswa Sithole.

Township Girls also shores up class issues among Black Zimbabweans. It is indeed a welcome read.

Work Cited

Chigumadzi, Panashe. “Bearing Witness to Unusual Childhoods of Privilege Under Oppression—Panashe Chigumadzi Reviews *Township Girls: The Cross-over Generation*”. *Johannesburg Review of Books*. 5 Aug. 2019. <https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2019/08/05/bearing-witness-to-unusual-childhoods-of-privilege-under-oppression-panashe-chigumadzi-reviews-township-girls-the-cross-over-generation/>.

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