



Meeting Daisy Makiwane...

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Citation for published version (APA):

Newby, A. (2015, Oct 6). Meeting Daisy Makiwane... Reading Race, Collecting Cultures - The Roving Reader Files. Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre. <https://aiucentre.wordpress.com/2015/10/06/meeting-daisy-makiwane/>

Citing this paper

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Reading Race, Collecting Cultures

Collections at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre



Posted on 06/10/2015

Meeting Daisy Makiwane...

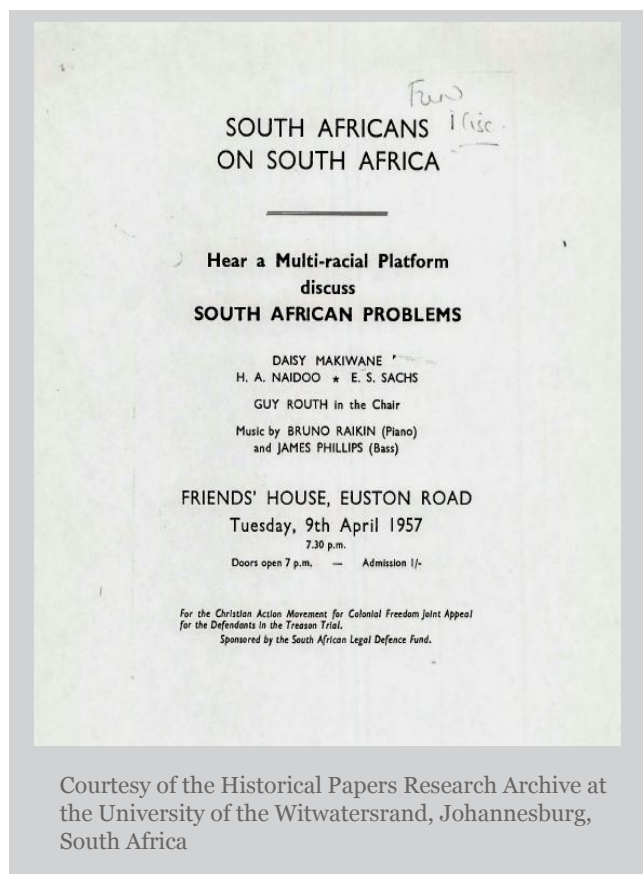


The Roving Reader Files

Previously we pored over correspondence revealing how Tennyson Makiwane got to the UK in 1959. Bringing an authentic Black South African voice to early UK anti-apartheid proceedings, he was crucial to the success of the Boycott Movement of 1959 to 1960. Tennyson Makiwane was a public figure, appearing before crowds and rallying support for his cause. But what about his sister Daisy?

Like countless individuals before and after (especially women), Daisy Makiwane has all but slipped into the uncharted shadows of history. Although we now know she was a significant player in transmitting the funds for Tennyson to travel to the UK, we have to admit that little survives concerning Daisy herself.

But hold on there! Take a look at this flyer...



Courtesy of the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Promoting a discussion on 'South African Problems' by South Africans, it invites everyone to an event held in London on Tuesday 9 April 1957. Boasting a multi-racial platform, who does it include? H.A. Naidoo and E.S. (Solly) Sachs (South Africans of Indian and Lithuanian Jewish heritage) – and Daisy Makiwane! Could this be a shaft of light illuminating a moment in the life of someone who might otherwise be forgotten?

Let's take a look. What do we learn? Well, for a shilling each (5 pence to you and me) we could all walk into the Quaker Friends' House on Euston Road to listen to a South African Black woman, Indian and Jew discuss the dire issues facing their country. Anyone with an interest in South Africa just had to attend. Pass law protests, major strikes and the Treason Trial were very aromatic.

The sponsor of the event was the South African Legal Defence Fund – for Christian Action and The Movement for Colonial Freedom. Specifically intended to raise money to support the defendants in the Treason Trial, this bore unmistakable traces of Canon John Collins and his activists in Amen Court. We know from **last time** how prolific he was in opposing apartheid in any peaceful way he could.

And who was the chairman? None other than Guy Routh. Remembered as an economist and lecturer at the School of African & Asian Studies at the University of Sussex, he was also the South African descendent of generations of Scottish-origin doctors and missionaries. Married to an Afrikaner and living outside his country, he was active in everything anti-apartheid.

Even the entertainment holds a message. Singer James Phillips was in fact a member of the ANC and Communist Party of South Africa, as well as a great friend of Solly Sachs. Like Phillips, Sachs and Naidoo were prominent trades unionists and communists, also having fled into exile due to the increasing implementation of the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act.

So on that evening in April 1957, almost two years before her brother hit the scene, Daisy Makiwane was standing shoulder to shoulder with émigré stalwarts of opposition to apartheid. People who had sacrificed much to live up to their principles.

The Makiwanes were a prominent Transkei family. Tennyson had studied law and was a defendant in the Treason Trial. Although I haven't unearthed why or when Daisy came to the UK, it's clear her participation in the 1957 discussion would have added a very personal note to the exchange of ideas. By early 1959, as we know, she was still active in advocating the interests of her brother as he illegally left his country for that conference in Cairo...

Our good friend Manu Herbstein recalls living in London from mid-1959. He lodged in the same student hostel as Daisy. Whilst he made do with crashing out on a bunk bed in a dormitory, she resided in possibly the only single room. Housing mainly Indian and Malaysian students, this hostel was where she introduced Manu to Tennyson and Mazisi Kunene (then ANC representative in London).

So the flyer, Manu Herbstein and the correspondence discovered in the People's History Museum shed new light on Daisy as an active participant in agitating for reform in South Africa, doing what she could to inform whoever would listen and to help raise funds. In these émigré circles, she had a unique voice as a Black woman and a Makiwane. Hers was evidently by no means a glamorous existence in late-1950s London, but as part of this multi-racial group furthering the cause of equality, she must have felt her efforts were worthwhile.

This brief glimpse of Daisy has caused me to feel sad. Why do we know so little about such individuals, whose lives have gone so unrecorded, yet who contributed to so great a cause? It's only by chance that we know anything at all.

Part of the Centre's mission is to preserve the stories of people of colour which would otherwise sink beyond trace. Some of the questions raised in the recent post about the **Future of Women's Pasts conference** could well be asked here. What can we all do to avoid knowing so little in the future?

Once again, I'm grateful to Manu Herbstein, who was kind enough to permit us to share with you his personal reminiscences. Thanks also to Michele Pickover

(Principal Curator, Archives and Digital Library, **Historical Papers Research Archive**, The University of the Witwatersrand) for giving permission for the inclusion of the image of the flyer. This can be found in the **Records of the 1956 Treason Trial**, Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.