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Jabavu's journey

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SECTION: 2

CREATIVE WRITING

A Preliminary Chronology of Noni's Life[1]

1919	Born in Alice, on 20 August. Four months later, her elder sister died.
1921	Her grandfather John Tengo (J.T.) Jabavu died.
1933	Left South Africa for England, to school in York & later Birmingham.
1939	Recruited to work at a munitions factory during World War Two.
1941	Married 1st husband (my calculated guess, year not confirmed).
1942	Gave birth to daughter Tembi.
1945	Married 2nd husband.
1951	Her mother Florence Thandiswa nee Makiwane died.
1951	Married 3rd husband Michael Cadbury Crosfield.
1955	Her only brother, Tengo died. He was 26.
1955 - 1960	Lived in Uganda with husband Michael Cadbury Crosfield who set up the Uganda Colonial Film Unit.
1959	Her father, Davidson Don Tengo (D.D.T.) died.
1960	First book *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts* published in London.
1961	Published Italian translation, *Il colore della pelle* of *Drawn in colour* in Italy.
1961 - 1962	**Appointed editor at *The New Strand* magazine in London.**[2]
1962 - 1967	Lived in Jamaica.
1963	Published second book *The Ochre people* in London.
1967 - 1977	Lived in Nairobi, Kenya.
1977	**Wrote a weekly column for the *Daily Dispatch* in East London, South Africa, visiting home in Kenya at intervals.**[3]
1978 - 1979	Lived in Zimbabwe.
1979 - 1980	Lived in UK as a refugee, while Zimbabwe was undergoing pre – liberation political changes.
1981 - 2002	Lived in Zimbabwe writes for *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail*
1997	Her only daughter Tembi died at 55.
2002 - present	**Lives at the Lynette Elliot Frail Care Home in East London, South Africa.**[4]

[1] Information in this preliminary chronology is from a range of sources starting with Noni's writings: Editorials of the *New Strand* magazine; columns of the *Daily Dispatch* newspaper; her books *Drawn in colour* and *The Ochre People* and her letters. Information on her grandfather J.T. is from the book, *The Life of John Tengo Jabavu, Editor of Imvo Zabantsundu* 1884 – 1921 published by Loveday Press in 1922 written by Noni's father D.D.T. Information on the year Tembi died came from an interview with Virginia Phiri as well as the names of newspapers Noni wrote for while she was living in Zimbabwe. Magda Caravaggi supplied information on the Italian translation. Information on D.D.T.'s death year from a book by C. Higgs *Ghost of Equality*: *The Public Lives of D.D.T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1885 – 1959*, Ohio University Press, Athens David Phillip Cape Town and Johannesburg, Mayibuye books University of the Western Cape published in 1997. I have yet to uncover some glaringly missing details like her husbands' names, her elder sister's name and what work she did while living the countries mentioned.

[2] From this period I wrote *So unlikely an editor: 1961-1962*, the first chapter.

[3] From this period I wrote *A peripatetic columnist: 1977*, the second chapter.

[4] From this period I wrote *23 Allenby Road: 2002 – present*, the last chapter.

2.1 So unlikely an Editor: 1961 - 1962

By September 1961 when Noni, aged forty-two, started to work as the editor of *The New Strand* magazine her first book *Drawn in colour: African contrasts* had been reprinted five times. The book was first published by John Murray in London in 1960, then by Mandadori- Casa Editrice in Milan, Italy 1961 under the title *Il colore della pelle* and would later be published by *St. Martin's Press*, New York in 1962.

The publication of her first book made Noni a public literary figure. The case of a black African woman, a British citizen by marriage, being published by a mainstream publisher so long before the advent of a distinct, feminist British women's press that only began in the eighties was certainly an oddity for many a Briton. Editorship at *The New Strand* marked her first executive position and her first position in publishing. She distinguished herself as a groundbreaker by becoming the first black as well as the first woman to be editor of this prestigious magazine. In 1951 she had married Michael Cadbury Crosfield, an upper middle class British filmmaker with whom she lived in Uganda until she returned to England to take on the job at *The New Strand*. To those who knew Noni's family history her successes were merely a case of an apple falling close to the tree.

The original *The Strand* magazine (1891-1950) founded by publisher George Newnes became one of the best known and most read monthly magazines of the 20th century. There were two editions, the UK (1891-1950).[87] In the UK *The Strand* soon became a trendsetter and one of the most popular fiction magazines renowned for great contributors of the time including: Grant Allen, Agatha Christie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Graham Greene, O. Henry, Anthony Hope, Rudyard Kipling, A. E. W. Mason, E. Nesbit, Leo Tolstoy, H. G. Wells and, P. G. Wodehouse to mention but a few. Even Queen Victoria and Winston Churchill are known to have contributed to *The Strand* at different times. During the Second World War *The Strand,* like many entrepreneurial entities, suffered. Costs rose and circulation fell. The magazine never recovered. By 1950, the magazine needed a quarter of a

million pounds to put it back on its feet. The owners lost hope of raising the money. In March 1950 *The Strand* was forced to stop publication.[88]

The press was agog with announcements that the old *The Strand* magazine would be revived under the new name *The New Strand* and that Noni would be at its helm thus joining the "august ranks of London's editors." She would be walking on the illustrious path paved by the magazine's former editors: Herbert Greenhough Smith (1891-1930); Reeves Shaw (1930-Sep. 1941); R.J. Minney (Oct. 1941-Dec. 1941); Reginald Pound (1942-1946) and; Macdonald Hastings (1946-1950).[89]

Noni made history by being the first black and the first woman to become an editor at *The New Strand.* As she had been born in South Africa her British citizenship was an acquired one. Interestingly, she openly disliked the short story genre, a genre that was a distinguishing feature of the magazine. "I don't like short stories," (From The Editor's Desk [FTED], December 1961, p. 69) she wrote in her first editorial column but had taken the job anyway. Why?

Noni had crystal clarity about the writers she wanted to attract, the changes she planned to introduce. The challenge seemed to be her driving force. In the first editorial of the issue that came out in December 1961 she wrote,

> *The New Strand* that is in my mind's eye is a platform for men and women who today wait in the wings of public life because they are young and therefore not yet prominent; but being young, vivid, racy, up-and-coming count and will do so in five, ten, fifteen years' time when the rest of us won't amount to a row of beans. (FTED, December 1961, p. 69)

When Noni agreed to take the job she was convinced that the old *Strand* needed new blood. That it required revival. That it was time it moved with the "trends". Between March 1950 and September 1961 much water had gone under the bridge. Understandably catching up with the times would have been a priority for a new editor worth her salt. The prestige of the old *Strand* also meant that Noni's challenge was mammoth. Although she had declared her dislike for short stories she was willing to introduce changes albeit slowly. She articulated her vision of the kind of writing she wanted the revived magazine to carry:

> My ideal contemporary *Strand* would sizzle with satire – Peter Ustinov; pulsate with paradoxical paragraphs – Peregrine Worsthorne; lilt with elliptical political grace – James Cameron; with an Osbert Lancastrian eye sardonically survey the scene. Short stories, in my opinion, are not the weapon to deal with current life. The very idea of a short story for nowadays is too leisurely, lethargic, tired. Contemporaneous times call for the racy, the vivid, the snappy. Short stories are just not 'with it': they have had their day. (FTED, December 1961, p. 69.)

Who were these people that Noni invoked with such literary verve? Can we learn more about her from knowing who they were? Would knowing the smallest thing about them open to us a window into Noni the woman, the writer. Would the window lead us to better understand her vision for the magazine and the professional editor she was becoming?

Sir Peter Ustinov (1921-2003) just two years younger than Noni wrote an autobiography, short stories, plays, screenplays, directed films, plays and operas. He became an internationally acclaimed movie star who won two Best Supporting Actor Oscars for *Spartacus*, 1960, and later, *Topkapi*, 1964.[90] Like Noni's father D.D.T. who was fluent in seven languages Ustinov spoke many languages. He was fluent in French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish, and could also speak Greek and Turkish. Ustinov was fondly known as a great raconteur, mimic and eccentric. Ustinov was known to publicly announce that he was "*not English*" claiming his half Russian heritage though he was born in England. Similarly Noni is known for having asserted her dual loyalties to South Africa and England. Ustinov also became well known for his ambassadorial role while working with the UNICEF.[91]

Sir Peregrine Worsthorne was one of England's most distinguished and outspoken political commentators and newspaper editors - he worked at *The Daily Telegraph* between 1953 and 1961 and for twenty-eight years at *The Sunday Telegraph*, spending five years as deputy editor and three as editor.[92] Like Noni, he was a journalist and an editor.

James Cameron (1911-1985) first worked for the *Daily News* as an office boy soon after leaving school,[93] similarly Noni's grandfather J.T. who while finishing his studies worked for three years as an apprentice at the *Isigijimi samaXhosa* a journal of Lovedale Mission. In 1940 Cameron joined the *Daily Express* 1940. In 1950 Cameron wrote a piece about the way that the South Koreans were treating their political prisoners a piece that resulted in his boss Hopkinson's resignation because Edward G. Hulton the owner of the magazine considered the article to be "communist propaganda".[94] Noni's grandfather J.T. had his newspaper *Imvo Zabantsundu* closed down in 1906 for having run stories on the Bhambatha rebellion.[95] Cameron covered world events for the Daily Chronicle (1952-60). He must have begun writing his first book when Noni became editor at *The New Strand.* His books include *Men of our time* (1963), *Witness in Vietnam* (1966) and *Cameron Country* (1984). And, like Noni, Cameron later wrote an autobiography, *Point of Departure* (1967).[96]

There are fascinating parallels between these aristocrats and upper and middle class journalists and writers that Noni mentioned, and her life and family history. She fully embraced her identity as a member of the elite by birth, by family of adoption, later by marriage and inevitably by association. She had read and admired their writings and she envisioned *The New Strand* with a style and character similar to these.

> A look through the five editorial columns she wrote during her tenure from December 1961 to April 1962 throws up a few themes that give us an idea of what was uppermost in her mind or rather what she needed to communicate in those days, those few months of her editorship. Noteworthy of her writing style in these editorial columns is her self-reflexivity. She was open about the issues she was grappling with at the time and she wrote about them from her personal perspective rather than that distant, editor-cum- philosopher-cum-intellectual perspective.

The most pervasive theme in her columns was identity, her identity as a writer and as an editor and entwined into this her writing process. "I do not feel like an editor," (FTED, p. 68) she wrote that December explaining how challenging the post was

for her as she was aware of an awesome sense of nostalgia that the mere mention of the magazine evoked. She saw *The New Strand* as needing to "genuflect to that celebrated predecessor with whom the name inevitably links it." She was conscious of the need to, through the first few issues of the magazine, build a bridge between the old and the new before she introduced changes that could be seen more as representative of "the Editor's personality".

Noni was concerned that by joining the other side, leaving the side of writers she "had gone over to the enemy." She believed strongly that writers needed to be paid decent fees. She admitted that "In secret, I even think: If *The New Strand* folds for paying princely fees, what a noble death." (FTED, December 1961, p. 70.)

In the January editorial Noni continued on the theme of her editor role. She wrote about how much she worries about her writers, how she had become totally involved and fascinated by their self-expressive efforts, how reading all the mail from them had become so overwhelming that she could not focus on her own writing. She seemed conflicted by her role when she wrote: "I've asked myself. 'What am I *doing*, bothering to do anything at all in such a mental climate – to edit, write, lecture or discuss the problems of the artist in our society?'" (FTED, January 1962, p. 103.) She thought a lot about and discussed with friends the value of her role, the place in society of writing and art in general. Her conclusion: "But of course, even as I ponder the futility and the futurelessness of what I do, I continue to do it against my intention to stop." (FTED, January 1962, p. 103.) She debated with others the significance of pitting artists against ordinary people, whether there was value in that at all, whether art and artists indeed made a difference in society. She believed strongly in the existence of a difference between artists and ordinary people – a difference that had to be recognized and valued. She was accused by one 'eminent critic' for climbing on to an 'African ivory tower of my own' for holding this view. Did Noni's short tenure as editor have anything to do with her ambivalence about her editor role? The skills required to be an editor are clearly different from those of writers and some writers do not cross the line easily for fear,

refusal and sometimes inability to give up the creativity and freedom that comes with writing.

In February Noni began her editorial like this:

> Jamaica in January; midwinter was Menton, next April in Alexandria. My travel diary seems bent on onomatopoeia, alliteration. Or is it bending that way because my mother tongue is an alliterative language? (From The Editor Abroad [FTEA], February1962, p. 196.)

This editorial stands out as the most passionate, most detailed, most penetrating and most revealing of her reflections on her writing process. It is also the most un-editor-like in appearance. It featured a full frontal picture of her at a beach, presumably in Jamaica, in swim wear (costume and cap), bare footed, right hand outstretched with a large shell the shape of a starfish in hand, palm trees and other coastal flora in the background with the headline "From The Editor Abroad" instead of the formal looking, bejewelled, hands on typewriter, head and shoulders shot of her two previous columns titled "From The Editor's Desk." She looked petite, casual, and relaxed, with eyes shooting seemingly shyly out of the page to see the reader; ordinary instead of the large, serious professional authority figure.

She had always been conscious of her writing process. She had struggled greatly while writing two novels that never saw the light of day. Just before her first book *Drawn in colour* was published she had an epiphany that she reflected on and wrote about reflectively. I quote in full this instructive paragraph:

> Then suddenly, in the Westminster flat that I had taken to work in (temporarily absenting myself from my forbearing family then living abroad), I awoke out of a deep sleep one night to find I was in a fever of excitement. My subconscious, burrowing away beneath the prolonged unhappiness, had hit on the deep-laid reason why I was in trouble with my writing. It was because all along, I had been trying without being aware, to make English sound and read like my own language. I had been writing long sentences, trying to force them into the shape that they would take in that language, with its alliterated concordial agreement of syllabic inflexion in suffixes and prefixes.

> This is the major characteristic of the South Africa tongue that I learned in infancy. (FTEA, February 1962, p. 196.)

Thus began her love of the English language. She likened this epiphany to falling in love, explored how love and affinity affects and inspires writers. At that time she was reading Cyril Connolly's book *Enemies of Promise*. She quoted extensively from Connolly's text to share with her readers how she was using Connolly's ideas to interrogate her writing process, engage with the English language and use it to her best ability.

Connolly (1903-1974) was a British author who began his writing career as a journalist. He founded the literary magazine *Horizon.* He also wrote for the *New Statesman*, the *Observer*, and the *Sunday Times*.[97] He was highly acclaimed as a critical book reviewer and by 1961 had written four books; *The Rock Pool* (1938), the autobiographical, *Enemies of Promise* (1938) and *The Unquiet Grave* (1944), a collection of aphorisms, reflections and essays and *The Condemned Playground* (1945).[98] Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* comprises in-depth observations about literature and the literary world of that time and a self-reflective analysis of his writings.[99] No wonder then Noni was engaging with his writings so intensely, so endearingly, so exhaustively. She quoted a passage wherein Connolly wrote about the relationship between artistic engagement with the art, inner isolation and the often resultant 'introversion, sentimentality and anxiety neurosis' Later Connolly wrote a literary collection *Previous Convictions* (1964) and the *Modern Movement: 100 Key Books From England, France, and America, 1880-1950* (1965). (1965). Conceivably Noni read these subsequent books if she continued to explore her writing process.[100]

By the end of this editorial Noni seemed to have resolved her dilemma at least in her head if not in practice. Again, worthy of a full quote:

> But my love affair with the English language opened out dimensions that I had not dreamt existed and which endure, are permanent. The effort that it costs me as I write, to try to pluck out of my system that deep in-laid infant training in fashioning majestic concordial alliteration of syllable; the effort to watch like a hawk that

> I don't get entangled in adjectives, adverbs, repetition of balanced phrases (devices which in English often weaken what you hope to stress, whereas in my inflected language their effect is different chiefly because the verb structure is developed to an extraordinary degree, positively wild); all this effort is almost enough to absorb anybody's energies. It almost eliminates those thoughts of confidence, of its lack, or of the need for artistic encouragement by someone – in my case I am a woman – by some man who seems brilliant, marvellous, magnificent, intellectually a veritable Hermes by Praxiteles with all that implies the creative urge. (FTEA, February 1962, p. 199.)

A reader of this passage would be forgiven for thinking this was a discussion on linguistics or a discourse analysis. This exposition of Noni is a passionate and inward looking engagement with her art. She actively used the lessons she was learning through her process with her writers. She wrote about how this self reflective process made her more critical of her writers' works. She met with them often in many of London's restaurants asking them piercing questions and having them clarify what exactly they meant in the manuscripts they submitted for consideration. As she was highly reflective with her own writing process she was able to see through the processes of these writers and help them although she was often conscious of the fact that unlike them, English was not her first language. .She engaged with their writing, put herself in their shoes and even wondered whether her level of engagement and encouragement of young writers was borne out of a maternal instinct. "How can you put pen to paper unless you've examined from every angle what you want to say in order to determine whether its worth saying?" (FTED, February 1962, p. 209.) is a question she says she asked many a young writer. It pleased her immensely to notice that some of these writers were excited to work with her constructive criticism. Ending her column with a sentimental note she confessed to missing her young writers and hoped that "they miss me too."

In this column she also shared with her readers one lesson that she valued. A lesson administered by her "literary doctor", Robert Graves, a friend, who advised her to learn from Joseph Conrad who had struggled, broken through the Polish barrier and wrote in English. This dose of advice seemed to have helped her resolve her

dilemma on multilingualism and of writing in a language not her mother tongue. As her writings attest Noni was scrupulous with her grammar, playful with her language and engaging and entertaining with her style. Her desire to master the skills of writing in a second language must have made her push herself.

In March, Noni began to engage with views from readers most of whom were seemingly disturbed by her first column declaration, "I do not like short stories." She also engaged with her contemporaries and fellow writers on the direction the magazine was taking. In this column she quoted at great length advice she received from Robert Graves. His advice was not limited to content and genre; he also advised her about the physical and aesthetic aspects of the magazine. Noni took his advice about keeping the short story genre. She had enormous respect for Robert Graves (1895- 1985) who was just ten years older than her father D.D.T. An English poet, classical scholar, novelist, and critic who produced some 140 books in his lifetime, Graves is perhaps best known for the historical novel *I, Claudius* (1934), with its sequel *Claudius, the God* (1943), autobiographical war memoirs, and the controversial study *The White Goddess* (1948), in which Graves rejects the patriarchal gods as sources of inspiration in favour of matriarchal powers of love and destructiveness.[101] In 1929 he published memoirs of the First World War entitled *Goodbye to all that* that speaks to his "development during and after the war. In order to overcome both the physical and psychological wounds incurred during the war…"[102] Graves was a resident professor of Poetry at Oxford when Noni went to visit him. As a result of this discussion with Graves Noni announced that she was not going to change the structure of the magazine. "Well those of you who agree with Robert Graves will be relieved to know that I have taken note of the opinion of the majority," she wrote. (FTED, March 1962, p. 325.)

Graves's father, Alfred, like Noni's father, worked in education; he was an inspector of schools, an editor of an Irish literary magazine, and a poet.[103] Robert Graves was acclaimed for his versatility as a writer and in all probability Noni took his advice on keeping the short story genre because she respected his across-the-board knowledge and writing experience.

Noni was also struggling with public expectations that she be the "visual aid" for her writing. Her first book was getting a lot of attention and reviews and she was frequently asked to speak about her book. She, on the other hand, expected readers to simply read her book. She again found comfort in Cyril Connolly's dictum "writers should be read, not seen."

In this editorial Noni also wrote about changes she had introduced in the office. As the number of manuscripts received averaged 312 a week and continued to increase, Noni had ceased to be the sole reader. They had introduced a system of readers that made judging the manuscripts fairer while reducing the load on her. She had an Associate Editor and the business side of the magazine was streamlined. She reminisced about the early months at *The New Strand* when the staff was small and she broke her fingernails trying to undo the "stout" cellophane-tape wrappings of the manuscripts.

The second theme in Noni's five editorials was her reading and writer community. Noni made reference to just over twenty writers in five editorials. She seemed to find answers and inspiration from other writers, quoted their work to make sense of what she was writing about, and made both direct and oblique references to their work in numerous instances.

Her favourites were Tchekov, Turgenev, and Thomas Hardy. She had hoped to "insert" them into the magazine to dilute the short story she so disliked. While listening to advice about not changing the short story genre she deliberately read Lord Donegal's manuscript on Sherlock Holmes-iana and was surprised at the pleasure she derived from it. In times of loneliness she re-read Arthur Koestler's *Dialogue with Death.* She quoted Connolly extensively. His *Enemy of Promise* became her "constant companion", then progressed to her book for that year and later her book for life. She also quoted Lord Tennyson's "flabby poem", Browning's *Home thought from Abroad,* Evelyn Waugh's paragraph on travel. While in Jamaica, reminiscing about its natural beauty she said she understood why

the West Indies had produced "magnificent" short story writers like Samuel Sevlon. She called Phillip Wills "On being a bird" a "treasure". She made reference to George *Orwell Road to Wigan Pier*, then The Duke of Windsor's writings on the West Indies, Sir Arthur Canon Doyle known as the magazine's most prolific contributor - from 1891 until 1930 when he died - and Angela Brazil her youth read. She was a friend to renowned writing guru Robert Graves and well-known Willie Sansom.

Ensconced in literature, her quotations made her points, her references read casually and naturally. She remembered lines and characters from books with ease. She clearly lived in and loved the world of books. In her last editorial, while in Kingston Jamaica she wrote about life in the tropics, "[…] I do not actually approve of life in the tropics. It is lush, conducive to sloth, self-indulgent. It is *disastrous* to the habit of reading books. One has to force oneself." (From A Mobile Desk, [FAMD] April 1962, p. 451). It is interesting to note that 1962 was the year in which Jamaica became independent. It was the year Noni moved to Jamaica which she called home until 1967. It was during a vibrant literary period. Since the massive post-World War Two migrations from the West Indies to Britain there had been a rise in literature by West Indian novelist and intellectuals. "The emergence of the West Indian novel, as a form, coincides with the great migration of the 1940s and 1950s and to a degree, was a consequence of it. The West Indian novel displayed a passionate concern for the West Indies – or properly, perhaps, for the author's respective island nation."[104] I have yet to uncover what exactly led Noni to move to Jamaica. It would not be surprising to learn that she had personal connections with one or some of these writers and intellectuals from the West Indies or that she was attracted to the idea of living in a politically independent state at a time when her own country seemed to be sinking deeper into a political abyss following the watershed 1961 massacre in Sharpville.

Noni was not shy about putting her vulnerabilities on a paper--another theme that loomed large in her editorials. She shared her private and often intense emotions with her readers in every issue. In her first editorial she was open about her

ambivalence about her role as an editor, upfront about her lack of experience in an executive position in publishing and forthright about her dislike for short stories. Any new editor was expected to be outspoken; however the manner in which she wrote about her emotions made them remarkable. On her editor role, and in truth-telling mode she wrote:

> Buffetted as I was at the time with waves of frankly frightening publicity, I could answer them only as I answered myself: "I did not feel like an editor." (FTED, December 1961, p. 68.)

The private and the public come together as one. She did not project a public image different from her private feelings. Touching honesty. On her feelings and experience of the short story genre, in a confessional style she wrote:

> I confess that my attitude to the art of the short story is a perpetual puzzle to me, deeply devoted as I am to some of its splendid practitioners…(FTED, December 1961, p. 69.)

A heartrending confession. Admitting to being perpetually puzzled by a genre while taking on a high powered position that expected, if not insisted on, enduring enlightenment may have come across as a weakness for some readers. Noni embraced the weakness. he named it, thus rose above it. On her response to the criticism of her plan to give the magazine a "face-lift" and in a self-aware demeanour she wrote, "Not being unduly obstinate, I noted their counsel." (FTED, December 1961, p. 70.)

Back to who she was, the personal penned for the public. She could have chosen to not recognize at least in public, her bending to pressure. She could have either stuck to her ideas, completely ignoring public opinion or given the impression that this was her choosing to change her mind. Instead she recognized others' input and her considered response to it. Her self-awareness came to the fore. On editors paying decent fees to writers and in a reflective frame of mind she asked, " At which point of wilful treachery I stop, ask myself: '*Am I talking writers rubbish? Where is the editor in me*?'"(FTED, December 1961, p.70.)

Conscious of her predicament, she let it be known. Curious for answers she directed the questions inward. Exposing her vulnerability yes, yet endearing.

In subsequent editorials Noni merged her everyday emotional life and experience with her professional public life and practice. She continued to share her daily life experiences with readers sliding seamlessly from one through to the next. "Midwinter in Menton," she began her February editorial. Then she moved to the weather, cloudy London, her childhood in South Africa, back to the people of Menton, driving to work everyday, encounters on the road en-route to work then a self-realization about her interactions with others:

> Noting the effect of sunny-tempered people, I too, have taken to smiling at others rather than scowling, however fiendish-faced the object of my advance may see to me. "They too have stresses, strains; one is not alone," I try to console myself. And my action has paid dividends, for you reap what you sow: worried hatchet faces smile back and cheer me on my way. Especially since the day in September on which I started my job as Editor of this magazine. (FTED, January 1962, p. 99.)

She exhibited a personal level of self-consciousness in human relations that many readers would have identified with. Again while writing about preparing an article on the subject of war and its effects, she moved from war to young married girlfriends whom she adored and how she often thought of them and "wept – literally – even in my office, indeed at the wheel of my traffic jammed motor-car when I have inadvertently heard a 'radiation' talk on my slender German transistor." (FTED, January 1962, p. 103.) This is Noni in context, Noni the ordinary woman who cries and worries about her friends. She ended this editorial with yet another self-exposing paragraph:

> However, you can't have everything; Midland mists would not have soothed my panic depression in December. Menton sun is therapeutic. (FTED, January 1962, p. 107.)

Presumably the panic depression she wrote about was related to the pressure of producing the first issue in December. Having started preparatory work for revamping the magazine in September the three months must have been very stressful. Again, she told it as it was.

In February she wrote emotionally about her writing process admitting her lack of confidence. In March most revealing were her feelings about being separated from her husband. Using very strong language she wrote about the "…ghastly panic. Manic unhappiness induced by being alone in one's home" and showed her readers the emotional impact of juggling work and family life. In April she was on a cruise, writing "From a mobile desk", while she and her husband were visiting people on different islands of the West Indies. Emotional anguish is replaced by a sense of settled serenity at being close to her husband. She reminisced about travel, its ups and downs but she was decidedly a happier, more settled Noni. How many editors are so open about their feelings? How many stay with their feelings in their writing of editorial columns? One of a kind?

Two of the five editorials Noni wrote have titles that suggest travel: *From the Editor Abroad* in February and *From a Mobile Desk* in April. In March she was back home in Menton and working from the London office. She wrote: "The month of March makes a halt in my current life of travel – the peripatetic print of *my* feet." (FTED, March 1962, p. 323.)

The 'peripatetic print' of her life it seems. Little did she know then that that the remainder of her life was to become that of a nomad. The month of March while she rested made Noni reflect on her travel. It's in this editorial that she spoke the most about her feelings on her punishing travel schedule. T he two paragraphs I quote in full give us a sense of how her work and travel were infused and what she thought of her travel.

Noni's travel schedule poses immense challenges for a biographer. The wish to draw a clear chronology of events is totally frustrated by "peripatetic" lives such as hers. Often in passing, she wrote about places she had been to. Even her readers seemed fascinated by her travel as this passage from her March editorial confirms:

> I find, this March, that writers for *The <u>New</u> Strand* scarcely sit down to our luncheon bottle of Nuits St. George before they ask: How do you edit the magazine

> stories, since you are perpetually on the wing, roving – Jamaica, United States, Europe, North Africa, wherever?"(FTED, March 1962, p. 323.)

The answer of course was staring them in their faces right from their very pages as she asserted in this explicit paragraph:

> As I "rove" round parts of the world and of England, writing this column for *The New Strand*, I am conscious of the happy group at the office and the extraordinarily good-humoured public that the magazine has. I feel that I am a lucky woman to have this. Why?
>
> Because travelling and roving brings its *miseries* – yes, miseries; "quarters of an hour" that are far from gay or as glamorous as they see; mornings of loneliness and distress because enforced separation from one's family and other nearest and dearest. It is not all fun and games, believe me. (FTED, March 1962, p. 327.)

With palpable nostalgia she wrote about her travels to or comparisons with South Africa now and again. Short though her stay was at the magazine, her historical imprint cannot be erased.

2.2. A peripatetic columnist: 1977

From January to December in 1977 Noni wrote a weekly column for the *Daily Dispatch*, a newspaper based in East London in the eastern region of the then Cape Province. She was fifty-eight years old. The newspaper was 105 years old. Established in 1872 as a four-page biweekly tabloid selling for three pence under the editorship of Massey Hicks. By 1977 its circulation had increased from 18 000 to 33 000.[105] Donald Woods was at its helm.

Woods was appointed in February 1965. He was thirty-one years old, had "all-round experience as reporter, sub-editor, political correspondent, parliamentary correspondent, columnist/leader writer, assistant editor and deputy editor."[106] He was born in Elliotdale, Transkei on December 15, 1933, the year Noni left South Africa. In 1965, the year of his appointment, Noni was living in Jamaica.

The sixties were years when significant changes were introduced at the newspaper. A daily page especially for women was introduced in 1961. Gordon Qumza was the first black man appointed to the editorial staff in 1963. Numerous technological changes were introduced in order to modernise the newspaper.

When Woods was appointed the circulation figure was sitting at 18 000. The ideological imperative of the newspaper was so germane to its image that when Woods was appointed its chairman and managing director, Mr. I.D. Ross-Thompson, wrote a letter reminding Woods of the paper's policy of 'fair treatment for all races'.[107] Woods' personal sense of justice led him to embrace the newspaper's ideological standpoint without qualms.

Innovative, enthusiastic and vehemently anti-apartheid Woods introduced even more changes. He recruited staff from overseas and around South Africa. Noni had already made a name for herself as a writer, a journalist and an editor. By 1965 both of Noni's books had been published and the first one translated into Italian. She had been an editor of a magazine, *The New Strand* and it is likely that Woods may have seen her as a prestigious recruit to the paper. Woods was looking for

talent and skill to work with. The changes he was introducing in the paper demanded professionalism. He also introduced the leader page that first appeared on March 2, 1966 the first such in the whole country. Other newspapers soon followed the *Dispatch's* lead.[108]

In his twelve-year editorship tenure Woods almost doubled circulation figures. It was the most profitable newspaper after the *Sunday Times* and *The Star*. Such was the *Daily Dispatch* when Noni became one of its columnists. Noni's recruitment most probably began in 1975 through 1976 during her periodic visits to South Africa to ascertain the possibility of returning home permanently. She also wanted to lay stones at the graves of her family members - her mother Thandiswa, father D.D.T., and brother Tengo who had died in 1951, 1959 and 1955 respectively. She also wanted to start some research towards her father's biography. Living in Nairobi, Kenya at the time, she needed to be in South Africa for a protracted period in order to do justice to her research project.

Upon investigation, it transpired that the immigration laws of the homelands - Transkei and Ciskei - as well as South Africa did not suit her need for a protracted visit. She was informed that she could not, as a British citizen, stay in South Africa indefinitely. Furthermore, the homelands would allow her neither permanent residency nor citizenship unless she gave up her British citizenship. As a result, she worked out a scheme where she spent three months in each homeland and three months in South Africa. Opportunely for her she was invited by Rhodes University in Grahamstown to spend a further three months as a visiting fellow and lecturer while she continued with her research.

Noni spent her time that year moving around South Africa, Transkei, and Ciskei. She stayed in a few cities and towns spending three-monthly stints in each "separate development" region. Now and again she travelled back to Kenya, her home since 1967, where her partner excitedly awaited her visits each time. Fortunately the technology had so improved at the *Daily Dispatch* that communication had become effortless. This peripatetic columnist could correspond

with the newspaper with relative ease from varying distances. Even the general public could call in.

The blocks of time she spent between South Africa and the Homelands entailed more travel than she had originally anticipated. This period bore similarities to her earlier experiences when, as editor of *The New Strand* magazine, she wrote her editorials while travelling between England and the islands of the West Indies. While she was not crossing any seas this time around neither was she stationed in one place. It is not surprising then that travel was a persistent theme in Noni's writings.

"Noni Jabavu comes home" was the headline that greeted readers on page 6 of the *Daily Dispatch* on the first Friday of January 1977. Above the headline were four photos. They showed her upper body, her arms in various animated positions, expressive facial expressions, her eyes speaking wisdom, a ring on the left ring finger, a watch on her left wrist, large earrings, a wig, and a necklace showing through her blouse. Pictures of her two books and a book society recommendation - what the press said about her first book *Drawn in colour* - below the headline and the columns of prose cried out in loud unison, "read me, read me!" "Peter Kenny profiles the famous South African authoress who has returned on an extended visit to South Africa. Noni Jabavu starts a weekly column for the *Daily Dispatch* beginning next Wednesday,"[109] appeared just under the large headline.

The celebratory tone of the article listed achievements of Noni's family through three generations; the family's long-lasting friendships to English families; Noni's personal and professional history and achievements; and her views on her identity, South Africa and its people; and most importantly, her reasons for returning to South Africa. She had come to conduct research for a biography of her father D.D.T. The working title of her book was *Portrait of an Ochre Father.* In his introduction article Kenny named eight countries that Noni had lived in excluding South Africa. Noni was living in Umtata at the time this article was published.

On the second Wednesday of January the anticipated first article by Noni "Back home again" appeared continuing Kenny's theme on page 8 of the *Daily Dispatch*. Accompanying this column was a picture of Noni at the top centre and at the lower right side of the page, and a picture of her grandfather sitting in a kingly chair with her father D.D.T. standing next to him. By the end of 1977 Noni had written forty-nine columns, mostly on Wednesdays.

The most pervasive theme in all her writings was her travel and her absence from her home of origin. Not a single column finished without her mentioning in one form or the other her prolonged years of absence from the country of her birth that she called her "mother country". Often she asserted that she had no homeland. In fact most of her columns mention this theme in the opening line or the first paragraph. She used this theme as a way to frame her writings. If one could think of stories as items of clothing hanging on a clothesline: the travel theme provided Noni's pegs and her life the solid continuous line. Her travels, her sense of other countries, people in those countries - their norms, customs and cultures - featured prominently in her writings. A close look at these columns shows the three main ways in which she spoke of her travels.

Firstly she wrote columns reminiscing about the various countries. The topic could have been one of many: music, language, friendships. She chose a specific event then related it through her memories of that particular country. The stories had the tenor of parts of a memoir. For instance, in her column on "Going native in Mexico" this style features prominently:

> Some years ago when I went to live in Mexico for a time (when you have an independent income and no dependants, you can roam around wherever you wish!) I rented a hacienda a few miles out of Oaxaca. A hacienda (Spanish word) is a country farm-style of house. I went there for peace and quiet after the bright lights of Kingston and Montego Bay to write – to increase my income. South Africans are deeply interested in how much money you've got!

> I was surrounded by simple peasants. Gentle people who till the land, are agriculturists mainly growing maize and sorghum.[110]

Then she explains in a paragraph that follows what a hacienda is, furnishing architectural details and its environment-friendly functionally. She ended this paragraph with the opinion "Some of the finest architects in the world are Mexicans." The memoir style then repeats:

> The people who surrounded me, peasants, suggested I might try wearing their peasant dress. Very cheap, airy, wide at the hips in order to circulate the air round the body.
>
> I took the advice.
>
> My servant would come round lunchtime to remind me that luncheon was ready in the dining room. She never really got used to my working all the time at writing. Peasants don't read. She would lead me to the dining room. I lunched alone of course, still thinking about words, sentences and grammatical constructions. She waited outside the door while the butler and footman attended to my needs."[111]

Secondly, she used a comparative style. Using any topic she wrote about differences and similarities from one to the next. This gave some her stories an encyclopaedic ring. When writing about music in a June column "The Sound of Music" this encyclopaedic tone to her writing comes across:

> Returning now two decades later, I confess I surreptitiously "sway" to the seductive sound of Tikki-draai on the Xhosa radio programme. Its possibilities have indeed been developed by some of the abler current black bands during the years I've been away.[112]

Further down in this column she notes, "Years ago living in Uganda and Kenya, I was spellbound by the natives' drumming." Following this opening line an elaboration on drummers, makers of drums, materials that are used to make drums and a drumming performance that she likens to orchestras follows. She explains how she engaged with the varying performances leading her to understand what a drumming performance is about. She dwelled on the intricate sound effects produced by the use of the fingers, palms and edges of hands. And then she returned to music:

> When I lived for years in the West Indies, exposed to the "Calypso" music, to me a new genre. After my West Indian years, then USA there, there exposed to the blues.
>
> On a brief visit to Cuba and Venezuela, I was exposed to the rhumba, samba and beguine, based on black "primitive" but heavily adulterated by different types of so–called advanced civilized white music.[113]

This column fills one with a sense of wide-ranging music genres and the ways in which people dance to them, enjoy them and play them all over the globe. It is as if Noni opened a page of an encyclopaedia and let the reader read.

Thirdly, she used a mixture of commentary and observations of her travels. She at times made declarative statements about the nature of travel and its impact on the traveller. One such column appeared in April titled "Travel only confuses the mind."

Countries she mentioned through these forty-nine columns are: Canada, Cuba, Egypt, England, Kenya, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, the then Rhodesia, Spain, Switzerland, Tunis, Trinidad, Uganda, USA, Venezuela. By 1977 she had spent the longest times in England, Uganda, the West Indies and Kenya, respectively. She expressed her views on travel very clearly. "Travel which has been my lot because of circumstances beyond my control doesn't broaden mine much. It confuses it."[114] In this column she used examples of vegetation, currency, skin colour, languages and varying accents, sights and smells of the countries she has been to make her point. On a personal level she asserted, "Travelling is in fact very upsetting for a woman. Women like to be in their permanent nest. Making homes across continents can be a marriage-breaker. That's one of the reasons I've been married more than once - but not as often as Elizabeth Taylor."[115]

Noni's experience with travel led her to carry her "office" with her. She called it her "travelling office". In it she carried "two wire-trays in which I neatly arrange my current correspondence, pencils bound in rubber bands, address books, bits of manuscripts dictionaries (English, Swahili, and French) and so on."[116]

In one of the February columns "Smuts and I" Noni writes about the meeting she had with her prospective foster parents at a home of General Smuts in Claremont in the Cape Colony. The column suggests that Noni was not adequately prepared for this travel, the travel that started it all, her departure from home. If she was prepared, she was not excited about it:

> A house called Tsalta, at Claremont, Cape, was where I first beheld and shook hands with the English couple who were to be my guardians in England. That house was where General and Mrs. J.C. Smuts lived. Its name was backwards for "At last".
>
> Like a typical black child of those days, at 13 I was not too well primed about the negotiations that must have gone on between my parents and my prospective loco-parents, about the life they were planning for me which, I was to learn in years to come, was to be a practical demonstration of the generations of friendship between families. I learned then that the plan was for me to be trained as a doctor to serve my people. But it misfired, for a medical doctor was the one thing I didn't want to be. I didn't know what I wanted to be.[117]

Smuts' wife did her best to comfort Noni telling her that her parents-to-be also have children and that she will be happy living with them. Smuts also promised Noni that he would be coming to England to visit her. The rest of Noni's family had come by boat from East London to Cape Town for their final trip together. Of note, this column focuses on the Smuts' family rather than Noni's. We are aware of their presence without ever hearing them speak. We hear nothing much of Noni's emotion about her pending departure. Light-hearted though the tone of her writing was she hinted to the pain of leaving home: "As her explanations drew to a close (for the party was now ambling back to the verandah, a chauffeur - driven limousine waiting to take us the Jabavus to Newlands where we stayed until my family sailed back to East London leaving me suddenly disconsolate) Tante Oubaas said comfortingly that she and the Oubaas were coming to England that summer - in a few weeks - and she'd come and see me again "And I'll find you happy like I've told you, promise'".[118]

In subsequent columns when Noni referred to her departure from home she used language like: “being carried away”; being “carried off”; “on being taken to England”; and “before I was sent to England”. Now and again she mentioned in passing, in some of her columns, the “awful homesickness”[119] that she experienced despite being surrounded by a loving family. From being the first one in the family of three since her elder sister had died when Noni was four months old, Noni became the last (forth) child, in her adoptive family, a situation that took some getting used to. However, her adoptive “uncle” Arthur and “aunt” Margaret made her life with her new “siblings” Helen, Nicholas and Anthony a homely one. All reminiscences of her time with this family are affectionate.

As a writer Noni put emphasis on observation and listening. It is no wonder then that she needed to listen to radio on all her travels. Besides, having been a radio journalist with the BBC in England it is not surprising that Noni enjoyed listening to radio during her travels. But, she noted that travelling alone in foreign countries is a disadvantage “if you don’t understand about wavelengths and megahertz’s and so on is having to twiddle and fiddle with knobs looking for music.”[120]

Her travels were so much a part of her life and identity that when she wrote about South Africa she put the word home in inverted commas all the time, and once asserted “Not my [homeland]. I don’t have one.”[121] and often called South Africa her mother country.

Entwined in this nomad identity was her identity as a black European that she spoke of in her October column entitled “Do you think that I’m a snob?” Consistent with her most frequently quoted proclamation, “I belong to two worlds with two loyalties; South Africa where I was born and England where I was educated”.[122] She reported that readers asked her “Why do you write only about professors, dukes, viscountesses, all these upper classes, the elite of the world? Why are you such a snob, Noni?”[123] Such questions she had encountered frequently during her travels in South Africa. Her accent attracted a lot of attraction: curiosity, questions, confusion, ridicule, amusement and at times unpleasant comments. She did not fit

snugly into boxes that ordinary South Africans were familiar with. This came across in her writings as well as her interactions with people. To all this confusion about who she really was she explained why she was not writing about workers of the world in this writerly way; "I write and talk about what I know; about the surroundings I grew up in; where my character was formed. What else can a writer write about?… What more can one say except that as a writer, one can write only about ones own experiences?"[124]

Personal relationships were a strong feature of identity in Noni's columns. She mentioned her father, brother and grandsons in many anecdotes. She also wrote about her friends mostly those of her time in England. She also wrote about her husbands and lovers in a matter-of-factly style much to her readers' surprise. In one such passage from the column, "Why I'm not marrying" she wrote:

> Since I went away, I've loved and been loved like anybody else.
>
> And through circumstances beyond my control and the environments I was exposed to, my husbands and lovers were of widely different cultures, countries and creeds. My involvement with them succeeded when the gentlemen concerned were of the same social class as myself – my environment having been English ("Ingesi of the water" as we say in Xhosa) there was understanding between me and upper-class Englishmen. When I become involved with a black, it was disastrous, not because of colour, but class habits.[125]

When readers wrote asking her to tell them about her personal life her short and direct response was, "Nothing in it to hide". While there is no column that she dedicated to her personal life there are numerous anecdotal references in the various columns, a suggestion that Noni's personal and professional life were comfortably integrated. Her daily professional life was in complete unity with her personal life - in love and in relationships, as these paragraphs show:

> My love-life goes on in its proper place, in Kenya, where it isn't forbidden as it would be down here, where my man-friend and I would be "put in" regardless of the fact that we are of the same English social class, and therefore share numberless class habits and assumptions, interests,

> friends. From habits in reading books down to habits in furnishing our abodes, and food that's "understanding", no friction.
>
> "But being a widow and a bachelor, why don't you marry?" I am asked.
>
> I've been married enough times, and unlike most blacks, I no longer imagine that bliss comes encircled in the wedding ring…
>
> We agree about our separate need for privacy at times for I have my writing to do and he has his vast business to attend to. He also likes hunting, safaris, mountain-climbing, brick-laying which I don't; and his bridge-playing![126]

We learn about her first husband, the father of her only daughter Tembi, whom she probably married before Tembi was born in 1942. In 1945 she married an Englishman who was a classical jazz lover and wrote for newspapers, magazines and journals in the whole of England about jazz. It was this second husband whose name she does not reveal who introduced Noni to the world of jazz. She mentioned him in her column on jazz, recalling fondly:

> One of my English husbands had been a jazz impresario, writer, expert on jazz. He wrote in the London jazz papers, Melody Maker, Musical Express, the American magazine Downbeat, had his own jazz feature programme on BBC. And he taught me about jazz and how to write and broadcast my own BBC jazz programme in turn.
>
> For several years my life was jazz morning, noon and night. Working trips to jazz gatherings all over England, Paris, Nice. Fascinating, but exhausted me. Later that husband and I went our separate ways – he to near-millionaire status founding his own record company; but the friendships he forged for me in the jazz world endure.[127]

In 1951 she married Michael Cadbury Crosfield, yet another Englishman, a filmmaker. She mentioned him naturally in her writings whenever it seemed appropriate. About her lover at the time she wrote:

> I'm pushing 58 years so naturally 40 at least have been full of love, children, family career, widowhood,

> flirtations, warmth, love, affections, laughters. It's a full life. Music, reading, writing, love, love, love…" My man friend in Kenya and I agree that freedom, democracy in the home, is what we, he and I, need. I'm a writer. He is a rich businessman only 39 years younger than me. I don't know why. Only 39, but so " understanding. And bossy, a real bully. We live in separate houses in Nairobi.[128]

She explained the nature of her relationship with him clarifying for her readers the roles they each played in the relationship. Coming from a black woman close to her sixties, such language and openness about relationships was unknown for many a South African. Noni's straightforward stand about her views on marriage differed from those of most blacks probably confused and interested many readers but hopefully informed others who began to see things differently. Had Noni been writing in the period after the adoption of the constitution when women's roles in relationships began to be discussed in open and public forums and men's social roles of supremacy were persistently challenged, her writings would not have attracted as many surprised, confused and often disgusted responses. On roles they each played in their relationship she wrote:

> We agree about our separate need for privacy at times for I have my writing to do and he has his vast business to attend to.
>
> Sometimes he cooks, sometimes I'm the one who cooks when we throw dinner parties.
>
> Then there's the question of organizing our money. This I regard as a man's job for I am incapable of looking after mine.[129]

In a sense then, judging by the kinds of questions asked of her by many readers, Noni was living ahead of her times. It would be fascinating to read readers' letters if they have survived. Conceivably for others she was an enigma, maybe an embarrassment to traditionalists, possibly a role model and even perhaps a teacher to those who were unsatisfied with the status quo. She was decidedly a loud voice. She proclaimed that she was not a feminist but her ideas on individual personal freedom and equality with relationships clearly suggests that she lived her life according to some feminist principles. Most obvious of these being her ability to

boldly name things, making visible what others may have remained silent on and her full integration of her personal and professional and public lives.

Had someone asked her to clarify this contradiction she most probably would have used class terms to explain it. Her worldview was framed to a very large extent by the middle class position she was born into, as well as the upper-class English family environment she was later raised in, an environment where class hierarchies were clear cut and pretty much played a major role in one's destiny. It is not surprising then that she tended to analyse situations and life in general through this lens.

What other writing projects did Noni have during her visit in 1977? In the forty-nine columns she said very little about how her research on the biography was progressing. However she let it be known that she was also writing her own memoir, the working title of which was *The Life and times of an Ochre Lady*. She did not reveal much of this either, except to hint that this would be a personal account of her travels and experiences.

Noni's interest in people's names and their meanings as shown in her two columns - one in April, "The names people are given" and another in November she titled "What's in a name?" - led her to write her own book on names. "I'm compiling my own name for baby booklet," she declared in April. In the November column she gave readers the title of this booklet, *Book of South African Babies' Names.* In both columns she discussed in detail her fascination with names and made comparisons between South African names and names from other countries. In April she wrote:

> In England, the Royal Family use, for instance, Elizabeth, Alexandra, Mary, Margaret for their female babies, for their male babies: George, Henry, Edward, Charles and so on. The Kikuyu tribe is also rigid in this respect: Babies are named after alternative grandmothers and grandfathers on both sides – father and mother. So you get very few imaginative names. Girls: Wailimu or Wanjiru; boys: Mwangi, Njunguna, and so on. East African blacks do however, enjoy themselves in their choice of "European" names for their progeny. Scholastica, pronounced Scholar

> Sticker; Emperor vespasian, pronounced Empela Veraspas.
>
> What I enjoyed coming back to southern Africa in 1976 was to note the poetic freedom, in which my Xhosa tribe really let themselves go when naming children in Xhosa names. They took these names for granted and didn't notice. Whereas my own ears, having been away for so long and having had to use many languages these names were breathtakingly dramatic, poetic, historic.[130]

Then she listed ten names with their corresponding English meanings. She also delved into potentially confusing South African names, showing her depth of understanding of her 'home" language:

> English-speakers or Afrikaans-speakers might think that Botha is in honour of some Afrikaner soldier. You'd be in error. I was too, until my old fashioned Xhosa language memory came back and I realized that "Bota"-singular or "Botani" – plural – is a pure Xhosa verb for "I greet you"-singular or "I greet ye"[131]

An interesting example in Noni's aptly titled November column, "What's in a name?" speaks to the significant impact of material conditions within the broader social context of giving names:

> A name I'll not exclude from my "Book of South African Babies Names" is that of a small boy "Galaxy". How poetic, how imaginative, I thought. The universe. The stars.
>
> But on hearing the explanation, I felt surprised, even let down: for his parents knew nothing about stars, Milky Way, Southern Cross. The splendid name had been bestowed upon him because the day he was born, his father had acquired a second-hand motorcar, *unomaxesha* of the trade name. I spoke of the stars, of galaxies, they stared at me as if I was crazy, and said: "Those are always there. Why for us to bother looking at them? But a material possession like a motor car, now that is an important event. Our son is proud of his name, although here at home we call him by his other name. Bless his little heart![132]

It would appear that none of the three books (her memoirs, her father's biography and the book of names) Noni was writing were ever published. I have yet to

uncover the whereabouts of the manuscripts. They are not kept at the National English Literature Museum's (NELM) manuscript department. The NELM is keeping some of Noni's letters and articles by and on her work.

The first biography of her father entitled *The Ghost of Equality: The Public Lives of D.D.T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1895 – 1959* written by Catherine Higgs an American academic was published in 1997. As the title states, this biography centres on D.D.T.'s public life, Noni's book would be very interesting as a comparison. Presumably it would take on a personal slant, giving readers more texture on D.D.T.'s personality and in particular his relationship with Noni. In all her writings Noni spoke endearingly about her father. One gets a distinct impression that she was closer to her father than she was to her mother. She clearly looked up to him and admired his writings and identified with him as a writer. When she wrote about the biography D.D.T. wrote about her grandfather *The Life of John Tengo Jabavu, Editor of Imvo Zabantsundu 1884 – 1921* she concluded the column by saying: "And it is riveting. All of us South Africans should read it…"[133].

Noni's column had appeared strictly on Wednesdays until that second week of September, the week of the death of Steven Bantu Biko, when it appeared on a Thursday 15th. When Biko, the leader of the Black People's Convention and the black consciousness movement, a medical doctor and a writer based in the Eastern Cape died in detention on Monday 12, September, the face of the newspaper changed. It was irrevocable change, change that was to reverberate way beyond the borders of South Africa. The front page of the newspaper on Wednesday 14, two days after Biko died had a large picture of Biko's face. The bold headline that spread through the whole length of the newspaper read, "Biko dies in detention" and a sub-heading "We salute a hero of the nation", to the left of his picture, to the right, a translation, "Sikhalela indoda yamadoda". Under the picture, the article headlined "Countrywide reaction" told the story of his death. The paper also featured Donald Woods' comments, reports of the Minister of Justice Mr. J.T. Kruger, Mrs. Helen Suzman's condolences, and the family's reaction.[134] This kind of page layout was suggested by Wood, once again, "a significant departure in the

style of the *Daily Dispatch*, and is regarded as one of its more historic issues."[135] Woods and his wife Wendy's articles on page 9 entitled "Tributes from two friends" was not just an editor's analytical report and tribute, it was also a personal reflection, a reflection on their bond, for Woods and Biko had been friends. They had been compatriots in the struggle for freedom. Woods wrote: "And because Minister J.T. Kruger heads the department which exercises such powers, I hold him particularly accountable for this tragedy."[136]

The next day, Thursday Noni's column "Message for the rich" reappeared. She made no mention of the shattering news that the world was reeling under. Article upon article, news, character testimonies, personal essays, protest letters, petitions, political analyses, obituaries, funeral announcements and later reports on the funeral, academic and opinion pieces on Biko and his death continued to fill the pages of the newspaper for months to come.

For the first time in the whole year, there was no column by Noni during the third week of September. Understandably writings on the death that had shocked the world were given priority. The third week was one of numerous memorial services all over the country leading up to the funeral. When Noni's column, "On peasants and possessions" reappeared on the following Wednesday 28, September, there was no comment on the missing column. Her writings flowed with their Wednesday precision again until the third week of October. On Thursday October 20, the bold headline on the front page read "Editor Banned". The opinion piece opened thus:

> One of the many victims yesterday of the Nationalist Government's attempts to still the voices of critics was editor of the *Daily Dispatch*, Mr. Donald Woods.
>
> A banning order was served on him at Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg not much more than an hour before he was due to fly to the United States and then Australia for brief visits as a guest of those countries. We apologise on Mr. Woods' behalf to those countries for his inability to get there after accepting the invitations.[137]

Woods had not minced his words in numerous articles he wrote after Biko's death challenging the Minister of Justice. His ban was a natural reaction from a state that

felt challenged by his outspokenness and criticism. For those who shared Woods' views the ban was another heavy blow, just three weeks after the Biko blow. World reaction was palpable in most press. Democracy seemed to be taking steps backwards.

That Friday, October 21, Noni's column carried the headline "Grappling with the gremlins". In the second paragraph she wrote:

> These (enemies of the writer) are gremlins who secretly and invisibly enter into your typewriter as you prepare the fair copy of your article; they make a mess in it, thus puzzle your readers. And again at the production stage of the newspaper, these gremlins interfere with the fingers of the skilled men who set the type, and make messes of their work.[138]

It was not clear from this paragraph at what stage the "mess" happened exactly, that delayed her Wednesday column. What was clear was that a massive political mess was unfolding rapidly within the newspaper and the country. Woods was banned that week, on Wednesday, 19. Minister Kruger was convinced that Woods' newspaper and some organisations had showed that "they endangered the maintenance of public order".[139] The paper quoted him on the same day explaining, "Why I did it".[140] Under such a strained and fast changing political climate, anyone suggesting that guarding against gremlins was hard if not trivial, was convincing. As the masses protested and calls for a thorough investigation into Biko's death gained momentum, the apartheid state reluctantly bowed to the pressure.

On Monday 14, November the inquest into Biko's death began. And so began the regular column "The Biko Inquest", unmistakable, the title of the column was written in white upon a black background, with Biko's face within the block. It gave detailed reports of the inquest sessions until the day of the finding was pronounced. The editorial opinion of the last day of the year, December 31, noted 1977 as:

> The year saw the death in detention of Steve Biko – an event that shocked the world. It saw the inquest – which shocked the world even more. It saw a finding that nobody

> could be held responsible for Mr. Biko's death – which shattered fair-minded people everywhere.
>
> The year saw the biggest crackdown on dissension for a long time: the banning of 18 organisations, one newspaper and seven individuals and detention without trail of dozens others.[141]

Noni's columns throughout the year made no mention of Biko's death, Woods' ban, or the political upheaval the country was undergoing. However in her very last column entitled "How to learn from your ears", in which she wrote about various accents of speakers of English she made one reference to Kruger's by then infamous utterance on Biko's death. She ended her column, "So many of them (young ones) are struggling in their juvenile way to put our country to rights. Nothing that happens here, as they grow up, 'leaves them cold'".[142]

While Noni suggested in some of her writings that politics "leaves her cold" her columns, however, suggest a contradictory position. She wrote numerous columns that were directly about politics; the South African version of institutionalised racism and dubbed these the "major and minor pinpricks of apartheid".

The first few columns: "Back home again", "Getting used to colour again", and "The Special Branch" address the impact of racism to individuals. She wrote about how radicalised immigration and citizenship laws affected her directly at the various entry posts. Her tone, often horrified, sometimes just irritated and other times even humorous she bemoaned the irrationality and the dehumanising nature of apartheid laws.

Even in columns she wrote later in the year, she continued to be affected in the most direct manner. Columns entitled "Petty Apartheid 1977", "Love, law and languages", "Star-spangled bother", "When the sky didn't fall", "The despised and rejected", and "When whites hold all the aces" all challenged apartheid laws. She demonstrated, in all these writings, giving personal stories, urgency, emotion, and insights. This next example from "Love, law and languages" tells one of those very personal stories and directly addresses the Immorality Act. She started this column

by telling readers that she had planned to write about languages and regional accents "but I am somewhat confused. Why? My frank answer is: I've fallen in love."[143] And she proceeded:

> So forget about my personal affection, my lover (Yes, he loves me too, this South African! We haven't slept together. We can't. We are not allowed, not unless and until Mr. Voster makes some kind of a change in the law of the land. I wonder if he listened to the advice from Mr. R.F. Botha and Mr. Hendrick Schoeman?)…[144]

Whether Noni would describe this as a major or a minor pinprick of apartheid is in fact irrelevant. What is fascinating to note is the fact that her understanding of being involved in politics was limited to active and formal party politics. She said towards the end of the same column "My friends who went into politics, such as Gen. Smuts, Mrs. Indira Ghandi, Mohan Kumaramangalam, Winston Churchill (and the grandson), were braver than I. For I am concerned only with, and write books only about, human affection, love, jealousies, reconciliations."[145] She did not view her writings on the Immorality Act and the Group Areas Act (the two she most frequently wrote about, directly or indirectly) as a political challenge to any apartheid laws. Dubbing herself "Rip Van Winkle" [146;147;148; 149;150] she claimed that she so misunderstood the politics of race in South Africa that she could well have been sleeping soundly during her decades of absence.

In this next longish, insightful example she writes about the dehumanising function of apartheid laws:

> […] in our country one is bound to encounter a racial insult; and to my mind, such a happening is equal to being despised and rejected.
>
> Our day, yours or mine, may begin with the gaiety, a bright dawn, elation, happiness. Then out of the blue, after you've left your humble home you are suddenly refused the service you need and which is your due, and for which you have the money to pay. You find yourself confronted by a scowl, a stare, a refusal. This is a rejection is it not? You're being treated as less than human. It overwhelms you. And you become "acquainted with grief" your bright day clouds over, for you have been diminished, reduced to

> a nothing, without having harmed anyone. To collect your senses in such situations is not easy.[151]

Noni understood her writings as being from a "human affection, love, jealousies, reconciliations" yet found herself "reduced to nothing" purely on the basis of the colour of her skin.

Had Noni stayed in South Africa for longer and continued to write in this way who knows where she would have landed? As it happened, many a South African who thought they were writing merely what they observed and experienced yet were surprised to find themselves in prison or in exile, their writings being banned. Noni's upper-class status, her "Englishwoman's" deportment, even her accent did not protect her from those pinpricks of apartheid. Her skin colour defined her destiny on a day-to-day basis. When she lamented about this in one of her December columns, "Far different north" she said, "You've no idea what it feels like to be in an apartheid land when you are not used to it. Even the southern states of the USA were better when I visited them in the late sixties."[152]

That was the South Africa of the late seventies and 1977 was the year that saw Noni etch a large journalistic footprint, the largest she had ever left on the country of her birth, after decades of doing the same in foreign countries. It was the year that saw Biko dead, Woods fleeing into exile, the *Daily Dispatch* plunged in disorder, and South Africa in dire political straits. Noni lived and worked in South Africa amidst all this.

As South Africa continued to navigate her political strait, Noni returned to Kenya, Woods and his family escaped to Lesotho and later London, and Biko's bones began to conduct an orchestra of black intellectual and political freedom. The sounds of this orchestra ring till this day.

Noni's writing was the colour of music, language, love, friendships reading and writing, family, relationships, identity, the demise of being black, travel, travel and more travel. Big doses of humour added bright shades to her writing. She wrote

about all these themes with her far-reaching lens of her everyday positioning and experience. She even engaged concerns raised by her readers. Missing only the 3rd week of September (21st) and the very last Wednesday of December (28th) and publishing two on a Thursday (September 15) and on Friday (October 21) Noni's column had a presence in the hearts and minds of her readers. The *Daily Dispatch* gained a colourful thread on its canvass of writers. In December 1977, she, travelling office and all, faced north again, by now a well-trodden path.

2.3. 23 Allenby Road: 2002 – present

Noni was the first resident of the Lynette Elliot Frail Care Home at 23 Allenby Road in East London. She was eighty-three years old. Lynette Elliott, a young geriatric care nurse, had just purchased the house in April 2002. "She was my first patient and has been here the longest."[153] The smile on Lynette's face as she said this suggested that Noni is very special to her. When Lynette had her first baby, Noni was there to act as an instant granny. When Lynette had her second child, Noni was still there to give the infant cuddly granny-hugs that infants tend to yield to with innate ease.

Lynette's love for geriatric nursing started, "for no special reason, I just liked it." She had worked at a hospice in Grahamstown and had loved it. In her father's old age his condition prompted Lynette to look for a frail care home where her father could be well looked after. None of the places she visited had what Lynette wanted: a homely look and feel. Her parents shared her feelings. As a result, Lynette nursed her father at home with her mother's help. When her father passed away in January 2002, Lynette's mind was made up. She was going to start her own frail care home. She began looking for a suitable place in March; she found it a month later.



Photograph 1: The Lynette Elliot Frail Care Home

Word-of-mouth brought Lynette and Noni together. Lynette's mother told her that an attorney in Harare was looking for a decent frail care home for an old woman who had been living away from home in Zimbabwe for many years. All Lynette knew then was that this patient was coming from Harare. Lynette contacted the lawyers in Harare, made the necessary arrangements, and learned that Noni's ex-husband, Michael Cadbury Crosfield, living in England, would be footing the bill.

It rained a lot on the evening of the 5th of May. Lynette was concerned. She just wanted to help her first patient arrive at her home without getting lost. She was also excited: her dream was coming alive right in front of her eyes. She asked her husband to accompany her to the airport.

When Lynette arrived with her husband at the airport they looked around to try to spot family members they expected to be waiting for Noni. After some time the awaited passengers appeared. They seemed to be the last ones to come out. Noni was in a wheelchair, Virginia Phiri on her side. Lynette approached them, introduced herself, and offered them a lift when it became clear that no other relatives had come to the airport. She recalled that Noni looked frail but lovely in her wig and beautiful jewellery.

Tired, she spoke very little and went to bed as soon as they arrived at the home. Virginia spent the night at a Holiday Inn nearby. After a brief chat Virginia, Lynette and her husband learned for the first time about Noni's history, background and identity. "We had no idea she was a writer. We did not know who she was at all." Lynette's husband subsequently looked through the internet and "suddenly, a whole new world opened to us." Lynette recalled how learning about Noni opened a window to the world of black literature and the history of the Eastern Cape, in particular of its black intellectuals during the early twentieth century.

The next morning Virginia visited Noni. She arrived at 9.30am found her bed neatly laid, the room warm. Noni had on a blue woollen cap that she had owned for

a long time and liked wearing. At about eleven they had brunch, the first meal that the two friends shared in South Africa after their long journey together.

Virginia, born and bred in Zimbabwe, began her journey with Noni in the eighties.[154] She recalled reading Noni's books from her parents' library. They had spoken highly of Noni. While Virginia became an accountant and an award-winning orchid farmer, she maintained her reading habit instilled by her parents. Noni had lived in Zimbabwe from the eightyies and she had a public profile as a journalist. She had written for *The Herald* and the *Sunday Mail*. Virginia had read many of Noni's articles then. Later Virginia became a member of the Zimbabwe Women Writers as she had "bumped into creative writing by mistake". However, it was not until 1999 that Virginia met Noni.

As the Zimbabwe Women Writers were preparing for the annual Zimbabwe International Book Fair in 1999 someone suggested that a women's conference, with a theme "Women's Voices: Gender, Books and Development" be part of the Book Fair. Scheduled to take place two days before the Book Fair from 31st July to 1st August, the organizers wanted high profile women writers to attend and speak at the international conference. One of them suggested Noni but no one in the organizing group knew how locate her. Virginia took on the task to trace her whereabouts.

Naturally she started with her parents who referred her to the old age home they knew to be Noni's in Harare. "I went to the BC Leon Home which is actually next to my house. What a coincidence it was that she had been living right next to me and I didn't know it." When Virginia arrived there she was told Noni had had a stroke and had been moved to a special intensive care room. Thus began a relationship that was to end with Virginia bringing Noni back home.

Because of her condition after the stroke Noni was not able to participate at the conference. She was greatly missed. There was an impressive presence of South African women writers at this historic event. Antjie Krog opened the proceedings

with poetry. Mrs. Brigette S. Mabandla, the then Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture in South Africa, Sindiwe Magona, Shamin Meer, Desiree Lewis, Miriam Moleleki, Lauretta Ngcobo and Karen Press were also in attendance and some gave papers. Writers also came from the rest of Europe, Americas, Asia and other African countries.

Noni was not at the conference but her presence was felt. A representative from the Eastern Cape Province Department of Arts and Culture had travelled to Harare to present The Premier's Award for Arts and Culture to Noni. This award had earlier been presented to Noni, in absentia, at an occasion at Fort Hare University.

After the conference Virginia went to give Noni her award and feedback from the conference. The two women liked each other. Virginia lived less than a kilometre away from BC Leon Home for the Elderly. She then began what later became regular bicycle visits to Noni. Virginia would bring Noni a few items like fruit, fruit juice and tissues. With time Noni's condition improved and she was moved out of the high care room to one for long stay.

Noni told Virginia that something about Virginia reminded her of her daughter Tembi who had passed away in 1997. As their relationship grew warmer and closer Virginia heard from the way Noni spoke that she needed help. She wanted to return to South Africa. Virginia recalled, "She never said it directly, I just knew from the way she spoke that she was trying to tell me something." Virginia spoke knowingly about how an older, proud and independent woman who was not even a relative would have found it difficult and indeed avoided making a direct request. She noticed how Noni started talking about South Africa more and more. She would punctuate her conversations with words like "*ekhaya*" (home), "Nelson Mandela" and "Fort Hare". One day she said she wouldn't mind having "a rondavel way back home". Virginia decided to take the challenge head on and from then on, "saw it as a calling".

So began a delicate dance of communication between the two women. Virginia found out about Harare-based lawyers, Stumbles and Rowe, responsible for Noni's affairs. She went to see them. Supportive as they were of Virginia's task it took a long legal process to arrange for Noni's return to South Africa. It was complex, legally speaking, because Noni did not have a South African passport. She was divorced from Michael who was living in England but still paying alimony. And she was a British citizen living in Zimbabwe with its own citizenship laws.

Virginia was working slowly yet steadfastly on this legal process towards obtaining formal documents that would allow Noni to come back to South Africa for good when fate's hand touched her. In January, within three days, she lost her daughter, and then her mother to a stroke. Virginia lost about nine months of time to grief and shock. During this time, she was unable to follow up on Noni's homecoming preparations. This made Noni "crazy" as Virginia recalled. Towards the end of the year Virginia revived her efforts. The triumphant end of Virginia's efforts is now the home at 23 Allenby Road in East London.

It was an immensely emotional moment then when the two women shared that first breakfast in South Africa on the morning of the 6th of May 2002, three years after their friendship began.

After breakfast Lynette gave Virginia directions on how to walk to the Vincent Shopping Mall. Virginia needed to buy a walking stick for Noni. In those days Noni used a walking stick for short distances and a wheelchair only for long distances or when she was tired. Virginia also went to Mr. Price, a local retail shop, and bought Noni a tracksuit, a *doek* (a head wrap), and some warm clothes. Virginia stayed in East London for a week, visiting Noni daily.

Noni had Lynette all to herself for a while. Lynette recalls that it took Noni time to settle in. She read a lot, books she had brought with her, mostly written by people she knew. She used to read at least five books a week and seemed to enjoy biographies. The first outing Lynette took with Noni was to buy a new wig and to

get books from the library. As Noni did not find a magazine that she enjoyed reading, Lynette organised with Noni's ex-husband Michael a subscription to *The Spectator*. And so it was that *The Spectator* would arrive in the post office every week for Noni's enjoyment during those early days. All financial responsibilities for Noni's stay and care at the home are borne by her ex-husband as per their divorce settlement. Lynette still has to discuss all planned expenditure with him before she can buy anything for her.

Lynette said that Noni spoke very little then; still true today. Noni is a "very private person. If you get her on a good day, she may talk a bit," said Lynette. "But she will ask you lots of questions about why you need to know what you are asking about." Disillusioned about Africa, Noni thought South Africans spoke funny and did not have a great dress sense. "I don't understand your English," she would say to staff at the Home. "Noni is an intellectual and, in essence, 'European'. Lynette thought that Noni's distance from people and her family was a product of her nomadic life. As time went by, Noni settled and, the staff warmed up to her, calling her "*Makhulu*", an isiXhosa endearment for grandmother.

With time Noni's relatives started to visit. The first was Mrs. Cecilia Thompson, a relative from Noni's maternal side. Mrs. Thompson soon called Siyabonga Jabavu to inform him that Noni had returned home.

Siyabonga is the great, great grandson to James Jonathan Jabavu, a brother to John Tengo (better know as J.T.), Noni's grandfather.[155] He is currently the Councillor for Buffalo City in East London in the Eastern Cape. A lover of history, he and some members of the family started in 1995 to document the history of the Jabavu family. They collected family memorabilia, and traced relatives who were either living far from home and outside of South Africa or whose whereabouts were unknown.

In the mid 90s many South African families were doing the same. There was optimism in the air as a result of the first democratic elections. Families that were

not re-united in time for the first democratic elections were privately or through institutional mechanisms tracing and reconnecting with loved ones. Siyabonga spent numerous hours of research talking to relatives, and visiting libraries and museums to unearth information on individual members of the Jabavu family. Family memory informed him that Noni was last known to be living in England. So began a search that Siyabonga first directed to the South African embassy in London. Later he learned that Noni was living in Zimbabwe. Although he was not able to connect with her way back then, information that she was still alive brought comfort to him and the family.

Siyabonga recalls with excitement the day Mrs. Thompson called to inform him that Noni was living in the same city. He used the first opportunity he had to visit her, about three months after Noni's return. Like the rest of the family members Siyabonga was pleased that Noni was in this homely place. "We were satisfied that she was staying in East London; it would have been very hard for her to live in her Middledrift home," Siyabonga said. He was referring to the house where Noni was raised. It still stands, dilapidated and in urgent need for renovations but proudly now a heritage site, thanks to the Department of Arts and Culture and Siyabonga's active leadership. "Although she is black she is very European, with a European way of life. If she had gone to Middledrift she would not even be able to eat the foods she is used to." Lynette confirmed this, recalling how Noni used to ask for cream at breakfast during her early days at the home, "Where's the cream, no cream here?"

"You are an angel sent to rescue me," Siyabonga recalled Noni's words when they first met. During this last stage of her life Noni had not expected to reconnect with so many members of the family. After Mrs. Thompson, Siyabonga appeared, linking her to her roots in a way she had not imagined possible. When Siyabonga found out that his great, great grandmother was "an illegal alien" in the country of her birth, because she did not have a South African identity document, he made it his responsibility to reverse this situation. He visited the National English Literature Museum in Grahamstown where a copy of Noni's birth certificate was

kept. Armed with that he managed to acquire an identity document from the Department of Home Affairs. Even Lynette noticed that Siyabonga's appearance on the scene made a great impression on Noni. Her mood lifted, she became more hopeful and looked forward to visits by her relatives. During that first year Siyabonga visited at least twice a week.

During that period, Noni used to wake up early, around five in the morning. She enjoyed listening to music, mostly classical music (Bach and Mozart) and jazz. She sat in her favourite couch and listened to CDs played on the communal music system in the lounge. She enjoyed coffee with biscuits, not a 'tea person' at all. Believing she was overweight she later cut out the biscuits enjoying her coffee unaccompanied. She continued to be very closed about her life. Not a word about her ex-husband, her daughter, her life as a public writer. She kept a copy of her book *The Ochre People* in her handbag. Although she tried to write she was clearly experiencing practical difficulties as her hands were arthritic. She would not say what she was writing about. In time, she gave it up. A self identified Quaker she said she liked simple things in life, did not like celebrating birthdays and throwing parties. Her desire to be cremated comes from this. She would like her ashes to be thrown far away.

In time, additional elderly people, all white, arrive at Lynette's Frail Care Home. For most of them, the home would be their last. The house, at the beginning, took a maximum of five people then. As the popularity of the Home grew Lynette added three rooms on the property. The Home now accommodates a total of eight people. Lynette and her family live in the cottage at the back. Having settled to the routine of her new home and intermittent connection with some relatives Noni began to miss England. Her mood changed and her health deteriorated. By the middle of 2003 she was saying she wanted to go back to England. She said she wanted to be close to Ben and Tengo her grandchildren, Tembi's sons. She also missed her friends from her early days in England. As usual, Lynette communicated Noni's desires to Michael. Unfortunately Michael did not approve Noni's move back to England, as her stay in an old age home there would be far too expensive. Noni

was disappointed. She sank deeper into herself. She stopped reading. Stopped talking about her books. On some days when her relatives visited she would inform Lynette that she was not in a position to see them.

Noni was extremely sad during this period. She also started to be confused and her quality of life deteriorated. She retreated to her room, vacating her favourite couch in the lounge that she had occupied with the territorial confidence and authority of one who was there first. This couch just behind the corridor wall faces a front window through which the person sitting can see the front gate. Beyond that, is the street, where Allenby road crosses Halstead road. The couch in Noni's bedroom stands next to the door that opens to the corridor and faces another front window that terminates one's view with lush hedges that surround the property. Through her bedroom door she can momentarily see passers-by walking up and down the corridor.

Noni's mood lifted somewhat in February of 2004 when the Jabavu home was formally declared a memorial site at an event in Middledrift to which Noni was a special guest and representative of the family. A picture of a frail looking Noni, her own books in her hands sitting on a wheelchair shows a smile on her face. Lynette and her husband attended this event. Lynette says she was anxious on Noni's behalf that day. She had noticed that Noni had started to lose her coherence in speech, her memory was no longer efficient, and maintaining a conversation was no longer possible. Lynette was worried that when she spoke people would not recognize that she was slightly confused from old age.



Figure 2: The signpost to the Jabavu House

The day, however, went very well. The small Middledrift community was in high spirits because the honour bestowed upon them by this public act was, for some of them, beyond their wildest dreams. The home of the "Professor" as D.D.T. was devotedly called, was being reincarnated to its former awe and dignity.



Figure 3: The Jabavu House

When Lynette was looking for a place for her father she wanted a place that looked and felt like home. A home-like environment, she believes, gives dignity to the frailty of old age. She clearly succeeded in this. The first time I drove to the Home in this peaceful suburb of well-tended gardens, I missed the house. It is a part of the neighbourhood, with no signs, no big boards with directional arrows. The gate to the house is nestled between green hedges that surround the plot. The number 23 is neatly and inconspicuously placed on the gate. As you go through the gate the home-made tyre swing sways under the tree and a fish pond bubbles softly, giving the place a truly homely feel. The glass-enclosed veranda has couches where the elderly residents sit to enjoy the sun. It is a home among other homes. Visitors can come and go as and when they please, without the constraints of visiting hours.

Once in the house the open-plan lounge and dining room complete the homely feel: couches, a bookshelf, a radio, a TV, a clock on the wall above the TV set, and vases with fresh and dried flowers and a rectangular dining table and eight chairs of very dark wood.

Noni's room is the first to the left as you enter the house. Her bed now has rails at the sides to protect her from falling should she move in her sleep. Sparsely furnished with a two-sitter sofa, a wardrobe, and a chest of drawers it draws in a lot of light from the front garden. On the chest of drawers stands the award Noni

received from the Minister of Arts and Culture in 1999. Virginia brought it from Zimbabwe when she last visited in September 2005.

In 2001 a year before Noni's return, the then Eastern Cape Minister of Arts and Culture Ms Nosimo Balindlela honoured Noni, a black woman writer and a pioneer. It was at this conference that participants mooted ideas of taking more active steps towards recognizing women writers. The ideas of producing a television documentary and writing a biography on Noni's life were discussed. The Department of Arts and Culture with Siyabonga in the lead have recently begun work on the documentary.

History was repeating itself. Again, Noni received an award at an inaugural literary lifetime achievements awards ceremony in Polokwane on December 8, 2005. Siyabonga accepted this award on her behalf. Speaking at this event the South African Minister of Arts and Culture Dr. Pallo Jordan said, "It is most appropriate that the South African Literary Awards are inaugurated in a manner that does not recognise one book or author, but honours an entire body of work by the writers who have been chosen in recognition of their contribution to the development of South African Literature."[156] Others on the list of awardees were: Ellen Khuzwayo, Es'kia Mphahlele, E.S. Madima, Nadine Gordimer, Dennis Brutus, T.N. James Matthews and Miriam Tladi. Noni is second on this list that was compiled to honour the oldest first.[157]

Between Lynette, Siyabonga and Mrs. Thompson, Noni is in warm, caring and professional hands. When I went to visit in September 2005 I noticed that Noni's eyes had that distant glassy look often seen on elderly people's faces. When Siyabonga introduced me she merely smiled and looked away. She does not talk much these days. Although she is frail and sometimes confused, she is in good health, eats well and spends all her time in the solitude of her bedroom.

Siyabonga carries the book *The Ochre People* that Noni gave to him with pride. Siyabonga and his colleagues' plans to honour and raise the profile of the Jabavu

family will certainly awaken public interest, possibly leading to many more visits to the Home on 23 Allenby Road.