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**Issue No. 90**

**August 2008**

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# **DORA TAYLOR**

- **Marxist revolutionary**
- **Outstanding historian**
- **Writer “of importance in the annals of S.A. literature”**
- **Foremost literary critic**

**Victimised during her life  
Vindicated after her death**

## **WISH GIVEN UP UNEXPECTEDLY GETS FULFILLED**

### Introduction

When most of your life has been lived and the time comes when you start preparing to bid farewell, there are few intense desires left. There are numerous unfulfilled wishes. One gets resigned to that state of affairs. However there is always sadness about what might have been but never took place and which is not in your power to realise.

There are also very few things which give you great pleasure and make you say: "It was worth being still alive."

Early in May, my son returned from Cape Town and a day or two after his arrival I found at my place at the kitchen table a book with the title: "*Don't Tread on my Dreams.*" The author was DORA TAYLOR. It was published by Penguin Books and was a collection of short stories. I hurriedly went to the "Contents" page and recognised at least one title: "*Nonibe*".

**The great joy of seeing this book, became one those things, that made living worthwhile.**

Over 50 years ago when I first visited Cape Town, one of my objectives was to collect as many Marxist books as I could lay my hands on. But Marxist literature had just been banned and none was at hand. Mrs Taylor must have heard of my mission and prepared a list of titles of useful books like "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" by Tawney and "Man's Worldly Goods" by Leo Huberman. It was not just the list I received from her. Her daughter Muriel handed to me a typed manuscript of Mrs Taylor's long short story: "*Nonibe*". Muriel had typed it for me at the request of Mrs Taylor.

"*Nonibe*" describes what life was like on the white owned farms for Africans who worked and lived there. It brought to life before the

reader's eyes the utter brutality suffered by those workers in a society which was feudal and buttressed by racism against the African people. The farmer, i.e. the "lord of the manor", literally had the power of life and death over his employees. Through "*Nonibe*" I learnt about the life of the workers on white farms. I came to learn what "feudal relations" meant. Then I realised the importance of Point Seven of the Unity Movement's Ten Point Programme which reads:

"The feudal relations existing on the land together with the land acts and the restrictions upon acquiring land must go."

I recognised the contents of a few more of the short stories but not their titles.

My first contact with the fictional writing of Dora Taylor was when as a young recruit to the Unity Movement I was given a thick manuscript of a novel by Dora Taylor. It was called "*Kathie*" after its principal character, Kathie, a brown-skinned "Coloured" I learnt for the first time the degrading phenomenon of "*Playing White*". Being "white" meant belonging to the privileged master race. All the best jobs were reserved for the Whites. All the best amenities were for the Whites. All the best residential areas and the residences were for the whites. The racist divisions in society compelled people to try and sneak into the white world and to be accepted as white. The people best positioned to do this were the fair-skinned and long haired descendants of unions between whites and those who were not considered whites. Genetics determined that a certain number, probably the majority of those descendants would be brown skinned having physical characteristics of both parents. A smaller percentage would take after their white parent and for all intents and purposes the physical appearance would be indistinguishable from whites.

Such descendants would have the option to "play white" and get into the white world. If that decision is made there are devastating consequences for the family. The play-white would have to abandon his/her family and live away from them. The play-white's biggest priority is not to be discovered by her newly-acquired white friends and community as being a "coloured". To achieve this it would be necessary

to refuse to recognise his/her own flesh and blood if they meet in circumstances where he/she is in the company of whites.

I also learnt from “*Kathie*” that wisdom is not the monopoly of intellectuals. In the novel Dora Taylor describes a shoemaker in District Six who was frequently visited by one of the heroes, an African intellectual who was a political activist. The hero visited the shoemaker regularly to learn the latter’s experience and political wisdom. I was told later that there was in fact such a person who was frequently visited by I.B.Tabata, the leading intellectual of the liberatory movement.

It was through “*Kathie*” that I came to know of the existence of African intellectuals who articulated the aspirations of their people and who faced reprisals, including death.

Thus through Dora Taylor’s work of fiction I took the first steps in the long process of being politicised. I read the manuscript over 50 years ago. The important aspects of the work have not been erased from my memory by the passage of time.

The next work of Dora Taylor that I was able to lay my hands on was “*The Role of the Missionaries In Conquest.*” This was during the early 1950’s.

- From this work we learnt that Capitalism had no compunction in using Christianity and its Churches in the conquest of the people of Southern Africa and in the dispossession of their land
- The Missionaries of the Christian Churches often acted as informers for the British Empire as to what was going on among the various tribes and what fissures there were in those societies for easy exploitation by the Empire
- The Missionaries did not scruple to implement the policy of divide and rule as a prelude to military conquest

- The principal tenets of Christianity like offering the other cheek to be smitten when there was an assault; that the rewards of humility and non-retaliatory conduct to injustices on earth will be found in the next world, i.e. after death, were all trained to create a submissive people who would be disinclined to engage in militant and physical resistance.

Since the Missionaries were the political progenitors of the modern day liberal, *“The Role of the Missionaries”* provided a powerful force in our ideological armoury against liberalism.<sup>1</sup>

Already, we, as young people, developed a deep reverence and admiration for Mrs Taylor. It is a rare combination to be able to write powerful and compassionate fiction and then a historical treatise the contents of which have *at no stage* been challenged or controverted.

Getting to meet her in person was a big occasion. She was warm and friendly without any airs of a deep and important thinker. But she was very perceptive. She could see in people more than others could. With this gift, she was able to make astute assessments of individuals. Tabata had occasion to remark on this gift and attributed her skill as a writer to it.

## **The Trio – A Partnership spanning Decades**

Dora Taylor was a member of the Workers’ Party of South Africa and remained a member until the early 1950s<sup>2</sup> and thereafter in spirit until the day she died. With the advent of the rise of fascism in Europe and the threat of its emergence in South Africa, the WPSA merely went underground and sadly, stayed there even when the threat of fascism had been removed.

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<sup>1</sup> So did Eddie Roux’s “Time Longer than Rope.”

<sup>2</sup> We suspect that the minority led by Tabata which broke off from the underground WPSA in the early 1950s continued functioning as The Club until it surfaced in the late 1950s and recruited within its ranks a new generation of intellectuals and worker intellectuals. (Source: Nina Hassim)

She together with Jane Gool and I.B. Tabata forged a political and comradely partnership which spanned forty years.<sup>3</sup> It lasted until her death in 1976. All three worked together and despite each having specialties of their own, it can be safely said that whatever was produced in the name of one, the other two would have made a significant input.

***“The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest”*** was not just an account of the activities of the Missionaries. It was a major rewriting of the history of South Africa. This work together with Jaffe’s ***“Three Hundred Years”***, Van Schoor’s ***“The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa”***, BM Kies’ ***“Contribution of Non European Peoples to World Civilisation”*** and Edgar Maurice’s ***“Colour-Bar in Education”***<sup>4</sup> revolutionized political thinking. This after centuries of being blasted with ruling class propoganda and lies about the alleged superiority of the people of the West and the imputed inferiority of those people whom they colonised through military conquest, through the policy of divide and rule and through pious hypocrisy and through plain knavery.

For the first time the dominant ideas in society concerning the history of the various actors ***were no longer*** those of the ruling class. There was mounted a massive challenge which was almost greedily grasped by the oppressed people in the ideological war which is waged relentlessly between oppressor and oppressed.

This ideological offensive constituted the first major breach in the fortifications of the oppressors and exploiters. The lies and fallacies were exposed for all to see. The ruling class recognised the massive defeat it suffered. Its most important tool, the enslavement of the mind, was damaged irreparably. The ruling class in the widest sense of the word, including its intelligentsia, its judiciary, the factory owners, the bankers and financiers, the printing and publishing houses, took a step back and viewed with wrath and malevolence the assault on its fortifications. We will return to this aspect.

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<sup>3</sup> For as long as his health permitted Dr GH Gool would have been a member. JG Taylor was in all probability in the background all along, but he was present when The Club was reorganized in the late 1950s.

<sup>4</sup> The innocuous sounding title belies the contents, a substantial portion of which deals with the origin and development of racism.

While there was nothing but anger and vindictiveness against the formulators of the new history, special hatred was reserved for Dora Taylor. But more on this later.

### **Why were Dora Taylor's works not published?**

This was a question we asked from time to time. Even though as young members of the Unity Movement we were not qualified to make a proper literary criticism of her works, we knew enough of her works to believe that they deserved publication. One recalls with bitter puzzlement when a novel by Katie Hendricks, titled "*Bend Down the Road*" was published. Its major theme was the question of a divided Coloured family caused by a member playing white. To the writer's untutored mind "*Bend Down the Road*" was placid and pale as against Dora Taylor's "*Kathie*". Yet Dora Taylor's novel could not find a publisher.

I recall reading a novel by Lewis Nkosi.<sup>5</sup> It dealt with an African man having sex with a white girl who literally seduced him. Yet he was charged with her rape and sentenced to death. Dora Taylor's short story, "*To Tell my Story*" written almost three decades before Nkosi's, dealt with a friendship between a young white woman and an African revolutionary intellectual. Upon this relationship being discovered, the African was promptly charged with killing her and sentenced to death. The major theme in both Nkosi's "*Mating Birds*" and Dora Taylor's "*To Tell my Story*" is the impossibility of the existence of a normal human relationship between black male and white female in a society where day in and day out the racist propaganda of black inferiority and white superiority is drummed into people.<sup>6</sup>

### **Mrs. Taylor recognised as a talented writer**

- The writer on one occasion asked Dr Neville Alexander, who holds a doctorate in German, as to what his views were on the quality of Dora Taylor's fiction. Dr Alexander thought highly of

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<sup>5</sup> "Mating Birds published by David Philip 1987

<sup>6</sup> Also Andre Brink's "*An Instant in the World*".

Dora Taylor's fiction. He was then asked why then were they not published? Dr Alexander could not give an answer to that.

- J.M. Coetzee leading novelist and Nobel Laureate for literature was thanked by Penguin Books “ for opening the door for the manuscripts to come out of hiding”. On the cover of her book “*Don't Tread on my Dreams*”, JM Coetzee's complimentary remarks about her works are inscribed.
- Professor Vivian Bickford-Smith, head of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, pays a high compliment to Mrs Taylor's novel “*Kathie*”.
- Professor Dorothy Driver, internationally-renowned literary critic and expert on South African literature, from an early period recognised Dora Taylor “as a literary critic and writer of importance in the annals of South African literature”.

*The all important question is: Why were her works of fiction not published in spite of clear evidence that they were highly rated by literary people?*

We hope to deal with this mystery below.

In the early 1960s just before fascism struck, the young Unity Movement cadres in Durban published Dora Taylor's play “*Bitter Waters*”. This was a play which was adapted from Ignacio Silone's masterpiece, “*Fontamara*”<sup>7</sup> . The text was typed on stencils and roneoed. The correction and collation was done by the group which then chose to honour Mrs. Taylor by having a handsome cover printed and the document bound professionally.

Unfortunately, soon after the work was printed and bound, cadres had to scramble helter skelter hiding political material. “*Bitter Waters*” was, alas, hidden too well so that today not a single copy is available.

## **Reprinting of “The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest”**

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<sup>7</sup> We were told that Dora Taylor did meet Silone subsequently. He was fascinated to learn that his “*Fontamara*” was converted into a play.



When a person is in prison, the operative word in his/her life is **denial**. That is perhaps the worst part of prison. There are a million and one things you wish to have and cannot get. That is when you plan and make promises to yourself of things to do and get when you are released. It is these promises which sustain you in prison. The fulfillment of those promises constitutes the zest for life after prison.

One of the many promises the writer made to himself was to have reprinted “*The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*”.

When the writer returned from prison, he was deeply disappointed to find that the Unity Movement and Apdusa were virtually unknown to the population. It was as if the Unity Movement had gone into a deep slumber and met the same fate as Rip Van Winkle.

After much effort it was possible to unearth a copy of “*The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*”. With the technique of photolithography, it was possible to have plates of the whole book within a day.

When we visited Harare in 1985, the matter of the reprinting of “*The Missionaries...*” was raised with I.B. Tabata and Jane Gool. They readily approved of the project. In response to our request they gave us a striking photograph of Mrs Taylor which we intended placing in the book. We intended introducing the true identity of the author of “*The Missionaries..*” through both name and photograph to the people of South Africa.

Incidentally, the name Nosipho Majeke was not chosen arbitrarily. The Trio were creative people. It was in fact the name of Dora Taylor in Xhosa. Her maiden surname was Jack and Dora from Latin means a gift. Nosipho Majeke in Xhosa means a “A Gift of Jack”<sup>8</sup>

We also met Mrs Taylor’s daughter Muriel. We asked her for the whereabouts of Mrs. Taylor’s fiction writing. She told us that she had no idea.

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<sup>8</sup> Told to the writer by I.B. Tabata.

**By that time, I was convinced that I would never see Mrs Taylor's fiction published.**

On our return from Harare we got down to the task of reprinting "*The Missionaries*". Whereas the cover of the original copy of "*The Missionaries..*" published by The Society of Young Africa was a plain two tone colour, we resolved to make the cover of the reprinted version attractive and striking. This, the writer believes, was achieved.

By this time we had drawn into the Apdusa Group of Pietermaritzburg a number of professional printers and we had acquired an excellent off-set printing machine.

For days on end, after working hours, that printing machine laboured unceasingly and without trouble in one of our garages.

Printing the material was one thing but the subsequent work – storing, collating and checking was quite another thing. The latter task turned out to be Herculean for persons not in the printing business. The front room of one of our homes was requisitioned, so to speak, for that purpose. A table tennis table was placed in the room to accommodate the piles of printed pages. When that did not suffice, heaps were placed on the floor.

It was in this room that about an average of eight persons worked for many nights on end labouring towards the production of the book.

Those were also turbulent times politically. One of numerous states of emergency had been declared. The state of emergency criminalized all anti- government political activity.

It was during one of those evenings while we were busy that the Security Police swooped. They came dashing into the room where we were working and the sight that greeted them must have elated them greatly. They believed that they caught us red-handed breaking the law printing literature in contravention of the Emergency Laws. It took some talking on our part to convince them that the printing was no more than history and had nothing to do with current politics. A scrutiny of

samples showed them that it was all about the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nothing about the Nationalist Party or apartheid, or P.W. Botha.

Reluctantly, they departed. It is not their fault that they did not know that the rewriting of the history of an oppressed people by themselves constituted a giant step forward in the defeat of the oppressive regime.

The members of Apdusa who were in the room continued after the Security Police had left. Apart from two, not one of them had seen the inside of a police cell. None apart from the two had been interrogated by the Security Police. They were ordinary people with all the fears and nightmares of police torture. Yet they continued working that evening and for many other evenings until the work was completed, taken to the printers where the collated piles were stapled and handsomely bound.

We were all proud of our achievement in paying this tribute to Mrs Taylor.

### **Why the non-publication of Dora Taylor's works of fiction?**

The reason, now obvious to the writer, is that Dora Taylor made herself a mortal enemy of the establishment or ruling class. The fact stared at us over the decades, but we could not see it. It took proof and evidence that members of the top establishment knew of the work of Dora Taylor and had expressed their hatred for it. That which was made public was just the tip of the iceberg.

Dora Taylor's research by delving into primary sources provided proof that the movement for the abolition of slavery was headed by people who were not motivated by humanitarian considerations. The motivation was what was best for a capitalist economy. Slave labour was wasteful and placed numerous obligations on the slave owner. The object was to free the movement of labour.

1. Dora Taylor showed the contradictory and hypocritical positions held by persons known throughout the world as

Liberators of the slaves. One such person was William Wilberforce. Side by side with pleading and striving for the abolition of slavery he passed the most draconian laws against the English working class.

2. Dora Taylor was able to prove beyond doubt that the Christian Church was in the service of capitalism and the employees of the Church, the priests and the missionaries were in fact also servants of the capitalists
3. The members of the ruling class including the Nationalist Party members gave out as being devout Christians. They brought up their children as Christians. They went to Church regularly and like any other person they too were moved by well-crafted and well-delivered sermons
4. The Church was considered as a house of God and represented all the moral and ethical values of its members including members of the ruling class.
5. To attack the Church was to attack what was held most dearly by its members, viz. the most important repository on earth of God's teachings and commandments.
6. To go further and attack the employees of the Church, the priests of various categories and the missionaries, i.e. exceptionally devoted servants of the Church who were willing to sacrifice the comforts of civilisation and risk death from disease, beasts and hostile local population, was really rubbing salt in the wounds.
7. Dora Taylor attacked that which was closest to the Christian members of the ruling class. People will go to war in defence of their religion. Salman Rushdie learnt this the hard way when he jeered at a praying posture of Muslims. A fatwa<sup>9</sup> was issued

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<sup>9</sup> A fatwa is a religious decree. In this case it was issued by the Ayotollah Khomeini of Iran.

calling on all Muslims to kill Rushdie. Apart from the heavenly reward awaiting the assassin after death, there was also an earthly reward of one million dollars!

8. In Dora Taylor's case, it was an informal Christian equivalent of a fatwa issued by the ruling class. This fatwa decreed that none of her works were to be published regardless of their merits.
9. We stated earlier that the assumption of a conspiracy is based on evidence which we described as the tip of the iceberg. When the sophisticated members of the ruling class enter into a conspiracy, they do not leave behind them a trail of written evidence of the existence of the conspiracy.
10. In Dora Taylor, the far-sighted section of the ruling class saw a **mortal enemy**.

There is little doubt that they would have known Dora Taylor's political history: a member of the Lenin Club, later of the Workers' Party of South Africa and the Spartacus Club, then of the Non-European Unity Movement. To heighten the hatred there would have been the fact that Dora Taylor worked with the formidable Clair Goodlatte, editor of "The Spark". It would have been underlined in red that the Workers' Party of South Africa had been in comradely communication with Leon Trotsky, the co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution of 1917. To put it in layperson's parlance Dora Taylor would have been known to the ruling-class intellectuals as being a Marxist who supported the position of the permanent revolution expounded by Leon Trotsky as against the anti-Marxist doctrine of Stalin - "Socialism in one Country."

In the concluding chapter of "*The Role of the Missionaries*." Dora Taylor's exposition is a brilliant application of the Marxist materialist conception of history to the South African situation and a true projection of the direction to be taken by the oppressed people in South Africa.

It will thus be seen that the phrase “**mortal enemy**” is not lightly used.

Hereunder is some unearthed evidence of our claims. This comes from an article which appears in *Kronos*, volume 11, 1986 pages 75 -81 and which was written by Christopher Saunders who is a Professor in the Department of History at the University of Cape Town. Some of his statements are repeated in his book “*The Making of the South African Past.*”<sup>10</sup>

1. Leonard Thompson, who in 1952 was a senior lecturer in History at the University of Cape Town, complained to “pioneer liberal historian W.M. Macmillan about the tone and tenor of Jaffe’s “*Three Hundred Years*”.
2. Ten years later, Thompson published an article in which he accuses “Mnguni” and “Majeke” as being: “vehemently anti-white; anti-British as well as anti- Afrikaner, anti missionary, as well anti-settler.” Apart from the bald statement, Thompson, the “historian” does not provide any evidence that the various “anti” positions by ‘Majeke’ and ‘Mnguni’ were unjustified or unsustainable. The damnation lies in their being “anti” the various major actors in the defeat, dispossession and domination of the indigenous population.
3. A number of white liberals in South Africa wrote to Macmillan and asked him to write a rebuttal, he being “the best person to do so.”
4. Hobart Houghton, the leading liberal economist and Institute of Race Relations member, was one such person. Another was the eminent Judge Tindall who described “The Missionaries..” as pernicious and showed the extent to which the propaganda against the white man is going. But he admits that the missionaries assisted the government “in the interests of law and order.”

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<sup>10</sup> Published in 1988 by David Philip, Cape Town and Durban.

5. Judge Tindall, further, went on to concede that “it would not be easy to deal with some of the points made in the book.”
6. Macmillan, however, never did do a rebuttal. Professor Saunders does an egg-dance in seeking to explain the absence of the rebuttal. For example: “It may be that he never read Taylor’s polemic<sup>11</sup> or because “he was out of touch with South African history”. What Professor Saunders does not consider is that it was not possible to rebut the research and the impregnable conclusions drawn from such research.
7. However, in his book referred to above, Professor Saunders makes the point:

“Many of the points they made for the first time in works of South African history would later be accepted by professional historians.”<sup>12</sup>

One final quotation:

“Leonard Thompson who to begin with was so angered by the anti-liberal approach of ‘Mnguni’s’ book, in the 1960s, having come under Africanist influence, admitted that the work was “interesting” and in 1969, he cited ‘Majeke’ *as the only examination of the role of the missionaries in white italics expansionism in South Africa.* (Our emphasis and italics). A decade later he quoted a long passage from the introduction to ‘Majeke’ without critical comment..”<sup>13</sup>

The above shows that the upper stratum of the ruling class in the broad sense of the word so as to include the opposition and all forces

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<sup>1111</sup> **Dora Taylor’s tremendous feat in unearthing the role of the missionaries is dismissed as a polemic by Professor Saunders**

<sup>12</sup> **C Saunders, page 137**

<sup>13</sup> **Kronos cited above page 81**

influencing government policy were aware of Dora Taylor's work on the role of the missionaries. The importance of her work was such that they felt compelled to express their strong hostility to the contents in strong terms and in writing. It requires little imagination to conclude that views on the missionaries would have been a subject matter for discussion by members of the ruling class in their exclusive clubs, the golf courses, and social occasions and whenever they assembled.

In those exclusive gatherings, the intellectuals of the ruling class would socialize with the captains of industry, banking and members of the publishing world, amongst others. The message would have been drummed in that Dora Taylor was a godless communist agitator who made it her goal in life to denigrate and blaspheme Christianity, the Christian Church and its devoted servants, the missionaries.

The ground was set for an out of hand rejection of her writings.

## **Conclusion**

Fifty-six years have elapsed since "*The Missionaries..*" was published. But even before its publication Dora Taylor had made known her views on the role of the missionaries in the conquest of the local population. This was through her articles in the local press like "The Trek" and the "Cape Times".

The decision was to punish her by ensuring that the publishing houses did not publish her work of fiction, which in itself was yet another method of exposing the social relations in this country and present in life from the consequences of a racist, feudalistic and exploitative society on a defenceless population.

There can be no crueler way to punish a creative person than by denying the validity of that person's creation.

It is said that Vincent Van Gogh, that great post-impressionist painter, sold only a single painting in his lifetime. Today each of his unsold paintings fetches many millions, whether it be in the English pound or the US dollar.

Can one imagine the deep sense of disappointment he would have suffered in being able to sell only a single painting of his? Equally can



one imagine how that failure would have been a major assault on his dignity and self confidence?

One can therefore imagine the pain and disappointment Dora Taylor must have endured in being unable to find a publisher. One can only hope that she would have been aware of the true reason behind publishers declining her work. And one can only hope that she did not falter in the faith she had in her works.

The times have radically changed.

Over the years Mrs Taylor's detractors have come to publicly concede the value of her history of the missionaries.

Yesterday's terrorists have become the presidents of this country. The one has been canonized and is revered as a wise statesman.

Dora Taylor has died. What was the point in punishing her if she is beyond pain and hurt?

So the political elements are replaced by literary critics who judge a piece of literature on its own merits.

An undying shame on all those publishing houses who turned down Dora Taylor's works on the basis of her political beliefs, and not on literary grounds.

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