

STRIKES HAVE FOLLOWED ME ALL MY LIFE

Emma Mashinini. New York: Routledge, 1991.

POST ABOLISHED: ONE WOMAN'S STRUGGLE FOR EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS IN TANZANIA

Laeticia Mukurasi. Ithaca: ILR Press, 1991.

By Lisa Schmidt

Emma Mashinini's autobiography, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*, is many things: a recent history of trade union activity in South Africa; an account of the struggle by Black South Africans to end apartheid; a description of contemporary life in South Africa.

Most importantly, it is the story of one woman's life.

Mashinini begins her account with a brief chronicle of her childhood in Sophiatown, a vibrant racially mixed community that has since been replaced with a white suburb and renamed Triomf. She writes about her early experience as a textile worker in a factory where she later became a shop steward. It is in this factory that Mashinini first became politicized

when she found out that the camouflage uniforms that she was making with her co-workers were worn by police troops to brutally suppress the youth uprising in Soweto in 1976.

Mashinini's fight for the rights of Black workers led her to found the Commercial, Catering, and Allied Workers Union of South Africa. One victory she achieved on behalf of the women of her union was the abolition of vaginal and anal searches performed by white female managers on the Black female employees at a chain of retail stores as these employees left the workplace at the end of the day.

For her trade union activity, Mashinini was regularly harassed and degraded by state police. This harassment culminated in her arrest and subsequent detention for a period of six months, most of which was spent in solitary confinement.

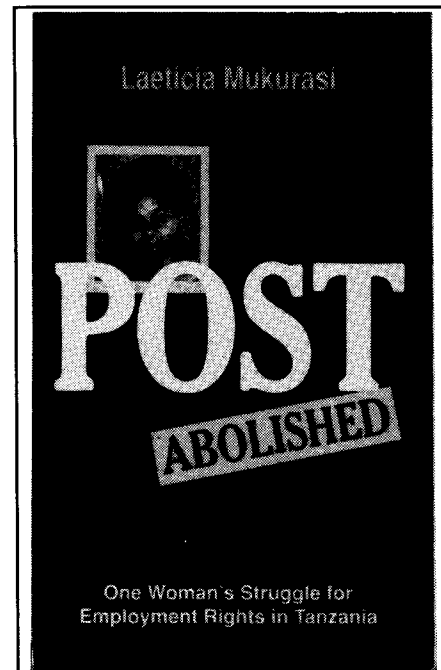
In spite of the enormous personal costs to her health and personal relationships, Mashinini continued to believe that the work she was doing would one day make South Africa a society based on fairness and equality—not on an intricate system of racial segregation and race-motivated violence. It is this vision and the personal style in which it is conveyed to the reader that makes this account so compelling.

Similarly, Laeticia Mukurasi's book, *Post Abolished*, documents a Black woman's fight against harassment and degradation in the workplace. But where Mashinini fought to achieve rights for all Black workers, Mukurasi's struggle was to enforce gender equality legislation put in place by Tanzania's socialist government after she was unfairly dismissed from her managerial position in a state-controlled company, Fibreboards Africa Limited (FAL).

Mukurasi's story is as follows:

In 1985, while employed as the Manpower Development and Administrative Manager at FAL, a company she had been with since 1976, Mukurasi received a letter informing her that her position with the company was being abolished due to cost cutting measures put in place by the Tanzanian government as a result of intervention from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Mukurasi spent the next two and a half years fighting her dismissal on the grounds of sex discrimination and eventually won her case. The battle, however, was a long one.

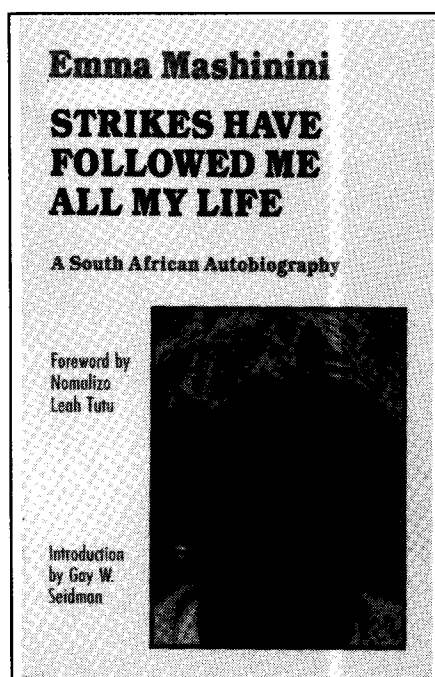


Some of the tactics used by Mukurasi's employers in their attempt to ridicule and victimize are shocking but by no means are they unique. For instance, while a company house was awarded to her as part of her employment contract, her employers issued her a memo stating that she was no longer eligible to live in the house upon separation from her husband because he did not give his consent to her living there. She was given seven days to comply.

In addition, Mukurasi's supervisor routinely bypassed her in favour of her subordinate. Later when she was reinstated as a result of the ruling by the chairman of the Permanent Labour Tribunal, it was this subordinate who despite having few qualifications, became her boss.

Mukurasi's account clearly exemplifies how a very influential "old boy's network" suppresses the ambitions of women to participate fully in Tanzanian society in spite of the fact that Tanzania's socialist government supports the ideology of equality.

In describing the importance in sharing her struggle with others she says: "Publicising our struggles is a necessary condition for destroying the stereotype of women as weak and it may greatly assist in bringing the social ideology which sees females as inferior more into line with the political ideology which promotes ideals of equality."



While both books are written in the first person, Mashinini's story is rich and personal. Reading this autobiography is like reading a long letter from a close friend. Mukurasi's ordeal, on the other hand, is laid out as a rational sequence of events, supplying dates and relevant correspondence. One chapter includes a transcript of a testimony from the court hearing into her dismissal.

Both accounts attest to the determination of African women, who fight against oppression in all forms. As South African women sang in the 1956 anti-pass campaign, "You have tampered with the women. You have struck a rock. You have dislodged a boulder; you will be crushed."

WOMEN WORKERS AND GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING

Edited by Kathryn Ward. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University/ILR Press, 1990.

By *Nora Jung*

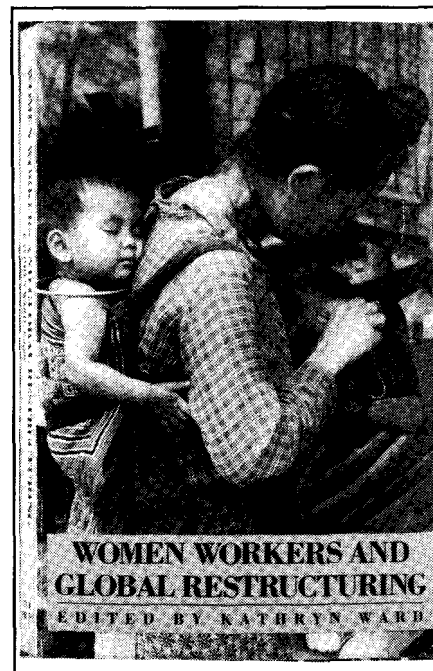
Since economists traditionally focus on market activities, women's non-wage labour has not been registered in works on economic development. On the other hand, women's wage labour has been described as supplementary or marginal to the household income as well as to economic development as a whole. The contributors to this collection did their research on women workers in countries from the core, the semiperiphery, and the periphery.

The eight articles are introduced by Kathryn Ward, who presents a critical overview of the literature on women workers and globalization. In Ward's opinion we have to develop new definitions for some key concepts in our theories on women and work. These concepts should aim at including housework and work in the informal sector, and women's various acts of resistance. Ward also suggests new perspectives from which we should theorize about women's work in the process of global restructuring.

Some of the contributors to the volume work out new concepts and approach issues surrounding women workers and global restructuring from new perspectives. Others use the findings of their research to challenge the conclusions of

earlier studies. Some authors, however, are less pioneering and use their case studies mainly to support arguments of preceding works.

In her study on factory workers and their families in Java, Diane L. Wolf reveals the contradiction between gender norms and real wages. Although she debunks the gender ideology which uses the myth of the "head of the household" to justify wage differences between men and women, some of her conclusions are rather controversial. In general she tends to emphasize the benefits these workers get from factory employment, over the possible drawbacks.



In her essay on factory and coffee farm labour in Columbia, Cynthia Truelove deals with the question of how "gender relations function to retain the actual value of women's labour below the social wage." She argues that the unprotected employment of women in the informal sector promotes the social reproduction of male coffee farm labour in Columbia. Truelove presents a sophisticated research on worker-management relationships and pays attention to women's resistance as well.

Joanna Hajicostandi shows how present gender relationships in Greece are embedded in history. After locating the Greek economy within the global economy she compares women's formal and informal work in the garment industry. Her study

elaborates on the advantages of homework and the problems of factory work. There is, however, little discussion of the disadvantages of homework and the benefits of factory work.

In a well documented article, Jean L. Pyle discusses the contradictions between the Irish state's policy to maintain the traditional family, which requires the woman to stay at home, and the effort to boost Irish economy by foreign direct investment, which in turn relies on cheap female labour. Pyle superbly supports her argument that "Irish state personnel designed policy not only to promote economic growth and development, but also to reproduce traditional familial relations."

To contrast the image of the Japanese worker as being protected by the "lifetime employment system," Carney and O'Kelly provide a comprehensive analysis of how most women workers are excluded from receiving the benefits of the lifetime employment system. In fact they argue that the restricted system was maintained and supported by the flexible labour reserve of women.

Using a rather original approach Karen J. Hossfield explores how immigrant women in Silicon Valley California subvert racist and sexist ideology to resist various forms of labour control. Since Hossfield did not find organized resistance, she focuses on individual resistance, but tends to elevate its importance on the level of organized resistance.

Hossfield is fascinated by the resourcefulness of women working under tight control and she arrives at an optimistic conclusion. She believes that individual resistance contains the possibility for greater, organized resistance.

Rita S. Gallin tries to find out the reasons behind the lack of labour militancy among female workers in Taiwan. Gallin seems to use lack of labour militancy interchangeably with lack of class consciousness. Her description of the working conditions in Taiwan prove that women workers are overpowered by management and government control. Gallin convinces the reader that this control prohibits labour militancy. However, her argument that there is a lack of class consciousness among working women in Taiwan does not sound convincing enough.

In her essay on maquiladora women, Susan Tiano challenges the validity of the