

# The Work of South African-Canadian Educator

by Dolana Mogadime

*C'est l'histoire de Goodie Tshabalala Mogadime, une éducatrice activiste de l'Afrique du Sud qui explore les liens entre son autobiographie, ses expériences*

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*de travail dans un contexte d'hégémonie patriarcale des institutions scolaires et son enseignement féministe.*

During the late '70s through to the early '90s (until the dismantling of apartheid), Goodie Tshabalala Mogadime, a South African activist educator, was a much sought-after public speaker for the Toronto branch of the African National Congress (ANC). She explains:

*There weren't many South African Black women or even men who had my educational credentials and were also willing to speak in public places about politics.*

It is important to understand the deeper layers of meaning in this statement. Goodie's political activist work was informed by an integration of her cultural understanding of Black women's leadership, her own educated middle-class privileged background, and her political consciousness.

Goodie's understanding of Black women's leadership grew out of the process of socialization she experienced in her relationship with her mother. She learned how Black women construct a self-definition rooted in praxis (both theory and action). For instance, the cultural construct

of "other-mother" produces a self-definition that is intricately tied to one's relationship to the community. One's commitment to giving back to the community is a site for both activism and self-empowerment. Self and community empowerment arise out of a commitment toward furthering the liberation of Black people from oppression. Black feminist revisionist historians have pointed out that this self-definition

has operated with the goal of transformation not only for the individual but for the communal members (Collins; Townshead). These interconnected notions were the basis for Goodie's sense of accountability to the children of the Black diaspora (within the Canadian context). Her deep-rooted desire to make sure Canadian Black students were provided with opportunities to learn about Black history arose out of her role as "other-mother" and cultural worker to Black students and her commitment ensured the delivery of this curriculum.

## **The work of an activist educator**

Goodie's initial involvement with the ANC was a result of her interest in the combined issues of Black children, education, and politics—the original cause for Goodie's exile from South Africa in 1963. Goodie and her family first migrated to the recently independent African country Zambia to protest the Bantu Education Act of 1953.<sup>1</sup> In 1970, the family migrated to Canada. Her protests for the sake of her own children's education were the catalyst for her eventual lifelong dedication to changing the effects of the Bantu Education Act on the lives of other Black children in

South Africa.

It was students' protests against the delivery of an inferior education for Blacks under the Bantu Education Act that formed the basis for the 1976 Soweto student uprising. The international media coverage of the resulting massacre of Black students on the receiving end of police gun fire incited questions among people from international communities. Western audiences in Canada, England, and the United States, wanted to reach a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding the government acts of violence against Black children.

In her role as an activist educator and as a representative of the ANC, Goodie's work focused on educating North American audiences about the disastrous affects of South African politics on the lives of children. The church became a focal point for this work and the World Council of Churches became a strong anti-apartheid group (Task Force on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility). Churches that had committed themselves to raising funds had to educate their congregations about the human rights abuses which characterized the dictatorship of the South African military regime. As a result, Goodie accepted invitations to take up these issues with congregations in United Churches across the province of Ontario and became a noted speaker.

Goodie worked as other middle-class Black women educators have, with the sense that their economic and social position should be used as a site for the upliftment of the race (Henry; King; Perkins). Central to Goodie's work as an educational activist is the notion of social responsibility to the community. In this internalized understanding of a Black women's cultural leadership, finding voice or self-empowerment grows out of working for the emancipation of the community. This link between

# Goodie Tshabalala Mogadime

self-empowerment and community empowerment continues as a theme throughout Goodie's work as an activist educator for the ANC and churches.

In response to the requests by various academic institutions and organizations that were calling for a South African public speaker, the ANC invited Goodie to take on an even more demanding public role. Goodie accepted invitations to address academic conferences as the key note speaker at the Human Rights Conference in Montreal (1982), at Grindstone Island's Women's Conference on the "Role of African Women in Liberation Movements" (1982), and for the Canadian International Defense Fund in Halifax (1983) among others spanning over a decade and a half (Tshabalala 1989).

The plight of the young freedom fighters in South Africa that called her to academic conferences across the globe, and to churches across the province of Ontario, once again influenced the direction of Goodie's educational activist life when she was called to the Solomon Mahlangu Refugee School in Tanzania, East Africa. In 1982, in coordination with Geneva, Zambia, Tanzania, ANC offices, and the sponsorship of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Goodie travelled to Tanzania to address an ANC Education Conference as the keynote speaker at the Solomon Mahlangu Refugee School. Umbrella ANC centres organized annual conferences with the aim to discuss the long-term visions of education under the projected democratic South African government. International specialists in education were brought to the refugee settlement to share their ideas with teachers and refugee students about what a restructured curriculum might look like.

The dialogue Goodie established with the refugee students as a guidance counsellor/advisor involved a dual role as an educationalist and other-mother. The refugee camp housed activist students who had escaped imprisonment and persecution from the government by fleeing from South Africa to various independent African countries such as Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. They were eventually sent by ANC branches to the camp in Tanzania. Goodie commented:

*It was incredible to go [to the Solomon Mahlangu School] and be of some use to [South African] refugees, to children. When I got there I found a lot of them were depressed, some of them were suicidal. You know some of them had left their homes knowing they might not return. And although they had this ambition of fighting apartheid—once they were away from their homes, you know some of them were as young as 14, 15, 16 years—the reality traumatized them. And even the process of getting to Tanzania was overwhelming.*

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*ing, they had to go through this thick dangerous bush. The stories were just horrendous, when they tell you about what happened to them in the bush. Seeing some of their friends dying...*

Added to this was the friction between various political camps that represented different political affilia-

tions. Some felt at odds with having to live in an ANC refugee camp. As a guidance counsellor, educational consultant, and other-mother,<sup>2</sup> Goodie listened to problem, issues, and dilemmas students spoke about. She recognized that the authoritative power relations between the teachers and students at the refugee camp had silenced the discussion of students concerns.

In response to a needs-based assessment of the South African refugee youth, Goodie set out to write and publish her first book, *Developing the Whole Individual in South Africa: A Guidance Program for Teachers and Parent*. In it Goodie discusses the idea of rethinking teacher student relations which silence the latter. What Goodie saw among the students at the refugee camp in Tanzania was a microcosm of what was happening in South Africa as a result of apartheid. Both students and teachers had been marginalized by an inferior Bantu curriculum. Goodie discovered that the so-called qualified teachers (as deemed by the low standards of South African government for the education of Blacks) were not

properly trained or qualified.

Goodie felt she had to assist in retraining, motivating, and inspiring teachers in a new direction, one that involved critical self-reflection of their role in the classroom as teachers. This became Goodie's goal and vision in her work as a writer and lecturer in institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

## University lecturer and writer

Drawing from case studies of her own experience as a teacher of exceptional students with cognitive and behavioural challenges, Goodie's program handbook for teachers focused on how teachers can work toward ensuring a secure, nurturing environment for students so they are free to learn. This depended on rethinking and restructuring the authoritative



Goodie in front of the Pietermaritzburg's Community College library, summer 1992

power relations between teachers and students, and changing teacher behaviour to accommodate positive self-concept development among students. In her subsequent books, *Free to Be: Creativity and Self-Discovery in Every Child* and *Dearest Teacher*, Goodie expanded on the notion that the teacher's self-understanding has a profound influence on classroom dynamics and student performance.

Engaging teachers in critical self-

reflective thinking became the resounding message behind the pedagogy and educational philosophy Goodie spoke about in South African educational institutions. Her ideas on critical self understanding among teachers was promoted as an avenue for opening up and changing attitudes towards teacher-student relations and the role of teachers. This process influenced instructors at teacher training colleges, universities, and in-service programs for teachers and principals in significant ways. It offered a new approach in dealing with teacher-student relations, including verbal and emotional abuse, and violence against students as well as vice-versa.

In *Dearest Teacher*, Goodie deals with the issue of violence by using her personal experiences of physical abuse as a child in the South African school system. Under a violent apartheid system this problem persisted and was swept under the carpet for more pressing political issues. The problem of abuse was heightened by the general feeling of despair, hopelessness, and helplessness which resulted from a severely repressive political climate. Goodie's ideas on critical self-understanding and love in the classroom aimed to engage educators in the process of reconstructing new meaning in their relations with students.

The publishing of Goodie's books in South Africa broke a barrier experienced by Black South African women writers who found that they were forced to publish outside of South Africa (Ravell-Pinto; Kuzwayo).<sup>3</sup> In order to publish Goodie's first book, Shuter and Shooter expected her to prove that there was a ready-made market. Hence, Goodie

had to produce letters from university professors at Faculties of Education where she had lectured, explaining the pedagogical usefulness of the text. Without this promise of a credible audience the book would never have reached a publishing house in South Africa.

The necessity of Goodie's lecture tours, the multiplicity of topics covered, and the variety of audiences from universities to business-women's organizations, was spurred on by the fact that Shuter and Shooter expected her to carry through with the projected selling of the book. Even in this capacity Goodie didn't receive the usual author appearance fee Shuter and Shooter paid to white authors for book promotions. Nor did she request appearance fees from the various educational institutions and organizations that invited her as a guest lecturer.

These acts of self-giving and self-sacrifice are testimonies of Goodie's commitment to using her position as middle-class Black women to encourage the social transformation and emancipation of Black people:

*In all the work I did with the universities I didn't ask to be paid. Even when I went for my extended stay in 1989, when I started the College. I did ask for paid leave from my board. I met with the director to discuss my project with him and he approved of it, he said yes, you'll go as our representative. He studied my books, and he was one hundred per cent for the project. But then he met some opposition with other officials and that offer was retracted. By then I had committed myself to working in South Africa for six months.*

*So I actually worked all that time without being paid. But I'm very happy for the support I have got through OTF [the Ontario Teachers Federation]. You know they funded my first book which I self-published before Shuter and Shooter took it on in South Africa. And various small grants from churches, from non-profit and gov-*

*ernmental organizations [helped too]. WUSC [World University Service Overseas] and CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency] have supported my annual lecture tours and projects in South Africa over a ten year period. The Cheltenham United Church congregation, under the leadership of Minister Wilma Cade, has been generous in paying my airfare to South Africa for four years. I'm quite fortunate that they believed in my work in teacher education, and educational development.*

During her six month leave of absence from teaching, while she was stationed at the University of Zululand as a visiting lecturer, Goodie appeared on both South African national television and renowned national radio talk shows. In 1989 from August to November, Goodie presented 50 lectures. Through this work, Goodie came to be seen as a pioneering spirit in education through the media (see Cembali; Green; Kiesouw; Kunene; McKinnell, 1986a, 1986b; Paice; Swan; Von Klemperer, 1991, 1992a, 1992b). The impact she made on the popular media as a pioneering spirit in education was important because it meant Goodie could access higher levels of funding and support from the private sector for her work. She employed these contacts when she spearheaded a ground-breaking project while stationed at the University of Zululand Education Department.

### **Contribution to educational development within South Africa**

Goodie's most significant work in educational development in South Africa occurred when she pioneered the opening of Pietermaritzburg College in 1991. The support of the executive director and the divisional head of the Department of Education and Culture assisted in working toward establishing Pietermaritzburg's first community college.

In 1991, a group of established

wealthy white males from the Rotary Club of South Africa had approached Goodie with a question: "What can be done for the lost generation?" This is a term commonly used to describe the militant youth who are most known for the 1976 Soweto student uprising. Their protests against the Act was marked by ongoing school strikes, student demonstrations, and strategic school absenteeism. Their political actions of defiance against the government's enforcement of the Act eventually led this mass group to become economically disfranchised and unemployed as mature adults.

Once again Goodie was called to churches and academic conferences to answer to the question: "Who will care for the lives of these dissident revolutionary students?" This is also what drew her to the ANC refugee school in Tanzania in 1982. Indeed, it was this very question which drove Goodie in her work as a writer and lecturer in South Africa after 20 years of exile. Once in South Africa it was possible answers to this question that changed educational policy which excluded mature people from obtaining an education.

Goodie worked in collaboration with the South African Rotary Club to establish the College. Modelled after colleges in Canada, with information acquired through Goodie's contacts with local colleges and research into higher educational administration, Pietermaritzburg Community College is the first of its kind in South Africa. It is politically committed to changing the class position of marginalized Blacks and offers literacy development and math upgrading, as well as skills which prepare people for a variety of sectors in the labour market from computer technology to early childhood education.

### **Conclusion**

Both Goodie's critical consciousness and her leadership skills were very much in demand within the political forum of the ANC and the anti-apartheid movement in Canada. I have demonstrated how Goodie's

activism and leadership grew out of a relational understanding between self and community. This interconnection is identified by Black feminists as a site for women's activism in the struggles of the community. The service in moving one's community forward results in Black women's self-empowerment and leadership.

Goodie's role as an other-mother and guidance counsellor to South African political refugee children gave rise to her desire to work toward changing the authoritative relations between teachers and students. Similarly her work as an activist educator helped establish South Africa's first community college informed by a committed concern for the needs of disenfranchised revolutionary students. Goodie's work as an activist educator and her cultural understanding of her role as an other-mother to South African children has assisted in moving her community forward.

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<sup>1</sup>The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was an oppressive law instated by the government of South Africa which legitimized and enforced mass under-education of Black people for the purpose of maintaining white military dictatorship (Troup). The desire to secure better educational opportunities for Black children was perceived as a political act of defiance by the oppressive Nationalist government regime. Many Black people marched, protested, were jailed and killed in their attempts to change the racial political ordering of society (Hartshorne).

<sup>2</sup>Goodie's task as a guidance counsellor and educational consultant were

integral to her cultural self-understanding of her role as an "other-mother." This is evident in her commitment to listening to the concerns of refugee students. These sessions extended into the early hours of the morning. Such action reflected an ethic of caring and accountability that is beyond that of a guidance counsellor. It reflected that part of her responsibility as "other-mother" to ensure the needs of the community's children are met.

<sup>3</sup>It's important to note that the combined factors of the political nature of Black women's writing and the banning of resistance literature did not permit the publication of Black women's work.

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