



SURFACING: ON BEING BLACK AND FEMINIST IN SOUTH AFRICA

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E edited by Gabeba Baderoon and Desiree Lewis, this collection of essays cuts across a variety of themes: some which are easily part of the feminist lexicon, like freedom, as well as others, like religion, which have a less intuitive association. In each piece, the authors speak to their personal entry-points and interpretations of what it means to be feminist and Black, making for rich and transparent material. The reflective stance taken by the stellar set of contributors makes for an insightful read, freed somewhat from the constraints of academic writing.

Many of the essays in *Surfacing* are dedicated to making visible the processes of Black women's writing. Danaï Mupotsa traces her literary and ancestral companions in her essay "Breathing Under Water" while Barbara Boswell's "Echoes of Miriam Tlali" recounts her journey with veteran novelist Miriam Tlali and reflects on her writings. Zukiswa Wanner imparts her decades-worth of experience in the less-than-glamorous publishing world, recounting her long journey from publishing her first novel *Madams* to eventually becoming a publisher herself. Through her insights, Wanner demystifies the behind-the-scenes process of publishing, calling attention to how a lack of racial transformation in the publishing industry affects each part of the publishing pipeline. Weighing in on the subject, Sisonke Msimang reflects on the process of writing a biography on *Winnie Madikizela-Mandela*, illustrating how sexism affects iconic women such as Madikizela-Mandela just as it does lesser known women. In Msimang's reflection, she also grapples with what it means to treat political figures with dignity without simultaneously losing focus of ethical questions.

Zethu Matebeni's essay, "Black Lesbian Feminist Thought of a Born Queer", is a standout piece, defying expectations about African culture and the attitudes of older generations towards queerness. Matebeni

shares a coming-of-age story that highlights the ways in which women serve as pillars of care within families. Merging reflection with cultural analysis in her writing, Panashe Chigumadzi also touches on the intergenerational question. Hers is a contemplation of learning to "hear the silence" between her and her maternal grandmother. The method she describes is reminiscent of Nthabiseng Motsemme's 2004 seminal text titled "The Mute Always Speak". In her essay, Chigumadzi explores the historical silencing of Black women but also the ways silence can be a legible part of communication between Black women.

Central to feminist thought are issues of representation and, in a critical conversation, Zoë Wicomb and Lewis probe the lenses used to read contemporary representations of Sarah Baartman. Seeking no easy answers, they discuss how empathy, pain, shame and pride can be utilised to serve different ends within representations. In their discussion of Willie Bester's sculpture of Baartman, Wicomb and Lewis set the scene for other authors such as Mary Hames and Pumla Dineo Gqola to dig into discussions of various kinds of art and squeeze out its pedagogical and political fruits.

Ending off the collection, Patricia McFadden reflects on the vulnerability of radical feminism to be usurped by nationalist agendas. She turns our attention to an insidious threat: the ease with which notions of "patriarchal impunity and violation" have been made blunt through their absorption into depoliticised, technocratic language. Like Wicomb and Lewis, she prompts readers to hold onto the sharpness of thought that gives feminist imagination its bite.



Gorata Chengeta is a sexual violence researcher, based in Johannesburg. She enjoys writing, thinking, and teaching about sexuality, politics, feminism, and social justice.