

THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY (HONORIS CAUSA)

MOTHOBI MUTLOATSE

Mothobi Mutloatse founded Skotaville Publishers, co-founded the literary magazine *Staff-rider*, and is now the Chairperson of the Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust. He came into prominence after Skotaville had published Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's first book, *Hope and Suffering*, in 1982, a book that Mutloatse personally edited and for which he wrote the foreword. This book became an instant best seller and was soon translated into six languages, namely, Dutch, Spanish, Norwegian, Swedish, German and Japanese. The German version alone sold over 80 000 copies, an accomplishment which, according to Mutloatse, was unheard of for a non-German and African cleric.

Skotaville Publishers, named after the former general secretary of the ANC, Mveli Trevor Skota (1893–1976), was the first publishing house in South Africa to focus on literary and scholarly works by and about Black people during the time when the Apartheid government was at its most severe. Established by Mutloatse in 1982, Skotaville Publishers was strengthened by collaborations with renowned American publishing houses such as Orbis Books and Eerdmans Publishers, with which it co-published a number of books for the South African and American readership, especially in the field of Black Theology. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Skotaville Publishers was therefore a household name in South Africa and served as a publishing avenue for aspirant black writers and academics as well as those writers whose material were so politically sensitive that the other publishers would not touch it for fear of government reaction. In this way Mutloatse made a significant contribution in advancing the African thought and also in unearthing untapped and latent literary talent.

Mothobi was born in Western Native Township, Johannesburg, in 1950. After completing high school in 1969, he worked for newspapers such as the *Golden City Post*, *Weekend World* and *The Voice*, where he trained and gained experience as a journalist. In the early 1980s, prior to the publication of *Hope and Suffering*, he compiled and edited a trilogy of the writings by prominent black authors. The first of these anthologies, entitled *Forced Landing: Africa South Contemporary Writing* (1980), was banned by the apartheid government upon publication. This anthology focused on South Africa's black cultural history. The second anthology, published in 1981, focused on historical and journalistic texts by great writers such as Tiyo Soga, Hope Dube, Noni Jabavu and Sol T Plaatje. It was titled *Reconstruction: Ninety Years of Black Historical Literature*. The third of the trilogy was titled *Umhlaba Wethu* (Our Land).

Apart from skilfully compiling anthologies, Mutloatse is a creative writer who has excelled in several literary genres. His novella, *Mama ndiyalila* depicted the 1976 Soweto students' uprising. For the stage he wrote and produced *Lakutshon' ilanga* which portrayed life on Robben Island; *Nkosi! The Healing Song* dramatised Enoch Sontonga's prayer for Africa. He also wrote dramas on prominent people such as the legendary saxophonist, Kippie Morolong Moeketsi, and the author, Bloke Modisane.

The idea of establishing Skotaville Publishers was born during a visit to the United States in 1976 where Mutloatse attended a programme on creative writing at the University of Iowa. This university subsequently awarded him an Honorary Fellowship in Creative Writing. In 1982 Skotaville was born and Desmond Tutu's *Hope and Suffering* published. Soon thereafter Mutloatse released a deluge of publications by authors such as Neville Alexander, Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane, James Cone, Philip Kgosana, Bob Leshoi, Chabane Manganyi, Don Mattera, Fatima Meer, Itumeleng Mosala, Buti Tlhagale, Mokgethi Motlhabi, Sipho Sepamla, Tim Couzens, Motsoko Pheko, Jonathan Jansen, Anne Letsebe, Simon Maimela, Kwesi Kwaa Prah, Lindiwe Mabuza, Bishop Mvume Dandala and Rev Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, among many others. Mutloatse worked tirelessly as Managing Director of Skotaville and soldiered on as creative writer during those difficult times in our history.

In 1996 Skotaville Publishers evolved into a broader entity known as Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, a vehicle through which Mutloatse continues his publishing activities as well as several other interests in the development and growth of the arts. Recent publications under the Trust include works such as Sandi Baai's *O R Tambo: Teacher, Lawyer, Freedom Fighter*; SADET's *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories*, Volume 1; The 2010 Arts and Culture Programme 2008, by the Department of Arts and Culture; and a photographic tribute to former President Nelson Mandela by Peter Magubane, entitled *Man of the People* and co-published with Macmillan in 2008.

Mutloatse's contribution to African writing and scholarship in South Africa is unique and commendable. This began at a time when intellectual activity by Black South Africans was discouraged and frowned upon by the country at large. His unrelenting efforts were therefore made at great sacrifice to himself and his family who had to endure long periods of time without sufficient, or any, income due to the unpredictable and unreliable sales of his books. However, the resilient Skotaville survived that life marked by vicissitudes until 1996, when Mutloatse diversified its activities to incorporate most of the arts with the establishment of the Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust.

He is working on two projects at the moment, he says. The first is on the life of Doc Bikitsha, the father of Black journalism. The second is a multi-media book on the historic Rivonia Trial. This book will come with the audio tapes of the court proceedings, particularly Nelson Mandela's famous speech from the dock.

It is therefore my greatest honour and pleasure to present Mothobi Mutloatse for the degree DLit et Phil, *honoris causa*, because of his outstanding achievements in the transformation of the South African Arts from a stilted and conservative focus to a much broader and more comprehensive African outlook.

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