RETHINKING THE FRONTIERS OF THE EASTERN CAPE

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Rethinking the Frontiers of the Eastern Cape participates in ongoing debates about academic history writing in post-apartheid South African and as such, it offers a brief review of the scholarly interventions that have delineated ‘the Eastern Cape’ as a unit of analysis in South African history. After 1994 debates about the writing of history in post-apartheid South Africa have created conditions for rethinking the scholarship that has sustained historical inquiry in South Africa. A brief review of South African historiography in this context reveals the evolution of the Eastern Cape in colonial, liberal and in revisionist traditions. These strands have sustained academic historical inquiry in South Africa for some time now.1 The first two genres of historical writing have shaped the emergence of professional history writing in South Africa from the writings of Mcall Theal and Cory. Followed by historians such as McMillan and de Kiewiet’s exposition of themes in social and economic history. The revisionist strand of South African history emerged in the 1960s and it became a popular critique of apartheid’s policies of racial segregation in the 1970s, 1980s and in the 1990s. Known for their exposition of the frontier and its relation to the nature of apartheid state in South Africa. As far as these scholars were concerned, the frontier thesis espoused in colonial and settler historiography of the Cape Colony justified the subjugation of the Khoi, the San and the Xhosa. Also writing in this tradition, Martin Legassick in his seminal work ‘The Politics of a South African Frontier: The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries, 1780-1840 has questioned ‘the fact of white supremacy’ which in his view was ‘often left unquestioned’ in South African historiography. 2 By highlighting flaws in colonial and liberal appropriations of the frontier thesis, Legassick demonstrated how scholars in South African history ‘conveniently ignored the existence of non-white autonomous communities with political power ‘in the frontier.’4 Martin Legassick’s study of the frontier revealed the cultural intersections and the transfers that occur in ‘a frontier zone’, a point at which the different cultural exchanges take place. In this way the radical Marxist historiography established the prior existence of autonomous non-white political communities in history. In their explanations these scholars demonstrated how colonial racial segregationist systems
were sustained through the economic collapse of the native reserves [such as the Eastern Cape] and argued that the cheap labour system of migrancy nurtured the development of South African capitalism.”

An inquiry into the Eastern Cape after 1994 grapples with the making of this geopolitical space. Here we immediately encounter the problem of provincialization which had its roots in the multiparty negotiation forum in the 1990s. As Ruiters states, during the negotiations, the National Party insisted on maintaining the ‘regional clauses’ that would make South Africa a quasi-federal state while on the other hand, the African National Congress argued in favour of a unitary state.6 Each side, as Ruiters demonstrates wanted to maintain its power base in specific regional areas. The rationalisation of the provinces in these terms risks recreating created apartheid ethnic enclaves of the homelands and as such would continue to deepen the divisions of the past. The most recent trajectory of this problem can be traced in the 1970s when the Eastern Cape consisted of two national states Transkei which gained its independence in 1976 and Ciskei which became independent in 1981. During this period, the apartheid government had introduced regional development advisory committees and the New Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA). Its aims were to disperse investment among major nodes within the nine regions in the province- a blueprint for a federal government. This is the very structure which the nine provinces inherited after 1994.

As far as the Eastern Cape is concerned, the making of the provinces reflected colonial logic of territorial control. This is the very logic that has created an unchanging narrative of violence and underdevelopment in the Eastern Cape. This narrative is based on the violence that characterised the first point of contact between the agents of colonial government, missionaries the traders, and exchanges between militarised commandos on the plains of the Eastern Cape. These interactions have created an enduring narrative of the violence that characterised the making of the Eastern Cape. This narrative is preserved in war memorials and grave sites that convey the history of military conquest in the Eastern Cape. Equally, the military narrative has created an enduring Xhosa nationalist narrative of those who died defending their land from the colonial invasion. The problem with the oversaturation of the narratives of violent
encounters is that they do not alter the spatial relations associated with specific areas of conflict between colonial administration and the Xhosa nationalists. This tension is carried through unchanging spatial conceptions of the Eastern Cape as a site of conflict and as such, it has kept the region locked in territorial terms set in colonial administrative discourse. Trapped in this logic these historical narratives elide the productive ‘forces that have defined this province not only as a geographical space, but as a place where people lived in the past and continue to do so in the present. Going beyond the narratives of violent encounters this paper considers how one might approach the Eastern Cape differently?

The most recent and captivating motivation for studying the Eastern Cape has issued from some of the leading historians in province who have argued: ‘if the history of the Eastern Cape is to have a wider relevance in the present, it has to speak to the problem of governance and transformation which the province faces today’…, to understand the problems of the Eastern Cape [these historians have suggested] a return ‘not to the history of the frontier but to the history of the period which immediately succeeded it.’ Rethinking the frontiers of the Eastern Cape takes a slight detour from the proposition which negates the frontier for two reasons: 1] negating the frontier, not only overlooks the logic of territorial control that has rendered the Eastern Cape as a supplier of cheap labour and as an ethnic enclave, but 2] it forecloses an engagement with the different forms of artistic expression that have produced the scripts that instigates a different kind of engagement with the Eastern Cape.

Rethinking the frontiers of the Eastern Cape offers a critique of the logic of territorial control, ‘the frontiers of colonial administration’ that dictated the nature of colonial and apartheid state formation and its renderings in post-apartheid state. It is a rethinking which calls for a reworking of the spatial dimension of the Eastern Cape in a manner that would give a different conception of the spatial relations at work in the structuring of the post-apartheid state. Rethinking the frontiers contends that the failure to detect the resilience of the colonial logic of territorial and spatial conceptions of the provinces have rendered the Eastern Cape as a linear projection of an unchanging narrative of colonial violence, underdevelopment despair and emptiness. The argument here does not seek to write ‘the agony of the dispossessed landless
communities whose lands were taken during colonial invasion out of history, rather, in keeping with this agonising pain of loss and nothingness, demonstrated in the work of Tiyo Soga, Charlotte Maxeke, Nontsizi Mgqwetho and Gladys Mgudlandlu one begins to cross the cultural borders into which the scripts of the lives and the works of these individuals have been obscured. These lives demonstrates how one might come to a different conception of the Eastern Cape in ways that do not take the prescripts of colonial violence as its starting point, but affirms the question of what it means to be human. The focus on these four individuals who comprehended a different conception of the Eastern Cape and its place in the world. The worldliness of the Eastern Cape is discussed in relation to not only its specific geographical location, but in relation to the universalising discourses of the mid-nineteenth century to the twentieth century which these different lives participated in altering the terms of their existence.

Rethinking the frontiers works with a different conception of the Eastern Cape as it attends to the ‘frontiers’ that have made the Eastern Cape a place where people live and thus made accessible to global and universalising discourses of human evolution, civilization, colonisation, apartheid, human rights, democracy and freedom. While not blind to the problematic renderings of these concepts in the work of Soga, Maxeke, Mzimba, Mgqwetho and Mgudlandlu considering that they were already cast in the discourses described here, their thoughts, arts, craft and oratory skills registered their response to colonial and nationalist conceptions of territorial control that were channelled in terms of the spaces they inhabited in their life time. Each of the individuals selected represent an aspect of how the early African modernity responded to colonial notions of time and space. What is common in these figures are their fluidity which often disrupts the pace with which colonial notions of time which they incorporated and at certain times they rejected.

**Tiyo Soga**

One of the major interventions regarding to disrupting colonial notion of ‘the changing times’ is found in the work of Tiyo Soga who in 1856 disputed John Chalmers’s prediction of the extinction of the Xhosa. In the aftermath of the cattle
killing, John A. Chalmers, Soga’s friend and colleague in the missionary enterprise predicted that Africans were approaching an age of extinction. His first step was to "deracialise and demystify ‘blackness.’" In May 1865, Tiyo Soga responded to the controversial statement made by Chalmers in an article which appeared in The King William’s Town Gazette and Kaffrarian Banner of 11 May 1865. In what later became the basis for the early traditions of black intellectuals in South Africa he argued:

“Africa was God given to the race of Ham. I find Negro from the days of the old Assyrians downward, keeping his ‘individuality’ and ‘distinctiveness’, amid the wreck of empires, and the revolution of ages. I find him keeping his place among the nations, and keeping his home and country. I find him opposed by nation after nation and driven from his home. I find him enslaved – exposed to vices and brandy of the white man. I find him in this condition for many a day – in the West Indian Islands, in Northern and Southern America, and in the South American Colonies of Spain and Portugal. I find him exposed to all these disasters, and yet living – multiplying and never extinct. Yea, I find him now as the prevalence of Christian and philanthropic opinions on the right of man obtains among civilized nations, returning unmanacled to the land of his forefathers, taking back with him the civilization and the Christianity of those nations.”

Issuing from Tiyo Soga’s article ‘destiny of the Kaffir Race’ which was in itself a reaction to a perceived ‘extinction of the Kaffir Race’ which issued from within the Christian missionary circles. Here Soga responded to what could have propelled the ‘extinction of race,’ a very dangerous discourse which could have had even more devastating effects in the aftermath of the Nongqawuse episode. The period marked the weakening of traditional political structures. On the Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony, the Nongqawuse cattle killing episode of 1865 epitomised the subjugation of the AmaXhosa through loss of economic independence and access to a key social resource in cattle. A volatile environment persisted in which the early African intellectuals and their mentors applied their hearts and minds to the predicament they found themselves in. While responding to a discourse which sought to limit itself to misrepresent the Xhosa, Soga’s response to what could have easily been deemed a defence of an essentialist Xhosa identity, rose above narrow ethnic caricature and demonstrated how the Xhosa were constituted part of a larger Negro group in Africa. Expanding the scope for understanding a non-essentialist Xhosa identity which is in relation to the Negro population dispersed in different parts of the world. Here Soga
demonstrates how the Negro survived some of the gruelling conditions of their existence in the plantation fields of West Indian Islands, in Northern and Southern America, and in the South American Colonies of Spain and Portugal. In Soga one gets a sense of someone who took interest in the history of the Negro race and the conditions of its existence. Soga’s reference to the existence of the Negro in ‘...the prevalence of Christian and philanthropic opinions on the right of man’ demonstrates how the very discourse of ‘rights of man did not include the Negro and in this context, Soga suggests ‘the Negro exists among the nations of the world, but returns unchained to the land of his forefathers taking back with him the civilization and the Christianity of those nations.”

Charlotte Maxeke

Between 1894 and 1914 a dozen on South African studied in the United States under the auspices of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This intervention produced the second generation of mission trained black intellectuals. The first blacks to matriculate at an American college were Bristol Yamma and John Quarrine who were sailors from Ghana. They enrolled at the College of New York, Princeton in 1774 under the auspices of Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles. The pair hoped the two sailors could return home and educate Christian missionaries in Ghana. In 1854 a group of Princeton graduates established the Ashwin Institute which later developed into the Lincoln University. The aim for establishing this institute was to train blacks –Africans and Afro-Americans for work in missions of the ‘Dark Continent,’ Many black Americans were not in agreement with Lincoln linkages with the American Colonisation Society and it had attracted dozens of African students. The flow of South African students to the United States swelled Afro-American Mission Movement well into the late nineteenth century, a time in which the Afro-American Mission Movement had embarked on a major drive to train native missionaries. The training of African missionaries became an integral part of the African American Evangelism. The African-Americans believed that it was their providential task to ‘redeem Africa’ however, scholars have been quick to note that despite this providential destiny, these evangelists were reluctant to
venture into Africa themselves and instead trained African missionaries as a substitute for actually embarking on the providential task themselves. By the end of the nineteenth century a contingent of South African students entered the educational migration of students from Africa to the USA.

Charlotte Maxeke represented the first generation of the students from South Africa who studied in the USA. She enrolled at Wilberforce in 1895 along with Magazo Fanelo Sakie, James Nxaninxani Kombolo, John Boyson Radisi and Edward Magaya. These students all hailed from the Eastern Cape. Sakie and Kolombe were both Xhosa speakers from a Wesleyan mission near Queenstown (could be Kammastone). Radisi was the oldest in the group he was twenty eight years old and he hailed from Cradock. Within their month of arrival Magazo Sakie wrote to the Voice of Missions pledging to use his education to help uplift his people.

Charlotte Maxeke expressed the same missionary commitment in her first essay when she wrote ‘I wish there were more of our people here to enjoy the privileges of Wilberforce and then go back and teach our people so our home lose that awful name ‘the Dark continent’ and be properly called the continent of light.11 None of the four students who registered with Charlotte Maxeke at Wilberforce qualified. Kolombe was forced to return to South Africa by ill health. Magaya transformed to Lincoln University where he graduated in 1903. Nothing is known of Radisi and Sakie. These students were a product of a specific class at a particular historical movement. They were drawn from a highly conscious Christian elite in which respectability and commitment to Western education reigned supreme. This class was also driven by a sense of duty towards their fellow uneducated class. Culturally, this class thought of themselves as ‘progressive’ as they marked progression from their traditions to a ‘western civilization.’ As such this generation of students was receptive to the Afro-American mission ideology with its emphasis on redeeming Africa from bondage of ignorance and sin.

Driven by her desire to see Africa losing her awful name, Charlotte Maxeke facilitated the registration of Chalmers Moss and Henry Msikinya in 1896. Both were from Kimberly and were drawn from wealthy class. Henry Moss was the son of Joseph Moss—an interpreter to the High Court of Griqualand West. He had graduated from Lovedale
and was a devoted Christian. Mr Interpreter Moss as he was affectionately known exemplified the unflagging faith in education, a signature of the 19th century African elite. In Kimberly, Moss was known for his defence of classical education, he no doubt grabbed the opportunity to obtain university training for his son. Henry Msikinya came from an equally illustrious family. His brother Jonas was a court interpreter at Beaconsfield. His brother, John was an ordained minister in the Wesleyan Church. Elder Msikinya at Lovedale and Henry followed David to Healdtown. He was twenty six years old and a school teacher when he departed for America in 1896. Tragically, Chalmers Moss died after a year in the USA leaving Henry Msikinya to complete his degree and returned to South Africa in 1901.

Two other students Charles Dube and Theodore Kakaza arrived at Wilberforce in 1896. Both arrived at the tender age of eighteen years and were considered the youngest of the South African students at Wilberforce. Dube was the son of an ordained American Board Ministers and the younger brother of John Dube who was popular among Amakholwa ase Natal. Like his brother, Charles Dube studied at the Congregational Mission at AManzimtoti before coming to America. Kakaza hailed from a Wesleyan Congregation in Port Elizabeth. Following this group of South Africa students, James Tantsi and Marshal Maxeke joined the student population of Wilberforce towards the end of 1896. This pair came with a specific intension to train as missionaries. Tansi was the eldest son of Ethiopian Church founder J.Z. Tantsi. He had studied at Zonneblom College. Marshall Maxeke trained at Lovedale in the industrial department. The pair had worked together in Johannesburg as apprentice by day and lay preachers at night. By the end of the nineteenth century Wilberforce was already filtering back across the Atlantic African Christians from Cape Town and Bechuanaland. Of those who crossed the Atlantic during this period were: John Manye, Mbulaleni Kuzwayo, Albert and David Sondezi and Stephen Gumende. They all hailed from Natal. Sebopioa Molema from Mafikeng was also a graduate from Lovedale – related to Silas Molema- his uncle.

In 1890 Francis McDonald Gow, a provincial member of the Cape Town ‘coloured’ community and also a member of the AME Church in the Western Cape sent his children Hannah, Francis and Herman to the USA. Marcus Gabashane’s son, Henry Barton who was 17 years also joined Wilberforce in 1898. Patrick Ngcayiya, son of H.R.
Ngcayiya was barely thirteen years old in 1904 when he accompanied his father to the General Conference in America. Since then, he remained in the US until he obtained a bachelor’s degree long after his father had left the AME Church and established the Ethiopian Church. The last to arrive was Jonathan Mokone, son of the AME Church’s founder. Mokone enrolled at Wilberforce in 1911 having graduated first class at Wilberforce Institute in Johannesburg –Evaton. This generation of students subscribed to the idea that education was the key to individual and racial progress. Black education became the basis on which claims for open door policies were promised but were never fulfilled. The departure of students for America was portrayed as the seminal event in the birth of a ‘new civilization.’ Little did they know that it was the very formations that facilitated the exclusion of the non-white populations of South Africa in the twentieth century. Marcus Gabashane was the founder of Ethiopian Church summed up this in a letter to Bishop Turner which accompanied his son Henry to America ‘My Lord, remember again, that this young man is the seed you are going to saw in Africa.’ Churchmen such as Henry Turner had long maintained that ‘civilisation’ would soon bloom in Africa only through black American agency.

**John Phambani Mzimba**

In 1901 J.P. Mzimba founder of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa arrived in America with eight young men whom he enrolled at Lincoln University. In 1903 close to a dozen of Mzimba’s followers were studying in the USA in Lincoln’s Tuskegee seeking professional training not available in South Africa. Those included Pixley ka Seme, A.B. Xuma. In contrast to their AME counterparts, those were responsible for their passage and tuition in the USA. Gordon Dana – one of the young men sent to America by Mzimba came from Qumbu District. Melrose Sishuba and John Sonjica two members of the reconstituted Ethiopian Church who sailed in 1910 presented similar background. Both were minister’s sons descended from two of the successful progressive farming families in the Eastern Cape.
Dana was unable to raise tuition after the death of his father. He returned to South Africa without the degree in law. A.B. Xuma completed his medical degree only by interspersing his studies with long stretches of working in stables, coal yards and in the boiler rooms. Sishuba and Sonjica returned to South Africa after the WW1. Approximately 100-150 South African students from South Africa passed through the USA between 1894-1914 fifty of those were under the auspices of the AME church. After the First World War South African government made efforts to stop the traffic of students from South Africa to the USA on claims that the church was propagating subversive ideology. The Union government introduced stringent control – and students wanting to study abroad went through a lengthy process of visa application. State intervention in the provision of higher education and training to non-white population was made available in 1916 when the Native College of Fort Hare was established.

While the Native College of Fort Hare was established, the outward migration of black students from South Africa to the US continued and culminated to the rise of the third generation of mission educated intellectuals and community servants. In 1920s Violet Makhanya and Amelia Njongwane were sent to Tuskege by the US Phelps Stokes Commission as part of an experimental programme to introduce American style vocational training to South Africa. Both were from prominent Christian families.

Phelps Stokes also funded Reuben Caluza and Q.M. Cele to the USA. Eli Nnyombolo. Son of an AME minister Eva Mahuma a schoolteacher, Pear Ntsiko – daughter of one of Mangena Mokone original Marabastad parishes. Haistings Banda destined to become the most famous Wilberforce product was a clerk at a Witwatersrand goldmine also studied at Wilberforce.

**Training in the US**

The Faculty to which arriving South African students were exposed included some of America’s foremost black intellectuals, E.W.B. DuBios lectured English, German and Classics. He had just graduated and returned to US fro Germany. William Scarborough taught classical languages in the school of theological seminary. He had risen from
slavery and became one of America’s philologists. What distinguished Wilberforce from other learning centres was its underlying faith in the intellectual potential of black race. Students were exposed to full classical curriculum featuring ancient and modern languages, mathematics and science. Rhetoric and composition were included to encourage proper elocution. Candidates in ministry received training in everything from systematic theology to Hebrew and even the school boasted a small Law Department. Four Degrees were awarded Bachelor of Arts, Divinity Degree awarded to graduates of Pyne’s Theological Seminary and lastly, Bachelor degree in Science and Law.

In 1880s, the institution had serious financial constraints and as a result, it received financial aid from the local legislature. This came at a price as the institution had to establish a commercial and a normal Industrial department at the Wilberforce Campus. This signalled a retreat from Pyne’s liberal idea as the institution veered to becoming more vocational. This occurred at a time when discussion of Africa still remained with ‘Dark Continent’ tradition which simultaneously portrayed Africa as a garden uncorrupted by man and a jungle befogged by ignorance and sin. Responding to this Theodore Kakaza recalled that a few of his fellow students had the nerve to examine their anatomy to see if they could observe the remnants of the forest of their ancestors.

**Nonstizi Mgqwetho**

The first and the only female poet to produce a substantial body of work in Xhosa. The poetry of Nonstizi Mgqwetho reflects her engagement with the discussions that accompanied the problematic renderings of civilisation and social progress in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. Nontsizi Mgqwetho was caught up in the mineral revolution that swept up all independent African chiefdoms in Southern Africa. She lived on the Witwatersrand goldfields but looked back to her background in the Cape and to earlier, happier times when the independent Xhosa chiefdoms were free of white domination. Between 1920 and 1929 Mgqwetho contributed poetry to Johannesburg newspaper, Umteteli wa Bantu. She was the first and only female poet to produce a substantial body of work in Xhosa. Very little is known about her life.
Nontsizi Mgqwetho exploded on the scene with her swaggering, urgent, confrontational woman’s poetry on 23 October 1920 and she sent poem to the newspaper regularly throughout the three years from 1924 to 2926. She withdrew for two years until her final poem appeared in December 1928 and January 1929. She then disappeared into silence and nothing is heard from her leaving behind her name an anguished voice of an urban woman confronting male dominance, ineffective and tragic history of nineteenth century territorial and cultural dispossession. She found her strength in her own conception of the Christian God and in Mother Africa. Nursemaid slain in her suckling’s, who, she insists had no need to respond to appeals for her return since she has never left, steadfastly standing by her disappointing people. In a lament published on 2 December 1922, Nontsizi Mgqwetho gave her mother’s name Emma Jane Mgqwetho, the daughter of Zingelwa of the Cwerah clan, and associates her with the Hewu District near Queenstown. Nonstizi took her father’s clan, Chizama. In the poem she urges members of the two bereaved clans to weep at the death of her mother: She signed he first poem in Umteteli with her clan name, Chizama and her next two poems credit her as author in terms of her clan. Earlier in 1897 two prose contributions written by Chizama were published in the King William’s Town newspaper Imvo Zabantsundu- submitted from Tamara in the Eastern Cape.

Gladys Mgudlandlu [1925-1979]

Gladys Mgundlandlu was born near Peddie, Eastern Cape in 1923 to Mfengu parents. She attended her primary schooling from 1929 in Port Elizabeth. She obtained a junior certificate from Healdtown Institution and in 1942 qualified as a teacher at Lovedale College, Alice. Mgudlandlu moved back to Port Elizabeth and registered to train as a nurse at Victoria Hospital, but did not complete her training before moving with her parents in 1944 to Langa, Cape Town. She continued with her training, but a leg fracture made the physical demands of nursing difficult so she reverted to teaching and taught art at the Athlone Bantu Community School for 15 years. However, the apartheid government’s 1953 Bantu Education Act declared the school exclusively for the use of coloured people, so Mgudlandlu had to move and she taught briefly at a school in Nyanga, a couple of schools in Guguletu before finally teaching at the township’s Nobantu Lower Primary Schoo from 1965 to 1977.
A dedicated art school teacher, Mgudlandlu began painting for herself in 1952. But it was her grandmother’s death in 1957 that spurred her on to paint seriously. Mgudlandlu was deeply influenced by her rural childhood and had been taught to paint wall murals by her grandmother. She was a self-taught artist and created her own unique African expressionist style of painting using vivid colours with bold, rhythmic brush-strokes to depict landscapes, people, fauna and flora overlaid by the influence of Xhosa folklore. Mgudlandlu worked in a variety of media using watercolour, oil paints, crayon, gouache, ink and felt-tip pens. She painted after her teaching day by the light of a paraffin lamp to create her naïve, dream-like pictures. The name ‘Nomfanekiso’ means ‘she who paints at night’. She has been criticized for not rooting her work in the socio-political protest genre current in the face of the apartheid experience. However, this is to overlook the spiritual and symbolic

Mgudlandlu exhibited her paintings between 1960 and 1971 and held successful solo exhibitions at the Rodin Gallery in Cape Town. Following the success of her second solo exhibition in 1962, Mgudlandlu said, "I think that I can claim to be the first African woman in the country to hold an exhibition. As far as I know, I am the only African woman who has taken painting seriously. It has become my first love and there is nothing else I want to do." (Cape Argus, 15 August 1962) Mgudlandlu held her last exhibition in 1971, the year she was badly injured in a car accident. She died penniless in 1978 and is buried in Guguletu Cemetery. A significant retrospective exhibition of her work toured South Africa in 2002 - 3 and her work is represented in the collections of the country’s major art galleries.

A qualified nurse and a teacher. She started painting in 1957. She lived and worked as a primary school teacher at Nyanga in Cape Town. She was known by people of Nyana as ‘the African queen’. The first black South African woman to exhibit her work in public, Gladys Mgudlandlu was born in Peddie and studied at Lovedale College where she obtained her teacher’s Diploma before proceeding to Port Elizabeth in 1940. In 1944 she moved to Cape Town. She was a self-taught artist – unlimited use of colour and her unusual perspective of high focal point set her art from her peers.
In 1960 she exhibited her paintings in Cape Town and instantly caught the hearts of art collectors. Her passion for art has been described her art as not for recognition, but art for personal fulfilment and enjoyment. She did most of her paintings using a paraffin lamp as most of her art was produced at night. Most of her early work were done in pen, charcoal an ink and subsequently in gouache and watercolours. She then progressed into working in oil and glazed canvasses. Gladys’s art depicted scenes from her daily surroundings. Here work incorporated folktales told to her by her grandmother. Her art also include scenes of women collecting and carrying firewood. Her work has been described as expressionist – drawing from indigenous sources. Her influences included the art of mural painting which she embraced since her childhood. She learnt the basics of painting from her grandmother. Over time her painting shifted from story-telling to documentary expression.13

She is the only woman mentioned in Steven Sacks from country to city: the development of an urban art. She was the most celebrated artist in the 1960s. Her paintings, saturated in colour and brushstrokes describes landscapes, plants and animals and scenes of township villages and township life. Brightly coloured, her narratives are shaped by Xhosa folklore tales
Endnotes

3 Ibid
5 Ibid.
10 Ibid.