

# Women in the Anti-Apartheid Movement

Ellen  
Khuzwayo

RESOURCES



# Women in the Anti-Apartheid Movement



## Ellen Khuzwayo RESOURCES

**ELLEN KHUZWAYO**

Review of her new autobiography *Call Me Woman* (Women's Press)

Meeting Ellen Khuzwayo, when she came to Nottingham recently to promote this book, inspired us to attempt to review it. Ellen is a 70 year old Black South African woman who has been working as a social worker in Soweto for a long time. She's especially been involved in enabling Black women to set up self-help cooperatives. She has also been involved in more formal organisations such as YWCA, the Committee of 10 Zanau Soweto Sisters Council, Maggie Magaba Trust and the Black Consumers Union.

Her autobiography is telling her own personal and political story. She also speaks for and with the women with whom she lives and works. She does this in a simple, honest and creative way. She said to us that she wrote this book because it was the last task in my life that I had to do, to tell the world who the Black women of my country are. I realised that if I didn't do this, they would pass by unnoticed, faceless and unheard.

But black women categorised as 'minors' have never surrendered to those oppressors without a challenge and often in her book gives several examples of how they have done this. They have resisted the pass laws, been involved in strikes, fought for reasonable wages and working conditions in the towns, improved social and educational facilities, and challenged their husbands' behaviour. 'Minors are heronies' and are the backbone of the black community.

Ellen tells us also how despite her suffering and losses she has grown politically as a Black woman through her first marriage broke down. As mentioned earlier, she has been actively involved in several organisations and today is president of the black consumer union and Maggie Magaba Trust.

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**Anti-Apartheid Movement NO 21**  
**Women's Committee**  
**25p Newsletter July/Aug 1985**

On 16 June 1984, 2000 women from all over the world gathered in London to attend the 10th Anniversary of the formation of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

Trust. She has helped to make two films about her life in South Africa: 'Awake from Mourning' and 'Tsiemelo: A Place of Goodness', both of international distribution. She, however, considers that her greatest challenge has been the development of her own self-help groups in Soweto since 1975, funded by the Maggie Magaba Trust.

In general, Ellen's commitment to her community, determination and hope, shared by many other Black women, are powerfully portrayed in this wonderful book. Her honest and sensitive style quell up the everyday feelings and dilemmas of people struggling for freedom and justice.

We all share the notion of Nadine Gordimer who writes in the preface of this book is a true testimony by a wonderful woman. For myself she is one of those people who give us faith in the now and different South Africa they will create.

We really recommend you read this book.

**Nottingham Women's Anti-Apartheid Group**

**APARTHEID STRIKES OUT AT DUNES STRIKERS**

July 15 is the first anniversary of the Dunes Strike in Dublin (see Issue No 17). The strike started when Mary Manning was suspended indefinitely after refusing to take payment for 2 South African grape-pollinators - the management have been completely inflexible and 12 of the strikers - all women except one - remain on strike, demanding against collaboration with apartheid.

In the strike's twelfth month, 10 of the strikers went on a solidarity visit to South Africa, at the invitation of Diamond Tubs. Although they got no further than Johannesburg, they were given a good taste of apartheid. First, they were held for 3 hours at Heathrow, while SA Embassy staff questioned whether they would be allowed entry, when they made it to Johannesburg.

They were met by 22 police armed with machine guns. They were held for 6 hours without access to a shower, washing facilities or toilet and (one of the women became ill). Then they were deported without further ceremony and flew back to Dublin.

In Ireland, there has been fierce condemnation of the Pretoria regime. The Dublin Council of Trade Unions has called for a Government ban on trade with South Africa and the Labour Minister has said to be determined to find alternative fruit supplies. This can only be seen as a victory for the Dunes workers in their strike against apartheid.

Messages of solidarity with the Dunes Strikers can be sent c/o IDATU, O'Leahane House 9 Cavendish Row, Dublin - 1.

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### Ellen Kuzwayo

Extract from the AAM Women's Newsletter 21, July/August 1985

Meeting Ellen Kuzwayo, when she came to Nottingham recently to promote this book, inspired us to attempt to review it. Ellen is a 70 year old black South African woman who has been working as a social worker in Soweto for a long time. She's especially been involved in enabling black women to set up self-help cooperatives. She has also been involved in more formal organisations such as YWCA, the Committee of 10 Zanau Soweto Sisters Council, Maggie Magaba Trust and the Black Consumers Union. In telling her own personal and political story, she also speaks for and with the women with whom she lives and works. She does this in a simple, honest and creative way. She said to us that she 'wrote this book because it was the last task in my life that I had to do, to tell the world who the black women of my country are. I realise that if I didn't do this, they would pass by unnoticed, faceless and unheard'...

Ellen tells us of the dispossession of her farm in the Orange Free State; the break up of her first marriage; the separation from her sons; her time in detention under the so-called terrorism act for an offence that was never specified. Ellen also shares with us the suffering of her peoples, especially the women, under the apartheid system: the exploitation at workplaces, the separation of families through the migrant labour system, the restriction of movement due to the past laws and influx controls, and the breaking down of the traditional moral codes and

values. But black women categorised as 'minors' have never surrendered to today's oppressors without a challenge and Ellen in her book give several examples of how they have done this. They have resisted the pass laws, been involved in uprisings, had responsibility for all the duties within their communities-as men are last to the mines, vote for reasonable wages and working conditions in the towns, improved social and educational facilities, and challenged their husbands' behaviour. 'Minors and heronies' - that form the backbone of the black community.

Ellen tells us also how despite her suffering and losses she has grown politically as a black woman throughout her life, especially since her first marriage broke down. As mentioned earlier, she has been actively involved in several organisations and today is president of the black consumer union and Maggie Magaba Trust. she has helped to make two films about her life in South Africa: 'Awake and Mourning' and 'Tsiemelo: A Place of Goodness', both of international distribution. However, she considers that the greatest challenge has come with the development of women's self-help groups in Soweto since 1975, funded by the Maggie Magaba Trust. In general, Ellen's commitment to her community, determination and hope, shared by many other black women, are powerfully portrayed in this wonderful book. Her honest and sensitive style open up the everyday feelings and dilemmas of people struggling for Freedom and Justice...

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# Ellen Khuzwayo

## The Representative

By MJ Daymond. Excerpt from Reality Magazine, November 1985

**Ellen Kuzwayo: Call Me Woman**  
Preface by Nadine Gordimer, Foreword by Bessie Head. Pp 266 plus 16pp photographs . Ravan R 13.50

*"This work is not for yourselves - kill that spirit of 'self' and do not live above your people, but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you."*

In this spirit of selflessness, Ellen Kuzwayo has written her autobiography. The words she quotes were uttered some 50 years ago by Charlotte Maxeke in her Presidential Address to the National Council of African Women, and it is their outlook, their optimistic focus on communal well-being, which Ellen Kuzwayo has determined, despite the debilitating consequences of oppression, to celebrate in telling her story. There is considerable tension between such selflessness and the potential ego-centricity of autobiography, a tension which raises some of the most interesting questions about this book. To reconcile her selfless purposes and her concentration on her own story, Ellen Kuzwayo asks her reader to see her as a representative figure.

*"The courage, generosity and support of my people have over the years helped, me to carry a load that under ordinary conditions I would not have found easy to bear. I am amazed when I observe the power, strength and self-confidence that are born of involvement in work on behalf of one's own hard-pressed people."*

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The self-evident importance of such representative autobiography for people who have been denied their heritage is born out by the number of life-studies, sometimes in fictional form, which are being published by black writers today. But it is still relatively rare to find black women producing such work - until this publication, only Noni Jabavu had written autobiography. In her writing too, the focus is decidedly not on self.

Granting Ellen Kuzwayo representative status is not to ignore that she is a remarkable woman, nor is it to imply that she does not know that hers is a remarkable story. The first notable, comparatively unique feature of her life which she identifies is that she was born into a family which had had freehold possession of a large farm at Thaba Patchoa, near Ladybrand, for several generations. When the area was declared a 'black spot' in 1974, the family were stripped of 60 000 acres of land which they had farmed for over a century. But the narrative's focus is not solely on the terrible inequity of such acts; what is even more important to Ellen Kuzwayo is that through her family's once settled conditions she knows what it is to possess her history. She knows too that her grasp of communal origins and of potential direction is rare for a black person in this country where a megalomaniac dream has given the power to destroy centuries of vital tradition to mere bureaucrats. The psychic effect of such dislocations on several generations of people is something South Africa is just beginning to have to recognise.

While she traces her descent (her maternal grandfather, Jeremiah Makoloi Makgothi, was politically active with men such as Sol T Plaatje, and assisted in the translation of the New Testament into his own language, Serolong) and while she depicts the customs of her people, Ellen Kuzwayo also describes

her education. She attended St Paul's School, Thaba'Nchu; St Francis' College, Mariannhill; Adams College, Durban; Lovedale College, Alice; and finally, as part of her mid-career change from teaching to social work, Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work, Johannesburg. The number of schools she had to





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attend and the distances she had to travel indicate the courage and faith she and her family invested in education, but, even if they wish or can afford it, the opportunity to gain an education they respect is not available to black children today. It is to record her own advantages compared with contemporary deprivation that Ellen Kuzwayo has gone into print:

*“The story of my life, my education, you see, cannot be buried quietly and safely in the past. How can I remain quiet when I see the choices open to the younger generation constantly restricted, their hopes fading into dreams, and the dreams becoming nightmares? “*

### AS A WOMAN

Ellen Kuzwayo’s third reason for telling her story lies in her experiences as a woman. Again she presents herself and her achievements as representative of the programme of organisations such as the NCAW. She records how ‘ at her first national meeting, the members

*“pledged themselves to serve their race and to liberate themselves from the shackles of humiliation, discrimination and systematic psychological suppression by their own menfolk as well as by the state through its legislation and administrative regulations.”*

These aspects of her story have already found public expression through the medium of film. In 1980 Ellen Kuzwayo was \_involved in the making of *Awake From Mourning* which presented the work of several self-help groups for women in Soweto, and in 1983 in the making of *Tsiame/o: A Place of Goodness,*

*“which tells the story of our family, the dispossession of our land and the history of the great men and women who preceded us.”*

Now, in her written narrative, Ellen Kuzwayo turns to a more sustained account of herself and her role as opponent of two mighty forces: white racism and her own people’s customary oppression of women. In confronting this country’s racist laws and practices, she can be sure that she speaks for all of her people, but in confronting the cultural traditions which have failed to equip black women for the realities of contemporary western life, she is making a potentially more divisive plea for change. In this light, her treating both issues in the same forthright but tactful way is striking. Although the personal note does not dominate this autobiography, some of her own experiences are used to illustrate what black women are up against. For instance, she records her anxieties when asked to be Chairwoman of the Maggie Magaba Trust. Despite her years as organising secretary for the YWCA, and her experience as a social worker, she, as a black woman, felt so unused to responsibility on that scale that she did not relish the job. She also records events which illustrate attitudes much more subtle and more difficult to counter, which rob women of self-hood. In 1977 Ellen Kuzwayo was detained and, in the familiar pattern of intimidatory arrests, was

released without charge five months later. Shortly after her release, she was asked to be a witness for the defence at the trial of eleven students charged with terrorism and facing a possible death sentence. Her role, which she undertook very reluctantly in view of her own recent imprisonment, was “to get through to the humanity” of the judge by creating for the court an understanding of the circumstances of daily life in Soweto which drive young people to despairing protest. During cross-examination the State seems to have dwelt on the menace of Black Consciousness, seeking to discredit Ellen Kuzwayo because of her sympathy for its function. She does not dwell long on the content of her testimony, but it is clear that although giving evidence was an ordeal, she spoke authoritatively and effectively. She concludes her picture of the trial thus:

*“I had hardly taken my seat with the rest of those who had come to court when suddenly someone took me in his arms and crushed me ... As I turned to see who this very brave person was, I saw a man who looked beside himself, as if under some strange influence. All he said to me was, ‘You are not an ordinary woman, you pleaded like a man, only a man could speak the way you did.’ Before I could respond or ask a question, he was kissing me and thanking me.. He was one of the parents of the eleven appearing in court that morning.”*

After a brief reference to the comparatively light sentences passed on the students, Ellen Kuzwayo moves on to other matters. Nothing more is said of her achievement; and the curious denial of her being, entailed in the thanks she got, is allowed simply to speak for itself.







## Ellen Khuzwayo

### Biography of Ellen Kuzwayo

by *Laura Wilson, South African  
History Online, 3 May 2018*

Ellen Kate was the name given to her by her biological mother and father. While important people in her life, they separated while she was still young, and so their influences crossed her life at different points. Her mother was crucial in the early years up until she passed away while Kuzwayo was still in high school, aged 16 (Kuzwayo 1985, 84). The name Cholofero was given to her by her birth mother, which means Hope. It was her mother's favourite name, and one that was regularly used in the early days of her childhood. Nnoseng was given later in life, when she met her father and his family meaning "Give me water." This was the same name as her father's paternal aunt's name. This name arose largely due to family association, but also because she was heavily involved in helping her step-mother in the running of the house without getting in the way and dominating the scene. One of her chores was to provide water for the family, and so the name not only fit, but stuck. Finally, Motlalepule arose among her mother's people meaning "the one who arrives on a rainy day." (Kuzwayo 1985, 55).

Ellen Kuzwayo was raised by her mother after her parents divorced. Her father was absent from much of her youth, and only really came into her life later on when she was banished from her aunt's household. She spent much of her early childhood up until she was 10 on her grandparents' property,

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which was large and fertile. She was one of 4 grandchildren, and lived a happy childhood. She references the relationships that existed at this point in her life, and talks fondly of her extended family. The agricultural community that she lived in was characterised by a broad sense of equality, where women shared the workload and fulfilled many roles, which made them valuable and gave them influence within their lives. (Kuzwayo 1985, 56-57).

She was shaped by experiences her whole life, one of which was when her Aunt Blanche, who had inherited the grandparents' farm, rejected her from the family. The conversation was minimalist and lacked much explanation, but contained the meaning of "There is no home for you here anymore. You should go and look for your father and your people in Johannesburg. You must go now or as soon as possible. I don't want to see the sight of you any more here." (Kuzwayo 1985, 105). Her relationship with her aunt had been positive up until this moment, and the shock of the event was large enough that Kuzwayo was emotionally scarred from it for a considerable period afterwards. When everyone within that family rejected her, she sought out her biological father, whom she had not met more than a handful of times, and moved in with him and his new family. Thankfully, they accepted her, and she became a part of their family for a time. She later moved out to be with a maternal aunt and her husband, the Tlhapane's. This turn of events ended up being a very positive feature for Kuzwayo, as it pushed her into a new field of life and gave her the opportunity to begin teaching once again. Mr Tlhapane was a well-respected teacher

in the community of Heilbron, and Kuzwayo's smooth transition from the rejection of her aunt into the next chapter can be largely attributed to the love and kindness of the Tlhapane's. (Kuzwayo 1985, 115).

This paper will be following the chronological life events of Ellen Kuzwayo, and tracing the actions and decisions throughout her life, while evaluating them in relation to Apartheid and the oppressive government under which Kuzwayo lived. It will begin with explaining her influence on the community around her, and her value as seen through the lens of an educator and role model for the youth under her care. It will then flow on into her role in challenging Apartheid, and why she became involved in it. Her separation from her children will be assessed in relation to how she was shaped by this experience and why it empowered her to aid so many other women. Her leadership roles and various educational and political activities will be mentioned and explored through the lens of oppression and their importance in freeing the people of South Africa. Finally, this paper will conclude by evaluating her achievements and explaining why she is such an important figure in opposing Apartheid.

Ellen Kuzwayo was a source of inspiration and motivation for countless pupils under her guidance in the early days of her work. Her teaching experience was one of the easiest lens' to witness her fight against apartheid through, as her struggle to uplift the children under her care and push them to be better was a major component. By the time she was 26, she had accepted a position in the small community of Phokeng, and worked with 2

male teachers to create the first high school in Phokeng. One of the most notable features of this high school was that the ratio of girls to boys in the school was something that Kuzwayo was proud of, which is a fascinating starting point to consider the rest of her life's work. Something that Kuzwayo brings to light in her interview with Cherry Clayton is the disparity between male and female education and opportunity in South Africa even during Apartheid. "The fact that black men first had an opportunity to first go to school and get into industry" (Mackenzie and Clayton 1989, 63) exacerbated the poor male - female power balance. An avid feminist, Kuzwayo fought her whole life for women and advocated women's programs, starting with young girls in schools and encouraging them to complete their education and create a career for themselves before marrying and raising a family. According to a feminist reading of Kuzwayo's achievements by Carmela J. Garritano, "her tribute to the accomplished women of South Africa and her own story of personal triumph are designed to inspire and motivate her black female audience." (Garritano 1997, 57-65). Kuzwayo's underlying life purpose of inspiring those around her is unanimously found in every source and piece written in her memory. Following teaching, she became heavily involved in empowering women and ensuring that their concerns were heard and addressed, largely through her participation in a variety of political organisations.

She became aware of and joined the Southern African Association of Youth Clubs, and started to participate in leadership training courses. By 1956, she had been recognised



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by the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work and worked as the organiser of youth work with the Southern African Association Youth Clubs in Vaal and Johannesburg. Throughout this time, Kuzwayo was still teaching, and used the club as a creative outlet for her more musical and theatrical side. She soon became known in the region for her ability to produce impressive classical performances, and was able to influence the girls that she helped due to their respect for her. (Kuzwayo 1985, 148). A feature that Kuzwayo recognised early in life was the “importance of the values, standards and practices of her own people.” (Kuzwayo 1990, 115). She adopted the truth of her South African heritage and upbringing, and focused on sharing it with “pride and confidence,” (Kuzwayo 1990, 115) instilling these same feelings in the girls that she created theatrical pieces with.

Another instance where her compassion and humility toward mankind shone was the teaching assignment she took on at Law Palmer High School, where she was working with young boys. A portion of this school included boys who had been in the reformatory and were attending school as a portion of their rehabilitation following punishment. Within the school, they were expected to be treated differently, and “accepted whatever reprimand, cautioning or punishment” (Kuzwayo 1985, 156) they received. For Kuzwayo however, these boys were just as capable of completing their studies and participating in the curriculum as any other member of the class, and she treated them accordingly. This drew attention to her from the headmaster and other teaching

staff, and she was eventually told under no uncertain terms to treat these reformed boys in a different manner and not make them feel as though they fit in. Amazingly, even the black men around her in positions of power were determined to keep these boys down and repress their movement back into society. These young boys were immensely aware of Kuzwayo’s position toward them, and recognised her stance as one of respect and firmness. Subsequently, they accepted her punishment when needed and continued to grow under her guidance. In contrast, the headmaster of the school had a progressively deteriorating relationship with these boys, as they recognised his desire to continue to view and treat them as “criminals,” and not “pupils.” (Kuzwayo 1985, 156-157). This came to head when one of the students attacked the headmaster in a low-risk environment, and Kuzwayo was called into the office to resolve the attack. Her ability to see these young boys as worthwhile humans was one of the biggest healing aspects of the situation, and her influence stretched as far as changing the headmaster’s behaviour toward the boys. (Kuzwayo 1985, 156).

With the admission of women as full members into the African National Congress (ANC) in 1943, Kuzwayo’s beginning in political movements was cemented. Four years after the admission of women followed by the birth of the Women’s League and the Youth ANC in 1944, she returned to Johannesburg and joined the party, describing it as a vision of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo to create “an organisation of the black elite.” (Kuzwayo 1985, 139). Kuzwayo worked

closely with these three main leaders, as well as other prominent figures in the anti-apartheid struggle, which greatly shaped her decisions and actions in life, and to some degree, influenced how the South African government assessed her as a threat much later on.

Kuzwayo states that she did not recall there being many women in the higher ranks of the ANC during that period, but this did change as the movement evolved over time.





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Kuzwayo's political involvement throughout her life was one of extensive effort, as she moved through a vast number of groups. She became the General Secretary of the Young Women's Christian Association from 1964 - 1976, and flowed from that role into being one of the ten members and only female member of the Committee of Ten from 1976 - 1982. In 1978 she joined the Zamani Soweto Sisters Council as a Consultant, in 1979 she became the Chairwoman for the Maggie Magaba Trust, and she served as a founding board member for the Urban Foundation in Transvaal. She was also the Black Consumer Union's first president. (Laber 1999, 32-33).

Her son Bakone rapidly became involved in anti-apartheid action as he grew up, and in September 1971, he was imprisoned by the white government for his opposition against the Apartheid state. When he was arrested,

he was allowed one final visit to Kuzwayo, where he appeared without warning in her office. She spoke with him for a brief moment, during which her true nature arose. Her feelings of defiance against the government sparked when she says, "This says to me, in this country if you are black, and you embark on a most respectable worthwhile project for your community, you become a real threat to the rulers of this country. Remember nobody ever kicks a dead dog. This action by the state should never dampen your spirit.

On the contrary, let it inspire you, reinforce you with new zeal to do better, when you get your next chance." (Kuzwayo 1985, 188). This moment perhaps best defines Kuzwayo in her complete form - a woman who fought not only for herself, her family, and her community, but also for her country and for her people, for those who could not fight for themselves. She

embraced the change and the danger that this required and did so in a manner that made her struggle dignified and worthy.

In 1976, the Committee of Ten was formed in response to the Soweto Uprising of June 16th and the ongoing unrest in Soweto that continued throughout 1976. This unrest had included the likes of destroying property and lighting fires at the hands of frustrated black African youths – and resulted in some 400 casualties during 1976 (sahistory.org). The region of Soweto was ruled by the Urban Bantu Council (UBC), who supposedly represented the black population of the area, but had evidently failed to do so. The Council of Ten were to create a report on the UBC, analysing its function and duties, and report its findings back to the community of Soweto. (Kuzwayo 1985, 199-200). This council however was not supported by the authorities in the area, and the first and second meetings were cancelled, with the results that the discussions and decisions of the Council of Ten regarding the UBC never were made public. On October 19th, 1977, all 10 committee members were arrested and placed in Johannesburg Fort. (Kuzwayo 1985, 200). Among those arrested was Kuzwayo, who was targeted for her political and social involvement and imprisoned for 10

months total - five months assigned for her involvement opposing the white system, and an additional five added just one week from her release date for refusing to cooperate with the Minister of Justice in "reconstructing the schools programme... in Cape Town." (Kuzwayo 1985, 213). Her fight against Apartheid was a continual struggle in her life, not merely something that existed for a period while she was youthful and felt ready. Kuzwayo was 63 when she was placed Johannesburg Fort, and yet her spirit did not waver throughout the detention. She emerged from prison as a woman who had "survived," (Kuzwayo 1985, 215). and was subsequently highly regarded by her community. She speaks very positively about the support and acceptance shown toward her upon release, and attributes much of her strength over the next months to that.

Throughout her life, Ellen Kuzwayo proved herself to be one of South Africa's most humble, determined and capable women of the 20th century. Born in 1914, she entered an era of great global turmoil, and grew up to live through the most challenging period of systemised racism in the history of South Africa. Given the implementation of Apartheid in 1948, Kuzwayo was 34 when the full impact of the racist systematic control peaked. Her life story is largely shaped by her desire to empower the youth and women, including toward the end by her determination to challenge the system of oppression that had dominated her adult experience and to evoke freedom for the youth who had come to the fore in struggle for freedom.



*Left: In September 2007, the South African Government launched the Ellen Khuzwayo, a purpose built research ship. M van Schalkwyk on Ellen Khuzwayo Research Vessel launch*

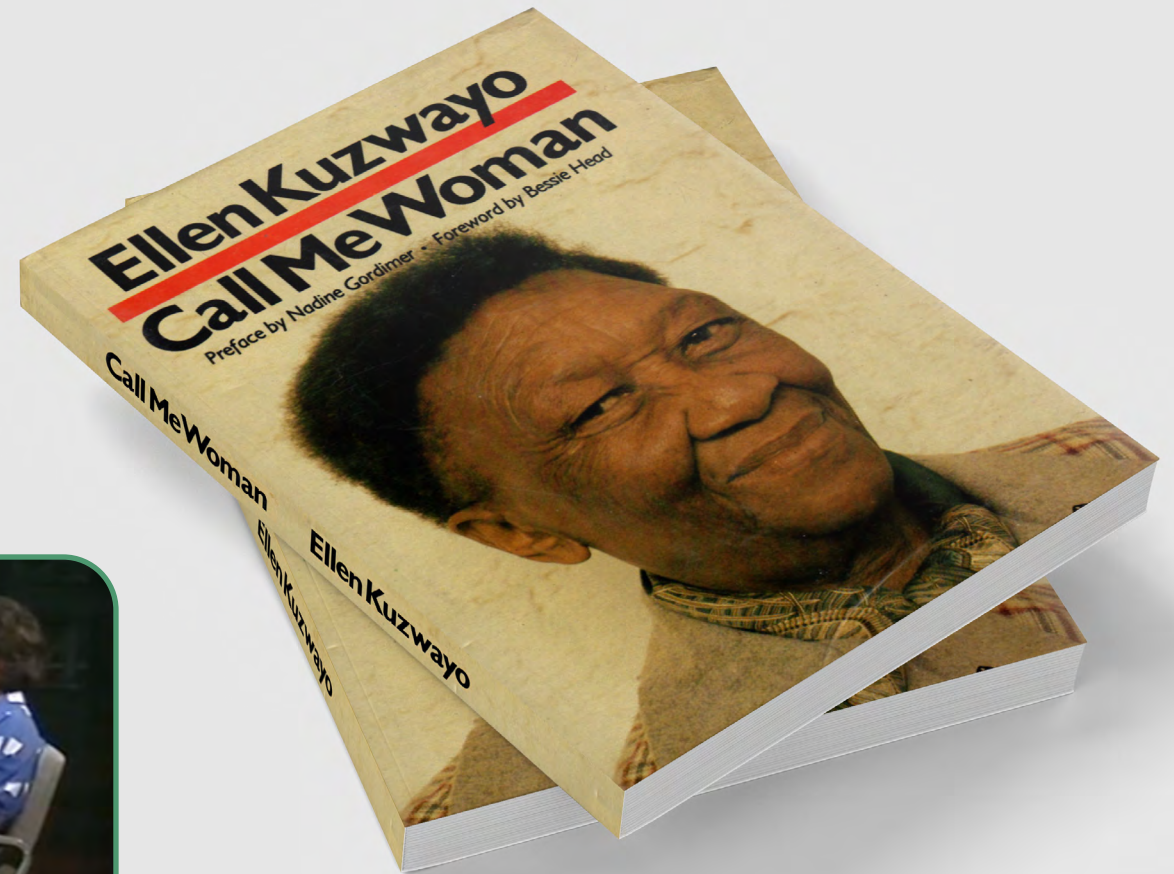




**Ellen  
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*Video: Part one of a fascinating interview with women's rights activist and 1960s leader of the African National Congress Youth League - Ellen Kuzwayo.*



*Above: Call me Woman, by Ellen Kuzwayo, Published January 1st 1985 by Aunt Lute Books*





## Ellen Khuzwayo

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### Ellen Kuzwayo: Tireless campaigner for women's rights in apartheid South Africa

By Shola Adenekan, *The Guardian*, 24th April 2006

Ellen Kuzwayo: Tireless campaigner for women's rights in apartheid South Africa, By Shola Adenekan, 24th April 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/apr/24/guardianobituaries.gender>

Ellen Kuzwayo, who has died aged 91 from complications from diabetes, was a stalwart campaigner against apartheid in South Africa and a tireless fighter for women's emancipation. Popularly known as "Ma K", she was a teacher, social worker, community leader and mentor to many. In 1994, at 79, she was elected as an ANC member of South Africa's first multiracial parliament.

Kuzwayo came from a family with strong ANC ties; as a young woman, she used to carry her father's bag at annual conferences. In the 1940s, she joined the likes of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo in forming the militant ANC Youth League, and served as its secretary. The organisation later transformed into Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of The Nation), the guerrilla faction of the ANC. Kuzwayo was present in 1936 when Mina Soga moved a motion to found the National Council of African Women.

Kuzwayo was born into a privileged black family on a farm in the Thaba Nchu district of what was then the Orange Free State. Her father, Philip Merafe, was a prominent Sowetan businessman and ANC activist; her maternal grandfather, Jeremiah Makgothi, had

been a leading member of the South African Native National Congress, a precursor of the ANC.

As a child, Kuzwayo had not, she said, experienced white oppression. But after her mother died and the farm was seized and allocated to white farmers, she found herself in an uncertain and menacing world. She was educated at St Francis' College, and trained as a teacher at Lovedale College, Fort Hare, graduating in 1936 with the highest teacher training qualification then available to a black person. She gave up teaching in 1952 when the Nationalist government introduced the Bantu Education Act, which cut back opportunities for black education. Kuzwayo said she did not have the strength or courage to teach her pupils "what appeared to be very poisonous to their minds".

Now a mother, she returned to higher education to train as a social worker at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work, where she shared a bench with fellow student Winnie Mandela. She refused to work with government agencies, collaborating instead with voluntary organisations such as the YWCA, where she worked with women in deprived communities in the Transvaal. She was at the forefront of a campaign against infant mortality, and promoted cottage industries.

Her first brush with the South African security forces came in 1977, following the 1976 Soweto uprising. The only woman on the committee of 10 set up to organise civic affairs in Soweto, she led the campaign to force the apartheid government to introduce a form of land ownership that would encourage private sector funding into housing in the township. For her efforts, she was detained for five months under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Much later, she described her pre-dawn arrest as she hid in the bathroom while police horses trampled her yard. She later became a consultant to the Zamani Soweto Sisters Council, the umbrella organisation of the township women's self-help groups.

If Kuzwayo's political life was turbulent, so too was her marital life. In her autobiography, *Call Me Woman* (1985), she recalled years of abuse by her first husband. When she finally fled her marital home, she had to leave her two sons behind. She acted as a shebeen queen, alongside Sidney Poitier, in the film *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951). She later re-married.

Kuzwayo became the first black writer to win South Africa's leading CNA literary prize. Her second book, *Sit Down and Listen* (1990), was a collection of short stories in which she took the role of oral storyteller to keep alive the African cultural heritage. The stories highlighted the value of traditions and attitudes, and the plight of women caught between the old and new South Africa. Her film, *Tshiamelo - A Place of Goodness*, documented her family's story and the dispossession of their farmland.

Kuzwayo was honoured by the Johannesburg city council and, in the 1980s, became the first black woman to receive an honorary degree from the University of the Witwatersrand. She retired as an MP after five years in 1999, when Nelson Mandela gave her an Order of Meritorious Service. She is survived by the sons of her first marriage.

Nnoseng Ellen Kate Kuzwayo, writer, campaigner and politician, born June 29 1914; died April 19 2006



## About this resource...

# Women in the Anti-Apartheid Movement

This presentation is part of a resource collaboratively developed by **The Anti-Apartheid Legacy: Centre of Memory and Learning (CML)** and **UEA**. It is part of the CML's work to promote the legacy and values of the Southern African liberation struggle, whilst supporting contemporary discourse around social (in)justice, inclusion and multi-racial collaboration for social transformation

Many of the images and linked documents are supplied with kind permission of project partners, **The Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives**. Other sources are referred to at the relevant places in the packs.

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### The Anti-Apartheid Legacy: Centre of Memory & Learning

*The Anti-Apartheid Legacy: Centre of Memory and Learning (CML) promotes the legacy and values of the Southern African liberation struggle and the UK's central role within this world-changing history, whilst supporting contemporary discourse around social (in) justice, inclusion and multi-racial collaboration for social transformation.*



**AAM ARCHIVES**

### Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives

*Forward to Freedom tells the story of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement and its campaigns to support the people of South Africa in their fight against apartheid. The AAM also campaigned for freedom for Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola, and against South Africa's attacks on its neighbours.*



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