

Mmatshilo Motsei, *Hearing Visions Seeing Voices*, 2004, Jacana Media, South Africa. ISBN 1-919931-51-1, R139.95, pp. 189.

By Mechthild Nagel

In those days, African time was time on the dot, measured not by the smoothly rotating hands of a Rolex, but in terms of a life lived in harmony with the earth; *mahube a naka tsa kgomo, fa dikgomo di boela sakeng, ka sethoboloko, kgotsa fa dikgomo di ya go nwa metsi*. Unlike Western time, time in the villages was in harmony with the laws of nature and the environment. With the introduction of a watch, a relationship with the environment is lost. Time is no longer described in relation to events, but as an abstraction (Motsei, 26).

Thus writes Setswana poet, social scientist and gender activist, Mmatshilo Motsei about globalization and cultural imperialism, which has had dramatic and detrimental effects on (South) Africans. Her autobiographical narrative, *Hearing Visions Seeing Voices* has become a bestseller in South Africa and may soon find a North American distributor. It is a moving self-empowerment story, weaving together different linguistic voices, prose, poetry and a womanist/feminist “speakerly text” in the traditions of Gloria Anzaldúa and Mariama Bâ. In this journey, Motsei takes us back to her roots, to sage women in the rural areas who still know to mark time in a relational manner to the world around them, to her childhood when nutrition was wholesome—not laced with synthetically processed chemicals—and when nobody ever went hungry. Hers is an eco-feminist journey, exhorting contemporary post-apartheid South Africa to return to Mother Earth, for men to “embrace their positive feminine and masculine energy” and for all to break “the chains of racial oppression. We must also eradicate the negative effects of patriarchy and sexism on our individual and collective psyche” (37-8). South Africa has become one of the most dangerous places for Black women, and Motsei has spent much of her adult life as a founder and director of the Asiganang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT) programme in Alexander Township, Johannesburg in addressing gendered violence; she has counseled battered women and educated men, some of whom emerged as community leaders in preventing domestic violence. She has been lauded for her

innovative peace work with men in prisons to raise their consciousness. For her community work and vision, she was awarded the prestigious United Nations Habitat Award in 2000.

Prophetically, Motsei declares that in the 21st century the tables are turned; invoking the words of freedom fighter Steve Biko, she proclaims that no longer will Africa be scapegoated as the Dark Continent; rather it will serve as a “place of freedom, abundance and peace. Now is the time for scholars in the West to seek scholarships to learn from Africans the art of returning humanity to humans” (117). She has embarked on this journey herself, beginning with a Western education of nursing, much of it resembling the military (131), to appreciating some of the healing, holistic modalities of traditional midwives who expertly avoid Caesarian sections. Motsei has had the benefit of experiencing with both Western and African health care and is able to combine the best aspects of each. She cautions that “[p]overty alleviation measures and respect for people’s cultural and spiritual beliefs should play a central role in the maternal and child health policies of any country” (137).

Finally worth mentioning for our Wagadu readers who know of the West African saga of the mythic python, Motsei opens the book with an invocation to snakes, as bearers of wisdom and health, as animals who ought not be feared but respected (11). Fear is an important spiritual trope in her writing, as it is a shadow side of oneself that is often repressed. Motsei writes movingly about abuse women face and how one may emerge from victim to survivor (143-152). *Hearing Visions Seeing Voices* is a powerfully written antidote to violence, cynical attitudes and fatalism and will provide soulful inspiration for feminist peacemakers the world over.

References:

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Jagne, Siga Fatima. 2004. [Mariama Bâ's Fictional World](#), *Wagadu*, 1(1) Spring. web.cortland.edu/wagadu.