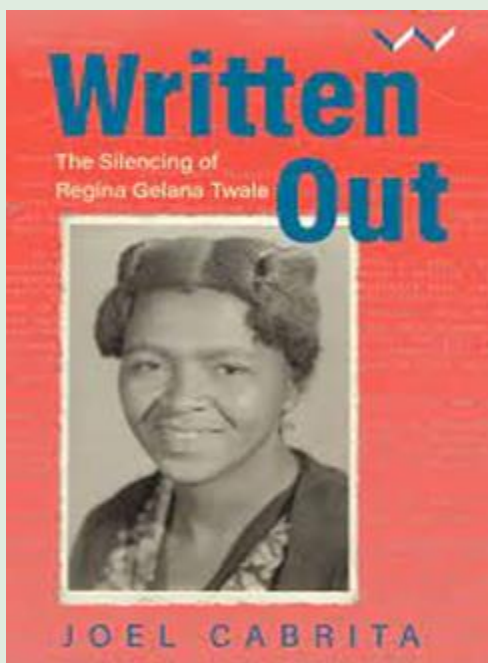




TITLE OF THE BOOK

Written Out. The Silencing of Regina Gelana Twala

AUTHOR

Joel Cabrita

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Declaration of bias: Joel Cabrita and I went to the same high school in Eswatini and belong to the same Christian youth group. This allowed deeper interest in her writing but placed no bias in the review.

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A review of the book *Written Out : The Silencing of Regina Gelana Twala* written by Joel Cabrita. Reviewed by Phumla Motsa

Information on the author

Joel Cabrita is a historian of modern Southern Africa focusing on Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) and South Africa. She is the Susan Ford Dorsey Director of the Centre for African Studies at Stanford University and holds a position as a senior research associate in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Johannesburg. In addition, she is an Associate Professor of History and Religious Studies at Stanford University. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge. Her work focuses on religion, gender, and the politics of knowledge production in Africa.

THE REVIEW

Through the lens of Twala's African identity, this book provides a compelling exploration of her enduring legacy as a literary and political figure in apartheid-era South Africa and colonial Swaziland. Cabrita exposes the deliberate suppression of Twala's work, underscoring the pervasive racial and gender biases that facilitated the exploitation of African intellectual labour by White scholars and politicians. The book traces the captivating journey of a woman from her rural upbringing to her experiences in the bustling city of Johannesburg, encompassing the complexities of love, fertility struggles, and political upheavals.

The story delves into the life of a woman born in the 1920s, offering a glimpse into a bygone era filled with faith, perseverance, and setbacks. Despite facing numerous obstacles, she navigates through life with resilience, pursuing her aspirations in writing, love, and career. Her journey resonates with many African occupational therapists, showcasing the determination of women striving to make a difference in society.

What particularly caught my attention, as an occupational therapist, was the intricate portrayal of beadwork and its cultural significance. Imagining myself conducting an activity analysis on the diverse shapes and sizes of beads highlighted the importance of cultural context in our profession. Reflecting on my own background, where in my first year as an occupational therapy student I was introduced to the concept of "playing with food". Whether it was using painted macaroni as part of an art piece or mixing water and flour for sensory input - as a girl who was taught never to play with food this aspect of occupational therapy was really hard for me, it was unconventional, I was struck by the cultural nuances depicted in the narrative.

Amidst the challenges, moments of tranquillity emerge, such as tending to a garden in Eswatini. Through meticulous storytelling, the author resurrects a life that could have easily faded into obscurity. The societal expectations placed on women, illustrated through the concept of "kubebetela", underscore the struggles faced by Regina Twala.

Light is shed on Ms Twala's relationship with the Former King of Eswatini, King Sobhuza II and their shared interest in anthropology as a pathway to African emancipation. This dynamic underscores the complexities of power dynamics and personal pursuits intertwined with larger political agendas.

*Kubebetela is a siSwati term that translates to "to comply with" or "to submit to" in English. It refers to the societal expectation or pressure for individuals, particularly women, to conform to certain norms, traditions, or authority figures

The book is recommended reading for occupational therapists working in the community, rural settings and especially if working with service users from the siSwati culture. Overall, it offers a rich tapestry of a woman's life journey, intertwining personal challenges with broader societal narratives. It invites readers to ponder the significance of cultural context in occupational therapy practice and the resilience of individuals amidst adversity – a reality that so many of our clients face when having to accept a permanent disability.

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