

Lauretta Ngcobo (1931–2015)

(Please note that this obituary could not be included in the 2016 edition of *Natalia* as submissions had closed: it is thus included in the 2017 volume)

LAURETTA Ngcobo died in hospital in Johannesburg on Tuesday, 3 November 2015, at the age of 84, following a stroke.

The daughter of teachers Rosa (née Cele) and Simon Gwina, Ngcobo was born and grew up in Ixopo, KwaZulu-Natal. She attended Inanda Seminary School, near Durban, and became the first woman from her area to study at the University of Fort Hare. She taught for two years, before taking a job with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in Pretoria.

In 1957 she married Abednego Bhekabantu Ngcobo, a founder member of the executive of the Pan Africanist Congress, who in 1961 was imprisoned for two years, under the Suppression of Communism Act. He died in 1997.

In 1963, facing imminent arrest, Ngcobo fled the country with her two young children, moving to Swaziland, Zambia, and finally England, where she was a school teacher for 25 years. She was eventually appointed head of a south London school, where she was the only black staff member, and in 1984 she became president of ATCAL (the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African, Asian and Associated Literatures). She found the time to write two novels, *Cross of Gold* (1981) and *And They Didn't Die* (1990), and a children's book, *Fikile Learns to Like Other People* (1994). She was the editor of *Let it be Told: Essays by Black Women Writers in Britain* (1987) and *Prodigal Daughters – Stories of South African Women in Exile* (2012).



After being in exile between 1963 and 1994, Ngcobo returned to South Africa with her family, following the election in which the ANC came to power. In South Africa she again taught for a while, before becoming a member of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, where she spent 11 years, before retiring in 2008.

In 2006, she received the Lifetime Achievement Literary Award and in 2008 she was awarded the Order of Ikhamanga for her work in literature and in promoting gender equality. She was named an eThekweni Living Legend in 2012 and in 2014 she received an honorary doctorate of Technology in Arts and Design from the Durban University of Technology.

Ngcobo is survived by her children, Luyanya, Zabantu, Nomkhosi, Sobantu and Zikethiwe, and her sister, Thandekile.

DEBBIE WHELAN