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METRO

There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island

WALT DISNEY  
American animator and film producer

APARTHEID IN TENNIS

# Giving voices to the oppressed and marginalised

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IT'S NO secret that marginalisation, among many other injustices, was a norm in apartheid South Africa – and sport was no exception.

Durban author and UKZN research professor Mohamed Saleem Badat has added another book to his name with *Tennis, Apartheid and Social Justice: The First Non-racial International Tennis Tour, 1971*, that explores tennis and social injustice with a focus on that year.

Badat said he combined tennis with apartheid and social justice to challenge the amnesia and sanitised histories of the post-1994 period.

"Much of my writing is on apartheid oppression and the struggles for freedom and social justice that it aroused. *The Forgotten People*, my previous book, told the story of the banishment of rural leaders opposed to apartheid to inhospitable, desolate areas (South Africa's 'Siberias') for long periods. Banishment was a weapon the British colonial government introduced in the 1890s to silence its opponents. This book examines apartheid in tennis and how black people bravely struggled for non-racialism, human rights, and social justice in sport, often at great personal cost. It gives 'voice' to voices ignored, marginalised and suppressed," he said.

"A misguided 'rainbow-ism' and urgings to 'forget the past' mean that past reprehensible racist conduct in sports is swept under the carpet. My research tries to recover and highlight the past as the only basis upon which we can build a future in our divided country. I argue that we needed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on sport to reveal apartheid sports crimes, how they were part of a system of racist oppression, and which organisations and individuals perpetrated those crimes."

He also added a sports TRC should have investigated how big business reinforced white domination in sport through generous sponsorship and the role of the media, which devoted print copy and airtime principally to white sports.

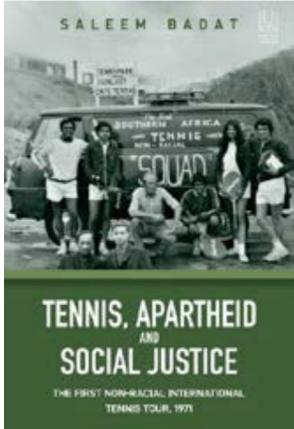
"It should have documented how apartheid affected black sports people and instituted restitution and reparations. Past sport journalism and many sports journalists have much to answer for the silences and exclusions of the apartheid era. In James Baldwin's words, 'not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced,'" he said.

He recalled 1971 in the book and the importance for tennis in South Africa that year, in particular.

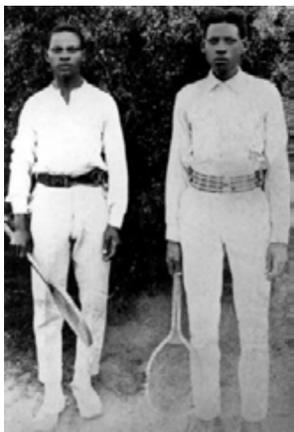
"1971 is recalled because in that year, the non-racial Southern Africa Lawn Tennis Union (Saltu) sent, at great cost, six promising young black players on a first, historic four-month international tour of Europe. Saltu was an affiliate of the South African Council on Sport, which championed non-racial sport and proclaimed that there could be 'no normal sport in an abnormal society'. Dubbed the 'Dhiraj' squad, after non-racial tennis champion Jasmat Dhiraj, the other players were Hira Dhiraj, Alwyn Solomon, Oscar Woodman, Hoosen Bobat and Cavan Bergman," said Badat.

The professor said South Africa in 1971 was a racist and repressive society based on white supremacy, privilege and black oppression, and that oppression spanned to sports.

"Residential areas, education, healthcare, worship, sport and amenities were all racially segregated. Blacks were included in the economy and society but excluded from enjoying the fruits of their labour and from citizenship and human rights. Black sports people were denied proper facilities, coaching and opportunities to excel, could not belong to the



MOHAMED SALEEM BADAT



BLACK tennis players in 1971. Badat said he tried to find their names, but nobody cared enough at the time to identify them.

same clubs as whites or compete in competitions with or against white players. Nor could they represent South Africa."

In his book, the black players take centre stage, and he also notes their modesty. "They wanted to compete against tennis players irrespective of 'race' and nationality, play tournaments in Europe, improve their tennis and be ambassadors for non-racial sport, upholding equality and human dignity as opposed to racism in apartheid sport," he said.

"Post-1994, there has neither been fitting recognition nor reparations for outstanding apartheid-era black tennis players. The apartheid legacy continues to affect tennis today.

"Probably less tennis is played today in black communities than in the 1980s. The leadership of the Tennis Association of South Africa has failed to transform tennis," he said.

"Nelson Mandela observed in 1995 that 'we can now deal with our past, establish the truth which has so long been denied us, and lay the basis for genuine reconciliation. Only the truth

can put the past to rest'. Regrettably, the 'truth' is being either ignored or sanitised, and myths are continuing to be peddled.

"Take the KZN Tennis Association website. Its 'History of KZN tennis' is an account entirely of tennis played by whites, yet it makes the staggering claim that it 'is the very history of South African tennis'. The 'legends' of tennis mentioned are all white. It is silent about blacks playing tennis from the late 1800s and does not mention that blacks were deliberately excluded from clubs, which were reserved for whites, and from tournaments that were held from the 1880s," he said.

He said the website noted the creation of the tennis Sugar Circuit with the help of the South African Sugar Industry, which became the "breeding ground for world ranked players". It was, of course, restricted to whites.

"The sugar industry was built on the blood and sweat of Indian indentured labour and black labour, more generally. Joanne Joseph's recent book, *Children of Sugarcane*, powerfully recounts the brutality of colonial sugar farming. Yet, sugar big business did appallingly little to support black players. Twenty-nine years into democracy, sport reflects many continuities with the devastating imprint and scars of the apartheid past. Meaningful development and cultivation of talent is sacrificed by an obsession with professional and commercialised sport, 'race' quotas, and the like.

"For meaningful change, we need an effective national development strategy to prioritise those who were historically marginalised, including women, ensure there are accessible and good tennis facilities and good coaching at schools and in working-class communities. Only in this way will tennis become socially diverse and inclusive," he said.

Badat said his close friend Hoosen Bobat's reminiscences of the 1971 tour were the inspiration behind the book.

"He was 18 years old then. He was invited to participate in the junior Wimbledon championship, and would have been the first black South African to do so. Until then, only whites participated because the international tennis body only recognised the racist white body, to which black players could not belong. That body objected to Bobat's participation, and he was excluded on the orders of the general secretary of the international tennis body. Can you imagine the excitement of the opportunity to play at Wimbledon, only for your dreams to be shattered? I had to bring to light this shameful episode, what racism and apartheid and the blatant collusion of international sports bodies did to black South Africans," he said.

He also said apartheid was a killing field of the talent and ambitions of countless black sports players, who were denied the opportunity and support to succeed at the highest levels.

"Another inspiration was Hira Dhiraj's plea that the book should be produced 'to get a message' to black communities 'that we did play sport under apartheid'. Hira notes that 'even with all the obstacles presented by the (racist) government, we produced some great sportsmen and sportswomen'."

"For Hira, try as it did, the apartheid regime was unable to destroy the determination of blacks to express themselves through sport, to excel despite impoverished facilities, to test themselves in competition against others irrespective of colour and to dream about a future where sport would uphold and enhance human dignity," said Badat.

◆ *Tennis, Apartheid and Social Justice* will be launched on March 14 at 5.30pm at Ike's Bookshop in Florida Rd, Morningside, Durban

*'In the Shadow of the Springs I Saw' is a tapestry of stories about people who live in the Art Deco buildings of Springs, Gauteng. It is an exploration of the imagined lives of those who live in a space that was not theirs historically but one that they have claimed as their own. Barbara Adair paints these lives with flair and imagination. Here are the stories of immigrants and locals set against the curving and sometimes crumbling façades of the Art Deco buildings that line the mining town. Here are the stories of those who left and never returned, such as writer Nadine Gordimer. The book is also illustrated with photographs and diagrams that enhance the stories. From the hustlers to the unemployed or retired, Adair's pen creates the patterns of their lives.*

EXTRACT

A six-year-old child living in Springs has a key to the door of the flat where he lives with his mother who is employed at the nearby Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet. His father, who may be Nigerian, is no longer around.

"I'm Kamohelo, ha they call me the latchkey kid. That is what the guy who brought all the white people said I was. He was tall and all the white people were following him and listening to him. I don't know what he was telling them, but they listened and they took photographs. No, they never came inside, not like you; I think that they thought it was too dirty and they would get sick. I was standing outside because it was Sunday and all the people, and my mother, are sleeping so early on a Sunday. It was cold, I remember because the man asked me if I was cold. I'm six. How old are you?"

You look old. I don't know old people, my mother she's young. She works on a Saturday night at Kentucky Chicken, that place over there, and they stay open late because many people buy it on a Saturday, I think because they like to eat and get drunk. She always brings us this chicken, I like it. Look, look here, it's fake money. Mandela's not on it, it must be fake.

I live here with my mother, only her, no, not my father, we don't know where my father is, and my mother, she is at work today, yes at the Kentucky Chicken, that's why I am alone. It's school holidays, that's why I am here, normally when it is not holidays I am at school. Lucky, if I wasn't here then I could not show you where I live. Come, look, it's down here, down this passage.



BOOKS

'Let me show you where I live in Springs'



Just hold this, the key is here, won't you help me, that's it, yes, no, that's fine, I can turn it now.

I go to the school down the road; it's called Selcourt Primary School. I'm in Grade two; the teacher there says that I am smart and cool.

Do you want me to show you where I live? Come. We live in this room, we

ANOTHER GBV ATROCITY

THE decomposed body of a teenage girl reported missing near Makapanstad in North West, was found buried in a shallow grave at her boyfriend's house.

have a big TV, and the bathroom; it's here, a bit down the passage, we share it with her, that girl there, and her brother, he is my friend; sometimes he is my best friend, Sphesihle. Her name is Londiwe, she is from KwaZulu-Natal and that small guy, he is Sphesihle. She is his sister, that one over there, that small guy, yes, that guy. He's smaller than me because he's one year younger. Let me show you now because then I am going to my other friend who lives across the road, up the road and then I have to cross it.

And look here, look at this money. You can't have the money, you can't take it, it's fake and I can't buy anything with it but I like it. I like to pretend that I am a big man, a rich man and so I like to show it to my friends. I never give it to them. I don't even let them hold it, but you can, you won't steal it, I know you won't. Where is Nigeria? Is it another place in the world? My teacher says that I should, when I get into another class, the bigger class, learn geography, and then I will know if Nigeria is a real place. Is it a real place? Is it far away? How far away?

My dad, he never visits, my mother says he is dead but I know she only says this because she does not want to tell me that he just left us, me and my mother, but I know he did. He didn't die when I was born. I think he is around here somewhere.

Maybe he is Nigerian, I think that he is Nigerian, and he has really gone away to wherever Nigeria is, that's why I keep this fake money. I want to show him when he comes around one day that I am rich.

And he will come, I know that he will. I just have to wait. And then he can take the money and spend it in Nigeria."

◆ *In the Shadows of the Springs I Saw* is published by Modjaji Books and retails at R290.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BARBARA ADAIR is a novelist and writer. Her novel *In Tangier we Killed the Blue Parrot* was shortlisted for the Sunday Times Fiction Award in 2004, while another, *End*, was shortlisted for the Africa Regional Commonwealth Prize. She contributed to *Queer Africa* and *Queer Africa 2*, and her writing, particularly her travel writing, has been widely published in literary magazines and anthologies. She is currently working with the Wits Writing Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2022, she received a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Pretoria.



SK GREAT MOMENTS AT THEIR GREATEST

SHOWTIMES  
FRIDAY 10 MARCH - THURSDAY 16 MARCH  
SHOWS, PRICES & TIMES SUBJECT TO CHANGE - NO COMPLIMENTARY TICKETS.

<b>CRESTA</b> THE BLUE PARROT 11:15, 12:30, 14:45, 17:00, 19:30	<b>REDFORD SQUARE</b> THE BLUE PARROT 11:15, 12:30, 14:45, 17:00, 19:30	<b>CENTURION CENTRE</b> THE BLUE PARROT 11:15, 12:30, 14:45, 17:00, 19:30	<b>SANDTON CITY</b> THE BLUE PARROT 11:15, 12:30, 14:45, 17:00, 19:30
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