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Profiles in Diversity: Women in the New South Africa

Patricia Romero

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A revealing oral history collection, *Profiles in Diversity* contains in-depth interviews of twenty-six women in South Africa from different racial, class, and age backgrounds. Conducted in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Vryburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Durban, and a rural section of Kwa-Zulu Natal, these life histories encompass diverse experiences ranging from a squatter in a township outside Cape Town to an ANC activist in Port Elizabeth, who lost three sons to the struggle for democracy and who herself was imprisoned several times during what many in South Africa now refer to as the "civil war."

Nearly all of these women describe their formative years spent growing up in South Africa's segregated society. Three young black students discuss the hardships they experienced in an unequal educational system as well as aspects of segregation in their childhood. They are joined in their memories and hopes for the future by two mature women—one now a high court judge in Durban and the other a linguist at the University of South Africa in Pretoria—both of whom studied at Harvard in the United States. Nancy Charton, the first woman ordained as an Anglican priest in South Africa, speaks about her past and what led her, in her early seventies, to a vocation in the church.

Three Afrikaner women, including one in her late twenties, speak about growing up in South Africa and articulate their concerns for a future that, in some respects, differs from the predictions of their English-speaking or black sisters. Two now-deceased members of the South African Communist Party provide disparate accounts of what led them to lives of active opposition to the discrimination that marked the lives of people of color, long before apartheid became embedded in South Africa's legal system. Also included is an account by Dr. Goonam, an Indian woman who grew up in relative comfort in the then province of Natal, while Ray Alexander discusses how she witnessed the tyranny visited on the Jews of her native Latvia before immigrating to the Cape.

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