

THEY LEFT IN THE 60's WHEN LIFE
IN SOUTH AFRICA BECAME INTOLERABLE...

EXILES LIVE IN HOPE OF RETURNING

As thousands of expatriates prepare to return to South Africa from all over the world, our London correspondent JUDY OLIVIER, talked to two women who have lived in exile for nearly thirty years. They spoke openly about their life abroad and their hopes for the future:

This is the story of two women. Both were born and brought up in South Africa. Both expected to live their lives in South Africa, bringing up their own children, living a conventional and happy life.

But it did not work out that way. The apartheid system intervened. Instead, both followed their husbands into exile in the sixties, and have spent nearly 30 years raising their children in a foreign country, following events in South Africa from 6 000 miles away, and longing for the day they will return.

Rose Motsepe is in her fifties, married to Godfrey Motsepe, the ANC's chief representative in London. She's the mother of four children, aged between 17 and 29, and a former chairperson of the ANC's women's section.

Tembi Nobadula, married to Fikile Nobadula, is in her sixties, and their children are aged between 28 and 35.

Both women live in North London and cannot wait for the moment when they can swap grey drabness for the blue skies of South Africa.

They both talk of education, a word they use constantly. There must be education for the brutalised children, and education for the women who have missed out.

The women come from similar backgrounds, both married teachers, and they left when life in South Africa in the sixties became intolerable.

Rose was born in Pretoria and went to Kilnerton, a Methodist high school, before taking up nursing. "I didn't finish though, because I met Godfrey. I had not been all that keen on nursing. But in those days you either became a domestic servant, a nurse or a teacher."

Godfrey was a primary school teacher. "He enjoyed it, but when the Bantu Education Act came in, he just threw



• Tembi had a tough time finding accommodation in London. "Flats were advertised but they would say: 'Sorry no blacks'."

it in. He did not want to teach such a system.

"At that time I was not as involved in politics as I now am, but I was aware of how wrong things were. There were the killings, the forced removals, the harassment, and eventually we decided to leave. We wanted to get further education for ourselves, and we wanted a better life for our children.

"I felt I couldn't do much at home, and that it would be better for me to come out and tell the outside

world what was going on.

"We lived in Zambia for four years, and then came to London. We got scholarships to study, and I got my A-Levels (the equivalent of first year university in South Africa). Godfrey went to the United States, where he got a degree in Political Science and Economics at Colgate University in New York."

Life was difficult for the Motsepe family. Rose was bringing up small children and studying at the same time.

**BOTH WOMEN LIVE IN NORTH LONDON AND
CANNOT WAIT FOR THE MOMENT WHEN THEY
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• Rose – “South Africa is something we talk about every day. You can’t forget your country, so you transmit your feelings to your children.”

“It was not easy. But I felt that in order to intergrate properly and get a decent job, I had to improve my education.

“It was difficult, coming into a new country, starting a new life, finding accommodation.” In the sixties, racism was rife in Britain, and it was not unusual to find flats with notices which said: “No children or coloureds.”

“The racism was there. I was surprised. Perhaps I was expecting too much.”

Rose got an administrative job at the Open University, and then her youngest child was born. “But she feels as South African as the rest of the family. South Africa is something we talk about every day. We watch the news on television; we read about it in the newspaper. You can’t forget your country, so you tend to transmit your feelings to your children.

“They want to know what to expect

when we go back. They know it is a beautiful country. But we all know that we will still find racism.

“I think the attitude of some people has changed. There used to be streets in Pretoria where we could not walk, we were terrified that we would be knocked over by the Afrikaaners. And our people have changed as well, they are much more confident and fearless than they were in the sixties.

In the women’s section of the ANC, Rose’s work involves mobilising moral support for the movement. “Women have done wonderful work in South Africa. Women are tougher than men. We are survivors.”

Rose realises there could be resentment against the returning exiles. “But we are not going back home intending to tell the people there what to do.”

Rose is not without her own feelings of resentment. She has had to spend

more than thirty years living outside her country, separated from family and friends.

“It was very painful watching television, particularly in the mid-Eighties. Night after night, we would watch our people being shot. But we did not feel completely helpless because our army was very active inside the country.”

Tembi is also impatient to go home and start building the future. “But even though I was born and brought up in Benoni, I don’t want to have to go back there. As a South African, I will go back to South Africa. I will go to Benoni because I want to, not because I have to.

Tembi was educated at St Albans, an Anglican school and married at 19. “My husband was also a teacher, and he also refused to teach when Bantu Education was introduced. People who were seriously committed to the struggle could not teach inferior education that they were morally opposed to.

The Nobadulas were both heavily involved in politics in the fifties. “It was a frightening time. When the State of Emergency was declared after Sharpeville, my husband only narrowly escaped arrest.

“It was a tough time. At first I just sat down and cried. Three of the children were at schools outside the country, and I also had to support my husband in exile. It really shook me. But if you are a South African woman, you toughen up quickly and pull yourself together.

“The system prepares us for hardship. We were brought up on such low wages. But when you look back, you wonder how you managed – yet we seemed to.

“I left South Africa in 1961 to join my husband in Tanzania. It was a difficult journey, with no passports documents – nothing. We just went. There were some sympathetic comrades in Botswana who helped us, but travelling with children was not easy. The children became ill with malaria, I thought I was going to lose the youngest. It took us five months to reach Tanzania.

“We spent three years there, and then came to London. We want our children to be educated properly. I took a course at Pitman’s College and got a job with the British Council.

Tembi also had a tough time finding accommodation. “You would see a flat advertised, and then they would say: “Sorry, no Blacks.” It was before the Race Relations Act, and racism ▶

EXILES RETURN

was just blatant. And the landlords who rented accommodation to blacks fleeced us.

"I didn't expect it, but on the other hand, it was nothing new. I was disappointed, but I soon pulled myself together and got on with things.

"Watching television I felt frustrated that I couldn't be with my people. What really angered me was the 1976 uprising, when they were killing the children. Before defenceless men and women were killed, but now it was children."

She and Rose are both conscious of the problems posed by the children that have been brutalised by the violence of decades. "They must be rehabilitated and intergrated into society. They must have something to live for.

"It will take time. It will take a generation. But a peoples' government will build special schools for these children. Some of them have never been to school, and they will have special needs.

"And look at the plight of the street children," said Rose. "They are homeless, and they need to be put



• **ABOVE:** Rose lived in Zambia for four years and then went to London.

• **BELOW:** Tembi left in 1961 to join her husband in Tanzania.



into educational institutions and rehabilitated.

"Bantu education is still intact, and that has to go. Education is the backbone of a country. Without it, you can't really have a start in life.

"Our people still live in slums. Unemployment is still rife. The cost of living is high. The economy is in such a bad condition because of apartheid. If apartheid was not there, the economy would be booming and there would be work for everyone.

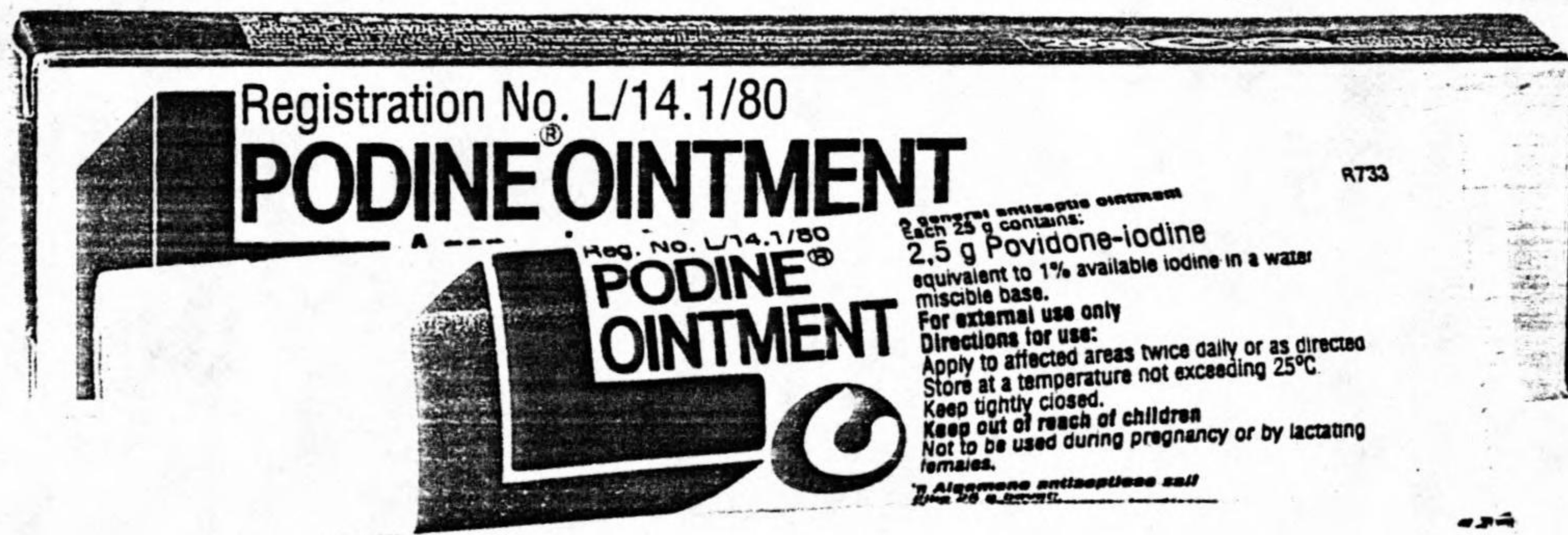
"What we want to do is to be part of the Mass Democratic Movement. We want to go home and meet with the other women and put down the foundations for the future. We need to help women at work, to make sure they have maternity benefits, trade unions, and proper contraception. We want to make sure that women get into positions of responsibility."

Although they can see the problems, both women are optimistic about the future. "We are not saying that it is going to be easy, but it can be done. The people will want immediate changes, because this is what they have been waiting for. But you can't deliver the goods overnight.

"We are going to need help. We are going to need people from all over the world to help us with their skills, to help us build a new nation which has to be built from scratch."

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