

Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri

The SABC's

new boss

As her car stops in front of the Matsepe home in the township of Seeisoville in Kroonstad, a group of children rush forward to greet Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri. "We saw you on TV, Auntie Ivy," they shout as she laughs and hugs them. They run next to us as we walk to the house.

When we enter the kitchen, the elderly woman standing at the coal stove throws up her hands in joy. "Doc-tor Ivey Matsepe-Casabuuri," she cries. "I will tell the media about you. I will send them pictures of you as a bare-footed teenager with mud all over your feet." Matsepe-Casaburri introduces me to her 82-year-old Aunt Elizabeth or "Topi", as everyone calls her.

We sit around the kitchen table to look at the Sunday newspapers, which have articles about Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, the first black person and the first woman to be chairperson of the board of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

From the dusty Orange Free State town of Kroonstad to the board of the SABC, Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri has come a long way. Two years ago, few

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Elinor Sisulu takes a closer look at this remarkable woman who will steer the new SABC

people would have believed that an African woman would be chosen to lead the SABC. It is an organisation which has always been controlled by white Afrikaner men, most of them members of the secret Afrikaner organisation, the Broederbond.

Many people are not happy that Matsepe-Casaburri has been chosen to head the SABC board, simply because they do not want to see a black woman in that position.

Sheila Sisulu, a board member, says: "I would not like to



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be in her situation. This is not because I think she cannot do the job, but she will be made to carry the burden of all African people and all women. If she does well, they will say she is very good. If she does badly, they will say it is because she is an African woman.”

Billy Modise, another SABC board member, believes Matsepe-Casaburri has the right qualities to deal with the difficult job of trying to change the white Afrikaner SABC to serve all the people in the country.

“She never allows anyone to ignore her because she is black or because she is a woman. She mixes easily with people from all walks of life, including rural and working-class people. She also speaks all the major languages of South Africa,” he

said.

Matsepe-Casaburri did her primary schooling in Kroonstad, her matric at Marionhill in Natal and her first degree at Fort Hare. She studied to be a Doctor of Sociology at Rutgers University in the United States of America (USA).

Matsepe-Casaburri left South Africa in 1963 and went to Swaziland. She taught there for a few years before going to work for a firm of lawyers. While she was travelling in Europe in 1971, she learned that the Swazi government would not allow her to return to Swaziland. She believes this may have been because of a political case which the law firm was handling.

Her work in Swaziland made her interested in studying society, especially the oppres-

sion of women in society. She went on to study Sociology at Rutgers University.

“While working as a lawyer, I had to defend women who had been arrested for prostitution and living on the streets. The same women were arrested over and over again. They were not able to change the way they lived because there was nothing else for them to do. I began to see that the people in the country had no part in making the laws and that not all the laws were right for Swazi society.”

Matsepe-Casaburri is well known for her writing on women in South Africa. Her article, “On the Question of Women in the South African Struggle”, is one of the best studies of women’s oppression in South Africa. In this article, she looks at the



Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri back home with relatives. She has come a long way since her childhood in the dusty Free State township of Seelisoille

ways in which women from different races and ethnic groups are oppressed.

Before returning to South Africa in 1990, Matsepe-Casaburri taught for the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN), a school for Namibian exiles. She enjoyed her work at UNIN and was very proud of her students. Many started off with very little education. But they worked so hard that, within a couple of years, some of them were able to go to universities in Europe and America. Today, many of her former students hold high positions in the Namibian government.

While working at UNIN, Matsepe-Casaburri became active in the ANC Women's

League. She worked on the ANC's policies on gender.

Since her return to South Africa, Matsepe-Casaburri has been the director of the Education Development Trust (EDT). She is the chairperson of the Research Advisory Group of the Women's National Coalition and sits on the board of the Women's Development Foundation. She has started a Black Women's Research Network to help black women researchers to improve their skills by working together.

Throughout her years in exile, Matsepe-Casaburri kept in touch with her family. One of the first things

we did in Kroonstad was to visit the graves of her parents, Dorrington and Violet Matsepe, and her grandparents. She explains that her family is a "mixed masala". "We have Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, Malay and French Huguenot ancestors. My parents were both teachers, very religious and popular within the community."

Matsepe-Casaburri was married in 1975 to Angelo Casaburri, an Italian American. They parted because she did not want to stay in the USA and he did not want to live in Southern Africa. Though they agreed to end their marriage, they are still very good friends. "He is my closest friend," she says.

She does not like to talk about her private life because, she says, "women are always judged by whether they are married or not; how many children they have or what they look like".

She is a strong supporter of SPEAK magazine, "because it promotes positive images of women by showing what women do in society, rather than who they are married to or what they look like."

She believes the views of black women must come out more strongly in the media.

"Because the South African media has always been controlled by white men, it looks at things from a white male point of view," says Matsepe-Casaburri. "We must look at things from all sides and through the eyes of all people – women and men, young and old, black and white, rural and urban." ☺



The new SABC board. In the centre is its chairperson, Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri

It's your SABC

The SABC used to be a mouthpiece for apartheid and the Nationalist Party government. Now it has a new board and has promised to serve the needs of all South Africans

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was set up in 1936. During the years of Nationalist Party (NP) rule, it was used to push apartheid policies. Until recently, no voices against the government were ever heard on SABC radio and television stations.

The SABC now has 22 radio stations, broadcasting in 11 languages, and two television services. Its headquarters are in Johannesburg and it has regional offices around the country.

The SABC has a Board which decides on policy for radio and television. Until this year, the SABC Board was made up mainly of members of the Broederbond or the government's Military Intelligence.

For a long time, organisations and political parties have demanded that the SABC should be free of NP control.

The Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB) was set up to fight for a free and open SABC. It is made up of media unions, Cosatu, political parties and other groups. The CIB said the SABC was paid for by all South Africans through taxes and TV licences. It must now start serving the interests of all its listeners.

Public participation

The campaign had some success. This year the NP agreed to appoint a new SABC Board. The public was asked to choose people to sit on the Board. Four judges interviewed all of those chosen and

decided on who should be on the Board.

State president FW de Klerk blocked this process. He did not agree with the judges' choices and he made changes to their list of Board members.

People protested against this. But the new Board has decided to go ahead and change the SABC to meet the needs of all South Africans.

It has a difficult job. Some of the SABC employees are still locked into the old "apartheid" way of thinking. We wish them luck!

It's up to you

The SABC belongs to all of us. The listeners have to try to make sure it serves their needs. The new Board says it wants to make sure the SABC plays a role in building the new South Africa. The listeners should also play a role in this. If you hear anything racist or sexist on radio or TV, or have suggestions to make, you should write to: The Chairperson, SABC Board, Room 2847, Piet Meyer Building, Private Bag X1, Auckland Park, 2006, Johannesburg. ☺