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Abstract

Unity Dow has published three novels in rapid succession: *Far and Beyond* (2000), *The Screaming of the Innocent* (2002) and *Juggling Truths* (2003). She is also the first woman to be appointed a judge of the High Court in Botswana; before her appointment she was an attorney and a prominent human rights activist, and she won some landmark cases in Botswana.

M.J. DAYMOND AND MARGARET LENTA

‘It was like singing in the wilderness’: An Interview with Unity Dow

(Durban, March 2004)

Unity Dow has published three novels in rapid succession: *Far and Beyon*’ (2000), *The Screaming of the Innocent* (2002) and *Juggling Truths* (2003). She is also the first woman to be appointed a judge of the High Court in Botswana; before her appointment she was an attorney and a prominent human rights activist, and she won some landmark cases in Botswana. For example, she won the right for a Motswana mother to give her nationality to her child —



(Photo: University of KwaZulu-Natal)

previously only the father could do so. She has said that in her novels she is ‘reclaiming the voice’ to speak out on human rights issues, particularly those of women. She was a guest at an annual writers’ festival, ‘The Time of the Writer’, that was held in Durban in March 2004. On March 22, Margaret Daymond and Margaret Lenta took the opportunity to interview her about her novels and her entry into the literary scene in Botswana.

D&L: *How did you begin writing fiction, when did you begin, why did you begin and how did you choose your subject matter?*

UD: First, how I chose what I wrote about: the easier part of a very complicated question. My first book is very much about family relationships, and about HIV-AIDS, and I guess when you start writing, you write about yourself — even if it’s not strictly autobiographical, it’s what you know best. What was hitting me at the time was people around me dealing with the HIV-AIDS situation, and how the kids were in tension between new Africa and old Africa. So that’s what kept me writing in *Far and Beyon*’. My second book, *The Screaming of the Innocent*, again captures what I hold dear to my heart about children, about the extent to which I believe that we don’t protect children, we fail children. So even though it is focused

primarily on a ritual killing, the bigger picture for me is the extent to which societies don't protect their young. People often say that children are the future; I don't disagree, but they are also the present — we must protect them because they are what is now. My third book goes back — I guess, once I had the courage of the two books — to look at my own life and at what I felt children benefited from in our traditions, and where we failed to strengthen children. That's why I wrote it.

Why did I start to write? I can honestly say that having worked as an activist for many years, having had no control over what I had to do as a lawyer, I found that at last [as a judge] I was in a state of silence; I had time to reflect. Although being a judge is a very busy job, it's not a chaotic job. I know exactly what I will be doing next May, and June, and July — the chaos happens out there. My work is pre-packaged and each case is put in a different file, blue if it's a murder, green if there's an appeal. But before, I was part of the chaos, I was picking up pieces, and I had no time in my life to write. I always thought I would like to write — I always felt that my head was full of stories. I felt that everyone around me is a story, a potential story. I really think that I got the first chance to write when I became a judge.

D&L: *You say that Juggling Truths took you back to your own life — are you implying it's an autobiographical work?*

UD: I say to my kids, 'Of course it's not an autobiographical work', and my daughter smiles: 'Mum, this is exactly what you told us about your life growing up'. So we argue about whether it is an autobiography — it's got a piece of myself, a piece of my sister, a piece of the people around me in it. I think in many ways it comes from the stories I told my own children when they were growing up. My youngest daughter just loves stories. I used to read from the Ladybird stories and Doctor Seuss, but she would say, 'Mum, I want you to tell stories about when you were young'. At the time she thought I was just making them up — it's too fantastic for her that people lived like that, with no running water, with no electricity, because those days were something else. So it's a bit about myself, but also definitely drawn from others.

D&L: *You are interested in the rural-urban divide in all three books. Did you grow up in a village?*

UD: Yes, very much so. I grew up in a village — I didn't see a refrigerator until I was a teenager. I first saw a TV set when I was twenty in Swaziland, which is where I went to study for my law degree.

D&L: *Talking about education: in Juggling Truths, the parents choose to send their daughter, Monei, to school to give her a formal, Western education*

— *was that something like your own experience? Did all your siblings go to school? Do you come from a largish family?*

UD: I grew up with a father for whom there was no compromise; we had to go to school. We were a large family of seven children, six of whom have had college education and some of them have postgraduate education. This was unique for my neighbourhood. So for my father there was no compromise; it came out later that he wanted to go to university, and that he won a scholarship to study at Fort Hare (at the time, there was no university in Botswana and so black people came to South Africa to black universities to study), but at the last minute the son of the chief was the one who was sent to university. So my father made a promise to himself that it would not happen to his children, that his children would have the education that he didn't have.

D&L: *And your mother's attitude to education?*

UD: Also totally uncompromising. My mother can read and write in Setswana, but not in English; my father can speak English and can read in English. It was just that we had to stay at school. Sometimes I look back and think that school was so harsh! We had to get up early in the morning; there was insufficient clothing, no shoes — what kid wants to go to school in those conditions?

D&L: *Was the discipline as punitive as it appears in Juggling Truths?*

UD: It was — sometimes even worse. I look back and think, really what kid could want to stay in school? But when you are inside something, that's your reality. My father said he heard about UN reports that concerned the starving children in Africa; but he said 'You know, Unity, I never thought they were talking about us. I never felt like a starving kid in Africa' — and you don't, because that's your reality.

D&L: *Were you starving?*

UD: In 1967 there was a drought in Botswana and a soup kitchen actually in the village. We must have been starving, but I don't remember it like that. If you think about what is now called 'potable' water and compare it with the kind of water we drank — I am sure it would be considered just totally undrinkable now. My kids would die if they had to drink it. But I survived it. I guess at the time, you are happy with it; you don't know any other life.

D&L: *And your further studies were in Edinburgh. How did that come about?*

UD: It was just part of the package: if you did Law, there was no Law school in Botswana at all, so you had to go to Swaziland and then Edinburgh.

D&L: *Was there a connection between the universities?*

UD: Yes, through British aid to Botswana. It was a contrast going to Edinburgh, but when you are eighteen, you know, snow is nothing. Now I look at New York and I wonder, how did people ever think that this land was habitable? But at eighteen or nineteen, I thought Edinburgh was just a beautiful city. The architecture is amazing.

D&L: *Unity, how did you get your name?*

UD: I was born in 1959. Those were the days of African nationalism, African self-realisation; and it really came from that. I think I am right that the South African coins used to have the motto 'Eendrag maak mag' (Unity gives strength) on them, and my father's attitude was: if it can give them strength, it can give us strength. It was a hijacking of that idea.

D&L: *Could we ask you about the range of fiction that you have written so far: the first novel could be called social realism; the second also investigates a social problem — ritual murder —, but it is one that is not spoken about and so you use a kind of detective plot to bring it out into the open; and the third one, as you said, is childhood memories. You have used three such different genres. How did that range come about?*

UD: I don't see my third book as retrospective, as a standing back — it's more born out of the courage to look in a mirror. My first two books were ... not anger, but the need to knock at a door, the need to kick a door open, to be 'in your face' and force somebody else to look in the mirror. My first book was probably influenced by a close cousin's dying of AIDS in 1997; and I just could not believe that somebody could just waste away and die — she never really had symptoms like sores or diarrhoea — she was more like candy. You know how with candy, you suck it until it's gone? So I just couldn't believe that someone who had had so much life in her could just go. One day I could not watch her any more, and the following day she died. So that informed me a lot in writing — her just going away.

Also I like delving into our culture; I just really like thinking about it. Take the position of children: a Motswana child does not have the power to say no to an adult. The uncle says — 'uncle' is used broadly, all the men in the community are uncles — 'Here, go and get me some cigarettes'. A child in England would wonder, and might refuse, but our culture doesn't allow that. Respect means saying yes to elders, especially male elders, regardless. So she goes off and buys a packet of cigarettes, and he will say, 'Go and put them on the bed'. This is actually from a case I know — a man said, 'Go and put the loaf of bread on the bed'. The child knew that bread doesn't belong on the bed, in the bedroom, but she hadn't the skills to negotiate herself out of the situation, so she took the loaf of bread and

put it on the bed. A second later, the door opened and the man is on top of her. And to me it's....

The reason why we train young girls to say yes to adults is because we believe that they are protective of children, but it's not true any more. Families don't always protect: sometimes they hurt. We have always had the belief that adults protect, adults will save you, adults will nurture you. That is not true — sometimes they will hurt you, and sometimes they are going to destroy you. So the deal is that we ought to teach a child that respect does not mean blind faith — and that's our problem. I have been on a school board where the idea was that young girls become pregnant as they go along — and it was assumed that that's just the fate of girls. They wouldn't even acknowledge that there is another participant in a pregnancy.

D&L: *In the light of what you have been saying about respect and obedience, is the personality you give Amantle in The Screaming of the Innocent — she's quite sassy and bossy, even if she's not always as confident as she might appear — is her personality part of the challenge to convention of your novel?*

UD: Yes, and some people at home have said she's an impossible character. She's too strong for a young Motswana girl when she defies the police officers, for example. Others have said, that could never happen. I said, well, we can dream, can't we? I hope that that will happen.

D&L: *She's a member of Tirelo Sechaba, [the national service organisation in which young people who are proceeding to tertiary education are compelled to serve]. She has all these important connections, but she agrees to go to a remote village. Do you find that young women readers like her?*

UD: Yes, I think they feel that they could be her — or that they would like to be her. In fact, a few years ago, before I wrote this book, a particular young woman was allegedly involved in burning down a school. She was thrown out of the school because she was supposedly leading a group of students who were so angry with the management that they had burned the school down. So she came to me when I was an attorney because she wanted to write her Standard 10 examination — the public school-leaving exam — and she was eventually allowed to write it. People said Amantle was impossible, but she is possible — it actually happened. Sometimes she is too strong; sometimes she is not particularly wise, and to me those are the pitfalls of youth — you think that you understand everything; you can handle it: but you can't.

D&L: *When you began writing The Screaming of the Innocent did you have the ending in mind already?*

UD: Not at all. I never have an ending in mind for my books at all.

D&L: *Perhaps the greatest shock of the whole novel is the confession that the gentle old man makes at the end, that he had been forced to help commit the ritual killing of young Neo Kakane, his neighbour's child. When did that come to you? How did you decide that that's how the novel should end?*

UD: When I am writing, I get into my characters and I just go with them — wherever they take me. I might take their actions from other people, from other cultures around them, but they end up as themselves. So honestly when I was writing that part I was crying myself because I just couldn't believe that this man could do it, even as I was creating him. I was asking myself, how could he do it; what would happen? What would be the reaction of everyone around him? His confession — I didn't plan it out at all. It just came out the way it did.

D&L: *In a way, that was the greatest evil in the whole story, that those men could draw a good man into a deed like that.*

UD: For me it was like investigating the potential for evil in all of us. Naturally that idea would tend to shock each one of us — that it could have been any one of us; that it could be someone we like very much. So who are these people who commit murders? And the motives for a ritual killing — it's not greed — well, it is greed, but it's different from somebody blasting their way into a bank; it's different from someone siphoning off money through accounting procedures; it's different from a lover who shoots another person. You try to think about it, but you can't grapple with it, you can't just understand the motives, or maybe I just can't understand. It's the same with paedophilia. Part of me is thinking what the victims must feel when they know they are going to die. Are the killer's motives really relevant then? I just imagine a child's eyes when they think 'I am going to die'.

D&L: *At the beginning of The Screaming of the Innocent, when you introduce Disanka, you depict him as getting almost a sexual kick out of looking at that little girl, Neo.*

UD: And I do that deliberately because I want to say, this is about power over a human being, and it's about self-gratification. He's a man who wants wealth; to be admired. I was thinking, what goes through such a man's head when he actually finds Neo? I saw something in one of the newspapers today about ritual killings in some other country in Africa — this is a problem for the whole of Africa. When you have a problem with diamond-

running in Botswana, you have the vice-squad, there's quite a set-up to deal with this problem. Or when you have an increase in cattle rustling, someone will stand up and say we must have stiffer penalties for this. But nobody, nobody talks about what to do with killers of children. The reviewers in Botswana talk about how my novel is a wake-up call, but still it's something that is just not talked about.

D&L: *Your accusation in the book is that ritual killing is something that everyone knows about.*

UD: Of course everyone knows that it happens, as everyone knows that traffic offenses happen. It happens. Kids disappear all the time — everyone knows it happens. It's in the papers that a child disappeared, and then when the body is found it's reported that the genitalia were missing and the tongue was missing, and that the police suspect ritual killing: but that's the end. It's not as though it's kept secret that a child has disappeared — it's very, very obvious.

D&L: *Do you think the silence is because ordinary people feel so helpless about this kind of thing, or is it a more psychological shame?*

UD: Sometimes I think that for the local people it's fear. Let's be honest: ritual killings, in Botswana at least (I don't know about other countries), are not committed by poor people. It's just not a poor man's offence. It's about gaining more power, so you have to have some power already. By the nature of the offence, you are already in power; it's as if you have already got a Masters and want a PhD; you've got a PhD, so you want to be a professor, or if you're a judge you want to be chief justice. You're an MP, a backbencher, you want to be the Minister. So it is not about some poor person in a village who wants another donkey. For the average villager, the first thing which comes to mind after the body is found in the village and there are parts missing, is 'Whoever did this must have more power than I do'. There is immediately a restraint on action. They are afraid of the people with the power to be able to do something like that.

D&L: *In the novel you also give insight into complicity when you show Neo's mother, who wanted a child, going to the doctor who offered to help her and then raped her. Even when Neo was born, she could never tell anyone.*

UD: That's another very common offence. I saw that when I was practicing as an attorney, and when I had cases on appeal, where exactly that had happened. It's the power of the traditional doctor, and now not only the traditional doctor, but also fakes, fake prophets, foaming-at-the-mouth Christians who probably haven't even read the Bible and just abuse and use people. Now with HIV-AIDS, with people dying so young, if one is

fertile one is afraid. None of the usual medicines are going to help, so one goes to these people, but they are just religious pretenders.

D&L: *What about being a writer in Botswana? Your country seems not to have produced a great many writers so far.*

UD: Why Botswana has not produced many writers? Some people point to the small population of the country, but it's not a very good answer to that question. Even proportionately, it doesn't make sense that I am probably the only indigenous Motswana being published outside the country — the only writer of fiction. I think we were just raised in an educational system that did not encourage it. I just thought, growing up, that books came from England, and I didn't quite understand where Chinua Achebe, with *Things Fall Apart*, fitted into the whole system, but clearly, for me as a child, black people did not write books. I couldn't imagine a neighbour writing a book, or even someone in Gaborone writing a book. I think for kids it's still the belief that books come from abroad, and because we were so far from South Africa, although we are neighbours, we didn't receive influences from within the region, not even from Namibia or Zimbabwe.

D&L: *Did Botswana deliberately turn its back on South Africa?*

UD: Yes. I didn't know Coetzee existed until after the end of apartheid. André Brink, and all the other writers in Zimbabwe, and the women writers — I didn't know they existed, and I was just next door. OK, Gordimer, because she publishes abroad, but none of the other South African writers, even the good ones — you wouldn't see their books. An Afrikaner name — forget it, it wouldn't even get into the bookstores.

D&L: *And writers like Es'kia Mphahlele?*

UD: No, not even him. There was a very strange barrier.

D&L: *What's it like knowing that you are probably the only writer in Botswana who is being published abroad?*

UD: It's very strange, actually, first of all being a judge and a writer, because it's almost like I am doing something wrong. There is a level where people think, should she be writing fiction? Is it compatible with her very serious work as a judge? The good thing is that I am in a young country where almost everything is a first, so it's OK. You can't criticise someone for doing something for the first time, because there are no rules about how to do it, or not to do it. People whisper about whether it's right or not right — but they don't know whether I am doing it right or not. There's no history of writing fiction. Now I get more and more letters from young people; the latest one is from a fifteen-year-old boy in Francistown, saying,

'I want to be an author; I want to be a writer; I have five stories; can you please read them for me?' That's great: you can see that there is an interest out there. I hope it will be nurtured and strengthened.

D&L: *A South African woman writer, Miriam Tlali, said that when she began to write in the 1960s she looked around for role models and she found absolutely no one. Did you have any of that sense of loneliness?*

UD: I guess it depends on why you are writing. I was a judge myself, and I was writing. I had retreated into my mind to write about the work I did before. So in a way, I didn't have to write — it was a pleasure I had. It didn't matter. I never even thought about how one published a book at all. I knew no publishers, so until I put in what I thought was the last full stop, I did not ask, 'What shall I do with this manuscript?' It was like singing in the wilderness and not caring whether or not somebody is listening. Only afterwards did I think, OK, I think I have a manuscript, but even then, I was almost done before I could tell anyone I was writing a book. I didn't know I could write a book; I didn't know anyone who could write a book — it was too — I don't know — presumptuous and arrogant to think that I was writing a book. I remember once when we were camping I said to a friend of mine, 'You know, I am writing a book', and they looked at me as though I was crazy. So I said, 'No, I don't mean I am really writing a book, I just mean that occasionally I just try to....'. I tried to fix it up so that they wouldn't think that I am writing a book, and I didn't give it to my husband until after it was completely done, or any body else, because I didn't know what a manuscript looks like when you are done. I had never talked to a writer at all.

D&L: *How does your husband feel about your writing?*

UD: I was divorced last year; but he is now my greatest supporter. We are good friends now — and he has always believed in my writing.

D&L: *You said this morning that you found writing reports for investigations you were doing when in legal practice rather boring, but you found it enjoyable to use that same material, the same experiences, for your fiction.*

UD: Yes, that's what I think. A friend of mine who lives in Minnesota and now uses such reports as part of her teaching material said she just couldn't believe that I could write because I was always late with my reports. I just hated the discipline. I think that people who do academic work are amazing people — that you can be disciplined in keeping to the material that you have, and not embellish. I found it very hard to do research and get statistics, and then try to limit my expression to the data that I had. When I'm writing as a judge — and the material is pretty interesting — I have

to ask myself all the time, did I get that from the evidence, or am I interpreting too much from the evidence? Creative writing is totally different, because if I were to write something strange in fiction, then somebody like you may say it's not in keeping with the character as introduced, but there's no actual evidence to measure it against. In writing a judgment, you have a set of material that you have to work with. For example: this happened in a certain place between 8.30 and 9.30; three people saw it happen. You have to confine yourself to that; you can't, just because it may sound great to say it, add that the sun was shining. Unless someone actually said the sun was shining, the sun was not shining. So it's really a different type of writing. I find that writing fiction is something you can do any time you want to talk — it gives you more freedom.

Also I worked for many years with women, abused women, women who had offended against the law, and I always found that they all had stories but no report could capture them. No report that was, for example, trying to get the Minister to change the legislation could attend to the finer details of their stories. I felt I could never really capture what they had said, but writing fiction allows you to take all this material and write in a way that will reach a wider audience.

D&L: *Your first novel was published by Longman in Botswana, but not the second, because, you say, they are really only interested in publishing school text books. How did the publication of your second novel in Australia come about?*

UD: Actually it was luck, how I found the publisher. I didn't know about Spinifex. I knew nothing about Australia, I'd never even been in contact with Australia. It was just e-mail and — just luck. The simple story is that a journalist from Zimbabwe called my office about something else, and I returned her call. She thought I was magnanimous, returning a call to a journalist. She couldn't believe that anyone would return a journalist's call; she was so frank — people in government hate journalists, only a fool wastes money on returning a journalist's calls. So we got talking and we became friends over e-mail although we have never met. One day I said 'Actually I have a manuscript of a book', and she said, 'Have you heard about Spinifex in Australia? They say they do women's work, so find out about it'. So I didn't just call them — I sent them the manuscript. Then they wrote back, they called, to say they would take my book. So it was really being in the right place at the right time.

D&L: *Are you going to continue with them? Double Storey is now publishing you in South Africa.*

UD: Yes, I am. The publishing house is very small in Australia, just two or three people. I feel — I might like to take my books to somebody else, but

I just think it's not fair — I will give them my fourth book. I really like them — we fight a lot, but I really like them — they are good-hearted. It would be selfish of me to go to somebody else who's bigger, just because now ... you know.

D&L: *They gave you a break; but they could have provided you with better editing.*

UD: Yes, I quarrel with them about that all the time. I don't have time to fix up all the commas and full stops. But *Far and Beyon'* is going to be translated into Dutch and *Screaming* is going into German in December.

D&L: *Have you an agent?*

UD: No, I don't have an agent.

D&L: *Have your books reached the British market at all?*

UD: Not really — only through amazon.com and amazon.co.uk. — but very few people will know to go and look for them. They'd need to know my name or a title.

D&L: *You mentioned getting a letter from a fifteen-year old boy; what kind of response have you had from readers in Botswana? Have you had lots of response?*

UD: 'Lots' would be an exaggeration. Unfortunately we are not a reading culture — no: we talk, and we talk, and we talk. We don't read. I've thought about this a lot, about how people criticise others in Botswana for reading. I've asked myself why do people read in trains, or in queues. It's because they don't want to stand there doing nothing; but people in Botswana don't do nothing — they talk to the people next to them, whether they know them or not. At a health clinic, there will be a lot of people who know each other, and so there's a lot of noise; people are talking to each other and asking, why are you here? Do you like this doctor? Or in a queue in a bank, people talk to each other, so they don't need to read. On the other hand, it's also that books are seen as expensive. When they see how much a book costs, people think, 'What could I have bought with that amount of money?'

D&L: *The Screaming of the Innocent, for example, what would that cost in Botswana?*

UD: About 99 pulas, which is about R130-00. That's a lot of money. That boy from Francistown actually said, 'I'd like to read your books, but I don't have the money to buy them'. In some countries, like New Zealand, where I have been, they have a national mission to support writers, to make

books more affordable. One way to encourage writers is to make books available at reduced prices to the public. I think it crazy that someone cannot read because they cannot afford a book.

D&L: *All your books are about Botswana. Who are they for?*

UD: I was married to an American, and so I am raising kids that are both Batswana and American, and I always have an eye to the outsider. How would they see something? I don't write only to be understood by the local person; I believe I am writing for Botswana and for outside. I am always aware of nuances that are not going to be picked up by an outsider. At the Festival, the other day at lunchtime, I was sitting with an Egyptian writer — and there were two Zimbabwean people, and a South African — and because of the speed at which they're talking, he couldn't hear them. I'm always aware of that — of leaving someone out. He speaks English, but he can't get our accent, he can't follow the references of the talk. So I think, 'Can't you see you are excluding somebody?' So I am always aware of the question, who is my audience? If I'm talking or if I'm writing — I'm sure you can't reach everybody, but I am always aware that there is another person who doesn't have my perspective.

D&L: *What about other people who have written about Botswana, like Bessie Head in A Bewitched Crossroad — and you mentioned this morning Alexander McCall Smith — what do you think of their representation of Botswana?*

UD: First of all we all have our own perspective. Each one of us will think differently, and each view will be valid — it's how you see things. The fact that I see things differently doesn't mean that I am right and you are wrong. I am amazed by Bessie Head — the wide interests that she had at the time and the work she produced. In her early work, there's a struggling writer. I am just amazed at what she did. I have tons of respect — I have every book that she ever wrote including the latest one that came out, *The Cardinals*. It doesn't mean that I have read all of them from cover to cover, but I just feel that I have to buy her books. I admire her greatly for writing when she did; with the education she had; with the resources that she had. In the political climate of the time. I have great admiration for her.

D&L: *'Authentic' is a difficult concept to define, but do McCall Smith's Number One Ladies Detective Agency books seem authentic to you?*

UD: Yes. I can look around and see what he's talking about — like Mma Ramotswe, and her drinking her bush tea — but don't think that such things happen in every community.

D&L: *His first book and your The Screaming of the Innocent, two very different books, have similar preoccupations — with dipheko [ritual murder], for example.*

UD: Yes, I see; that's very interesting. I know his books are going to be made into a TV series and I can tell that they will be right for serialization. They are episodic and very visual — Mma Ramotswa going around Gaborone in her little white pick-up. There's another non-Batswana person who has written about Botswana: Gail Mogwe in *Colour Me Blue*. She is a New Zealander who was married to a Motswana; she's now divorced, I believe, and living in England. I read her stories, and she's got a Motswana mind. I am amazed at what she can see. Then there's another writer, Norman Rush, who wrote a book called *Whites*, and then *Mating*, and now he's just written a third one. The first book, *Whites*, is short stories. I couldn't believe that a white person, from another culture, who just came here on contract, could have written it. I found that he really had a good insight; I loved some of those stories. I didn't like *Mating*; but sometimes you are amazed that other people can see you as you think you see yourself. There's another author, Caitlin Davis, she's just written a book, called *El Negro*; before that she wrote one called something — *Town*. Again, she's British — married to a Motswana, and she wrote that book within two years of being in Botswana. Again, it's a wonderfully perceptive book.

D&L: *Going back to your representation of Botswana, there's a moment in Far and Beyon' when a marriage ceremony is taking place, and men warn the husband only to beat his wife where it doesn't show.*

UD: It makes it very hard for me, to be part of a marriage ceremony, because that still happens today. It's not just yesterday's advice. When marriage is being negotiated the man's family will say they have come to ask for a gourd of water, and they ask 'What is the nature of your gourd? Is it cracked or not cracked?' That still happens today, and whenever that comes up, my sister looks at me, and she is saying silently, 'I know you don't want this, but you are not going to change it today. Don't say anything'.

D&L: *Have you ever been one of the elders who instruct the wife?*

UD: Yes, I have. The language is changing over the years. I know my sister will stand up, and her husband will stand up and say, 'A woman is not a ball; you don't kick her around'. In jest he'll say, 'You want a football — I'll buy you one. But don't use your wife'. Then you get older people saying, 'Marriage is very tough; and sometimes you want to leave; but you must understand: look at me, I'm seventy years old; I'm still married

— you think it was easy? I stayed, so you have got to stay’. This attitude is still part of the instructions today — it is still what happens every day.

D&L: *Have you ever managed to introduce a new note into such a ceremony?*

UD: Well, you try all the time, but again — if you understand African culture, or the Botswana culture — I am the second-born, so my older sister has got more authority in the family than me. I will say something if she is not there, otherwise I have no power. She is regarded as wiser than I am, because wisdom is age-based, and gender-based. It is also based on other things: are you married? Are you widowed? So I think that there are all kinds of little secrets in Tswana culture that you can only be introduced to once you have passed a particular rite. So maybe you know more now that you are married; but you don’t know everything. My mother does not know what happens when somebody is widowed, because she’s not been widowed. She may be 69, but she’s going to get the shock of her life when she’s widowed, and all these widows gather round her and make her do what is considered necessary. She’s not had time to think about it because she has never been part of it. Information is very much based on rites of passage. Before, five years ago, ten years ago, I wouldn’t have been allowed to be part of the marriage ceremony, because I might give people really bad advice, now that I am divorced.... But it is changing in some ways — because of my education, because I have been married and I have raised children — so surely I must have some wisdom to impart. So I’m included; but still some people will be thinking, ‘I don’t know if she should be here, telling the bride how to behave if she could not behave herself — and look what happened to her’. There are all these nuances that are new, but the general rule for married women is still: ‘Don’t leave — just don’t leave’.