

Cissie Zainunnissa Gool

South Africa's Joan of Arc



South African National Library, Cape Town

Cissie Gool (1897 – 1963)

Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool was dubbed 'Joan of Arc' by the press after the French martyr who led her people to battle against the enemies who were inflicting great suffering on them. Cissie was born in Cape Town. Her father, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman was the first black South African to be elected to the Cape City Council in 1904 and later the Cape Provincial Council. Her father made sure that Cissie had a good education, which included schooling at the Trafalgar Public School, which he founded. Her mother, Dr Abdurahman's first wife, Helen James, was the daughter of a Scottish solicitor.

Cissie married Dr Abdul Hamid Gool in 1919, who became the President of the South African Indian Congress. They had three children. Cissie was the first black woman to receive a degree from the University of Cape Town (UCT) when she graduated with a BA in 1932. A year later she obtained her MA in Psychology from the same university. In 1962, just before she died, she also received her LLB from UCT.

In 1936, Cissie was elected as the first President of the National Liberation League, working alongside Alex La Guma as Secretary. In 1938 she was elected to the Cape Town Council, representing District Six and she kept this position until 1951. She campaigned for equal voting rights for all and the end of racial discrimination in many spheres. She was part of the opposition to the establishment of a Coloured Affairs Department and to the Asiatic Act in the 1940s.

Cissie ran into trouble with the law for her role in resistance in 1946 and in 1951. Then, in 1954, she was named under the Suppression of Communism Act, which destroyed her political career. She died suddenly of a stroke in 1963, just as she was considering running again for the Council and was buried near her father in the Moslem cemetery in Mowbray.



Cissie Gool Unisa Archives,
September 1957

Pictures and Promises

In this lesson plan, learners will study: some images of Cissie Gool; a letter written to her; an election handbill; a newspaper report and an extract from a short story she wrote when she was a teenager. They will be asked to see how much they can find out about what she was like from this collection of sources.



Source A


36506 A5.5

MUNICIPAL ELECTION

WARD 7 5th SEPT., 1938

VOTE FOR

**"The
People's
Own
Candidate"**



**"The
People's
Own
Candidate"**

Mrs. Z. GOOL

M.A.

(PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION LEAGUE OF S.A.)

Who stands for

- 1 DECENT HOUSING AND SANITATION
- 2 ADDITIONAL REFUSE REMOVAL SERVICES
- 3 MORE CRECHES AND CLINICS FOR THE POOR
- 4 OPEN SPACES FOR CHILDREN
- 5 THE ABOLITION OF SLUMS AND THE REFORM PARTY
- 6 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF COLOURED PEOPLE IN THE COUNCIL
- 7 HIGHER WAGES FOR MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES
- 8 RECREATION GROUNDS AND A SWIMMING BATH FOR WARDS 6 & 7
- 9 **NO RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION**
- 10 THE IMMEDIATE CONSTRUCTION OF A PUBLIC HALL FOR WARDS 6 & 7

STEWART, CAPE TOWN

Manuscripts and Archives, UCT, Abdurahman Papers, BC506, A5

Source B

Back to the Shores of England

Miss. Z. Abdurahman's Prize Winning Story

(The Raven family is on its way to Johannesburg by oxwagon. Eric Raven is an Englishman and his dearly beloved wife is a black South African.)

'About four days before they reached Johannesburg, Bess Raven was seized with a high fever and grew speedily worse. Eric Raven, being far from medical assistance, ministered to her as best he could, but the intense heat, exposure at night, and constant motion of the wagon, had a bad effect on her, and she grew worse and worse.

Raven was in despair. He outspanned, and inquired at a large farm whether he might be able to get a bed for his now dying wife. The farmer, a typical long-bearded Dutchman, after learning from his wife, who could understand English slightly, what Raven wanted, took a good look at him, and gladly granted his request. Raven thanked him, and with a grateful heart, lifted his wife in his giant arms, and carried her to the stoep.

The farmer stepped forth to give Eric some assistance. But he drew back instantly, for instead of a dying Englishwoman, he was horrified when he saw the dark form of the Native girl and exclaimed: "Ala Machtig! O, God, Ik wil ne zo n zwart kaffer mens in mijn huis he ne." (My Word! Oh God, I don't want a black kaffir person in my house).'

(The farmer instructs his servant to take the Ravens to an outhouse where Bess dies)

"Toadie Jimiesen" Competition No. 6

'Back to the Shores of England', Short story submitted for African People's Organization writing competition in 1912 in Everett, EA Townsend, Cissie 'Zainunnisa' Gool, 1897 – 1963 (BA Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, Appendix A)

Source C

CAPE TIMES. SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 1939.

FREE CINEMA SHOW



Some of the 2,000 non-European children from wards six and seven who were entertained to a free cinema show at the Star Theatre in Hanover-street, Cape Town, yesterday. On the left of the picture is Mrs. Z. Gool, a member of the committee which organised the treat for the children.

Free Cinema Show For 2,000 Children

More than 2,000 non-European children from wards six and seven were given a New Year treat at the Star Theatre, Hanover-street, yesterday morning, when they saw the film Robin Hood.

Last week the Mayor of Cape Town, Mr. W. C. Foster, held a party in the New Drill Hall for about 2,000 non-European children. So many children had to be disappointed, however, that it was decided to invite the overflow to a free cinema show this week.

An energetic committee, composed of Mrs. Z. Gool, Mr. R. Solomon, Mr. D. Jansen, Mr. L. Morley-Turner and Mr. S. Kahn, collected money for yesterday's show and 1,800 tickets were sent out to children in the two wards.

Cape Times, 7 January 1939

In the article that accompanies this photograph we read that, "(Mrs. Gool) is planning to arrange similar cinema shows of educational value for poor children about every three or four months."

Explain to the learners that Hanover Street was in District Six. The movie the children were shown was "Robin Hood". You might like to ask learners why they think Cissie and her committee chose this movie.

Source D: Good news! A newspaper report about Advocate Cissie Gool in 1963



MRS. Z. GOOL, a non-White Cape Town City Councillor — and a grandmother — was admitted to the Bar as an advocate by Mr. Justice Hall in the Supreme Court, Cape Town, to-day.

Mrs. Gool, who was congratulated by the judge on a very meritorious achievement, now becomes the only woman practising as an advocate in Cape Town.

Though she will continue with her City Council work and is planning to stand at the next elections, Mrs. Gool says she is hoping to find time to practise also as an advocate.

Learner Activities

- Study the photographs of Cissie Gool. What do they tell us about her?
- What did Cissie Gool say she stood for in Source A? What kind of people did she say she cared for most?
- In Source A, why does it say 'No residential segregation' in such big letters?
- Source A suggests Cissie Gool was serious about some of her electoral promises. Which ones?
- How old was Cissie Gool (then Abdurahman) when she wrote her prize-winning story in 1912 in Source B?
- If you were a judge of the competition, what future would you predict for 'Miss. Z. Abdurahman'?
- She chose to write under the pseudonym 'Toadie'. What does that tell us about Cissie Gool?
- What does Source C tell us about Cissie Gool as a person?
- Source D tells us that Cissie Gool was a granny by the time she became an advocate and also that she was the only woman advocate in Cape Town. Why did it take her such a long time? Why was she the only woman advocate at the time?



Official photo of Cissie Gool as President of the National Liberation League of South Africa, 5 August 1939 South African National Library, Cape Town

**MUNICIPAL ELECTION (WARD 6)
MONDAY, 1ST SEPT., 1947**

VOTE FOR



VOTE FOR

Councillor Mrs. Z. GOOL, M.A.
The People's Candidate

BECAUSE she has fought for and will continue to fight for—

1. A comfortable and decent home for every family.
2. Higher wages and better working conditions in the Council's employment for every worker, irrespective of colour or creed.
3. The development and reconstruction of flooded and distressed areas.
5. More playing fields and recreation grounds for all citizens.
6. The municipal franchise—one man one vote—and a say for every citizen in the government of his ward.
7. A proper ration scheme—more and cheaper food and proper sheltered depots for the mobile food vans.
8. More bus shelters and better and more convenient bus service in Ward 6.

Cissie Gool's election flyer for the Municipal elections in 1947 South African National Library, Cape Town

Other Ideas

Make up your own electoral poster addressing pressing issues in your local area.

Criteria for Assessment

- Learners will be able to make reasonable deductions about Cissie Gool's political position from reading her election promises.
- Learners will be able to draw a reasoned conclusion about her commitment to at least some of these promises.
- Learners will gain some insight into the obstacles which women wanting to enter the professions faced in the twentieth century.
- Learners will be able to draw some conclusions about Cissie Gool as a person, politician and professional woman.

Curriculum Link – Grades 10 & 11

LO 1, AS 2 & 3

LO 2, AS 2

LO 3, AS 3

Grade 11 Content Link – Segregation as foundation for apartheid & nature of resistance to apartheid