

# Aura Msimang



## Current position

Artist, singer, poet, actress.

Organised Africa Week in Yeoville 2010-2011.

## Bio details

**Born:** 1947, Western Native Township, Johannesburg  
**Family Status:** Single, 1 child (US)  
**Lived in Yeoville:** Since 2000  
**Current job:** performer, producer, writer

## Aura's experience of racism

"We were classified coloured from my father's side - my father was Peter Bormann and he married Noliqwa Victoria Msimang. My apartheid experience was how racism comes down, the classing-over - living in an African location and going to a school in a coloured one. My friends from the location would say *amaboosmani*, and at school we were *kaffers*."

## Why Yeoville?

"When I came to Yeoville, I knew this was home. I walked around and it was familiar to me. It is a diverse place with people from everywhere. I like those kind of spaces. I'm much more relaxed there. Times square at the time was a great place for meeting all the intellectuals and artists that were still living here. In fact times square was the hub of urban street culture breakout in Jo'burg."

## Investing in the youth

"With friends of mine we started what we called Busy Kids where we tried to work with children after school, children from other parts of Africa... A lot of them needed help with English, but even the others, they had nowhere to go, so they end up just coming at the park the whole day... We'd keep them occupied, with home work, yoga, swimming, sports, with friends who'd volunteer and donations from the shops..."

**"I believe in cultural activism. Not everyone is academically inclined and some people are artistic and need to express themselves in this way. Our education system still does not facilitate that."**

## Aura's dream for Yeoville...

"My big dream for Yeoville is this African village where I see like a circular structure, because Africa is circle, our structures are circular. The place I always talk about is the water tower, that open land where religious groups have their open air..."

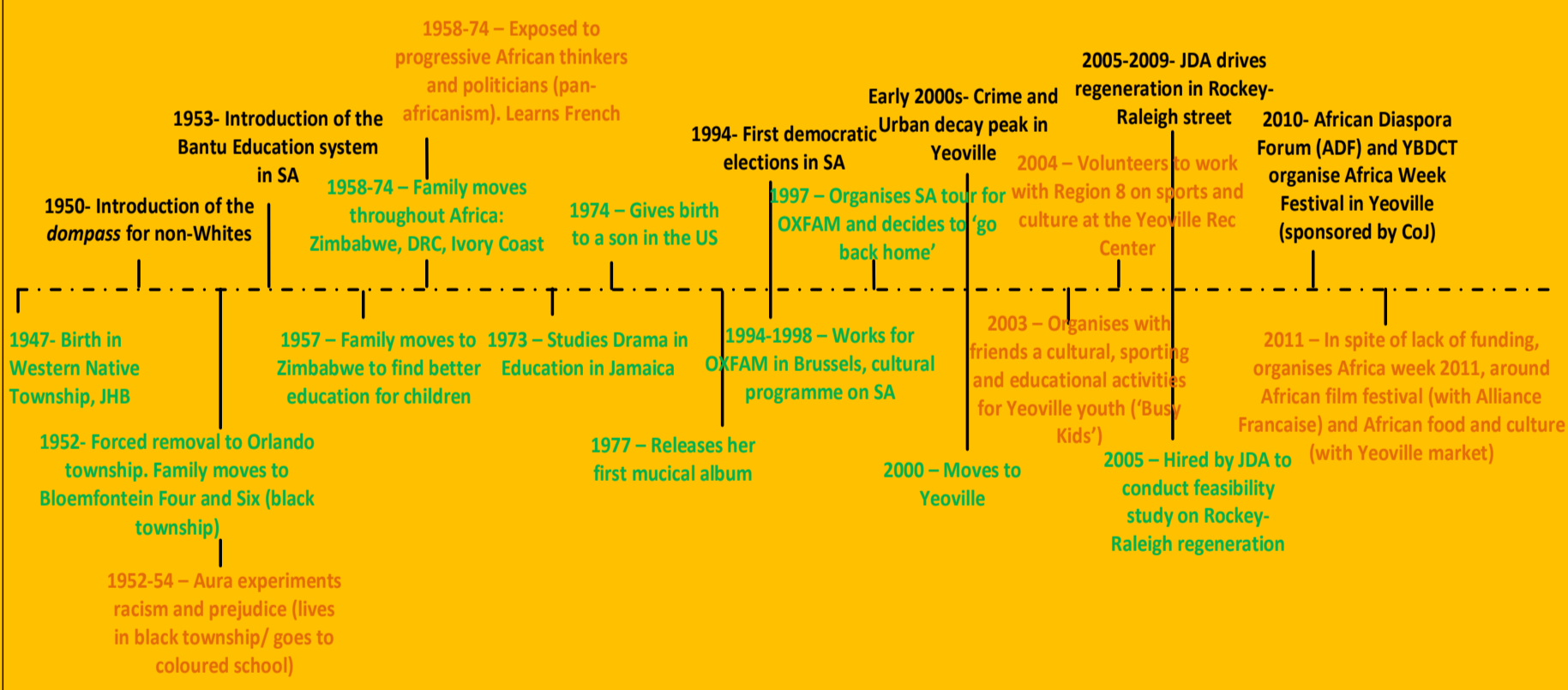
In the circular structure, a hut, and behind the hut, a library of each of the different countries living in Yeoville, a hut for Nigeria, a hut for Ghana, a hut for Somalia in South Africa. In each one of those huts it would have all the information of that country, its history, culture... then on the hut side would be the cuisine you know, the food.

This will be for schools, for youth organizations, for women's organizations to visit and you choose a country, each one of them is a full educational, interactive experience and at the end you get a snack from that country... Then afterwards you meet all together and there are questions for each trip, you have to discuss with us before you leave us in the *legkotla*.

I've said this so many times that somebody might steal the idea but why not, at least it will be done. I know eventually it will be done.

This is the African renaissance village dream that I see only possible in Yeoville. I don't see any other neighbourhood, anywhere in South Africa that could have that, which is why my love for Yeoville."

## Aura's journey



## Africa week, 2010-2011

"Africa Week 2010 was an incredible experience. I wasn't a part of that at the beginning, it was Maurice together with a Senegalese brother, Talla. I was called in later because then they realized, with the respect that I have from Yeovillites, from the work they have seen me do for quite a few years, they saw it as a good thing to have me on board.

In 2011 there was no funding, so most of them decided no, they were not going to do it. I said no way, NO WAY! Even without funding we can get Yeovillites to come on board. I knew I had to do this all on my own..."

I went to Alliance Française for films and got them to give us the films from the Burkina Faso film festival. I went to the market, it was important to expose to the general public the kind of tropical African foods that are sold in Yeoville, what those foods are, how they are cooked.

So part of it is the atrium of the Recreation Center we turned into an African market where these women set up all their different wears. At the market I worked with Sebastian to get some of the people who do cloths to also come. I mean it was beautiful..."



© Guimard 2011. Setting up the 'African market', and showing films in freezing recreation Center...



## Working with JDA for regeneration

I automatically found myself being part of the outreach programme of the Yeoville Recreational Centre, on a voluntary basis. It covered everything from helping in the office to when Region 8, which was what the rec was at the time, when they use to have sports programmes... We use to have tennis courts in the back and one of my big things was that we didn't have enough people playing tennis anymore and we didn't make sense to have 5 tennis courts so we had to keep two of them and change the others into netball, hand-ball. And then when the JDA came with the upgrading of Rocky/Raleigh I was automatically one of the people that was called to help with the feasibility studies, and I worked with two young men, we went the length and breadth of Yeoville, up and down, up and down."

## Trade-offs

"Africa 2011 was my last for now work as a community activist in Yeoville, that was my final thing now I'm going to concentrate on my work. There is so much I need to do... and I need my own house, then friends from overseas can come and visit, and my son and his fiancée can come stay with me for a while."