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Robert R. Edgar. *Josie Mpama/Palmer: Get Up and Get Moving (Ohio Short Histories of Africa).* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020. 223 pp. $16.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-2410-0.

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There exists a paucity of scholarly work that centers African women in struggle narratives, and "because they did not participate in the public domain of politics and political parties," author Robert Edgar posits that they have long been portrayed as static figures whose domain in the personal sphere in their varying modalities has been as odds with popular definitions of an activist. Enter Josie Mpama/Palmer, the First Lady of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), who through her travel, political education and training in the Soviet Union, and her eventual testimony in a key political showdown in Moscow in the 1930s established herself as a leading figure in South African resistance politics during what Leonard Thompson refers to as the segregation era in South African history. This short history of Josie Mpama/Palmer is long overdue, not only in the exploration of her lived experiences and influence on future generations of activist mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, but in destigmatizing non-ANC-dominant political lives and experiences as well. *Get Up and Get Moving* is a narration of her life experiences and contributions to the South African freedom struggle in the years preceding the system of apartheid. The text provides valuable insight into our understanding of women's political lives and uses Mpama/Palmer's life as a lens through which we can "witness the power of women in organizing and mobilizing" (p. 73).

Get Up and Get Moving packs a hefty punch despite its small size and the lack of parity in its six chapters. In the wake of the separation of her parents and Palmer's father gaining custody, Edgar demonstrates that Palmer's father's complicated social reputation dictated a truly "chaotic childhood" (p. 24). Palmer's paternal family routinely exposed her to physical, emotional, and psychological trauma for almost a decade during her childhood. Protracted family abuse resulted in an embarrassing trial where "all the unpleasant things" done to Palmer came to light, resulting in the fourteen-year-old relocating to live with and subsequently care for her aging mother. Palmer's political awareness was birthed in the 1920s when she was employed as a domestic worker in the home of Russian Jewish emigres who spoke freely about the 1917 Russian Revolution. Palmer "got an idea" of the power of revolution at seventeen years of age, but the birth of her first child, her mother's declining health, and father's compounding legal woes and death delayed her from joining the CPSA until 1928 at the age of twenty-five.

In "A Fighting Location," Edgar reveals the complex challenges of national and international

political issues that demanded women's organizing and mobilizing expertise. African women worked—politically and otherwise—in defense of their families and livelihoods. Necessary historical backgrounding significantly slows the narrative in this chapter, but the author must understandably distinguish segregation-era South Africa in detailing the arbitrary laws designed to restrict and control the everyday lives of Africans and undermine "the integrity and cohesiveness of Black family life" (p. 50).

"Party Battles" demonstrates the difficulties associated with being Black and Red in the 1930s. Palmer's nascent political experience was put to the test often and early in her activist career, and long-standing factional disputes within the CPSA frequently placed Palmer—young, idealistic, and blindly allegiant to party rhetoric—in the unenviable position of denouncing established figures within the CPSA who dared to advocate for *less* revolutionary policies. Palmer's commitment to CPSA ideals culminated in an illegal journey to "the Red Mecca" in 1935 to study at the University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), a training school for Communist political leaders from around the globe (p. 80). Edgar reveals the rigorous coursework Palmer and her cohort encountered at KUTV that provided general education to party members inclusive of "theoretical and practical knowledge" about the nature of revolutionary struggle (p. 80). One clear shortcoming of that education, however, was the influence of race and racism on organizing. Soviet underestimation of racism and white supremacy as barriers to organizing across racial lines in the early 1930s set the stage for decades of division within CPSA ranks, with clear lines drawn distinguishing those who believed racism could exist in a Communist Soviet Union from those who did not. This tension between fighting fascism and recognizing racism was no more clear than in 1935 when the Comintern charged parties around the world with forming interracial, anti-imperialist organizations, but Palmer and other South African Communists struggled to unite Black and white workers.

The narrative pace picks up considerably in "Declarations of Independence," the lengthiest chapter, wherein Edgar walks readers through the complicated and often contradictory mandates, policies, and rhetoric of the CPSA. Edgar describes the Communist Party as being in "denial" of the unique role and reality of Africans in resistance struggles in South Africa (p. 109). Russian Communists were, ironically, so arrogant in their ideological superiority regarding fascism that they could not recognize racism as a problem. The aversion to recognizing the totality of the African experience was further reflected in the seemingly careless and dismissive attitude of party members who seemed to mock and deride the very institutions and methods of upward social mobility the masses had come to prize. Rhetorical attacks on Christianity (religion) and intellectuals dissuaded many Africans from aligning with the CPSA, and the party's unwillingness to market itself to working women—despite Palmer's best efforts to encourage it otherwise—meant hundreds upon thousands of potential supporters went unutilized. Palmer's frustrations with patriarchal controls within the CPSA led her to take a page from the activist book of her Black American compatriots who utilized what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham dubbed "the politics of respectability," using religious and social uplift work as a backdoor to political activism. Connecting with women on "bread-and butter" issues like high rents, informal beer brewing, pass laws, mass arrests, and food insecurity secured their attention and allegiance much more readily than existential conversations regarding party doctrine.

In "Apartheid," Edgar demonstrates the "new chapter" that opened in Palmer's life with ascension of the National Party to power in 1948 (p. 135). Though she was eventually silenced by the infamous 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, Palmer remained as politically active as possible,

championing women's concerns like domestic beer brewing, birth control, and public services and improved childhood education opportunities, in spite of her declining health. In 1955 Palmer ran afoul of the apartheid government for the last time and received banning orders that prohibited her from attending political meetings and public gatherings. Five years later, in 1960 following the Sharpeville Massacre, Palmer was detained for several weeks simply due to her notoriety in protest politics, and in the wake of that arrest spent years being harassed by Special Branch police who "would regularly visit to see if she was involved in political activities and to search of prohibited materials" (pp. 150-151).

The final chapter, "Comrades and Christians" speaks to one of the greatest ironies associated with organizational and recruiting difficulties within the CPSA: had Communists been willing to see the African experience as unique the Comintern might have understood the centrality of the church to both spiritual and community needs and been able to bridge the nonexistent ideological gap between being a Christian and a Communist. As Edgar points out, "both were addressing practical issues and offering services to others," and respected African activists such as Nelson Mandela and Chris Hani accepted that those two modalities were not mutually exclusive (p. 159). Through her involvement and work with the church in the latter part of her life, Palmer was able to solidify the early foundation she had laid for a distinctly gendered consciousness within protest politics. Palmer's open letters to African women appeared in the pages of leading South African periodicals, and her appeals to women to organize against restrictive laws provided a framework for the first generation of activist women who labored to combat the birth of apartheid.

It is clear this text is a labor of long-standing love, with author's research beginning in the mid-1990s and spanning multiple continents and dozens of archival resources. Edgar's extensive and impressive archival research, utilization of government records at the national and municipal levels, and reliance upon a cadre of established scholars, librarians, and archivists from across South Africa pay proper homage to the First Lady of the CPSA and reveal her life and works as being filled with purpose, intent, and a fervent desire to combat race and gender discrimination for the benefit of future generations.

A handful of proofing errors (pp. 97, 98, 108) in no way detract from the overall value of the text, and while inquisitive minds might want the salacious details associated with Palmer bearing another man's child while her husband was training in the Soviet Union, Edgar is correct to not engage in conjecture that does not propel the central narrative forward (p. 81). There are few drawbacks to this brief history of Josie Mpama/Palmer, but ***caveat lector***, modern social etiquette dictates usage of names and courtesy titles based on both the relationship involved and/or a given situation. Edgar's choice to register Palmer as "Josie" for the entirety of the text is a subtle—but marked—diminution that is not lost on readers versed in Black women's respectability politics in the early twentieth century. Palmer made a deliberate decision to anglicize her family name in the 1930s with strategic intent, and readers would be better served to learn (and respect) the particulars of that decision in the preface rather than chapter 4, thus eliminating what the author refers to as possible "confusion" at Palmer's use of her indigenous and anglicized surnames.

One of the greatest contributions of this work is that it centers the actual words and work of an activist, African woman engaged in vanguard politics of the era. The plethora of correspondence, speeches, and various testimonies of Palmer —in addition to the oral interviews conducted with family and friends—removes conjecture from the reconstruction of her life and contributions as a woman whose mere existence "as the

daughter of an African man and a mixed-race woman" was a transgression of apartheid conventions (p. 168). *Get Up and Get Moving* would make a wonderful supplemental text to courses in resistance politics, Black internationalism, and gendered activism, and students at both the undergraduate and graduate level will appreciate its readability in spite of the occasional narrative lag.