

Editorial

Women's History and Subjectivity: Reflection on Liberation Narratives

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Stereotypes Embedded in a Single Story: His Story

Patriarchy the system (Johnson 2005), has long confined women in a subordinate space in social, political and economic institutions. This system privileges men and 'the masculine' in most world societies, including those of Africa. Men, 'the masculine', often have more power than women and 'the feminine', including other minority genders (such as LGBT+). Colonialism and apartheid (in South Africa) extended patriarchal powers and structures with white men on top of the power pyramid and black women at the bottom (in terms of gender roles and status). It is undeniable that black men especially suffered under colonial and apartheid patriarchal hierarchies of power. Both men and women were denied freedom; however, to some extent, men's stories were told and women's stories untold. There was a single story. Thus, black women were more invisible than black men. The aim of the apartheid system was to divide and conquer which was strategically done, and it planted divisions, destruction and distortions among many families. There are multiple stories of how black men fought back and brought down the apartheid regime, and multiple stories of how men were tortured and brutally murdered for all South Africans to be free. However, women were left with a single story of how they were left behind in the home while men were out fighting. Women's most popular story is that of the pass law campaign of 1956, concerning maids and madams. What about the stories of women in the villages and rural areas, who made sure that families lived and sons and daughters of this nation were taken care of? What about stories of women who as domestic workers for the madams and were sexually assaulted by the husbands and sons of madams?

What happened to the voices and narratives of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Albertina Sisulu – the mothers of the nation? Evidently, most women spent so much time as outsiders within and still, in the era of freedoms, are insiders at the periphery (at the margins) whose multiple stories are hidden scripts or behind the scene.

In post-apartheid South Africa, narratives on the liberation struggles have largely been male centred, focusing on popular and prominent men such as Nelson Mandela, Oliva Tambo, Steve Biko and many more. Little attention is paid to women. However, recently there has been a growing body of scholarship seeking to document the role and contributions of women in the liberation struggle. Women have been at the forefront of the struggle. They fought side by side with men, determined to fight the evils of apartheid that was certainly no easy task. As black women, they faced intense oppression in the context of their race, gender and class. Firstly, as a non-white, the black woman was oppressed by the colonial and later the apartheid government. They were subject to harsh racist laws which reduced her status to subservience and inferiority. Secondly, women were also exploited in the work-place. They were seen as sources of cheap labour in the towns and cities, with black African women working mostly as domestic servants. Others worked in industry at very low, exploitative wages. Thirdly, patriarchal attitudes within society and the home further relegated women to a subordinate status. Women contributed immensely to South Africa's democratic journey. Different women's organisations existed in order to fight injustices in the country. Although this was not allowed by the ruling apartheid government, the women continued to form and participate in different organisations and movements, risking imprisonment or assassination (Hassim 2006).

Women's resistance to unjust laws can be discerned as early as 1913. They marched to the Municipal offices in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State (OFS) to protest against the implementation of passes on African women. In the same year, Indian women joined the Satyagraha campaign resisting discriminatory laws, in particular, the three-pound tax on ex-indentured women and the non-recognition of non-Christian marriages. Political resistance at the turn of the century was largely segregated. There was further resistance by women against passes, high rents and rising food prices. Hence, early protests and campaigns were small, isolated but they did raise political consciousness among women and highlighted women's capacity for resistance. (*Sechaba* 1969:2)

In the 1920s and 1930s, the gradual urbanization of African, Coloured, Indian and even white women led to their entry into the factories, industries and trade unions. Trade Unions united women, irrespective of race. For example, in the Food and Canning Workers' Union, women shared common grievances, such as poverty, high food prices and low wages. Trade unions also became a platform for women's political resistance and produced many well-known leaders such as Rahima Moosa, Rebecca Bunting, Lilian Ngoyi, Ray Alexander, Frances Baard, Elizabeth Mafikeng and Mary Moodley, to name a few. From the trade union movements, many women joined the political movement recognising that the workers' battle was inseparable from the wider political struggle for liberation (Walker 1991: 10-24; *Sechaba* 1969: 4; 1970:16). One of the community-based women's prominent movements was the Alexandra Women's Council (AWC), which was established in the mid-1940s to fight against the removal of squatters in Alexandra Township. The movement included the Zenzele Club that was established by two women, Josie Plamer (Mpama) and Madie Hall-Xuma. It is stated that the Zenzele Club encouraged women to make a living from knitting. It was through such community based women's organisations that the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) rallied women for a common goal to fight apartheid segregatory policies (South African History Online 2011). Women also organized along religious groups that aimed at offering spiritual and emotional support (South African Online History 2011).

Many women also became active members of political organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), the South African Communist Party (SACP), the PanAfricanist Congress (PAC) and the Non-European Unity Front (NEUF). However, in the 1950s women became a political force when the apartheid state sought to impose passes on women. In 1955, the apartheid state announced that passes were to be issued to African women, beginning from January 1956. For African women, the pass was an instrument of bondage and humiliation. It hindered their social and economic mobility, and meant state control of their personal and civil life. Florence Mophosho in the 1970s, an anti-apartheid activist, African Secretary in the Women's International Democratic Federation and attached to the headquarters in the German Democratic Republic describes the impact of passes on women:

Passes for women meant that there was never any peace the home

was no longer secure against demanding policemen, who frequently carried out raids to check up on passes. Today men and women and even children over fifteen have to carry passes. It sometimes happens that a whole family may be arrested because the passes are out of order. Because of the pass people cannot sell their labour where they wish, they cannot move freely and permits are required for what people in other countries regard as a natural right (*Sechaba* 1970: 17).

Women realised the need to work as a collective and established a non-racial women's organisation called the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in 1954. In 1956, in a defiant stance, the protest march by over 20 000 women to the Union buildings in Pretoria took place. Women who did not comply with carrying passes were vulnerable. During mass raids, women who did not comply with pass regulations were huddled in police vehicles and taken to prisons and deported (*Sechaba* 1970: 17). In addition, passes had a detrimental impact on women's status in urban areas. Mophosho added:

The pass is also a compulsory bond within your family life. Women have absolutely no security unless their passes indicate that they are married to a man who is in lawful employment. When the husband loses his job then the whole family is in danger of deportation. On the other hand, if the women finds it difficult to get on with her husband she cannot leave him, since she is subject to immediate removal from the area as a single woman (*Sechaba* 1970:17).

Significance of the Freedom Charter to Women's Freedoms and their Contributions to Others' Freedoms

Adopted in 1955, the charter paved the way to people freedoms, including women's freedoms. It also connoted democratic Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The present Constitution encourages a non-sexist and non-gender society, which is a society that was reflected in 10 chief values of the Freedom Charter: The people shall govern; All national groups shall have equal rights; The people shall share in the country's wealth; The land shall be shared among those who work it; All shall be equal before the law; All shall enjoy equal human rights; There shall be work and security; The doors of

learning and culture shall be opened; There shall be houses, security and comfort. Evidently, The Charter aimed to open doors for all the oppressed South Africans, including girls and women, and represented freedom for the oppressed – the blacks. It wanted the voices of the people to be heard, listened to and respected. The Charter thus opened room for marginalised secluded voices, making the documentation not only of his stories crucial but also of her stories, memory and voice momentous.

Women Activists

Many women sacrificed their lives in the liberation struggles in South Africa of which there are far too many to mention. However, below are women who deserve profiling for their unwavering commitment, dedication and resistance against the apartheid regime. These women showed indomitable courage in the face of exploitation and brutal police repression.

Dorothy Nyembe

One of KwaZulu-Natal's prominent political activists was Dorothy Nyembe. She had spent most of her adult life under restrictions, banned, imprisoned or in court. She joined the ANC in the 1950s and participated in the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign (Defiance Campaign) in 1952 and served two short terms of imprisonment. Nyembe chaired the Natal branch of the FSAW and lead the women of the province to the demonstrations against passes at the Union buildings in 1956. At the time, she was also Vice-Chairman of the Durban branch of the ANC Women's League. Nyembe was one of the accused in in the Treason Trail of 1956-1961. She was subject to imprisonment and banning orders, and served a 15-year prison sentence in Pietermaritzburg. (*Sechaba* 1974:40; *Sechaba* 1969:7).

Mary Moodley

Mary was a member of the ANC, a trade unionist and grass roots organiser in the East Rand. She was a founder member of the South African Coloured Party and worked tirelessly towards uniting all the oppressed groups in South Africa. She was a also a grass roots organiser, moving from one township to another

mobilising women to fight oppression and injustice, and played a pivotal role through her grassroots activism in political conscientising women. Mary was banned in 1963 under the Suppression of Communism Act (*Sechaba* 1969:26 -25).

Dora Tamana

Dora was a leading community activist. In the 1930s and 1940s when there was a shortage of food and prices rose, Dora together with other women in Langa and District Six in the Western Cape, formed Women's Food Committees. These Committees forced the authorities to deliver food to communities at controlled prices. She joined the Community Party in 1942 and became actively involved in several campaigns, influx control, demolition of homes, education and the Defiance Campaign of 1952 (*Sechaba* 1983:30 - 32).

Lilian Ngoyi

Lilian Ngoyi was a tireless struggle activist and organiser who fought against passes. She worked as a machinist in a factory and later became a member of the Garment Workers' Union. She joined the ANC Women's League at Orlando and participated in the Defiance Campaign of 1952. She later became the President of the first non-racial women's organisation, FEDSAW. She endured constant police harassment and was among the accused in the Treason Trial of 1956-1961. Lillian was also detained and issued with banning orders by the apartheid state (Lilian Ngoyi A3299).

Clearly, women have played a pivotal role in the liberation struggle in South Africa. Women were imbued with a 'revolutionary spirit and they can be depended on as the struggle sharpens' (*Sechaba* 1970:17). Florence Mophosho in 1970 reflected on how the revolution would affect the status and role of women in a post-revolutionary society:

I think the revolution will help to liberate women The old tradition that a woman merely belong in the kitchen will pass away in the course of the struggle as we take our rightful place in pursuing the dangerous tasks that a revolution will impose on us. It will then be realised that women are not inferior to men and can do anything than

men can. Without doubt the women are going to prove themselves in the revolution. They are going to learn many skills which they have never had the opportunity of learning before and this will give them a new status. Speaking for myself I would say that politics has given me experience, which have helped me to overcome the weaknesses women have to put up with I have gone through many hardships. I have even jumped over fences just as men have done. In the course of political work, I have forgotten that I am a woman. Politics is the best school for the development of true comradeship and equality between men and women (Sechaba 1970:17).

So Why is Herstory Extraordinary in History and Historical Education?

The significance of women's roles, mostly marginalised, in South Africa's history and road to democracy has been covertly and overtly expressed and marked in different ways. The contributions of African women like Winnie Madikizela Mandela and Mama Albertina Sisulu – the queens on their own, for example, in South Africa's history is troubling. African women, in their own respective ways, contributed to the emancipation of the African people since colonial South Africa. Hence the lack of narratives about women's contributions and agencies in Africa's historical documents. This is how Thandiswa Mazwai¹'s song phrase '*nizilibele kuba nizalwa ngoobani*' – have you forgotten who has given birth to you – is crucial in this case of women's contribution to South Africa's history and the road to democracy. For instance, Princess Suthu of abaThembu nation who was married to King Ngqika in the 1800s lobbied for *ubukhosi* – the reign – but Nkosi Maqoma (Jongumsobomvu) aligned with his brother for regency. It is not only Princess Suthu who is not remembered by history. Amongst many is Katyi the wife of Chief Maqoma, Princess Mkabayi kaJama Zulu (aunt of King Shaka Zulu) and Queen Nandi kaBhebehe (Mother of Shaka Zulu) who contributed immensely in their nation's monarchies and battles against British imperialists, making them prominent in South African history. These are women who, one way or

¹ Thandiswa Mazwai is a South African black African female artist, musician and activist; born and bred in Soweto.

another, contributed to the history of South Africa but their narratives are continually omitted; if enunciated, it is under the shadow of men.

Moreover, not only were women's contributions to history marginalised but also their roles were misrepresented. For example, the misrepresentation of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. The negative portrayal of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in history has left many with questions that still need answers. Patriarchal powers deliberately used a football club and the unfortunate death of Stompie to erase Mama Winnie's positive contribution to South Africa's history as a political stalwart and activist, freedom fighter, mother and wife to Tata Madiba. The reason authors are concerned with the discourse of inclusion, as fundamental questions of women's contribution, subjectivity and personal power remain unaddressed in historical accounts. Thus the patriarchal historical biases mask women's diverse experiences and ignore gender and power dimensions leading to other forms of exclusions in South Africa's democracy.

Our aim is to offer an alternative tool in historical accounts to scrutinise discourse of power, voice, and rights. Women have long occupied both insider and outsider positions in their own countries' education and histories. Not including meaningful and adequate South African women's contributions on the road to democracy in research and documentation of history, is itself reinforcing women to inferior outsider positions. Despite their contribution to liberation struggles and the road to democracy, women have always been occupying roles of outsiders within (outsider-insider positions) in society at large. Nevertheless, in today's democracy, many women are included and encouraged to take part in leading political, social, and economic roles, trying to bridge the historical gender gap. Our government encourages the engendering of all government institutions, including business sectors, that women can govern, have equal rights, be equal before the law, enjoy equal human rights, share in the country's wealth, have work and security, fully participate in learning and culture, have houses, security and comfort, and have peace and friendship just like most men do in our society. However, their roles are always those of an outsider-within. Thus, the question of *who* contributed to and *who* benefited from the democratic struggle raises awkward concerns for South Africa's history. The means by which women are excluded, equally, may echo and reinforce hegemonic gender norms, as well as replicate patterns of gendered exclusion that have wider resonance. This calls for an examination of mainstream 'participatory' agendas, to explore barriers to historical

narratives faced by women and ways they might be overcome. The main argument is to highlight some of the gender obstacles that arise in efforts not just only to engage women's contribution to South Africa's road to democracy, but also to make history more participatory and gender sensitive.

Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, we want to and urge women to use such platforms to creating a new history – using their own voices and experiences. We are challenging the traditional concepts of history, of what is historically important (Gluck 1977: 3).

Hence this journal's contribution intends to affirm that women's contributions to South Africa's road to democracy and everyday lives are history. For such reasons we believe in oral history research methods and have been applied in most of my research, projects, studies and teaching. Oral history is essential for counteracting habituated research tendencies and focuses that exclude voices and experiences of those marginalized by majoritarian forces in society. Thus, oral history allows multiple narratives, voices and memories to be heard, documented and kept. Through oral history research methods, people can listen to women's voices that have a history of being silent and marginalized in most communities. Armitage (2011: 3) refers to marginalized women as lost heroines whose experiences are not recorded and whose struggles and histories remain unrecognised. This is what ought to be transformed in history, scholarship and research spaces, adding to decoloniality and education in society.

The articles in this special issue of Alternation seek to address some of the key issues highlighted above.

Nadia Kamies explores notions of identity during the apartheid era with particular reference to the 'coloured' community in Cape Town, South Africa. Kamies problematizes notions of 'colouredness' in its historical context along the continuum of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. The article highlights how the 'coloured' community responded to perceptions of 'inferiority' and 'shame'. Women played a critical role in challenging these stereotypes, resisting narratives of subjugation, by taking control of their

personal space, in particular the home. Kamies' article is significant as it explores an untapped area in liberation narratives, in particular the constructs of racial identities during slavery, colonialism and apartheid and how it shaped and defined community stereotypes.

Lebohang Motsomotso critiques the underlying ontological gendered power dynamics and violence that occurred in the oppressive structure of political prisons under the apartheid system in South Africa. In contextualising the position of the black body, the author explores and exposes inequalities and hierarchies, and actions of resisting as an instrument of challenging power. On one hand, the article outlines how men monopolised power, which was expressed and (re)presented through authority, reason, masculinity and dominance. On the other hand, women, are re (presented) through femininity, inferiority and lack of reason. Hence, Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela functions as the focal point of discussion in the article through her experience. The argument that unfolds in the article illustrates the prime objective of the mechanics of power that operate in prison is to create docile bodies through, discipline that occurs by means of regulation, surveillance and isolation. Interestingly, Motsomotso views that troubled inequalities as embedded in phallic power signifies the overall oppressive systems.

Khaya Mchunu and **Busisiwe Memela** ground their article on a theoretical lens of fashion as communication, and views fashion as political action and resistance. Through a semiotic content analysis of stills, the authors revisits some of Miriam Makeba's performances and analyses her orchestration of dress and music to express an anti-apartheid message and resistance. The article views Makeba as a symbolising fashioned citizenship not only of South Africa but also of Africa and the global world. Hence known as 'Mama Africa', Makeba employed various strategies in her fashion and music activism to fight the oppressive apartheid regime. The article is centred on marginalised forms of women's activism, which contribute to unsung women's histories and narratives. In this regard, some forms of fashion and performances also largely contributed towards democracy in South Africa just like local and global renounced political activism.

Peter Masvotore and **Linda Tsara**'s article provides another lost narrative of the South African liberation struggle, in particular the role of women in covert political activities. Masvotore and Tsara utilize a postcolonial feminist theory to illuminate the contributions of Albertina Sisulu, Ruth Mompati and Joyce Sikhakhane and others to the liberation struggle. Women

were critical in sustaining the struggle by assisting families of political prisoners, raising funds and helping comrades to leave the country. The article calls for a rethinking and repositioning of gender and resistance in South Africa's road to democracy. Both the private and public spheres became sites of resistance and protests.

Kalpana Hiralal in her article highlights one of the unknown narratives of the liberation histories in South Africa, in particular the Natal Organization of Women (NOW) which was established in the early 1980s. The article utilizes archival sources such as NOW correspondence, minutes of meetings, agenda and pamphlets, to highlight both the challenges and constraints of NOW in the 1980s. NOW played a pivotal role not only in politicizing women, but also conscientising them around gender issues. It was a multi-racial organization that sought to mobilise women both across race, class and ethnicity. The history of NOW highlights two significant issues, firstly, how women's organizations shaped and defined regional political resistance, secondly, it shifts women's voices from the margins to the centre, thereby alluding to their collective effort in the liberation struggle.

Conclusion

History and historical practices and approaches ought to be depatriarchalised to create spaces of gender inclusive discourses and critical scrutinisation of gendered power relations. Not only feminist historians, but all historians, need to be engaged in engendering historical theorizing, practices and documenting. Specifically, South African historical studies, scholarship and orality ought to include more women's stories to allow her stories and multiple narratives in oral history. Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Mama Albertina Sisulu are good examples of how women's narratives are omitted and marginalised in history. It is also important for patriarchal historical experts to feign ignorance in some instances and betray their privileged insider positions to accommodate non-gendered knowledges. It is important for both insiders and outsiders of our narratives to sustain the accuracy of women's contributions and narratives in history. We also argue for the inclusion of reflexivity, which allows the balance of power between the research subjects (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). We argue for considering women's contributions to the road to democracy and their diverse narratives. This can help turn today's obstacles into freedoms, allowing more multiple stories irrespective of the politics, identities, and

differences these women occupy and/or occupied. The 20th century women's liberation struggle was built on solidarity, the movement with a collective responsive goal.

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