

# **The Power Dynamics and 'Silent' Narratives of Madikizela-Mandela's Testimony in Prison**

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## **Abstract**

This article explores the underlying ontological violence that occurs in the oppressive structure of prisons. As a site of power dynamics, prisons are naturally defined based on inequalities and hierarchies. As such, they are marked by relationships of domination and subordination of prison wardens and prisoners respectively. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's actions of resisting the power of the prison wardens becomes an instrument of challenging power. This power will be examined as phallic power and it signifies the overall oppressive systems. The prison experience becomes a mute narrative for Winnie Madikizela-Mandela who is imprisoned by a phallic power-driven system. It is a system that advocates for exercising control over prisoners by silencing and suppressing political convictions through a (il)legitimate system. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela functions as the focal point of discussion in this article through her experience, the argument that unfolds in this 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. Firstly, this article will outline how men monopolise power and how it is expressed and (re)presented through authority, reason, masculinity and dominance. Women are re(presented) through femininity, inferiority and lack of reason. Secondly, it explains and contextualises the position of the black body. Thirdly, it illustrates how prison becomes a space in which the voiceless are compelled to remain silent through the mechanics of power. Fourthly, it examines political and apolitical experiences of Madikizela-Mandela which are the focal points in interpreting how those who appear voiceless persist to redefine the mechanics of speaking and gain a

pivotal voice. Finally, it analyses how Madikizela-Mandela's rebellion distinguishes an ethical assertion of her being.

**Keywords:** affirmation, black body, inferior, mute, narrative, power dynamic, prison, resistance, superior and testimony.

## **Introduction**

South Africa's anti-apartheid struggles involved various organisations and individuals within a range of capacities aimed at achieving fundamental democratic change in the country. The compatriots of the apartheid struggle have been represented and recognised on multifarious levels. However, there seems to be an underlying marginalisation of women's roles in post-1994 South Africa. Particularly because historically the political agents have often been portrayed as male-centric and through this logic it has shifted political agency towards a patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is deeply manifested within political and societal institutions and this has created the subhuman position of women. Women have been involuntarily placed as apolitical agents. The patriarchal nature of political and societal institutions has also influenced the (re)generation of men as powerful and rational agents and women as weak and irrational. This has propagated the notion of the power dynamics between women and men; of which men are portrayed as powerful and dominating and women are depicted as weak and dominated. In fact, the work of Lugones (2007) interprets how European gender arrangements imposed a gender system that marked different categories for colonised males and females in relation to white colonisers. The different categories of the colonised and colonisers created a hierarchical dichotomy in which the colonised were non-human or subhuman, thus there were non-human males and females. But the colonised female lacked on two folds – she is non-human and non-male. According to hierarchal dichotomy, colonised men were not regarded as highly lacking because they were not women-like (Lugones 2010). Colonised women were reduced to an empty category since 'no women are colonised; no colonised females are women' (Lugones 2010: 745). This is the category with which Madikizela-Mandela is associated and positioned. In prison, she is in a position where she is dominated thus she is meant to appear less than human, as subhuman. This is the nature of the power dynamic that exists between the colonisers and colonised. However, this power dynamic does not always

translate and subscribe to the predictable discourse of women as inferior and men as superior. Instead throughout history it is known that women have rebelled and resisted against the ascribed position of the subhuman. As a political icon and prisoner, Madikizela-Mandela's modes of rebellion and resistance should be considered as highly influenced by the nature of the intersectional oppression she encounters both in and out of prison. In this context, Madikizela-Mandela's prison experience is explored with reference to how the power dynamics unfold within a space that has an extraordinarily masculine character of penalty. This article will draw biographical information from three autobiographical texts of Madikizela-Mandela namely; *Winnie Mandela Part of My Soul Went with Him* (1985), *Winnie Mandela: A life* (2003) and *491 Days Winnie Madikizela-Mandela* (2013).

## **The Power Dynamics**

The explanation and formulation of power is a distinguished field of study – there are various views widely debated, but a fundamental definition of power is often related to how it encompasses the ability of one party being able to determine the behavior of another party (Hepburn 1985). Power is founded on the principle of arranging mechanisms that produce relations in which individuals are forced to comply (Foucault 1977). Power can be expressed in a variety of spaces and be distributed differentially to bodies. In prison, power illustrates itself in the most transparent raw form. To have someone incarcerated, implies constraining their movements, depriving prisoners of food and heat, to break them down psychologically through torture, subjection to solitary confinement and to rearrange their bodies. To have power means having monopoly to centralise the use of that power on prisoner's bodies – thus a prisoner's body becomes the site of exercising that monopoly. In that way, prison becomes a space where power is exercised in all its nakedness and in its most excessive dimensions and remains justifiable as moral. In prisons, power is exercised in its purest form as archaic and infantile. Power does not hide itself in prison or mask itself – it reveals its oppressive and violent nature; it is applied in a cynical form (Deleuze & Foucault 1972). The power dynamics are evident in prison – the prison wardens have the legitimate authority to exercise power and the prisoners are expected to obey and act according to the instructions of the wardens. By this logic a norm of functioning under a system of formal inequality is implemented in prison. The wardens have the power

and the prisoners have no power – there is an unequal distribution of power. The unequal power creates a hierarchy, the prisoners are at the bottom and the wardens are at the top. This interpretation of power in prison is normalised through means of discipline and surveillance (Foucault 1977).

Discipline can be implemented in different ways but generally in prisons the purpose of discipline is to punish the prisoners. When discipline is meant to punish, it is essentially corrective, and its aim is to change or coerce behaviour in a certain direction. It is through discipline that the operation of relational power sustains itself because it is the wardens that give instructions to the prisoners – the prisoners have to act upon those instructions. The techniques of surveillance also have a critical role, surveillance provides ‘physics of power’ it is the hold over the body, it watches over the body and monitors its movements. According to Foucault (1977: 177) ‘it is a power that seems all the less corporal in that it is more subtly physical’. The mechanics of power that unfold are to create a compliant obeying body through discipline and surveillance. The fundamental idea when imprisoned is to enter ‘a machinery of power that explores it [the body], breaks it [the body] down and rearranges it [the body]’ (Foucault 1977: 138).

Madikizela-Mandela’s life was characterised with imprisonment and it became normalised in her life, she was confined both in and out of jail. In the conventional way, it was through the penal system by the form of house arrests and actual imprisonment. The most notable among the many times she was imprisoned was the time she spent in the Pretoria Central Prison where she was detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act which was passed in 1967. Madikizela-Mandela was arrested on 12 May 1969, she spent 491 day in solitary confinement, she was denied normal contact with another human being (Madikizela-Mandela 2013; 2003). One of the key outcomes of imprisonment during the apartheid era was to extort information, to discipline and punish prisoners. She described her first few days in solitary confinement as the worst days of her life. Her time in solitary confinement was characterised with deathly silence, and it became a form of torture because all she was surrounded by was endless silence. ‘She only had her thoughts for company, she was overwhelmed by excruciating uncertainty and insecurity, a sense of hopelessness, the feeling that this is the end’ (Madikizela-Mandela 2003: 140). Solitary confinement is an established and painful form of punishment and a brutal exercise of power by the security system of prisons. It violates the prisoner both mentally, spiritually and physically. The peculiar element of

solitary confinement is that it has inhumane effects that are psychological which are often difficult to measure regarding their severity compared to the physical of torture (Lobel 2008). Lobel lists the possible effects of solitary confinement – they include insomnia, confusion, hallucinations and insanity. Although initially solitary confinement was developed to encourage self-reflection and repentance for prisoners – it has been used to achieve different objectives (Vasiliades 2005 & Shaylor 1998).

When Madikizela-Mandela was placed in solitary confinement it was a calculated decision by the apartheid regime to weaken her commitment to her political convictions, to segregate her from other prisoners in order to coerce her into a confession. Madikizela-Mandela notes that one of the reasons for being placed in solitary confinement was a form of social control over her, as well as to create terror and intimidation (Madikizela-Mandela 2003). After two weeks of being in solitary confinement, her interrogation began – she had no contact with anybody while in solitary confinement she was ironically relieved to be around people, to hear voices and finally escape the endless silent hours of her cell. When imprisoned ‘the prisoner’s body is symbolically inscribed as a commodity’ (Davidson 1997: 36) which means that your body and space are always regulated and monitored. This notion of regulation and monitoring is closely linked to the use of power in the form of control. Madikizela-Mandela was constantly being watched over because she belonged to the category of the subhuman. She was subjected to inhumane tactics such as solitary confinement, torture, beatings and sleep deprivation. This discourse of sub humanity is rooted in reducing people to ‘properties of the state’ – it reduces people to objects and numbers. When entering prison, prisoners are given a prison number and they are to always quote that number when referring to themselves. The prisoners’ identity is somehow reduced to a number, because often the wardens will address prisoners according to their prison number which condenses ones’ humanity to a number. Franklin (2017) notes the damaging nature of people being labelled as objects and numbers as it renders them in an inescapable position of non-human or subhuman. In prison there are various elements that are used to perpetuate the position of the subhuman.

In prison it is the wardens who dictate the movement of prisoners – the wardens are the timekeepers. When closely examining the prison structure it resembles what Sharpe (2016) refers to as the hold. The hold is a position where life is static, fixed and is ultimately placed in confinement. It is a position that is imposed upon – prisoners find themselves in the hold.

According to Sharpe, when one is imprisoned, it means one is constantly living in the hold. Sharpe further explains that in the hold there are keepers - they have control and power. Similar to the hold is prison, which also has keepers; the wardens are the keepers. Power is further expressed through time – for a prisoner time is empty because he/she is subjected to a routine. Madikizela-Mandela explains how she had a routine; she knew when her food would arrive, when she would exercise in her cell and when she would have to go to bed which was when the lights are switched off. It is the wardens that decide when time begins and stops. When Madikizela-Mandela was placed in solitary confinement she did not know how long she would be there. She writes, ‘The long empty hours tore through the inner core of my soul’ (Madikizela-Mandela 2013: 25). She was placed in such a condition to deprive her of any contact with any individual – with the idea of making her static, fixed in a position where she has no control. To trap her in a space of nothingness, Madikizela-Mandela (2003: 140) writes, ‘The light burned constantly and there was no way of knowing whether it was day or night. Time had no beginning and no end. She was trapped in an infinite vacuum of nothingness’. Madikizela-Mandela endured high levels of psychological trauma that was caused by solitary confinement. This form of punishment has more detrimental effects on the soul of a person. As Madikizela-Mandela (1985: 100) states, ‘my interrogation started on a Monday. And I was only delivered back to the cell on Saturday night. They interrogated me for five days and five nights .... During the fifth night I was having these fainting spells which were relieving to the body’.

The purpose of the interrogation was to break her mind, body and soul and most importantly her political commitments against the apartheid regime. Major Theunis Jacobus Swanepoel who was the chief interrogator during Madikizela-Mandela’s interrogations said to her, ‘You are going to be broken completely, you are shattered, you are a finished woman’ (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 101). The style of interrogation that was used on Madikizela-Mandela aimed at making her vulnerable enough to coerce her behaviour. To force her to confess and provide information on the African National Congress (ANC) and its leadership as well as any other information on anti-apartheid activities that threatened the agenda of the regime. The purpose of all this was to create docile bodies through regulation and strategies of aggression. The significance of the power the wardens portray is aggressive and perverse it reaches a level that is aimed at humiliating the prisoner (Abu-Jamal 1996). As Madikizela-Mandela (1985: 100) narrates, ‘We had inspection every day in

prison. Two wardresses walk in, they order you to stand up, they take off your clothes. They start by inspecting your shoes as you stand there stark naked... Nothing is more humiliating'. This experience takes away self-authority for Madikizela-Mandela, she has no power to stop the searches from happening, even though she would resist the wardens would continue. Ultimately, those that have authority over her body make the decisions for her body. She had no sense of privacy or autonomy over her body. There are different layers in how power unfolds in prison.

The core function of power is establishing the clear boundaries between those who have the power and those that do not. The prisoners are shaped into the subhuman category, which maintains the order of oppressive systems and justifies the use of power as a tool to dominate others. Fortunately, Madikizela-Mandela adamantly did not acknowledge the function of prison, because to participate would entail admitting that, 'Society is legitimate because of its exploitation of the oppressed' (Newton 2003: 82). She scrutinised the purpose of her imprisonment, after she had recovered from physical damages of prison and she seemed more determined than ever to continue with her involvement in the fight against apartheid. She was stronger and more resilient than ever before, and said prison had liberated her inner self and purified her soul. Her experience in prison had rebirthed a stronger sense of political commitment to the struggle. Her testimony on what she experienced in prison and how it affected her is strange and unsettling because it is difficult to imagine any positive outcome from what she experienced (Madikizela-Mandela 2003). Nonetheless, Madikizela-Mandela did not succumb to domination evoked an extraordinary strategy to maintain her political commitment to the fight against the apartheid regime.

## **The Black Body**

The black body represents a site where oppression occurs. The black body is an object and its function is of material use. It is arranged, dominated and inferiorised. It has no power and autonomy. It does not justify and ratify itself. As a result, there is a (il)legitimate radical difference in excluding the black body both *de facto* and *de jure* from the genre of being complete human beings (Mbembe 2001). Hence, the category of subhuman emerges – this category rationalises the use of power and domination upon a marginalised group. The black body exists in the category of the subhuman. Cleaver (1968) explains the

phenomenology of the black body as based on a division between the bodily and mental experiences of blacks and whites, which obscurely supports an ethical dualism of white as ‘good’ and black as ‘evil’ that has long been reinforced for centuries. As a result, the black body is associated with a racialised and dehumanised being. According to Cleaver, the main issue within the phenomenology of the black body is consciousness and the body. He notes that it is critical to understand how blacks experience their own bodies within a world of racial restriction. Cleaver suggests a broader consideration of experience, the body and black consciousness. The body becomes a site of where consciousness occurs, it is the nexus of thinking therefore the body is the anchorage to the world. With that noted ‘intentionality’ should be considered since it is the structure that gives meaning to experience (Johnson 1993). Johnson notes, that intentions are at the centre of consciousness, they are the *noesis*-pole and determine the manner in which we perceive the world. In fact, intentions give form to consciousness and acts, the mind is not passive it is a participant of each act of knowing, thus consciousness is embodied and occurs with intention. The constructs that define the black body are founded on an implicit racial bias with which Madikizela-Mandela was confronted numerous times. The apartheid regime established an identity of inferiority and sub-humanity for Madikizela-Mandela as a political activist. This identity is characterised and experiences life through the black body. The black body is confronted with various levels that challenge and undermine its humanity - apartheid laws such as Act No. 59 of 1959 on Reservation of Separate Amenities was one of the ways Madikizela-Mandela was confined to existing as a black body. Act No. 59 of 1959 legalised the racial separation of public premises, vehicles and services. It only excluded public roads and the facilities used by whites were far better equipped and functioning than those of blacks [bodies] (Digital Innovation South Africa 1953).

On 15 May 1977 Madikizela-Mandela was exiled to Brandfort – a small township in the Free State. It was only on her arrival where she was confronted with a destitute condition of black people living in dire poverty and in contrast was the Afrikaner in his/her ‘kingdom’ thriving socially, economically and politically. While in Brandfort she realised she was a living symbol of what the whites feared. One of the reasons she was exiled to Brandfort was in hope of defusing her political will in the struggle against apartheid. She writes, ‘I am and will always be only a political barometer’ (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 26) - she knew how critical her actions were.



Madikizela-Mandela openly defied the apartheid laws. – 'I went into the shops no black went into, at the police station I used the white entrance, I went into the white side of the post office – there was nothing they could do' (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 27). Through its laws the apartheid regime created parameters for black bodies to function within, but for Madikizela-Mandela she defied those parameters. Madikizela-Mandela acknowledges that the actions she undertook by using facilities specifically labelled for the Afrikaners was the only way she could conscientise them. She asserted that was the only way they could know and be aware of the apartheid struggle. Madikizela-Mandela realised that the Afrikaner of Brandfort had never heard of the African National Congress – she wanted to politicise her presence in Brandfort. Madikizela-Mandela wanted to show that her commitment to the political struggle would not be deterred by merely being relocated by the apartheid regime. She knew that as a black body existing in the constructs of apartheid, was driven by the core purpose to depoliticise her. But it was her political consciousness that restored her convictions.

Johnson (1993: 604) suggests, that although one can be conscious of one's body, 'I know that I cannot see myself as others see me, white and black, as if the secret of my body and the objectivity of its 'outside' belongs, not to me, but to everyone else'. Johnson is alluding to the fact that consciousness of the self is also subject to those outside of the self to make the judgement of acknowledging your presence and conscious self. Therefore, one does not have the control of how the world perceives you. He notes, 'I am black. I do not see what the white other sees in my skin' (Johnson 1993: 604). He further states, 'My body gives me the world, but, as that world is given, it is one in which I can be unseen' (Johnson 1993: 604). The black body is unseen regardless of that black body being self-conscious. Being unseen means not being recognised and acknowledged as a being. Madikizela-Mandela experienced what Johnson alludes to when she opted to use entrances that were only permitted for white people and it is in those moments that she was asserting her being. The manner in which apartheid laws were devised and implemented, was to compellingly declare that black and white people cannot exist in the same space consistently and equally. The apartheid regime functioned under the compulsion of making sure that the black body remains in an inferior position.

Johnson refers to an experience which is experienced by black bodies as 'black-as-body' which is the condition through which the black body

experiences life. It points to the stained nature of the black body, whereby consciousness is darkened or stained thus, overriding the existence of the black body as a subject and yielding it to exist as an object. This experience is intensified by the body's appearance as black and as 'stained' it lacks interiority and Johnson refers to the work of Fanon (1967: 87) who writes; 'I am overdetermined from without. I am a slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance'. This explains that the black body is visible or seen through the perspective of the white lens. It is through the perspective that 'sees' a body and not what is within and beyond physicality. It 'sees' and recognises the physicality, yet it recognises it in a peculiar physicality that Johnson notes as a physicality equivalent to that of an object such as a fire extinguisher. An object when 'seen' is recognised through its 'stained' nature. This position then obscures from the 'embodied consciousness' which relates to experiencing the mind through the awareness of the body, it deviates from this logic creating the problem of a body lacking rationality and its only use being its physicality. This is indicated in how Madikizela-Mandela explains that an Afrikaner who is a farmer, sees a black man he sees something that sits on his tractor or plods behind his plough; what is most important to that farmer is his tractor, and should lightning strike the man on the tractor, the first thing he will run and check is the tractor (Madikizela-Mandela 1985). The black man who sits on the tractor is merely a black body that appears as an object, thus he appears like that fire extinguisher to which Johnson refers. He can be seen, and simultaneously he can be unseen, he cannot be recognised as a human being. Thus, it indicates the level of how intense the degraded nature within which apartheid operated. The position that the black man on the tractor is located within, is similar to that of Fanon (1967) when he states that he is seen as a slave because of his appearance. It should be noted that the notion of the black body is not limited to physical appearance, but rather it refers to the entirety of a black body as inferior.

Racially oppressive systems and ideologies such as apartheid were pioneers of using power and domination on marginalised groups as a means of justifying their superiority. Moreover, through policing and security systems the apartheid era created laws and policies that were prejudicial, unavoidably and visibly biased against racially inferior groups that were non-European which included blacks, Indians and Coloureds. When the black body enters prison, there are different mechanics that unfold, it enters a machinery of power, of which the body becomes the object and target of power. The black

body is thus manipulated, shaped and trained by use of power (Foucault 1977). Madikizela-Mandela as a black body within the confinements of power had to devise modes of resistance. The manner in which the power of the apartheid regime attempted to redefine Madikizela-Mandela resonates with Cleaver's phenomenology of the black body. It is because of the power dynamics that Madikizela-Mandela was confronted with and existed within both in and out of prison which were compelling her to be synonymous with the notion of the black body. But, unsurprisingly Madikizela-Mandela rejected this notion of a black body as irrational, stained and inferior.

### **Deconstructing 'Silent' Narratives**

To be silent when given instructions as opposed to acting upon them can often be misinterpreted as a sign of submission or ignorance. But Madikizela-Mandela deconstructed the symbolism of silence. She writes, 'I have told you already I am answering no questions and if you keep asking me the same thing I am going to keep quiet that's all' (Madikizela-Mandela 2013: 37). By refusing to answer questions during her interrogation was a means of taking ownership of herself and accepting the consequences of such ownership. To be quiet does not necessarily mean one is compliant to what one is encountering. Motsemme (2014) considers silence as resistance and courage as well as a mode of coping and reconstituting the self. There are moments whereby Madikizela-Mandela is unable to vocalise her trauma. In some instances, physical pain can be so severe that it destroys language (Scarry 1985). The physical pain affects the body in a brutal manner that it is unable to participate in its vocal capacity. This makes Madikizela-Mandela's body appear passive and allows domination. However, Gordon (2000) asserts that the body retains the trauma in efforts of expressing it in a different mode, that trauma becomes the inscriptions of the inner life which means the trauma is internalised and shapes the individual. It is mindful to note that Madikizela-Mandela was already existing in a position that had rendered her voiceless – this is the position of prison and being in the hold. Madikizela-Mandela began to reimagine the meaning of silence – silence embodied defiance and resistance. It became a method of shifting power. When Madikizela-Mandela was interrogated she consciously made the decision to not reveal any information to the police that would be detrimental or implicating any individual. When she was in solitary confinement on several occasions and was presented with

statements that claimed she had underground meetings, the aim was to lead her to a confession. Their concern was to weaken her political will and confidence. Major Swanepoel went as far as asking her ‘What do you think you are resisting? You are politically naked.’ (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 102). By refusing to answer questions and confess Madikizela-Mandela had shifted the power into her possession, she understood that silence was the only option. In a complex way silence had shaped the culture of liberation movements such as the ANC because it was imperative for members of the movement to protect the political activities of the movement against any opposing factor.

Madikizela-Mandela explains that when she was in Brandfort her house was always kept under surveillance. There was always a security police officer that was assigned to watch her every movement and monitor who came and went to her home. Exiling her to Brandfort was a premeditated attempt to prevent her from being politically active, and was banned to Brandfort under ‘preventative detention’. The main objective for the apartheid regime was to isolate her, to make her political life static and ultimately deny her of any contact to engage in political activity. In addition, the local language spoken in Brandfort was Sesotho and she was mainly Xhosa speaking – hence the language barrier would possibly make it difficult for her to organise people for political engagement (Twala 2008: 70). She was prohibited from addressing more than one person at a time. Essentially, she was in a figurative prison, silenced from not only being politically active, but suspended from humanity. Nonetheless, her silence was short lived – she managed to do the unthinkable while in Brandfort. Madikizela-Mandela mobilised the women in the community to start a gardening project, the prime objective was to try mitigate the food insecurity issues in Brandfort because food was too expensive to buy, she assisted with opening a crèche and set up a knitting/ crocheting group in the community. When Madikizela-Mandela arrived in Brandfort she was confronted by destitute conditions in a community that was suffering from dreadful socio-economic issues. The joint efforts of Madikizela-Mandela and the community of Brandfort indicates a reclaiming and reimagining of a renewed voice, a voice that was muted and pained by oppression of the apartheid regime. But, the actions that ensued were not necessarily those invoking a verbal proclamation rather it was a non-verbal action of resistance, a method of creating possibilities in a space of domination.

Madikizela-Mandela did everything in her power to uplift the community of Brandfort. She evoked and embodied the work of Hartman

(1997) in which she interprets as 'stealing away.' Hartman explains, 'stealing away' as moments when the enslaved would slip away to have secret meetings, they referred to it as stealing the meeting. Stealing away included a wide range of activities, essentially it was illegal activities that contested the authority of the slave master. The phrase of stealing away alludes to a contradiction in the life of a slave, because the slave is considered as property according to its master and property does not have agency. Fundamentally, Hartman's conception affirms that property cannot steal property, a thing or an object cannot undertake the action of stealing another object because it is an empty container with no soul – the slave is merely a commodity, an object that can be exchanged and purchased. By this logic the slave is synonymous with the black body and by extension so is Madikizela-Mandela - since she is a black body, she is much like the slave – she is equivalent to property. Thus, she is the property of the state and consequently, the apartheid regime labels her as lacking agency.

Hartman expands on the notion of lacking agency and being labelled as property, explains the complex need and justification of stealing away by the slave. She describes stealing away as incomprehensible and beyond what is expected of the slave thus it is an 'unnatural act'. But beyond the surface stealing away advocates defiance and resistance because it involves seizing the master's property, and is an assertion of agency as well as a transgression against legitimate authority (Hartman 1997). Stealing away represents a contestation towards the relations of power that were meant to dominate. The moments of stealing away in the life of Madikizela-Mandela were expressions of freedom. When she was in solitary confinement, she experienced fear and rage – she had to find a means to overcome these feelings. She had a mantra that helped her to deal with her fears, 'I am the captain of my soul', which came from a poem titled *Invictus* (Madikizela-Mandela 2013: 143). In the silent moments, she endured while being interrogated and in solitary confinement she had to steal away moments to restore herself. She knew and understood the power the apartheid regime had and its aim of destroying her political will. Thus, in the moments when she recited her mantra she was simply stealing away. Seemingly, the act of stealing away may appear as a simple exercise but it was challenging the figuration of the slave and inferably that of the black body. Hartman (1997: 69) notes that, 'It ironically encapsulated the impossibility of self-possession'. Madikizela-Mandela had to transgress against what the apartheid regime was imposing on her.

There are also subtle and sensitive means of stealing away that can be easily unnoticed and be mistaken for being weak amongst the oppressed. Madikizela-Mandela (2003) recalls a moment when she was in prison and was told about the death of her stepson, she sank to the floor and wept – it was the first time she cried since her arrest. The news of the loss brought so much despair and tears that she could not suppress. Major Swanepoel showed no remorse or compassion when he delivered the news to her. Madikizela-Mandela considered the security police a special breed of people that had no consideration or empathy toward human life and it is for that reason they were able to torture people to death for no particular reason. When she cried it was a form of expressing the violation and domination she encountered. Maldonado-Torres (2008: 133) interprets a phenomenology of the cry, he considers the action of crying as ‘a sound uttered as a call for attention, as a demand for immediate action or remedy or as an expression of pain that points to an injustice committed or to something that is lacking’. Crying becomes a call of recognition and it announces a presence, meaning the individual is claiming a sense of self. When Madikizela-Mandela is crying she affirms her feelings and herself because she has been denied humanity by the apartheid system. Her cry transforms her humanity and it indicates the ‘return of a living subject’ (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 133). By crying she announces her humanity, she unsettles the established structures and meanings of power and challenges the dominate apartheid regime.

Fanon (1967) considers the cry an expression of paradoxical existence. Fanon contextualises the cry as a result of demanding something that is impossible. He defines it as an impossible demand because, it is a demand to continue living and those that cry are not considered as living subjects they are subhuman. Hence, the cry embodies such a significant moment because it is a way of reclaiming humanity. Gordon (2000: 33) also further alludes to the fact that the cry is a realisation of ‘the absence of his interiority from the point of view of interiority’. The moment of crying is critical because it is a point in which the individual realises that those who are around see an absence or lack of an inner character or soul or no true sense of being. Moreover, the individual realises this from the perspective of his/her inner character. Essentially, it is a moment in which Madikizela-Mandela realises that Major Swanepoel does not recognise her humanity, her soul. The symbolism of crying hence represents an expression of a subject that is dominated and who seeks affirmation of humanity. Ultimately, revolutionary tactics are not always aggressive and

militant as there are silent narratives which can emerge and be radical in form. These silent narratives possess the spirit of resistance and defiance, because in moments of being voiceless other forms of rebellion arise.

### **Existing through Other Forms of Resistance**

Madikizela-Mandela alludes to a critical point, which is that being in prison did not only constitute to the literal confinement in a cell. When she was exiled to Brandfort, as well as being placed under house arrest – these are forms of confinement but are implemented differently. They all resonate with the concept of the hold. Madikizela-Mandela says, 'I got more liberated in prison. The physical identification with your beliefs is far more satisfying than articulating them on a platform. I am not saying it is best to be in prison. But under the circumstances, where it is a question of which prison is better, prison outside or inside' (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 97). For Madikizela-Mandela she had to devise modes in which she had to exist and affirm her existence. She was existing within an apartheid regime that aimed to do anything possible to maintain the status quo and remain as the ruling racially oppressive system. The apartheid regime was structured in a manner that people who were non-European were merely existing as a tool to be used and disposed of within the political, economic and social systems of apartheid South Africa. They were objects existing among humans.

The apartheid regime employed specific strategies in order to confine the black body both literally and figuratively. The use of the 'the passbook' in apartheid South Africa was introduced in the early 1950s although prior to that there were already Pass Laws in the apartheid legislation that severely limited the movements of non-Europeans. It was only on March 1953 that the passbooks were distributed. The booklet contained personal history and movements, a long list of official permissions which enabled non-Europeans to be at certain places. It also included official permission to enter an urban area, permission to seek work, records required for medical examinations and the names and addresses of employers (Breckenridge 2005). The direct Afrikaans translation of the passbook is the 'verdomdepass', which literally means a damned pass (Madikizela-Mandela 1985). This booklet represented a textual form of the dehumanisation black bodies had to encounter. It was a material form of condemning the black body. The passbook was a manifestation of the colonial subject, the subject that does not have reason and agency

and dehumanised black bodies, limited movement of the black body and marked that body for arbitrary interrogation. Fanon (2004) speaks about the damnation that makes black bodies immobile – the passbooks presented restriction to movement, black bodies could not move freely as they wished. Fanon articulates that colonised subjects are damned, as they are invariably those who carry the damned pass. They are forced to exist as subhuman, moreover, oppressive systems such as apartheid recreated and perpetuated this damned status through passbooks.

According to Madikizela-Mandela, the pass laws were part of the larger constructs of an anti-black world of which the apartheid regime was orchestrating. She attested that even though you give the black man the same salary as the white man, the black man still returns to the township where he has no rights and must carry the document of oppression. This very act of carrying the document further demoralises and makes him believe that if his work environment is normal so is the oppressive document he carries with him. But Madikizela-Mandela understood that her existence was founded within rubrics that reinforced the anti-black world. The passbook was just another mechanism to oppress black bodies. The black bodies were living in the anti-black world. They were being actively denied the right of being fully human. In August 1956 Madikizela-Mandela participated in the anti-pass demonstration which was led by renowned female political activists namely Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Albertina Sisulu, Sophia Williams-De Bruyn and included many others. These women were not willing to accept the dehumanisation of pass laws.

Haymes (2002) confirms that living in the anti-black world means to live in a world where the presence of black bodies illustrates the absence of human presence. In the anti-black the black body cannot *recognize* and be *recognised*. Fanon (1967) asserts that this position does not allow the slave [black body] to be recognised by the master [white apartheid police] and additionally it does not allow the slave to recognise his/her own being. Fanon (1967: 216-217) asserts that, ‘As long as he has not been effectively recognised by the other, that other will remain a theme of his actions. It is that other being that his own human worth and reality depends. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed’. The apartheid regime had to be persistent and robust in its making of the anti-black world which is not limited to geographic or physical confinement – it is a structural, systematic and ontological positioning that aims at dehumanisation.



In January 1985 the apartheid regime approved the Strategic Communication (Stratcom) project which was a propaganda project led by the State Security Council. Theoretically, it was concerned with the dissemination of information and disinformation, libel and manipulation (Ellis 1998). The key objective for Stratcom was to fight the revolutionary climate that was emerging in townships and amongst key political leaders that were against apartheid. The project emerged in the backdrop of heightened political activity in South Africa – the rebellion in the country was more organised and was highly supported by the armed guerrilla movement of the ANC known as the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation). The apartheid regime was determined to restore order and defuse the spirit of rebellion within political movements such as the ANC. Stratcom aimed at neutralising radicals who were against the apartheid regime such as Madikizela-Mandela. The regime politically aimed at creating divisions between Madikizela-Mandela and the ANC leadership by depicting Madikizela-Mandela as an individual who was acting in her own capacity that appeared rebellious and unruly. The objective was to isolate her from the movement. Essentially, it was to discredit her political commitments, to publicly portray her as a maverick, imperfect and a devious wife (Bridger 2015). Madikizela-Mandela had shown resilience and influence within the movement as she had survived solitary confinement. Although she survived solitary confinement, she did have moments of weakness and doubt and even thought of taking her own life while in prison. Madikizela-Mandela (2013: 25) states, 'I decided I would commit suicide but would do so gradually so that I should die of natural causes to spare Nelson and the children the pains of knowing I had taken my life'. Stratcom and the apartheid regime's aim was to weaken strong members of any political movement that was opposing apartheid. Madikizela-Mandela recalls that the press had reporters writing incriminating articles that made her appear as undignified. Nonetheless, this did not weigh down on her. She writes, 'They thought that, as the years went by, they were going to break me and that I would throw in the towel' (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 85). For Madikizela-Mandela, existing through a time where powerful oppressive forces have the means of crushing the humanity of others meant she had to exist through resisting, she defined her existence based on her continued acts of resistance. Furthermore, Madikizela-Mandela was aware that the humanity of the inferior always requires justification and in her acts of resistance she was a symbol of what the white man feared. 'I am of no importance to them as an individual. What I stand for

is what they want to banish. I could not think of a greater honour' (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 26). She recognised the importance of what her resistance represented as she was part of the larger struggle against apartheid. Even she was aware she was too small in this enormous liberation machine, the fight against apartheid cannot be perceived from an individual perspective – it must be a collective action.

Madikizela-Mandela constantly referred to the importance of collective action against apartheid, and she did not think of herself as separate or isolated from the oppression. She never idealised her struggle as extraordinary from others who also experienced torture, solitary confinement and imprisonment or any injustice caused by oppression of apartheid. She continuously placed herself within the ideals and political goals of the people. Madikizela-Mandela (1985: 6) writes, 'The ideals, the political goals that I stand for, those are ideals and goals of the people in this country. They cannot just forget their own ideal. My private self doesn't exist'. She implicitly acknowledged that her imprisoned self, tortured self and isolated self, represented the collective of the people fighting against apartheid. She embodied the ability to internalise her experience into an 'organic ideology' which made her aware of the importance of collective action. The notion of an organic ideology stems from the work of Gramsci (1971) – he describes such ideologies as directly within actual social relations, they are important, motivating, they produce meaning and their function is critical in history. Gramsci attests that an ideology can only be important if it can change, correct or perfect the conception of the world and thus change norms of conduct. Gramsci's (1971) conception of an organic ideology resonates with the ideological approach, underlying actions and commitments Madikizela-Mandela had towards the struggle against apartheid. She aimed for an ideal that was interested in the preservation of human rights and human dignity. The words of Gramsci exemplified what Madikizela-Mandela pursued in the fight against apartheid, she aimed for an ideal that would incorporate itself in reality as if it were originally an expression of it. Her role was to resist and most importantly expose the oppressive system. She was resisting an organising system and principal based on racial prejudice.

As a political prisoner, Madikizela-Mandela did not conform or submit to the authority of apartheid security forces. In all the numerous times she was convicted, it was because of her resistance to oppression thus, she had to be socially and politically displaced (Nagel 2011). But, she did not reform or

participate in legitimising the apartheid regime. Madikizela-Mandela placed herself in what Butler (1993) refers to as the gap between speech acts and conduct. Butler identifies this gap as resistance, when she explains that speech acts are guided by social reality whereby language and gestures create symbolic social signs. Speech acts are pronouncements that *do* something rather than *represent* something (Butler 1993). Speech acts are practices that aim at producing a particular action, the uttering of the words is simultaneous with the action. There are various implications that can emerge in different speech acts, resistance develops a symbolic social sign when one is expected to react in a certain way but instead one does not (Butler 1993). When Madikizela-Mandela was interrogated by Major Swanepoel, she was expected to answer questions providing information that would implicate her as a criminal. During her interrogation Madikizela-Mandela (2013: 37) responded to Major Swanepoel and said 'I have told you already I am answering no questions and if you keep asking me the same thing I'm going to keep quiet that's all'. This moment, when Madikizela-Mandela refuses to answer questions is the moment of resistance, it is the gap that Butler (1993) refers to whereby Madikizela-Mandela is instructed through a speech act, but she does not respond with the conduct expected. Madikizela-Mandela's resistance declares that although she is oppressed, she is not confined by the boundaries of oppression. The notion of resistance in Madikizela-Mandela's life is linked to how she maintains her existence because she was able to distinguish what dehumanises her and her unwillingness to submit to a subhuman position. Thus, resistance announces itself as a value because it transitions from facts to rights – it translates to from this must be to this is how I should like things to be. Hollander and Einwohwer (2004: 539) conceptualise resistance as a value by explaining that resistance confronts its targets directly and openly, moreover it is easily recognised. With this conception of resistance, it is evident that Madikizela-Mandela unapologetically claimed her existence through resistance. Her resistance evoked rebellion because she could not submit to the oppression she encountered.

## **Rebellion as the Foundation of Inroads to Freedom and Democracy**

Throughout her life Madikizela-Mandela has often been labeled a rebel and a dissident. Parts of what is known of her life story has undoubtedly been

influenced by her own choices, her self-representation and her utterances (Gqola 2017: 151). At the same time what is known about Madikizela-Mandela comes from premediated external forces such as Stratcom. As an apartheid apparatus, Stratcom had its own agenda to discredit Madikizela-Mandela as an extraordinary political activist. Madikizela-Mandela could be described as complicated, layered and uncontained, she reflected the type of woman who defied stereotypes and patriarchal limitations. But, politically she stood out as a rebel. A rebel cannot be thought of or described outside of the external conditions that exists around him/her. Thus, the rebel emerges in order to question the conditions in which he/she exists. Camus (1956: 13) asks a critical question – ‘what is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion’. A rebel rejects certain conditions, but in rejecting these conditions, at a certain point he was forced to be compliant to the very conditions he rejects. The rebel Camus speaks of, is a slave that has taken orders from his master and he can no longer accept taking orders. The slave says to the master ‘this has been going far too long, up to this point yes, but beyond it no, you are going too far... there is a limit beyond which you shall not go’ (Camus 1956: 13). In the moment the slave utters the word ‘no’ he is confirming that he refuses to act upon the instructions of the slave master. The slave affirms his existence when he says ‘no’ – he recognises that there is a borderline which marks a limit in which he can say yes to certain instructions but beyond that limit he says no.

Madikizela-Mandela and the slave share a fundamental similarity as dominated subjects as they are both characterised by oppression and domination that is exerted upon them by a superior constituent. Madikizela-Mandela and the slave are both inferior. However, when the slave says ‘no’ it is proclaiming that he/she has been oppressed and tortured and can no longer accept these conditions. The slave has accepted certain conditions and up to a certain point but beyond the borderline he/she says ‘no’. Camus (1956: 13), writes ‘to say no, preserves the existence of certain things on this side of the borderline’. Thus, when Madikizela-Mandela utters the word ‘no’ she is in fact preserving her existence. It is critical to understand the conceptual meaning of the borderline and Mudimbe (2013) explains that it determines and organises space. But, it has a metaphorical function, it determines space in everyday life and it separates. For Madikizela-Mandela it separates the confrontation between her as an inferior and the apartheid system as well as all its personnel,

laws and strategies that reckon as superior. This line preserves and maintains the roles of the inferior and superior. When Madikizela-Mandela said to Major Swanepoel, 'You kept me awake for five days and nights to answer all your questions... after you satisfied yourselves that I had made a satisfactory statement, otherwise you would have not stopped interrogating me. I am not answering any questions' (Madikizela-Mandela 2013: 37). This statement is an assertion that she had said yes to a certain point but beyond a particular point she was saying no. She was distinguishing the line that separates her and the wardens. The act of uttering the word no symbolised rebellion for Madikizela-Mandela at a level that meant her humanity was again being denied. Her rebellious nature was guided by a specific intent. The intention to rebel can either result in effective or reproductive consequences. It is effective if the dominating forces are successfully challenged, it is reproductive if the rebellion reproduces the status quo (Aggleton 1987; and Raby 2005). At first glance, Madikizela-Mandela's rebellion challenges the apartheid structures, strategies and systems. She is arrested countless times, interrogated, placed in solitary confinement and exiled to a small township in the Free State away from her friends and family but all that did not discourage her political will in the fight against apartheid. She possessed a fearless nature against the apartheid regime, even when she was positioned in a setting that is designed to intimidate her and she still does not break. She confronts oppression fearlessly. During an interrogation Major Ferreira said to her, 'We are going to use certain methods to induce information from you since your attitude it what it is. You are going to talk against your will for that matter' her response was, 'We can go to the torture room now, I'm ready' (Madikizela-Mandela 2013: 38). She unswervingly challenged her oppressors, and this was indicated in the manner she undertook her interrogation, because at the end of it she was sent back to her cell without providing any incriminating information to her interrogators.

The kind of commitment Madikizela-Mandela had towards the fight against oppression was revolutionary, she was defiant, she supported the idea of a socialist state and she wanted to solve the problems causing poverty (Madikizela-Mandela 2003: 221). To achieve all of that meant she had to find ways to position and direct her rebellion in a meaningful way. Thus, it called for a radical leap towards freedom because her humanity and that of others was in question. Madikizela-Mandela had to make a conscious decision in realising that freedom calls for rejecting bad faith and essentially anything that threatens the humanity of others. Bad faith is 'a lie to the self, one that involves an effort

to hide one's freedom' (Gordon 2000: 31). Bad faith justifies oppressive systems such as apartheid, the oppression over black bodies and undermines political imagination (Sithole 2016). Madikizela-Mandela rejects bad faith through Fanon's (2008) articulation of freedom in which he states that to have freedom means to not be a prisoner of history and to look for meaning in your own destiny. Fanon (2008: 204) further alludes to the fact that 'I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behavior from the other.' and adds, 'In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself'. It is through Fanon's understanding that Madikizela-Mandela's actions regarding her political commitments indicated that she was demanding human behavior that would restore the humanity of black people. Although, her demands may have seemed impossible for the oppressive system of apartheid – freedom was essential for her. She stated that, 'We are fighting for the total liberation of the black man in this country. It is a national struggle we are fighting ... the black man does not want his chains changed into gold and polished. He is fighting for his total liberation' (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 122). She often made the reference to collective action, because freedom was not only a single moment defined by an election or being released from prison. Freedom entails a collective destiny that is dependent upon collective action. Freedom unfolds in a series of actions. The oppressed and inferior should be the custodian of their own freedom. They should initiate and visualise their own freedom.

In addition, Madikizela-Mandela (1985) noted that fundamental freedom from oppression in South Africa would be guided by the Freedom Charter as a blueprint for a free society that would accommodate a multiracial nation. The Freedom Charter is a unique document in that for the first time ever, the people were actively involved in formulating their own vision of an alternative society. The existing order of state oppression and exploitation which was prevalent in the 1950s (and earlier) was totally rejected. The significance of the charter was that it encouraged a socialist state, which was in accordance with the belief that there was no other option to resolve poverty and the discrepancy between population groups. The core principle of the charter was that every citizen was entitled to have a fair share in the wealth of the country (South Africa). Madikizela-Mandela supported the principles of the charter because she believed if it were executed appropriately it would result in abolishing oppression and achieve political, social and economic freedom.

Nonetheless, it is critical not to fall into the danger of recognising

freedom as the ultimate end, not to perpetuate the falseness of freedom depicted as utopia. Freedom should not be considered as arriving at the ultimate end. For Madikizela-Mandela freedom meant more than just being able to vote and abolishing apartheid laws. Freedom meant the importance of consciousness that had to be realised among black people. An attitude of mind and way of life that had to emanate from the communities that were oppressed in order to realise and overcome oppression. Madikizela-Mandela's ideas on freedom resonated with those of Black Consciousness because she too believed the struggle had to be Africanised and the militancy of the youth had to be emphasised and integrated. The Black Consciousness movement is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his fellow Africans around the cause of his/her oppression - the blackness of his/her skin - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. Black Consciousness emerged at a time in South Africa where there was a political vacuum because the ANC had been banned and forced to operate underground, so Black Consciousness was operating openly. Madikizela-Mandela considered the leaders of the movement as part of the struggle against apartheid – 'they know who the enemy is: the government of this country' (South Africa) (Madikizela-Mandela 1985: 121-122). Moreover, she admired Steve Biko as a national idol and custodian of the Black Consciousness movement. She too, like Biko understood freedom as the ability to define oneself with one's possibilities not being held back by the power of others. It is through such ideas of freedom that created the foundations of South Africa's road to democracy. Moreover, the political commitment that women such as Madikizela-Mandela had towards the struggle against apartheid was the driving force that created a strong sense of national resistance against oppression. The ideas that guided South Africa's road to democracy stem from the ideas of freedom that influenced the fight against oppression.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this article was to explore Madikizela-Mandela's lived experience both in and out of prison in reference to how she experienced the power dynamics that were guided by oppressive structures which are influenced by the discourse of racial and patriarchal systems. The discussion confined itself to her experiences of prison, banishment and solitary confinement. It was

demonstrated that the notion of the hold as a form of oppression can unfold in various ways and that modes of resistance can also emerge through unconventional means such as those discussed above namely; silence, crying and stealing away. The lived experiences of Madikizela-Mandela illustrate the intricate ways of how power can be exerted upon those who are deemed inferior or subhuman by a racially oppressive system. Most significantly, the article highlighted how the resistance of Madikizela-Mandela towards the apartheid regime never lost momentum. Thus, by way of conclusion one might maintain that the life of Madikizela-Mandela is a contested one even after her death. It is difficult to confine her in one identity. What remains is that she understood the mechanics of the hold as being confined and subjugated whether in or out of prison, essentially under oppression and non-Europeans remained black bodies, who were the epitome of what is subhuman. She recognised the thriving power of oppression through the apartheid regime and how it dictated to black people on how to be, how to live and basically how to be subhuman. Her spirit of resistance and rebellious nature illustrated the obligation she felt towards achieving a true sense of freedom for South Africans. Above all, Madikizela-Mandela was mindful that a true sense of freedom had to emanate from those who are oppressed because they understood what oppression entailed. Hence, given her political and social commitment to the fight against apartheid and her experiences all forms part of a critical national narrative to South Africa's road to freedom, democracy and what is yet to be achieved.

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