Constructing Silence:
South Africa’s Erasure of Women’s Resistance in
Post-Apartheid Memorialization

by

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Abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress
ANCWL – African National Congress Women’s League
APLA – Azanian People’s Liberation Army
AZAPO – Azanian People’s Organisation
BCM – Black Consciousness Movement
BPC – Black People’s Convention
BWF – Black Women’s Federation
BWL – Bantu Women’s League
CODESA – Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions
DACST – Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology
FEDSAW/FSAW – Federation of South African Women
FEDTRAW – Federation of Transvaal Women
IFP – Inkatha Freedom Party
JDA – Johannesburg Development Agency
MK – uMkhonto weSizwe
NCM - The National Monuments Council
NOW – Natal Women's Organisation
NP – National Party
NPA – National Prosecuting Agency
PAC – Pan Africanist Congress
SABC – South African Broadcasting Commission
SACP – South African Communist Party
SAIC – South African Indian Congress
SANNC – South African Native National Congress
SASM – South African Students Movement
SASO – South African Students’ Organisation
SSRC – Soweto Students’ Representative Council
TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF – United Democratic Front
UWCO – United Women's Organization
WLHM – Women’s Living Heritage Monument
Introduction

Gender History, Memorialization, and South African Women

It is a silencing silence, the kind that hits you between your eyes and kicks you in the hollow of your stomach. That silence is not the absence of words or noise; not the kind we crave for when we think of a peaceful moment. This silence is fearsome. It is a pointed and powerful speech of disapproval.¹

_Nomboniso Gasa²_

If we discount the notion of deliberate misogyny or of a male conspiracy to deprive women of social value, how can we explain the fact that women were there, but forgotten or ignored, ‘hidden from history’?³

_Joan Wallach Scott_

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² Nomboniso Gasa is a leading South African feminist and adjunct professor of law at UCT who has written extensively on gender in South Africa, whose work has been invaluable in writing this thesis.
Are you aware of this “silencing silence”? This constructed, material, pervasive and purposeful silence? The silence of women’s voices, bodies, lives deafened by a sea of men, men and more men? The more you listen for the silence, the more attuned you will become, noticing the depth and breadth of the unremembered, until the contrast of the vastness of silence makes the sea unbearable to listen to. Indeed, the silence is constructed. Its purpose is to dictate hierarchy, to wield power, to exploit. It is not without challenge, and thus, it is active. In this thesis, I hope to guide you through this silence, its audacity, and its effects on South African women.

I will introduce the problem at hand, namely the overarching exclusion of black women’s anti-apartheid activism from South Africa’s predominantly masculinized history and its material forms of remembrance. The subject of my thesis is focused particularly on black women’s activism. Thus, when I use the term “women” I am referring predominantly to black South African women. Black women were the most oppressed group under the apartheid regime and form the largest part of South Africa’s demographic of women. Analyzing the topic of anti-apartheid memorialization through the lens of black women’s experiences is useful because of their disproportionate underrepresentation in public memory. Black women also remain the most disenfranchised social group in today’s South African society. Thus, this thesis attempts to draw connections between this underrepresentation and black women’s social status. Chapter 1 will provide a detailed analysis of traditional forms of history and the glaring exclusion of women’s activism from most historical narratives about South Africa’s liberation movement, while also providing a chronological overview of this period with an emphasis on key moments of women’s activism. Chapter 2 builds
on this discussion of narrative from a perspective of visuality, demonstrating the visual ways in which women were demonstrably visible and active in their resistance, yet were subsequently rendered invisible in the post-apartheid construction of public visual narratives. Chapter 3 presents evidence for memorial projects that do highlight women, analyzing their successes and failures as well as ongoing problems in representation and narrative. Chapter 4 provides perspective on the material impacts of the silencing of women in post-apartheid memorialization. I argue that the lack of recognition of women and silence around their gendered experiences like sexual violence is symptomatic of and contributive towards South Africa’s epidemic of gender-based violence. I conclude with a brief reflection on contemporary political and social events that resist this historical erasure and point to an optimistic but weary trajectory forward.

My analysis has relied on a wide variety of primary images testifying to women’s visible activism against the apartheid regime: photographic evidence, memoirs, museum exhibits, site visits, websites, interviews and testimony from the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In examining this material, I have placed it alongside existing narratives about anti-apartheid activism and women’s history narratives. These formal narratives have served dual purposes as both secondary material and primary evidence for my narrative analysis. Essential to this project was the research I conducted in Cape Town and Johannesburg. This field research allowed me to experience the presentation of public history as a visitor but also to conduct participant observation. This research process has been a multi-disciplinary one drawing on the research and analytic methods of History, Museum Studies, Visual Studies, and Gender Studies. In addition, the social theories and analysis common in
political science have further grounded my argument. This interdisciplinary method has allowed me to draw together my study of memorialization and historical narrative with contemporary concerns about South African women’s vulnerability to gender-based violence and the need to pay attention to their present-day activism.

**Remembering South Africa’s Liberation**

South Africa’s hard-fought liberation from apartheid in 1994 was achieved by black South Africans from across the social spectrum: by women as well as men, by the young as well as the old, by activists using tools of violence as well as tools of passive resistance, and by those in rural areas as well as those in the cities. It was led not only by the African National Congress (ANC) but also the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and many women’s, youth and workers’ organizations. To those familiar with South African history, this statement may seem obvious. Yet, if we reflect on the articulation of South Africa’s history of apartheid resistance through structures of memory like public memorials, commemorations, archives, museums, statues, memoirs and widely circulating images, the story of what is remembered emerges as something quite different. Through these structures of memory, the most coherent, consistent and widespread historical narrative that propagates in the public’s consciousness is that South Africa’s freedom was predominately won by South Africa’s male, ANC-loyal, and educated heroes. Nelson Mandela, O.R. Tambo, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Steve Biko, Albert Luthuli, and Walter Sisulu are all popularized in South Africa’s history.

The instrumental role that women played in anti-apartheid activism at all levels, from national leaders to drivers of grassroots organizations, as pioneers of passive
resistance and as combatants in the armed struggle, has predominantly been swept under the carpet since South Africa’s 1994 liberation. The overriding narrative of the anti-apartheid liberation movement in South Africa is dominated by male-led organizations and leadership, with monuments and memorials disproportionately dedicated to men. Women’s significant role in the uprising against apartheid and contributions to its ultimate dismantling over several decades have been obscured in favor of a monolithic representation of the liberation movement. Some of the popular references to well-known female anti-apartheid activists might appear to undermine this argument. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Mamphela Ramphele, Lilian Ngoyi, and Miriam Makeba are relatively well-known by the South African public. A particularly well-studied South African might be familiar with Charlotte Maxeke, Victoria Mxenge, and Fatima Meer. However, it is a sad reality that the most well-known black women activists in South Africa, like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Albertina Sisulu, are known first and foremost as the wives of apartheid heroes or through their relationships to famous male activists. While there are exceptions to the rule, these women’s outstanding achievements that stand independently of any men are

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4 Complimentary to the attention paid to these liberation heroes, is the nod given to mass action around a few important events: the 1969 Sharpeville Massacre, the 1976 Soweto Uprisings, forced removals in District 6 and Sophiatown, the 1986 State of Emergency are some examples. However, these events are often masculinized, as I will discuss in my first and second chapter.

5 I am purposefully excluding well-known white women activists like Helen Joseph, Helen Suzman, and Ruth First from this list, who are oftentimes more popularly known and discussed than most other popular black women activists, which displays a different sort of bias in South Africa’s public memory.

6 Mamphela Ramphele is often linked to Steve Biko in order to legitimize her popularity despite her being a seasoned activist and politician. Albertina Sisulu has historically been represented only through her partnership with her husband, Walter Sisulu, as seen in photographs, memorials and museums. She was one of the most active political figures, founders and leaders of key organizations, and was banned, detained, arrested and imprisoned countless times. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela has her own legacy of militarism, black consciousness thought and bold resistance. She too was banned, tortured, imprisoned, and was the face of the anti-apartheid movement the twenty plus years of Mandela’s imprisonment.
eclipsed by the remembrance of the work of their male counterparts. The rhetoric of these prominent and powerful activists as “wives” or “supporters” of the movement has been a largely successful strategy in sidelining and minimizing the individual achievements of these women and the extensive influence that they exerted.

As a general phenomenon, women are presented as the sufferers of lost husbands and sons, not activists and agents of change. Their words are used as quotes to color in newspaper articles and historical accounts, but they are not the protagonists of history. Despite a counter-tradition of writing women’s histories by a community of academics, this pattern of diminution has been transplanted into South Africa’s democratic institutions and reflects itself in South Africa’s commemoration and memorialization efforts. Does this dominant positioning in public forms of history, through memorials and commemorations perpetuate the perception among the population that women are to be victimized and expected to be passive? Would the alternative have any impact on the real-life circumstances of South African women?

The Masculinization of History

History as a modern professional discipline was shaped as a masculine pursuit, limited to male professional historians who were influenced by gendered thinking around the validity of history. An obvious outcome of this masculinization has been the systematic omission of women from accounts of the past, resulting in the phenomenon

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7 This is evidenced, for example, in the number of women testifying in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) who spoke as wives of lost husbands or children and not about their own stories, but also presents in newspaper articles and history textbooks.
of women’s invisibility. In *Retrieving Women’s History*, S. J. Kleinberg discusses women’s historic omission, arguing that it has “distorted the way we view the past; [warping] history by making it seem as though only men have participated in events thought worthy of preservation and by misrepresenting what actually happened.” In addition to masculinization, the westernization of history has also biased the field against narratives of the global south. African history is not a subject generally taught in South African schools, although this has started to slowly shift in the last decade or so. It is especially difficult to come by histories of African women, even in higher education institutions. Even if African women are included in histories, they are often treated as exceptions, not active agents in the historical process.

South African history is no exception as masculinized narratives reach beyond the anti- and pre-colonial periods. For example, contrary to present perceptions of pre-colonial Zulu society as “fiercely patriarchal and militaristic,” nineteenth century royal Zulu women demonstrated extensive leadership across political, economic, militaristic and religious spheres. Elite women leaders, both before, during and after Shaka

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9 S. J. Kleinberg, introduction to *Retrieving Women’s History*, ix.
10 Kleinberg, xi-xii. In particular terms, masculinized and Eurocentric historians are created due to historians’ own biases and reliance on certain sources such as diaries, memoirs, and censuses, all of which are unlikely to include or come from women, or other oppress groups in the context of imperialism, resulting in these groups’ lack of representation and subsequent implication of impotence of inefficacy in history.
12 Ayesha Mei-Tje Imam, “The Presentation of African Women in Historical Writing,” in *Retrieving Women’s History*, 30, 36. Imam gives examples including narratives about Asante queen mothers or writers of the “Merrie Africa,” tradition that singles out key women figures.
Zulu’s reign, were powerful in their own right and not through their mere proximity to powerful men.\textsuperscript{14} The patriarchal historiography of this period has all but erased a complex and nuanced narrative of women’s leadership that pervaded Zulu society across political and ethnic divisions by the late 1800s.\textsuperscript{15} This story of masculinization has been repeated throughout the continent and continues to not only erase women’s agency but also draws false conclusions of the unfolding of history. In the case of South African anti-apartheid history, historical writing has tended to ignore South African women’s role and contributions or to simplify their positions in South African history.\textsuperscript{16}

Fortunately, South Africa has a noticeably strong tradition of women’s history writing from the end of the 1970s and the work of these historians has started to shift the narrative to include more women in South African histories. Authors like Cherryl Walker, Iris Berger, Joanne Yawitch, Julia Wells, Helen Bradford, Belinda Bozzoli, and Mamphela Ramphele, the majority of whom are white middle-class women, were instrumental in building South African women’s history and developing a tradition of radical critique.\textsuperscript{17} They were able to bring to light a lot of women’s narratives and experiences that had yet to be written into historical record, as well as the development of a more critical analysis of women in society and gender within South African history.

\textsuperscript{14} Weir, 4.
\textsuperscript{15} Gasa, \textit{They Remove Boulders}, xx. Although this narrative somewhat falls into the category of treating these elite women as ‘exceptions,’ their recognition complicates and contradicts commonly held and simplified perceptions about gender in Zulu society. Other authors listed above portray a more nuanced view of women in Zulu society, these narratives are part of the process that moves towards a more holistic gendered history representing women across dominant or subordinate groups.
\textsuperscript{16} See Chapter 1 for a more in-depth discussion with examples of how this has been done.
This trajectory was influenced by a much broader movement in the field of women’s and gender history. The 1970s witnessed a wave of resistance and critique to the widespread masculinization of history, spurring interest in women’s history and gender studies as part of a moment of rebirth of political movements for women’s rights around the world.\textsuperscript{18} As historians like Scott and Smith have discussed, the analysis of gender as a construct signifying relationships of power within history has allowed historians to move beyond simply “stirring” women in already existing narratives. In the case of South African history, it is not enough to merely include women as having been “present,” or that individual women were “exceptions” or “women worthies”\textsuperscript{19} within an overarching masculine narrative, but that women both affected and were affected by history and the relationship between gender and society.\textsuperscript{20} As Scott writes, the goal is to “bring women from the margins to the center of historical focus and, in the process, transform the way all history [is] written.”\textsuperscript{21} However, these transformed historical narratives need to become public history in order to become public knowledge and influence the way society perceives and values women. One of the primary ways in which this achieved is through public efforts of memorialization.

\textsuperscript{18} Scott, “The Problem of Invisibility.” 5.
\textsuperscript{19} Margaret Strobel and Marjorie Bigham, “The Theory and Practice of Women’s History and Gender History in Global Perspective,” in \textit{Women’s History in Global Perspective Vol.1}, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 13. Strobel and Bigham describe “women worthies” as the characterization of women included in “compensatory” histories, where examples of women are used to provide evidence of women’s comparability to the achievements of men and women’s ability to transcend into the public sphere, and thus merely adding what women did “too” within a history of men.
\textsuperscript{20} Strobel and Bigham, 12.
\textsuperscript{21} Joan Scott, \textit{Gender and the Politics of History} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xi.
South Africa’s Memorialization and Its Treatment of Women

Even though South Africa has a plethora of social, economic and political issues to analyze, especially in relation to South African women, I choose to focus on memorialization because of the significance that South African society itself has placed on the act of heritage-making. South Africa’s project of heritage-making has been a serious affair from the moment democracy was on the horizon, and has been allocated substantial resources even in scarce times, even taking precedence over individual financial reparations.

Memorialization, as the material and visual manifestation of South Africa’s anti-apartheid past, has also been a primarily top-down state-run project in South Africa. Thus, I believe it is useful to assess the state’s prioritization of gender equality and women’s rights by looking at its representation of women through a perhaps less obvious and more abstract form of state behavior: public history making.

An argument for the representation of women within forms of public memory carries an assumption that representation in these forms has significance. Academics studying forms of visual representation are concerned with the relationship between cultural representation and how groups are treated in everyday life. Representation

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22 This is somewhat conflated with history-making as the state has constructed narratives of the past and visual representations of historical events through museums and memorial sites as a way of redefining and portraying history. However, the concept of heritage has more connotations of a prescribed South African identity that the country can associate with “history,” and is also associated more with the aspects of heritage that has been shaped by its appeal within South African tourism. It is generally non-academic and has formed an important association with the uncovering of histories censored by apartheid.

23 Sabine Marschall, “Gestures of Compensation: Post-Apartheid Monuments and Memorials,” Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa 55, no. 1 (2004): 81, 86. The importance of memorialization is also tied to the need to redress the long legacy of colonial and apartheid era monuments and South Africans’ desire for their liberation to be reflected in the histories around them.

effects not only how groups are perceived by others but also how members of the
groups self-perceive and inter-relate with one another. Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P.
Herbert argue that what society consumes through its visual surroundings dictates what
it is meant to consider important, helping individuals define their social identities and
social realities. I argue that visual forms of memorialization and commemoration
form key components of South Africa’s heritage-making project, and that these visual
forms are influential on societies social relationships. Specifically, state-sponsored
forms of memorialization contribute to the visual milieu of society that is “officially”
sanctioned, so to speak, providing the state’s validation of who and what matters.
Necessarily, the state is required to represent women’s historical experiences
specifically at the end of apartheid rule to acknowledge their contribution and
validation in the new society.

The transition moment provided both an opportunity and obligation to re-
represent the new South Africa both to its constituents and the rest of the world, an
urgent task that was hotly debated from 1990 and has continued today in the form of
debates around road and airport renaming, for example. Memorialization has also
been used as a key ideological tool for nation-building and racial reconciliation. The
effort to construct a coherent and unified history, especially in the wake of a fragmented

analysis of images and representation became popular from the 1970s, beginning first with analyses of
women and black people before expanding to other marginalized groups in terms of ethnicity, sexual
orientation, ability and eventually encompassing dominant groups like men.
26 Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Herbert, “Gender, Race, and Media Representation,” in The SAGE
Handbook of Gender and Communication, ed. Bonnie J. Dow and Julia T. Wood (Thousand Oaks, CA:
27 Annie Coombes, History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South
and traumatic past that might present with contradicting and complex narratives, was publicly propagated by influential figures like Ahmed Kathrada as a priority in building a new South Africa. Sabine Marschall describes South Africa’s memorializing tradition as being influenced by socialist commemorative traditions, demonstrating a “penchant for bronze statues of male heroic liberation leaders, and the frequent conceptualization of a linear, teleological grand-narrative of resistance culminating in triumph.” However, this came at the cost of homogenizing narratives and alienating and ignoring certain groups who did not fit the individual, monolithic, heroic narrative of South Africa’s liberation, including women and roles of most non-ANC members.

For women to be left out at such a pivotal time as the reconceptualization of a new country, the determination of its identity, and the definition of its past poses questions about the prioritization of women in a now democratic, yet still manifestly oppressively patriarchal South Africa. What can explain the public absencing and erasure of women’s anti-apartheid activism in South Africa’s memorialization at this transitional period? Why won’t South Africa remember its women?

Marshall argues that similar to how women’s liberation was subordinated to black liberation and its perceived superior importance, women’s issues have been subordinated to national goals of post-apartheid race reconciliation. I argue the dearth of women’s memorials, after democracy, compared to that of men, indicates more than a mere de-prioritization of women’s issues in favor of race issues, but an erasure that

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28 Coombes, 100.
30 Sabine Marschall, Landscape of Memory Commemorative Monuments, Memorials and Public Statuary in Post-Apartheid South Africa (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), 243.
reflects systemic patriarchal attitudes and structures in South Africa’s government and public culture.

How may we begin to redress the lack of women in public, visual forms of memory? Is it possible to avoid the pitfall of tacking women onto an already existing masculinized perception of South Africa’s past? Does doing this work automatically assimilate women into an existing history, similarly to that of a compensatory history? Or is the presence of women’s memorials, even in a male-dominated milieu, disruptive and transformative? The answer is not so clear cut, and as I hope to show in South Africa’s case, there is much work to be done, calling for a wide variety of tactics and forms of memorialization of women’s activism. I believe women need to be included in the dominant paradigm of memorialization, whilst also challenging it. Ultimately, to many South Africans “the concept of the hero is a very valid and important one,” whereby prestige, heroism, and permanence are respected. We need not break the silence only by accumulating whispers in the face of resounding disapproval, but also by shouting out and demanding to be reckoned with.

31 Marschall, “Commemorating ‘Struggle Heroes’,” 184.
Chapter One

The Long and Steady Erasure of South African Women’s Activism in History

The weight of resistance has been greatly increased in the last few years by the emergence of our women. It may even be true that, had the women hung back, resistance would still be faltering and uncertain … Furthermore, women of all races had far less hesitation than men in making common cause about things basic to them.

*Albert Luthuli 1962*

Remember all our women in the jails
Remember all our women in campaigns
Remember all our women over many fighting years
Remember all our women for their triumphs, and for their tears

*An excerpt from a South African Women’s Day Song*

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Women’s resistance to white minority rule was long-standing, multi-faceted, diverse in its strategy, bold and unrelenting. Women too endured and fought back against male domination alongside their fight against racial domination. Even after gains in liberation were achieved, women had to continue to fight to be visible, for their contributions and achievements to be acknowledged and not forgotten. There are many stakeholders and players in the course of South Africa’s history against apartheid and racial oppression. However, in the telling of this history, women are one of the primary victims of erasure, reflecting their continued struggle against gender inequality even in the post-liberation period. Albert Luthuli’s statement in 1962, while President of the ANC, acknowledges the force behind women’s activism under apartheid rule, especially as women became particularly mobilized from the 1950s and afterward. However, the excerpt from a Women’s Day song that arose during apartheid (date unknown) shows how women have been preoccupied with remembrance. Women had to actively call for visibility that would reflect into the past, even as resistance events were unfolding. The awareness that women had about the need to “remember” what women did came from a long history of the threat and actual erasure of women’s voices, even if they were commended for their actions in the moment. Activism, heroism, and anti-apartheid resistance are central to South Africa’s national identity and coming-of-age in its democratic era, yet women’s activism tends to be brushed over or ignored. This chapter will provide an historical context of women’s activism and demonstrate how this was erased in traditional narratives of South African history.
Women’s Erasure in General South African History Texts

Many women’s organizations, mass women’s demonstrations, individual women’s sacrifices and bravery, and the rich history of women’s resistance are ignored in many versions of South African history.\(^{34}\) This section will demonstrate this bias through the analysis of key historical texts and their reference to women, or lack thereof. For example, William Beinhart is considered one of the foremost authorities on South African history and has written a “textbook narrative” for university students, namely *Twentieth Century South Africa* (2001). Beinhart’s opening chronology unsurprisingly does not list any of the various moments of women’s resistance in the apartheid era, even the popularly well-known 1956 Women’s March,\(^{35}\) which is considered the primary women’s resistance event and is consistently commemorated as such. Beinhart only references women a handful of times throughout his survey of South African history from the 1880s to 2000. Clearly, women’s contributions were not significant enough, in his framing, to charter or alter the course of South African history. Beinhart’s glossing over of this crucial public demonstration and consequential moment is demonstrated by his brief reference to the protest of pass laws and swift progression to explain the laws that were executed regardless. He writes:

> Resentment at the ‘dompas’\(^{36}\) was powerfully expressed in a march of 20,000 women, organized by the Congress-linked Federation of South African Women, on the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956. Nevertheless, by the early 1960s nearly 600 labour bureaux had been created.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{34}\) Unless the history is specifically geared towards South African women’s history.

\(^{35}\) See pages 24-25 for a more detailed description.

\(^{36}\) ‘Dompas’ is the colloquial name used for the pass books black people were forced to carry within South Africa to prove their identity. The pass laws and pass book system were one of the Apartheid state’s primary tools of enforcing segregation, population control and organizing migrant labor.

Beinhart continues to discuss apartheid legislation and does not refer to women again, graciously allowing three lines in his book for this momentous form of resistance. Beinhart, like many authors who lack depth on women’s history, poses the 1956 Women’s March as a failure because it did not stop the government from instituting pass laws for women. By contrast, the March is now popularly considered a successful action, especially amongst those familiar with women’s history. It was a feat for women to organize a peaceful, multi-racial, mass protest of women across the country. Unfortunately, the lasting impact that this resistance event had on subsequent activism in decades to come is lost to any reader engaging with seminal texts like Beinhart’s.

Omissions of key women’s events are present in many historical books. Kathryn A. Manzo’s *Domination, Resistance and Social Change in South Africa (1992)* includes an entire chapter on 1950s activism but only one paragraph on the 1956 Women’s March. The same book also demonstrates the tendency for many historians to attribute anti-pass activism of the 1950s to the ANC, and not the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), which organized the 1956 March and rallied mass women’s support. Even in the discussion of women’s activism, women are denied the recognition of their agency. *The End of Apartheid in South Africa (1999)* by Lindsay Michie Eades similarly excludes women from its chronology. It only mentions women in the form of a select few famous individuals like Winnie Mandela and Albertina Sisulu. These books are a few of many that fail to include significant women’s resistance events, including the 1956 March, the founding and work of different

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women’s organizations and even the acts of famous individual women. Many of these books include a list of abbreviations for a number of different organizations (local and international), political parties, unions, political terminology, youth organizations and councils, yet none of them include any reference to any of the many women’s organizations, including the most well-known ANC Women’s League (ANCWL).

Issues of Narrative: Women in a Chronology of South African History

So often women’s history, if included at all in historical texts, media representations, memorials or the production of other public narratives, simplifies the role of women. Raymond Suttner outlines that some usual arguments tend to pose women as merely having replicated existing patriarchal relations or having performed unimportant roles. These roles are stereotyped as being passive, non-violent, mothering or other supportive roles. Women’s roles were far more complex – women were leaders, successful organizers, and activists for the liberation of black people as well as for women. It is also important to note, as Nomboniso Gasa emphasizes that “there is

39 The following books do not include any reference to women’s organizations in their list of abbreviations: William Beinhart’s Twentieth Century South Africa (2001), Posel’s The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961 (1991), Worden’s The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy. 4th ed. (2007). Deteriorating slightly, R.W. Johnson’s South Africa: The First Man, The Last Nation (2004) has a chronology from 6-8 million B.C. to 2004 and mentions no women or women’s events and lists no women’s organizations in its list of abbreviations. The case is the same for Leonard Thompson’s A History of South Africa (1990). Other books that do not have chronologies or abbreviation lists, like Welsh & Spence’s Ending Apartheid (2011) do not even list women in their indexes, never mind the ANC Women’s League (ANCWL) or any other women’s organizations. Lowenberg and Kaempfer’s The Origins and Demise of South African Apartheid (1998) do not reach any of these benchmarks. Books that do refer to ANCWL and other organizations are usually in seminal women’s history texts like Cherryl Walker’s Women and Resistance in South Africa (1991). Iris Berger, a well-known South African women’s historian, also includes more detailed analyses of women in her more recent general history, South Africa in World History (2009).

40 Even the ANCWL has historically been perceived in relation to and restricted by its role as a “wife” organization to the ANC, unable to impose women’s issues over grander political objectives.


42 Gasa, introduction to They Remove Boulders, xxx.
nothing inherently conservative about women’s defence of their homes and families, especially in the face of the state’s onslaught against them.”

Thus, to progress further in our understanding of women’s participation in the struggle, we must take into account the many varying identities and points of departure of South African women.

A substantial portion of this chapter will entail a constructed chronological history, both to give a holistic understanding of the South African context, and to specifically offer a narrative of often-forgotten key events of women’s activism. I hope to demonstrate how the lack of this inclusion limits the storytelling of history. I further argue that this erasure negates the powerful acts of resistance that women performed, under the guise of a “gender-neutral” veneer present in historical narratives. As a result, we miss the gendered acts and realities present throughout history, limiting the value society places on women and its ability to address issues of gender equality.

**Pre-Apartheid History: Development of and Resistance to Early Racial Segregation**

South Africa has a long history of colonial conquest and racial oppression prior to the institutionalization of racial segregation in the form of Apartheid in the 1950s. From as early as the 1650s, Dutch and British imperialists conquered lands occupied by indigenous groups. In the 1800s, British control over Dutch-settlers led to friction and the founding of an independent homeland in Zulu territory, named the Republic of Natal, by the Voortrekkers/Boers. The British annexed this region, and strengthened

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43 Gasa, xxvi.
44 Because of the limited scope of this thesis, this overview will lack a complex analysis demonstrating the nuances of women’s experiences, daily life and position in society. However, I intend to give a broad overview of events accompanied by key narratives of women’s activism.
its hold over the region with the discovery of diamonds and gold, leading to the Boer War (1899-1902) where the Boers lost but were promised self-rule. The Zulu people, subjected to increasing heavy taxes and control over labor, resisted in the Bambatha Rebellion (1906-1908) but lost. By 1910, the Afrikaners (Boers) negotiated a dominion status, merging the country under the Union of South Africa, which excluded black enfranchisement, political and economic rights.47 The Union segregated land it had dispossessed from indigenous groups, laying the groundwork for almost a century of stripping African’s right to own land and institutionalizing inequity in the country.48 In response, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later the ANC, formed in 1912 and would be integral in achieving the country’s liberation in 1994. The Union was under British control until 1948 when the National Party (NP), an Afrikaner nationalist party, won power and ushered in the era of Apartheid.

This formative period of pre-apartheid history is usually told without mention of any women. Men are the politicians, men fight the wars over land against other men, the founders of the state in 1910 are all men, and the anonymous masses working in the first mines and factories were all men.49 When the SANNC was formed in 1912, politics was a male domain and women were denied membership in the organization, though they were present at its founding.50 Its call for political enfranchisement was exclusively for men, until the 1940s when it included women in its conception of

50 Julia Wells, We Have Done with Pleading: The Women’s 1913 Anti-pass Campaign (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1991), 18.
universal suffrage.\textsuperscript{51} Yet, in the early 1900s, women acted outside of the purview of black male political organizations, sending delegates with petitions against the pass laws to the seat of government in Bloemfontein.\textsuperscript{52} By early 1913, African women’s situation had worsened with more and more women getting arrested under the pass laws. Women organized and powerfully demonstrated their protest to pass laws in the 1913 Women’s Anti-Pass Campaign in the Orange Free State. This campaign was the first national organization of black women outside of traditional political institutions.\textsuperscript{53}

The 1913 Campaign included hundreds of women who marched into Bloemfontein to protest carrying passes, which restricted their movements and made them vulnerable to harassment and assault by policemen.\textsuperscript{54} This march spread into a campaign across other towns in the region and lasted for over six months, while women wrote petitions, tore up their permits, and met with ministers. In response, they were imprisoned, beaten and put their lives at risk.\textsuperscript{55} These women pioneered struggle tactics like refusing bail and denying guilt when imprisoned to protest the cause.\textsuperscript{56} An impressive image (see Fig. 1) from 1913 shows hundreds of women in their head scarfs flooding the entrance to the Bloemfontein Town Hall. This campaign provides an early insight into women’s collectivity and utilization of tools of visibility in their actions, demonstrating their opposition to policy through a public march to a site of official administration.

\textsuperscript{52} Wells, \textit{We Have Done with Pleading}, 18.
\textsuperscript{53} Walker, \textit{Women and Resistance}, 27.
\textsuperscript{54} Wells, \textit{We Have Done with Pleading}, 1.
\textsuperscript{55} Wells, 2.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Amandla! The People Have Spoken}, 5.
While the 1913 Women’s Campaign is sometimes included in some general histories, its overarching omission, as well as lack of comprehensive analysis fails to see the impacts of this women-led event in history. The campaign was an unprecedented collective, public, visible and long-lasting form of demonstration that would influence future women’s participation in the political sphere. The campaign impacted the enforcement and legislation of passes, and women were only forced to legally carry passes over forty years later.\textsuperscript{57} The campaign also made the ANC reckon more seriously with women and resulted in the formation of the Bantu Women’s League (BWL) in 1918. It was the first national political organization of black women, headed by one of South African’s leading women activists, Charlotte Maxeke.\textsuperscript{58} Yet, the League was an auxiliary of the ANC and members were not given voting rights until another twenty-five years down the line.\textsuperscript{59} In the 1940s, the ANC platform was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Wells, \textit{We Have Done with Pleading}, 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Wells, 36. Born in 1874, Charlotte Maxeke was one of South Africa’s first prominent activists and first black woman graduates after studying in the U.S. She also helped organize the 1913 Campaign and was an early writer on issues of feminism in isiXhosa. She has been called the “Mother of Black Freedom in South Africa.”
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Walker, \textit{Women and Resistance}, 33.
\end{itemize}
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overhauled to lay the groundwork for a mass political party and it finally included women in its policy for universal enfranchisement in 1943, whereupon the ANC Women’s League was founded, though still a subsidiary of the ANC.

1950s: Instituting Apartheid and Mass Resistance through Burgeoning Organizations

The NP’s electoral win in 1948 marked the beginning of institutionalized racism under the apartheid system. In the early 1950s, the NP instituted major apartheid legislative acts, including the Group Areas Act, forcing the physical separation of races in different residential areas, the Population Registration Act, creating a national register of recorded races of the population, and the Immorality Act, which outlawed sexual relations between white and non-white races. Gender analysis is crucial in understanding the mechanisms of Apartheid’s policies and methods of control. Controlling women’s bodies and sexuality was at the center of the state’s political concerns, as much of its regulation was gendered as well as racialized. In response to these restrictive laws, the ANC launched a Programme of Action in open defiance of the new government and these laws, which transformed into the Defiance Campaign, in tandem with the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) in 1952. This campaign was well supported by men and women alike, and of different racial groups, which called for the civil disobedience of unjust apartheid laws. Forced removals of entire communities in key urban areas like Sophiatown met much resistance in 1953-1954 before the state violently uprooted its residents. With increased legislation and enforcement, resistance organizations came together in the form of the Congress

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60 Walker, 87.
61 Walker, 89-90.
Alliance and declared a new desired constitution, the 1955 Freedom Charter, at a convention in Kliptown, Johannesburg. The Charter would come to form South Africa’s democratic constitution in 1994. The convention was raided, and many leaders were banned, weakening the resistance movement.\textsuperscript{63}

Many of the narratives of this period focus on the ANC’s Defiance Campaign (although it was part of an alliance) and mass resistance in response to apartheid laws. However, these retellings often exclude key events on behalf of women. The launch of the highly influential FEDSAW took place at the 1954 First National Conference for Women with close to 150 delegates representing over 200,000 constituents.\textsuperscript{64} Women leaders from many different organizations drew up the Women’s Charter, the “first comprehensive statement of principles by the new women’s movement.”\textsuperscript{65} It aligned with the national liberation goals, but also advocated for a change in women’s position in society.\textsuperscript{66} Led by formidable women’s activists and leaders, the organization forms part of a robust legacy of women’s activism and organized one of the largest mass demonstrations in South African history in 1956.

The 1956 Women’s March is “considered one of the most significant examples of multi-racial political solidarity in the history of the struggle.”\textsuperscript{67} Over twenty thousand women marched to the Union Buildings on August 9\textsuperscript{th} with over one hundred

\textsuperscript{64} Walker, Women and Resistance, 160.
\textsuperscript{65} Walker, 157.
\textsuperscript{66} Walker, 156.
thousand signed letters and petitions in protest of the proposal to extend pass laws to women. Large public protests were illegal, and women descended on the buildings despite police attempts to thwart them, and despite an overwhelming lack of male support. Even domestic workers marched with their white employers’ babies on their backs, a visually striking demonstrating the levity of the march. The march was organized by FEDSAW and was led, both literally and figuratively, by a cross-racial alliance of representatives – Rahima Moosa, Sophie Williams-de Bruyn, Helen Joseph and their leader, Lilian Ngoyi. These women marched into the buildings and directly to the office of J. G. Strijdom, Prime Minister of South Africa at the time, but Strijdom refused to face these women. The mass of women addressed Strijdom by chanting and singing, “Wathint’ abafazi, Strijdom! wathint’ abafazi,wathint’ imbokodo,uza kufa!” which is loosely translated to “You strike women, Strijdom! You strike women, you strike a rock, you will be crushed/will die.” The phrase “wathint’abafazi, wathint’imbokodo” and the translation of “you strike a woman, you strike a rock” has become a well-known freedom song and battle cry for women, representative of women’s struggle for liberation through both the words, translation and visual imagery.

Although no one was arrested at the time, the March did not go without consequences. The March formed part of the evidence used in the 1956 Treason Trial that charged 156 leaders in the Congress Alliance of treason. Many women prominent leaders were arrested and detained during this time, and throughout the four-and-a-half-year-long trial, FEDSAW and ANCWL members were vital in organizing support for

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68 Amandla! The People Have Spoken, 5.
69 Amandla! The People Have Spoken, 12.
defendants and their families. This march was one of the biggest marches that had occurred in anti-apartheid history up until that point and is considered a very successful protest. The protest spread to other parts of South Africa including a substantial protest in Zeerust in 1957 which became violent. After this protest, the ANC became cautious about women’s militancy and the associated danger, creating tension between FEDSAW and the ANC. After 1956, FEDSAW had managed to accumulate a striking five hundred thousand anti-pass signatures in preparation for another march. Unfortunately, FEDSAW left the arranging of the date to the ANC to prove FEDSAW’s loyalty, and the march itself never materialized.

1960s: Shift to Tactics of Armed Struggle and Underground Resistance

Despite some key moments of mass protest, apartheid strengthened in the 1960s and extended pass laws to women by 1960. The pass laws were the state’s primary tool to enforce segregation and to combat the political opposition. In continued resistance against these policies, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which had split with the ANC in April 1959 over ideological differences, organized a mass protest at a police station in Sharpeville in March 1960. Between five and seven thousand protestors were present, but the police opened fire and killed 69 women, men and children and wounded an additional 180 people (at minimum), many of whom were shot in the back while running away. In response, the state declared a state of emergency, officially

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70 Amandla! The People Have Spoken, 13.
71 Amandla! The People Have Spoken, 13.
72 Manzo, Domination, Resistance, and Social Change, 185.
73 Lindsay Eades, The End of Apartheid in South Africa (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 15.
banned the ANC and PAC, and detained over ten thousand people.\textsuperscript{74} Because of this brutality and seeming lack of control, South Africa was criticized by the international community but chose to isolate itself, leaving the British Commonwealth in 1961.\textsuperscript{75}

In response to the Sharpeville Massacre, anti-apartheid activists mobilized through increased strikes and stayaways and shifted its strategy from non-violent action to a strategy of armed struggle. The ANC formed its armed wing uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) in 1961, as did the PAC for its wing, Poqo.\textsuperscript{76} Leaders strategized in secret, yet many were caught and detained. Famously, Mandela, Walter Sisulu and seven other ANC members were caught at Lilliesleaf farm in Gauteng and charged with sabotage in the Rivonia Trials in 1964, which ultimately, sentenced them to life imprisonment.\textsuperscript{77}

From the 1963 Rivonia Trials until the unbanning of political parties in 1990, the ANC and other political organizations were forced to go underground and operate outside of the country. This enforced secrecy created a false sense of “lull” in organizational efforts, although this conception has been popularly challenged.\textsuperscript{78} The absence of public political expression and organization has in South Africa’s history been taken to mean an absence of political organization altogether. Public memory of this period appears to solely focus on individual male political activists who were imprisoned during this period, however, many women were also detained and imprisoned. In 1963, a law was passed that allowed for 90 days of detention without trial, under which


\textsuperscript{75} Eades, \textit{End of Apartheid}, 16.

\textsuperscript{76} Manzo, \textit{Domination, Resistance, and Social Change}, 190-192.

\textsuperscript{77} Eades, \textit{End of Apartheid}, 18.

\textsuperscript{78} Gasa, \textit{They Remove Boulders}, xxvi.
Albertina Sisulu was the first women to be detained and placed in solitary confinement. In 1965, the period of detention was extended to 180 days, and the 1967 Terrorism Act allowed for more brutal methods of torture and detention, which many women faced.\(^79\) Amidst a growing body of local and international renderings of the male apartheid prisoners, the woman apartheid prisoner is an alien image for most South Africans.

During this period of repression, men and women canvassed as part of a healthy underground system to keep ANC alive. It was dangerous and lonely work.\(^80\) While the majority of the male leadership of the resistance movement was imprisoned for decades, it was the female counterparts like Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Joyce Sikakhane, Shantie Naidoo and others, who were “stoking the fire, canvassing and rebuilding the organization.”\(^81\) A large part of this decade’s organizing was from a position of exile, where ANC members and soldiers of MK operated in countries like Tanzania and Botswana. Women did reconnaissance work, prepared for male and female soldiers to re-enter the country and provided accommodation among other vital tasks to maintaining the underground activity of the ANC-in-hiding.\(^82\) During the latter part of the 1960s, the influence of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness was becoming more widespread, especially amongst the youth. Black Consciousness was supported by many women intellectuals like Winnie Mandela and Baleka Kgositile.\(^83\) In 1968, Biko founded the South African Students’ Organization (SASO) which would become instrumental in youth organizing and helped fill the

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\(^79\) Light and Johannesson, eds., *The Legacy Series*, 7.
\(^80\) Gasa, *They Remove Boulders*, xxvi.
\(^82\) Gasa, *They Remove Boulders*, xxix.
\(^83\) Light and Johannesson, eds., *The Legacy Series*, 11.
political gap that was created by the banning and exiling of political organizations.\textsuperscript{84} Women like Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, Clarice Dlamini-Zuma, and Sam Moodley were all active and influential women members of SASO.\textsuperscript{85}

1970s: The Emergence of Black Consciousness and Student Activism

The 1970s form some of the more influential years of activism in South Africa’s anti-apartheid history. Set against a backdrop of global recession, increased workers’ riots and protests, the influence of Black Consciousness and a political void waiting to be filled by other organizations, activism increased around the country, especially for women and youth. In 1971 the Black People’s Convention (BPC), of which Steve Biko became its first president, was formed under the manifesto of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). In 1975, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi formed the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) under a Zulu nationalist platform. Importantly, the IFP would form a rivalry against the ANC and had a large presence in Natal. Different students’ organizations were forming as more youth were being politicized, including The South African Students’ Movement (SASM), which formed in 1972. It was inspired by BCM and was geared toward high school students. The Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) was an action committee formed as a branch within SASM, and it was instrumental in organizing the 1976 Soweto Uprisings.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} Manzo,\textit{ Domination, Resistance, and Social Change}, 199.
\textsuperscript{85} Light and Johannesson, eds.,\textit{ The Legacy Series}, 11.
The uprisings and high levels of youth revolt in the decades thereafter were extremely significant events in the trajectory of South Africa’s liberation movement. In the 1970s, an increasing number of “Africans” attended schools with a lack of funding and facilities, which caused high tensions even before the apartheid state ruled that half of the curriculum in black schools were to be taught in Afrikaans. The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1975 fostered further resentment among students and adults alike, who perceived the imposition of “the oppressor's language” as intolerable. Students eventually organized a peaceful protest against the instruction of Afrikaans in their schools on June 16th, 1976. Over 15 000 students marched through Soweto with “Liberation before Education” as their battle cry, which was echoed across the country. Police forces shot at students and several children were killed. The uprising spread to neighboring towns, cities and provinces and by the end of 1976, hundreds of students and youth were killed, and thousands wounded. This period of youth activism is intimately linked, although not always acknowledged, with women’s activism. There was a proliferation of women’s organizations that formed after the 1970s uprisings largely in the form of partner committees.

Repression increased in the post-Soweto period, as the state cracked down on any opposition to the apartheid system. Thousands more people were detained,

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87 Worden, Making of Modern South Africa, 131.
88 Afrikaans is derived from Dutch, and although a large portion of the South African population speaks the language, it was associated most strongly with the white Afrikaner population and the white Afrikaner nationalist government that was in power during apartheid.
90 Worden, Making of Modern South Africa, 131.
91 Worden, 132.
92 Gasa, They Remove Boulders, xxvii.
including children, and they were interrogated, tortured, and even killed in detention. The names of women leaders who were detained and imprisoned during this period are not all well-known. They include women like Jeanie Noel, Sibongile Kubeka, Sally Motlana, Cecily Palmer, Joyce Seroke, Vesta Smith, Jane Phakati, Deborah Mashoba, Fatima Meer, Lorraine Tabane, and Winnie Mandela. Women, many of whom were part of the newly formed Black Women’s Federation (BWF), were detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act and were placed in solitary confinement. Organizations like BWF worked with influential youth organizations like SASO in Durban, responding to key events like the Soweto Uprisings and organizing rallies and meetings. Such meetings resulted in the banning of congregations of more than three people, which further limited people’s ability to organize and ultimately ended the lifespan of the BWF. In a now well-known case, Steve Biko was detained and murdered by security forces in 1977. That same year the BWF was banned in October under the Internal Security Act along with seventeen other black organizations, making it the only women’s organization to be banned in South Africa’s history. In 1978, many leaders of the banned organizations formed the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) under a Black Consciousness and anti-capitalist ethos, and it would continue to be an important political avenue for youth.

In addition to women’s roles in civic organizations like BWF, women were also activists within worker’s organizations. Women were successful activists within the workplace, despite being a small portion of the wage-earning labor force and were

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93 Fatima Meer, Prison Diary: One Hundred and Thirteen Days (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 7.
94 Meer, 23, 211.
95 Meer, 211.
particularly influential in the trade-union movement. Women advocated for worker’s rights despite the worker’s unions being male-dominated and women experiencing sexist treatment. South African trade unions were at the forefront of workers’ struggles, forming vital spaces for the organization of anti-apartheid resistance, especially from the 1970s onwards. Strengthening trade unions and increased workers strikes became more militant with the participation of women who often won demands of higher wages, better working conditions, and maternity leave. Many formative female leaders like Lilian Ngoyi, who helped organize the anti-pass campaigns, were trade unionists. Often women’s husbands would restrict and limit women’s participation in workers’ unions, sometimes resorting to physical intimidation and violence, as women began to bring “the struggle home” after being politicized in the workplace. Women often had the lowest paying, most exploitative and labor-intensive jobs. In such conditions, black women were deeply affected by the ‘double-shift' phenomenon that occurs when women enter wage labor economies, as they usually take sole responsibility for domestic work and childcare.

Notably, this group of women was vocal about women's emancipation not only in the context of the workers' movement but in the larger national struggle for liberation. They were also vocal about the prioritization of women’s issues in the

98 Gasa, *They Remove Boulders*, xxv.
101 Cohen, Muthien and Zegeye, 281.
struggle because they endured the most suffering under the apartheid system. In contrast, most other organizations deprioritized women’s issues in favor of national liberation.102 This vocalization was influential in making a more explicit declaration of support for women among other organizations, including the ANC at a rather late stage.103 With women’s particularly high profile in the national liberation struggle in the 1970s, there was optimism that women as equal agitators in the anti-apartheid movement would receive an “equal place in the post-revolutionary settlement.”104 However, this ideal has not been fully realized.105 Despite the influence of women in the worker's movements, especially from the 1970s to democracy, and despite what is considered a "rich history of documenting" the labor movement, women were again written out of the history. Very little of the documentation of worker’s movements women's experiences, locations, and roles.106 It is, therefore, unsurprising that the history of the worker’s struggle is almost exclusively male.

1980s: Mass Mobilization, Violence, Rise of Unions and Women’s Organizations

The 1980s continued the momentum from the decade before and led to an unprecedented amount of resistance against the apartheid state.107 The United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983. It comprised of an alliance of over seven hundred organizations, forming a majority of the political resistance influence within

102 Cohen, Muthien and Zegeye, 271-272.
103 Cohen, Muthien and Zegeye, 273.
104 Cohen, Muthien and Zegeye, 282.
105 South African has one of the worst gender pay gaps in the world, with women receiving approximately 27% less than a man for the same job.
106 Gasa, They Remove Boulders, xxxi.
The ANC was largely operating outside South Africa at this time, gathering international influence and working from the outside. This period had more violence and unrest than even the 1970s. After intense resistance from 1983-1985, a State of Emergency was instituted in 1985, in which the first eight months, eight thousand people were detained, and twenty-two thousand were charged with political crimes. In 1985, COSATU formed, gaining a lot of traction and influence thereafter. COSATU’s formatted resulted particularly in many workers’ strikes in a struggling South African economy towards the end of the 1980s. Political divides were increasing, which manifested in the widespread conflict between the UDF and Inkatha from 1986-1989. In 1986 pass laws were finally repealed, but national troops occupied township areas under the state of emergency. Clashes between the state and resistance forces were growing more and more violent. In 1988, the UDF was banned. This violent period can be seen as turning point in South African history, as while the apartheid state was repressing revolts in the township areas, it lost its grip on economic and political stability, ultimately resulting in negotiations.

When surveying literature that has been written on the decisive turbulent periods of the 1980s, women are barely mentioned despite their activity and the proliferation of women’s organizations. Fewer than ten of five hundred works on the 1980s period focus primarily on women’s struggles over this period, with the general

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110 Eades, 25.
113 Cherry, 282.
use of gender-neutral terms like "youth" and "people" but no specific discussion of women’s organizations or women within other civic organizations. As such, by assuming that the struggle itself was "gender blind," the distinctions between women's struggles and the national liberation struggle have been consistently blurred.

Women were, in fact, organizing on every level, including many grassroots women’s groups in rural areas that were active on taking up women’s issues in the 1980s. Women in trade unions, community-based organizations, and political organizations formed separate women’s groups to take on their own issues and grew substantially during this time. These included the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW), the Natal Women's Organization (NOW), the Port Elizabeth Women's Organization, and the United Women's Organization (UWCO), all of which grew into substantial organizations and became more militant by the 1980s. These organizations were “autonomous,” led by women and without male control. In addition, it was also difficult to find an anti-apartheid political organization that did not have a women’s wing. The 1980s was a period where women were beginning to take up the “bread-and-butter” issues that women faced and were linking them to issues of national liberation. These organizations’ demands included calls for better wages and working conditions, campaigns against forced removals, childcare, sexual harassment at work, violence, rape, and high rents, a combination of issues specific to women and

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114 Cherry, 282
115 Cherry, 283.
117 Gasa, *They Remove Boulders*, xxviii.
119 Shamim Meer, 119.
those linked to the primary goals of the liberation movement at large.\textsuperscript{120} Women were mothers, as well as leaders and combatants, who worked for the dismantling of apartheid while trying to advocate for women’s issues such as rape and sexual harassment.\textsuperscript{121} Although the ANC had long thought of women as integral to the liberation movement, women worked to redefine within the ANC what that liberation itself could not be achieved without the liberation of women.\textsuperscript{122}

1990s: Negotiating Democracy and Hierarchies in Post-Apartheid South Africa

After decades of resistance, the apartheid regime finally began to crumble. In February 1990, F.W. De Klerk unbanned the ANC, PAC, and SACP and released Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners from prison.\textsuperscript{123} In July, Inkatha formed a political party under IFP, and the ANC suspended its armed struggle that August. Shortly after that, the state repealed a number of apartheid cornerstone legislations including the Group Areas Act, and the Land and Population registration acts. In October 1991, a Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was formed to negotiate South Africa’s new constitution.\textsuperscript{124} Despite these promising interventions, the country was in ongoing turmoil. Kwa-Zulu natal saw some of the highest levels of violence from the mid-1980s and early 1990s, making it an effective warzone in the years leading up to democracy.\textsuperscript{125} Thousands were killed, women were raped, homelessness was prevalent

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\textsuperscript{120} Gasa, \textit{They Remove Boulders}, xxviii.
\textsuperscript{121} Gasa, xxx.
\textsuperscript{123} Eades, \textit{End of Apartheid}, 27.
\textsuperscript{124} Eades, 28.
\end{flushright}
and there were great rivalries between the UDF and Inkatha, which were being fueled by the apartheid security forces.\textsuperscript{126} Whole families were killed by Inkatha members if an individual were found to be part of the UDF. The fear of rape was a serious concern for women during these politically-fueled attacks.\textsuperscript{127} The prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence during apartheid is one of the crucial aspects of women’s history that has been silenced in the post-apartheid era, which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

With the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, the ANCWL was also relaunched within the country’s borders. Ultimately the UDF women’s organization would disband and form part of the Women’s League. This was an attempt to create a unified women’s organization, but it came at the expense of demobilizing and weakening grassroots women’s organizations. This change mirrored the country’s shift on issues at a local to a national level.\textsuperscript{128} The Women’s League ensured that women’s needs were being addressed and taken into consideration during the construction of the constitution. It fought for more women in national leadership and also drew up a charter of women’s rights.\textsuperscript{129} During this time, the Women’s League brought forward a resolution in 1991 that one-third of the ANC executive member should be women, which was much opposed by men. This resistance was one of the first demonstrations that women’s role in the struggle would not be appreciated nor would it directly translate into women’s liberation. Male leaders told women that “women were not ready to lead [and] that there were not … enough … women of leadership quality and that women had to prove

\textsuperscript{126} “We are Dying My Child,” 36.
\textsuperscript{127} Mahadi Miya, “Together We are Strong,” \textit{Speak} 47 (1993): 27, in \textit{Women Speak}.
\textsuperscript{128} Shamim Meer, \textit{Women Speak}, 120.
\textsuperscript{129} Shamim Meer, 120.
themselves.”130 The League fought for this resolution and eventually won it in 1994. However, it was clear that women faced an uphill battle, especially within the ANC.

This difficulty was not only present in politics but was also reflected in trade unions which were preparing to take footholds in the new South Africa and worked to include worker’s rights in the new constitution. By 1990, women’s leadership in trade unions was still very low, and men mainly wanted to “do away with women’s forums, and, in short, did not see “why women should meet separately.”131 It was clear that trade unions like COSATU were not sensitive to gender with regards to worker’s issues, also failing to organize or advocate for domestic workers, farm workers or informal sector workers, where the majority of black women worked.132 While different organizations were organizing to participate in the construction of the new country, violence continued. The Boipateng Massacre of 1992 between Inkatha and ANC supporters threatened CODESA II, as the incumbent government was found to have supported Inkatha and instigating violence during these massacres. Negotiations were delayed and at times broken off altogether until finally an interim constitution was decided. In 1994 South Africa had its first democratic elections with universal franchise and the ANC won power by over a 40% margin.133

A Reflection on Narrative and the Power of Erasure

In conclusion, women’s activism ranged from the 1913 Anti-Pass Campaign, to the founding of the BWL, and subsequently the ANCWL, to creating the Women’s

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130 Shamim Meer, 120.
131 Shamim Meer, 50.
132 Shamim Meer, 50.
133 Eades, End of Apartheid, 30.
Charter, and marching in the tens of thousands to the Parliament buildings, gathering hundreds of thousands of signatures. Women were at the forefront of the Soweto Uprisings, built countless women’s organizations, formed alliances, worked double shifts and circumvented significant hurdles to unionize. Even when they were being tortured, detained, imprisoned, and killed; women were present, active and visible.

Alas, this wide range of women’s activities has been largely written out of major historical texts and narratives about the end of apartheid rule. This silencing has also taken place in material and visual forms of public memory, the cumulative effect of which is to make it appear as if women were not agents of change. Yet, women’s voices alter the way history is narrated. Without women, historical narratives are less accurate – they do not account for women’s influence on social and political shifts, weakening the understanding of how relationships of power play out in society. Nor do these narratives account for women’s power within decision-making structures. Including women’s narratives in history dispels stereotypes and myths, in both the past and the present and hopefully prevents its recurrence in the future. Furthermore, teaching history without being representative of women and their agency disseminates a message, especially to youth, that women are irrelevant and have no import outside of the domestic sphere. The erasure of women in history is one of the necessary strategies to perpetuate patriarchy in society. To negate this, women must be represented, not only as dependent on and supportive of men, but as individual, impactful agents – as the chronology clearly demonstrates. A crucial element of this representation is that women must be made visible, as they once were, in the public’s consciousness and rooted in its memory.
Chapter Two

Rendering the Visible Invisible: From Anti-Apartheid to Post-Apartheid

Women Marching at the 1956 Women’s March in Pretoria
Source: Drum Social Histories / Baileys African History Archive / Africa Media Online
We know women were active participants in the struggle, first and foremost, because they were visible. They were on the streets as well as in their homes and they were on the frontlines and well as holding down the fort. Their faces and bodies were captured in photographs and their actions and gestures were illustrated and published. They took up space in popular media and were called on to unite for liberation. Kim Miller, who has done extensive work on gender and commemoration in South Africa, argues women were not invisible within political or visual culture during the struggle, as images of politically active women were distributed on posters, T-shirts, political journals, murals, photographs, and banners, of both popular figures like Lilian Ngoyi and Charlotte Maxeke, but also anonymous ‘everyday’ female figures. She argues that this rich visual culture has since disappeared and so too has the ability to help create political identities and recognition for women. In this chapter I will delve into visuality as a significant element in contemporary remembrance and history-making, analyzing images of women in anti-apartheid activism and their visual presence before liberation. Using two examples, the 1976 Soweto Uprisings/youth activism and militant women in combative roles, I will demonstrate that women were both active and visible in their acts of resistance despite how events have been remembered and visualized after the fact.

135 Miller, 297.
Visuality in Heritage Production: Why Visibility Is Important

South Africa has a unique emphasis on visuality in history. The apartheid state was purposeful and orchestrated in its control of visuality, constructing specific public images and erasing that which it did not want to be visible. It also used memorialization as a visual tool of hegemony and Afrikaans nationalism, creating its own lineage of heroic figures and Afrikaans nationalism. Similarly, visuality in democratic South Africa became of great import. The new state was required to reconstruct and rewrite old forms of visual narration into counternarratives, creating a national identity in the process. The government, as the producer of the official narrative of South Africa’s past and heritage, has responsibility for the domain of historical production in the public sphere, which entails the defining, representation and production of images that embody the post-apartheid state and its identity-forming past.\(^\text{136}\) Memorialization, commemoration, public memory, and heritage-making all entail acts of visualization. Indeed, much of the heritage production is engineered at the top and disseminated downwards.\(^\text{137}\) In South African’s sphere of heritage, visual histories have been favored over written and oral forms, through design, curatorship, new monuments, museums, and even spectacle.\(^\text{138}\) As such, visualization is intimately linked with visibility, as the apartheid regime’s primary and long-lasting tool of subjugation was the physical spatial separation of the races that literally pushed black people to the edges of society and tried to make them invisible.\(^\text{139}\)


\(^{137}\) Rassool, 2.

\(^{138}\) Rassool, 21.

Visuality in memorialization is also particularly salient in South Africa. Ciraj Rassool describes that as South Africa was in the final stages of achieving its liberation, South Africa’s representation of history in the public sphere took shape primarily as visual forms, and that “tourism, monuments, museums, televisual histories, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been arenas in which histories have emerged, characterized by the 'visuality of the spectacle'.”\textsuperscript{140} The special penchant for visualization of history in South Africa’s case can be theorized as attributing to a few different factors. Arguably, much of the importance placed on visibility and visualization in contemporary South Africa is in response to the complete lack of visibility and active silencing of people under the apartheid state. The apartheid state was infamous for its strict policing of photographic images.\textsuperscript{141} For example, photographs of Nelson Mandela were banned and not published up until 1989. Publications released sketches of Mandela’s possible appearance because he had spent so much time in jail, and no one knew what he looked like. Visualization through photography was a way to transcend the separation of space and to push against this forced invisibility. Photographers who dared to make visual records of the injustices under apartheid were putting themselves at serious risk and had to do so clandestinely. Photography became a form of activism, whereby the photograph could portray realities that were not revealed in the curated, manicured and deceiving television media, newspapers and billboards.

\textsuperscript{141} Wylie, “Documentary Photography in South Africa,” 15.
Thus, visual histories become “revelations of hidden heritage”\textsuperscript{142} that South Africans feel particularly connected to after decades of censorship and restriction. Other forms of protest like mass marches and protests are also visual forms of protest as activists insert their bodies in spaces that signify their oppression or places in which they are not allowed. Mass marches are a form of visual protest that accompanies resistance to a specific law or institution, and one that was used consistently throughout the anti-apartheid movement. Thus, the relationship between visibility during apartheid and the post-apartheid visualization of history takes shape in South Africa’s efforts of memorialization and heritage-making. Visual representations are tangible, subjective, emotive and long-lasting, potentially immortal, expressions of history and identity. Their existence is integral to demonstrating and who and what was present. The visual representations that survive from apartheid are decisive in creating a hierarchy of importance, influencing present-day cultural notions and self-referencing the present to the past. In South Africa’s case, visually present women have since been rendered invisible in the post-apartheid era, which I will show in the remainder of this chapter.

\textit{Genderless Youth in the Soweto Uprisings and Aftermath: Girls Were There}

The erasure of women in the post-apartheid era is particularly evident in the heavily masculinized reflections of the youth uprisings of the 1970s and 1980s, which is considered one of the most violent and turbulent periods of South Africa’s resistance. Rachel E. Johnson makes the argument that "the absence of women from struggle

\textsuperscript{142} Rassool, “The Rise of Heritage,” 5.
histories is not just a banal twist in the historical record but rather an active, contested and ongoing process.”¹⁴³ This manipulation is present in both academic historical writings and popular narratives. It is also noticeable in the visual representations traditionally used when discussing the youth uprisings and have played a vital role in the formation of public memory. Young women and girls were captured in many photographs, showing their visibility as participants and leaders of marches, yet these photographs did not become popularized or heavily circulated. From a visual perspective, in addition to the masculinization of the youth uprisings in historical texts and public rhetoric, these young women have become unknown and no longer visible.

The significance of the 1976 student uprisings and their effects cannot be understated. The Soweto Uprisings caused shock around the country and the world and would be a day remembered in South Africa’s history unlike almost any other. Claim over June 16th became used as political currency between liberation groups and a rallying call for protest and support, especially amongst youth. Youth were particularly militant in their school boycotts and were also a formidable force in policing and enforcing participation in consumer boycotts. They burned perceived symbols and institutions of apartheid and were undaunted in their confrontation with police.¹⁴⁴ The apartheid state was brutally repressive, and violence was an ever-present reality. Violence also pervaded groups from within as youth participated in “necklacing,” where victims perceived as traitors or threats to the community and liberation

movement were burnt alive trapped inside a rubber tire, doused with petrol. In studying this period, the archive shows a continued preoccupation with men. Some of this is attributed to the association between masculinity and violence and the social norm that assumes women to be inherently non-violent.

The term “youth” in reference to this era is often synonymous with young, urban black men and has a number of other connotations that contribute to its construction of social identity. The widespread presence of violence and the association held between masculinity and violence is arguably one of the contributing factors to why women are not perceived as being part of the "youth" in both historiographies as well as the public imagination. This image is, however, false. Women were involved in all form of resistance, including both passive and violent acts, and were at times the leaders and instigators of this violence, a reality contrary to traditional narratives. Belinda Bozzoli’s book Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid (2004) on youth uprisings in the township of Alexander typifies historians’ conflation of youth with masculinity. The 1980s witnessed increasing violence that created the perception that young men were the primary agitators and agents of resistance in this period. The politicization of resistance became ever more influential and the 1980s and its accompanying youth movements became characterized by identity politics and other forms of organization that made it more difficult for women

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145 Straker, 1.
147 Johnson, 19.
148 It is worth noting that Bozzoli’s work on this topic is somewhat anomalous to the majority of her work that centers women within historical narratives or focuses exclusively on women’s narratives.
to be visually present, although not absent, as history suggests. Bozzoli describes that women in the organizing youth groups were placed in secondary roles, perceived as afraid of violence and often staying home from activist meetings because of expected gender roles and their own desire to do so. The image of the youth uprisings in the 1970s and 1980s that Bozzoli portrays is predominantly masculine, and one of violent resistance pioneered and enacted by young boys and men with secondary participation by a few women and the rest remaining passive actors. Bozzoli highlights the gendered nature of the rebellion but does not critique it or analyze it. Indeed, women are incorporated into her text as merely as witnesses or victims. It is a trope that pervades many narratives of this period.

There are, of course, histories written that do draw attention to this blind spot, though they are often in women-specific histories. In Hilda Bernstein’s *For Their Triumphs and Their Tears* (1985), she aims to deconstruct this masculine history:

> It is not necessary here to describe the heroic and tragic events that started in Soweto and spread to towns and townships throughout South Africa but simply to record that girls and women were involved in all phases of the uprising. This was seen in the photographs of the students on their protest marches, with girls in their old-fashioned gym-slips well to the fore; in the number of women held as detainees under the new Internal Security Act; and in the grim evidence of the mortuaries, where parents sought the bodies of their daughters as well as of their sons.

Unless texts are specifically geared towards writing a women's narrative in opposition to traditional history, explicit mentions of young women’s participation in youth revolts are difficult to find. The image of women’s participation painted above by Bernstein is a rare occurrence within general histories and thus is not a popularized image in the

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150 Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs*, 102.
South African consciousness when thinking about this period. Many of the ways that the public forms memory around specific events, especially as substantial time has passed from these events, lies in their visual representations and the visual evidence. Despite there being a large presence of girls and women in photographs from this time, the once visible manifestations of their activism have since been obscured.

The absencing of women in the case of the 1976 Soweto Uprisings is a phenomenon that mirrors South Africa’s creation of memory of the struggle at large, where monolithic narratives of individual heroes are used as the main form of representation in South Africa’s memorialization projects. By far the most famous photo from the 1976 Soweto Uprising is the photograph of schoolboy Hector Pieterson, who was shot by police on June 16th, 1976 during student protests in Soweto (see Fig. 2). Pieterson is being carried by another schoolboy, Mbuyisa Makhubo, alongside Hector’s sister, Antoinette Sithole. This individual photograph, taken by Sam Nzima, has become the representation of the Soweto Uprisings, and arguably apartheid, while Hector Pieterson has become the symbol.

Sam Nzima’s photo spread throughout the world, rallying international support and mobilizing youth and adults alike in their uprisings against the state. It takes its place as one of the fundamental photographs recycled in post-apartheid commemorative media, and as a representation of both the atrocities or apartheid as well as the resistance against it, encompassed in one tragic photograph. In the 1980s, the image appeared on t-shirts, posters, and pamphlets. It has lived on until the present,
reappearing in artworks, memorials, murals, cartoons, June 16th commemorations and as the main feature outside of the Hector Pieterson Memorial and Museum.\textsuperscript{151}

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

Fig. 2. Sam Nzima’s famous photograph of Hector Pieterson during Soweto Uprisings. Source: The Guardian

While the presence of Antoinette Sithole in this photograph may appear to demonstrate girls’ participation in the uprisings, her role is memorialized as sister to the victim and bystander. She is commonly known as being Hector’s Sister, rather than Antoinette. Hector and Makhubo are centered and Sithole is positioned to the side and further back. Because this photo became so popularized over others as a tragic and symbolic representation of apartheid, Sithole and other girls were cast in the public memory as fulfilling secondary roles. However, if one intentionally looks for them,

many of the images of the 1976 events show girls at the forefront of the protests, proving Bernstein’s argument. The images below, which primarily feature girls, are not commonly reproduced and distributed photos and they do not appear in many accounts of the Soweto Uprisings. I accessed these photos solely through an online article by Thando Sipuye called “Herstory: Soweto uprising and the erasure of Black women” (2017). The photographers of these photos are not known, but they demonstrate a clear desire to document and feature these young women as protestors, perhaps with the intention of being published. Because of the overarching influence of Hector Pieterson’s photo, many of these other photos that include and feature girls, are not present in Youth Day commemorations, popular narratives, historical accounts and commonly produced imagery, rendering the once visible, invisible.

In Figures 3 through 7, some of the subjects in the photos are aware they are being photographed, and others are not. Almost all the girls are in their school uniforms and are visible as such because they are wearing dresses and skirts. Some hold peace signs using their hands while others are making fists, signaling the liberation sign of Amandla! (power). Many of them look joyous, happy and passionate to be protesting, while others appear angry, serious or determined. Girls are also holding signs protesting Afrikaans in school and protesting the killings of their fellow school mates. They also implore their parents to unite with the youth. Indeed, many girls are in the front, leading large groups of boys and just as many girls are seen protesting on the streets.

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152 I found it difficult to find a reliable source of many images of the struggle and found the collection of photos from one online article about women’s participation in the youth uprisings. Some of these photos occasionally appear in educational pamphlets.
Fig. 3 Group of schoolgirls posing for the photo with peace and Amandla hand-signs with a “Don’t Shoot” sign in the background

Fig. 4 Young schoolgirl featured in front with girls in background showing Amandla signs with their fists and holding up large protest sign
Fig. 5 Girls in their school uniforms smiling and showing peace signs

Fig. 6 Crowd of marching school children with girls in the front cheering with Amandla! gestures
What the photos do not show, and what is often not remembered is that girl protestors were also killed, some of whose names we will likely never learn. As Thando Sipuye argues in his article accompanying these photos:

There are many distortions in the dominant narratives around the 1976 students’ uprising. One of the most critical of these is the persistent, subtle projection of that uprising as the exclusive initiative of young men, to the complete exclusion and erasure of the invaluable contributions and sacrifices of young women.153

The distortion of the narrative is done primarily through the often-exclusive focus and naming of male leaders of the protest, excluding women’s involvement in organizing and planning the march, as well as the lack of acknowledgment of the women and girls

who were killed or maimed as a result of being protestors.\textsuperscript{154} Sipuye draws attention to the young women protestors’ erasure, identifying that many schoolgirls were shot and killed around Chaiwelo when the uprisings spread to Nghungunyane Secondary School. Their identities remain a mystery to this day. Other girls, like Hermina Leroke who was shot in Diepkloof, are known but remain relatively unknown and unacknowledged, even in the abstract.\textsuperscript{155} Poppy Buthelezi, shot and confined to a wheelchair thereafter, and Phindile Mavuso, who lost her leg during the uprisings, were both featured in the \textit{Sowetan} newspaper after the events, albeit largely positioned as victims.\textsuperscript{156} This type of media attention was, however, limited to the time of events as “the heroism accorded to these young girls in the early 1980s disappeared,” with media focusing on young black men instead. Therefore, even in cases where women’s involvement in history has been documented at the time, women do not gain entry in the public memory of the event.\textsuperscript{157}

Young women during these pivotal times are depicted as innocent, non-violent victims, even though there is evidence of a far more heterogenous dispensation among young women, including those who were instigators and perpetrators of violence that they were expected not to be capable of.\textsuperscript{158} However, the effect of only discussing “youth” in gender-neutral terms has also contributed to the ongoing masculinization of the concept of youth. Women and girls who were present and visible during these

\textsuperscript{154} Sipuye, “Herstory: Soweto Uprising.” Women’s organizations like the BWF were active in supporting the youth after the uprisings. Women also in leadership positions that helped organize the uprisings. Sibongile Mkhabela was an executive member of the SSRC and General Secretary of SASM, who helped organize June 16\textsuperscript{th}.

\textsuperscript{155} Sipuye, “Herstory: Soweto Uprising.”

\textsuperscript{156} Johnson, “Making History, Gendering Youth,” 81.

\textsuperscript{157} Johnson, 82.

\textsuperscript{158} Johnson, 100.
pivotal moments have been subsumed into the genderless youth category and, thus, lost their visibility altogether. As a result, they have remained as bystanders, secondary victims, dealing with the trauma of men and boys who were killed, rather than the activist and hero protagonists that we see them posed as in their photographs. Present in large numbers with their fists high, these girls are evidenced through photography as active participants and leaders in the uprisings. They are not segregated as separate groups of young women but are intermixed and protesting with other students. These images are not memorialized, and they did take root in public memory the same way Hector Pieterson did. Why are they put aside in the narration of this history?

*Militant Women: Forgotten Icons of Armed Resistance*

Women have often been called mothers of the revolutionaries, but women were revolutionaries too. Women of all classes and races, women from urban and rural areas, women from all regions of South Africa played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid.

Shamim Meer

If you were a black South African raised during the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps you would have imagined an uMkhonto weSizwe soldier as a man, but also just as likely as a woman. You might have conceived this idea from the appeals around you for women to join the armed struggle, or from the imagery of militant women on some ANC publications. You were influenced by the rhetoric around you, and perhaps you even knew of some women who had gone abroad to train. However, if you were a black South African raised in the 1990s onwards, it is unlikely you will conjure the same image. Of course, there was no longer an armed struggle, and you weren’t exposed to liberation propaganda. However, you have been taught about apartheid and the armed struggle’s role in defeating it. But, somehow, women and their role as soldiers, once quite prevalent, became scarce. You did not know that women were soldiers, that they were militant, that there were many of them, that they died because of it. You did not know this because women were no longer needed as soldiers in your minds. They confused the story you were meant to be told. Women were not violent, they are submissive; women were not captured, imprisoned or dying for your country, they are too weak for that. This belief harms you, without you knowing, and harms women too.

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One of the lesser known and acknowledged forms of resistance that women participated in, contradicting typical perceptions of women’s resistance, is their role as violent actors and as combative agents in the military struggle against apartheid. Its use as a case study is different to the Soweto Uprisings, which was relatively well covered by media and is well known as a popular resistance “event;” whereas the armed struggle is less linear and far more clandestine. There are a limited number of images and information, much of which has not been popularized through forms of public history like exhibits, memorials, statues, memoirs, and public photography. Thus, iconography in illustrated forms appear to be more ubiquitous than actual images of the soldiers of MK. Women were used as iconographic symbols for the armed struggle, even though they were present as manifestations of those symbols and were captured in many photos that were circulated through liberation publications. In the post-apartheid era, the symbolic use of women as combatants, as well as the abundant photos of militant women, are hard to source and are not visible in present forms of memorialization.160

Many women did, in fact, take up arms, although not only in typical ways. Women were called to join the armed struggle and had been doing so since its inception. The realm of conflict and war is far more gendered than popular and academic literature portray, and as Tanya Lyons writes in Guns and Guerilla Girls (2004), “women have always participated and been affected by war.”161 All in all, the different types of activism that women displayed were varied and often different behaviors could become

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160 Post-apartheid South African society largely pushed against women exhibiting militant qualities, as overtly militant women like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela were vilified for their radical thought and use of violence – qualities men are not as harshly judged for.
blurred in the face of violent upheaval and resistance.\textsuperscript{162} Women were active in many military wings of liberation groups, as many more women were arrested and linked to them by the 1980s.\textsuperscript{163} Siphokazi Magadla writes that some women played “guerilla” roles, becoming combatants under an organization’s military wing and underwent formal military training, often internationally in countries like Swaziland, Angola, Lesotho, and even Cuba and Russia.\textsuperscript{164} These women combatants were often in their teens and early twenties, who joined after the 1976 Soweto uprisings and comprised 20\% of MK by 1991.\textsuperscript{165} Many more women were once active but were overshadowed by MK’s prominence, in other military wings like the PAC’s armed wing, the Azanian’s People’s Liberation Army (APLA) as well as Amabutho, a self-defense unit in Pretoria.\textsuperscript{166} Kim Miller argues that even though there are demonstrated roles that women played in militant activities like MK, “depictions of them are almost entirely absent in post-apartheid visual culture, and in public arts nearly all depictions of MK members are gendered male.” \textsuperscript{167} This gendering has taken place despite women being used in political publications at the height of resistance to rally both men and women’s support. It is a typical example of how women were utilized and visible in iconography as participants but were subsequently rendered invisible when the struggle was over.

\textsuperscript{163} Gasa, \textit{They Remove Boulders}, xxviii.
\textsuperscript{164} Magadla, “Women Combatants,” 394.
\textsuperscript{165} Magadla, 394, 395. These women were often involved in student politics and left the country to join the military struggle in response to police harassment, former imprisonment, and expulsion from school as well as revenge for a family member or belief in the ideology of the mission of the military struggle.
\textsuperscript{166} Magadla, “Women Combatants,” 392.
The visual prominence of militant women is seen clearly in the ANC’s use of photographs of women clearly protesting the apartheid state as well as “the iconography of militarized motherhood to advance its political objectives,” as Miller describes.168 This is evidenced in the use of women as militant mothers, specifically, on the cover of ANC political journal for MK, called Sechaba, and the use of women in imagery and propaganda throughout the decades, positioned as more or less combative depending on the need for women’s militancy. Women and mothers were used as a rallying cry to advance the movement, providing political currency at the time. As Magadla writes, “the family [was] the most effective site of resistance and support,”169 making women necessary participants in the struggle. Miller references Anne McClintock’s words that argue, “women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency.”170 The attention and recognition afforded to women during mobilization against apartheid has not translated into contemporary recognition nor did it translate into guaranteed post-apartheid social and economic rights for women. The politicized use of women as iconographic symbols was perceived as no longer politically relevant. Yet, these iconographic representations were based off real women who were militant and combative, as shown in photographs published in political journals like the ANC’s official political organ Sechaba.

Figure 8 shows the cover of Sechaba in April 1968, featuring a militant mother. The ANC colors – black, green and yellow – are present alongside a large spear symbol.

168 Miller, “Moms with Guns,” 74.
169 Magadla, “Women Combatants,” 397
on the right-hand side. The spear is a symbol of uMkhonto weSizwe, which also means Spear of the Nation, although the woman featured on the cover is holding a rifle with an infant on her back. Here the woman is portrayed as both a fighter and a mother and that she is capable of being both. This visual representation implies that the ANC endorsed and required the support of militant women in the struggle against apartheid.

Figure 9 is another demonstration of the same reference to motherhood and militarism in Sechaba’s August 1969 issue, as the illustration depicts a woman on the left-hand side with a baby in her arms, and the same woman with a rifle in place of where the baby was once held. The illustration could be interpreted as one woman or as two separate women, one who is a mother and another who takes on an equally
important role as soldier, both taking on the symbolism of the “mother of the nation” icon. The ANC relied on women’s participation to win the struggle and thus equated the importance of motherhood with the importance of military struggle and success, implying the one is necessary for the other.\(^\text{171}\)

Figure 10 depicts a younger militant woman in a poster from 1984, the year deemed as the “Year of the Women” by the ANC.\(^\text{172}\) Differing from the late 1960s, the armed struggle was heightened in the 1980s and the country was experiencing very high levels of violence. It is unclear who published the poster, however, the logo appears to be a modified logo using the ANC’s colors, and indicates ’84, which is notable because of the year’s dedication to women. In this poster, the woman is dressed in military-wear with a rifle gun on her back and is holding up the logo above her, as if on a pedestal. The image portrays a woman who holds the liberation cause above all else and who is clearly militant. The poster specifically calls for women to “unite for people’s power,” but dictates that women should take up arms using the imagery of the woman soldier. Figure 11 is another example from Sechaba’s May 1984 “Year of the Women” issue, with a woman foregrounded with a rifle on her back. Notably, the cover is accompanied by text: “The mobilisation of women is the task, not of women alone, or of man alone, but of all of us, men and women alike, comrades in the struggle.”\(^\text{173}\)

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\(^\text{171}\) The August 1969 Sechaba edition, published in honor of women’s month, dedicates August 9\(^{\text{th}}\), Women’s Day, as “Day of Our Women Militants” and includes articles on “Women in the Front Line,” “South African Women in [Jail],” “Our Women at Work,” “And… Those who stay at home,” giving space to varying types and degrees of militant women who were active in the struggle.


This rhetoric appears as an attempt to engender cooperation and unification among the sexes and to normalize the role of women as militant activists. The visual depictions in 1984 are no longer as mothers, but as young women, speaking to the higher numbers of young women joining military wings in the 1980s after the Soweto Uprisings.

There are many examples of visual media, produced either by the ANC or other organizations, that appeal to women to “arise and act!” or to join uMkhonto weSizwe that portray women with large weapons. There is a noticeable trend of photographs with women placing their fists in the air signaling the liberation call of Amandla! As seen in the photos of the 1976 uprisings, young girls and women alike were indeed visually present in their activism that was then depicted in iconographic forms. These
were also published in a politicized, popular publication that was intended to disseminate throughout the black population to rally support for the struggle. Predictably, *Sechaba* featured women on the cover of the majority of their August editions from years 1968 to 1990, in celebration and commemoration of Women’s Day and Women’s Month. However, women were also featured on other months. *Sechaba* featured Albertina on its March 1987 edition holding a sign stating “Victory is Ours” as well its January 1984 edition as part of the Year of Women. A few editions featured key women leaders after their deaths as commemorations. Women were also featured on covers as protesters (May 1987, October 1986 and 1980), as women with weapons (August 1971, January 1969, January 1975, December 1988) and one woman being arrested by a white policeman (March 1979). Figures 12 and 13 show women depicted as militant soldiers from the September 1986 *Sechaba* edition with accompanying text: “Every Patriot a Combatant.”

These women, as subjects in photographs, and not icons, portray to *Sechaba* readers that women are in fact soldiers, alongside men, and fighting for the same cause. They are powerful images that disrupt the traditionally masculine conception of freedom fighters, and they were widely circulated in the 1980s. Any images of women combatants from this period are quite difficult to find in present-times, making it appear as they did not exist or were a rarity. The desire to erase the visual evidence of women’s militancy and participation in the armed struggle alludes to the ways the state limits women’s roles, influencing cultural beliefs that refuse to see women as strong agents.

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This includes Dulcie September after her murder in 1998 (May 1998), Dora Tamana (October 1983), Lilian Ngoyi in June 1980 and August 1982, Mary Moodley (Jan 1980). Winnie Mandela was featured in Nov/Dec 1970 after the banning order against her.
Fig. 12 Photograph of woman soldier with Amandla! sign in uniform on cover of *Sechaba* Sept 1986 edition. Source: *Sechaba*, Digital Innovation South Africa

Fig. 13 Photograph of women soldiers with Amandla! signs in uniform holding posters to free Nelson Mandela. Source: p.9 Sept 1986 *Sechaba*, Digital Innovation South Africa
Denying Women’s Militancy

The acknowledgment of female participation in military resistance is important because of its potential in further legitimizing women’s claims on citizenship rights when liberation was achieved. Tanya Lyons writes that throughout many liberation wars, women’s involvement in war and combat has been “the most obvious way that women can earn their demands for equality of access to the resources of the state.” However, the “alleged gains” that women achieve through their participation in liberation movements have not automatically informed public policy or been reflected in liberated society. The Sechaba cover pages depicting militant women, as well as circulating posters and iconography spanning over two decades, visualized the desire for and importance of women’s participation in the struggle, especially a combative one. Girls and women were on the streets protesting; they were detained, shot and killed; and they joined the armed struggle to become fighters. Women are in photographs signaling Amandla! whilst protesting, donning rifles, and getting arrested, as mothers or not. These photographs were circulated in popular political magazines from the ANC articles and discussions of women’s role and activity in the struggle.

These visual markers have since been conveniently erased and disfavored for a more palatable narrative of the 1956 Women’s March of peaceful women protesting as mothers and wives. Why is this the only event that seems to make it into major histories? One aspect is the cross-racial organization of the 1956 March is compatible with post-apartheid state’s goal of racial reconciliation. Thus, it is a useful narrative for

176 Lyons, Guns and Guerilla Girls, 23.
177 Lyons, xix.
nation-building. However, the peaceful nature of the March, and the visual evidence that was propagated thereafter, emphasized a particularly non-violent association with women’s activism. The elevation of this one event above all other forms of women’s activism portrays the march’s occurrence as exceptional, as a “look what women did too” moment. Thus, the character of the march takes on a “supportive” role within the broader liberation movement and buttresses the overarching historical narrative of women as supporters of male activists.

Yet, evidence shows that women’s militancy used to be encouraged. Women were important enough at the time to be made into icons, to be appealed to and to even be commemorated during apartheid. In the midst of fighting, women were celebrated as militant figures so that the resistance movement could garner more support and inspire other women to be militant. However, the post-apartheid era has purposefully lacked commemoration of both women and militant women. Like the post-war period in many other African states, South Africa has erased once prominent images of women in combative roles. The no longer politically-expedient role of women-as-militant-mothers or combative agents has rendered the roles that women played invisible. This denial of militarism dictates acceptable and non-acceptable behavior of women in post-apartheid society. Women are expected to be non-violent and submissive, even in the face of abuse or marginalization. Post-apartheid society requires women to assume the domestic, supportive and disenfranchised roles they contradicted as autonomous and militant agents of anti-apartheid activism. Once used as symbols and agents for the national goals of liberation, women have been pushed back into the private sphere and out of public view.
Chapter Three

Memorializing Women in a Masculinized Sphere: New and Old Attempts without Coherence

[Monuments] are not an objective means of educating the public about history; they interpret history… they produce, organize and homogenise public memory… Monuments represent what the public values or rather what the public is meant to value.  

Sabine Marschall

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Memorialization is not objective; it is a narrative, a subjective portrayal that the government manufactures, influencing its citizens’ interpretations, identities and values. Memorialization in South African cannot be discussed without discussing gender. Memorialization and heritage became a hot topic from the early 1990s, forming political and social pressure points as South Africa was transitioning to democracy. Yet, we cannot discuss memorialization without discussing gender. As sites were named, sculptures commission, and museums curated, women were systematically written out of South Africa’s past. Where did all the women go? Monuments and memorials specifically dedicated to women are scarce and are far outweighed by commemorative dedications to men.

In recent years, there have been encouraging instances of a changing tide, where women are receiving more recognition and are centered more in discussions of heritage, identity and memory. Still, these changes have yet to be transformative. Set atop a backdrop of masculinized public memory and a struggle for recognition, South Africa’s memorialization of women has moments of insight, inspiration and even the potential to mitigate some of its past erasures. However, these moments still indicate a lack of commitment to women’s narratives in public history. This chapter will explain the historical masculinization of South Africa’s period of memorialization after democracy and provide some key examples through the first national monument to women and its failures. It will then discuss more contemporary examples of the memorialization of women, aiming to demonstrate potential progress and ongoing setbacks that need to be addressed.
The Masculinization of South Africa’s Memorialization

South Africa’s memorialization both reflects and reinforces the validation of certain groups along the lines of race, class, party-affiliation, and gender, as part of the post-colonial nation-building project. Memorialization centers predominantly black, male, ANC activists who were educated. The ANC as the ruling party has shaped the past through deciding who and what is memorialized, and how this is done, to portray a specific narrative. It has shaped memorialization in a way that attempts to erase not only the differences between liberation factions or differing goals of the working and middle class but also the conflict between women’s and liberation issues, continuing to legitimize South Africa’s patriarchy. While each of these exclusions is relevant and intersects with one another, women are one of the most substantial exclusions of the last twenty-five years,\(^{179}\) pointing to one of biggest failings in the post-apartheid era.

South Africa’s primary and paradigmatic apartheid heritage site, Robben Island, erases women by default. Robben Island is infamous for imprisoning Nelson Mandela for over twenty years, during which time it was an all-male prison. It is by far the most famous and internationally recognized site of apartheid struggle.\(^{180}\) In 1998, Robben Island was receiving eighty percent of the government grants for “arts, cultural and heritage institutions.”\(^{181}\) In contrast, there is no well-known and popular narrative of women prisoners during the liberation struggle despite many women being jailed


\(^{180}\) Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 122.

\(^{181}\) Coombes, 118.
and imprisoned\textsuperscript{182} for their activism.\textsuperscript{183} Women suffered and were at risk of the same tortures and dangers as men in prison, and were particularly vulnerable to rape and sexual assault.\textsuperscript{184} In fact, they were generally put into solitary confinement more often than men.\textsuperscript{185} Women criticized the focus on Robben Island as the principal site of memory as it was developing, because of its erasure of women’s roles. Many women had written autobiographies with strong narratives of imprisonment before apartheid had ended. These narratives were available before men’s and were just as prominent.\textsuperscript{186} Yet, only men’s stories of imprisonment are amplified partly through the status of Robben Island.

Attitudes towards women’s imprisonment continue to be dismissive. Thandi Modise, former MK commander, expressed in an interview that “women who went to jail, for some reason, [men] think we chose to fight and go to jail because we are stupid!”\textsuperscript{187} as though women did not have comprehensible reasons for putting themselves at risk of imprisonment. A 1989 FEDSAW report Women in Prison also reported that imprisoned women’s families were not given as much support as men because “it was regarded as unacceptable for a woman to go to prison.”\textsuperscript{188} Dorothy

\textsuperscript{182} Women were usually held in Nylstroom, Kroonstad Prison, Diepkloof Prison, Boksburg, “Sun City” Johannesburg Prison, with the largest one being the Pretoria Central Women’s prison.

\textsuperscript{183} The only, although not comparable, exception to this is the stories of women’s imprisonment at the Women’s Jail at Constitution Hill.

\textsuperscript{184} When I asked the tour guide (a woman) at the Constitution Hill whether the treatment of prisoners in the women’s jail was similar or different in any way to the treatment of prisoners in the men’s section, the tour guide responded that she thought the treatment of women was worse in the women’s jail.


\textsuperscript{186} Coombes, History After Apartheid, 105.


Nyembe was sentenced to ten years imprisonment at Kroonstad prison at the same time as the famous Rivonia trialists. Yet she received little recognition for her suffering. This attitude towards women’s imprisonment has bled its way into the country’s commemorative efforts, disregarding this integral part of women’s struggle experience.

At the very moment South Africa emerged into its era of democracy that women fought so hard to achieve, women were already made invisible through a complete lack of recognition in the first years of South Africa’s commemorative projects. This exclusion was not for lack of ideas or proposals. In December 1995, there was a proposal to replace seven busts of former prime ministers and apartheid leaders with sixteen portraits of women activists like Lilian Ngoyi, Albertina Sisulu, Helen Joseph, and Winnie Mandela from their site at the parliament buildings in Cape Town. However, their portraits were only temporarily exhibited. Memorials dedicated to the women of South Africa were proposed as part of the twenty memorial proposals suggested to the Legacy Project. This project included the establishment of “new and diverse” monuments, museums and commemorations under the National Legacy Committee. The National Monuments Council (NCM) campaigned for inputs from citizens in the “national programme to honor the founders of democracy.” Individual male leaders were singled out and memorialized through statues or museums of their
old homes. This focus on individual male heroism is a landmark of South Africa’s memorialization project and continued into the 2000s.

**The National Monument to Women: A Failed Monument**

Only in August 2000 was the first national monument to women unveiled in commemoration of the 1956 Women’s March, an advent which many perceive as a ‘turning point’ in the liberation movement.\(^{193}\) Containing different formal components, its primary feature is a sculptural element of an imbokodo, a large grinding stone for grinding maize, placed at the center of one of the more prominent spaces in the Union Buildings in Pretoria,\(^{194}\) where the 1956 March took place.\(^{195}\) (See Fig. 14) The Union Buildings in Pretoria have historical import, serving as the site of the official seat of Presidency and South African government, which remained as its function in the post-apartheid era. A beautiful and poignant site, the presence of a women’s monument within an historically male, white political institution carries significance. It is also noteworthy that the monument sits in the same space that Nelson Mandela took his inaugural oath of office. The monument was designed as part of a 1998 national competition by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) to commemorate the 1956 Women’s March. It was intended to be a “significant visible tribute to the women of South Africa,” of which it is safe to say it has failed at.\(^{196}\)

It was unveiled on Women’s day, 9 August 2000 by Thabo Mbeki. Its

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\(^{193}\) Coombes, *History After Apartheid*, 114.


\(^{195}\) Coombes, *History After Apartheid*, 108.

\(^{196}\) Miller, “Selective Silence,” 296.
commission was South Africa’s first national attempt to recognize women within the
d public sphere and the first national commission of public art.197 Over 50 proposals were
submitted, and the project was won by Wilma Cruise and Marcus Holmes, who created
the imbokodo sculpture as part of an interactive monument experience.198 The
imbokodo rests on small bronze base atop of a set of stairs whose risers have raised
steel phrases taken from the petitions delivered by the women marchers. They read,
“We came from the cities and the towns, from the reserves and from the villages as
women united in our purpose to free the African women from the degradation of
passes.”199 The installation also features an audio component; a recording plays
women’s voices chanting the famous phrase “Whathint’abafazi Wathint’imbokodo
Uzokufa” in South Africa’s eleven official languages.

Fig. 14  Photo of main feature of the Monument
to the Women of South Africa, an imbokodo or
grinding stone. It sits in an amphitheater in the
Union Buildings. Source: Wilma Cruise
Website, 2000.

197 Miller, 296-297.
198 Coombes, History After Apartheid, 111. The application process was hampered by the ability of
applicants to gain access to the site online or physically? Were proposals excluded economically? to see
where the monument that they were designing would be positioned. Some artists gave up on the proposal
because of this difficulty.
199 Coombes, 108.
Up until 2016, it was the only commemorative site dedicated entirely to women’s apartheid-era political efforts. (Although, as I will come to discuss, no monument to the women of South Africa is fully functioning or accessible as I am writing this.) However, despite the significance of the event which is being memorialized and its rarity within South Africa’s collection of liberation monuments, the Women’s Monument is virtually impossible to visit. Access to the monument for the public is closed. Thus, despite its presence as a feminist monument, its invisibility to the public eye undercuts the purpose of the monument and reaffirms the state’s dismissal of women’s contribution. Miller argues that not only does this inaccessibility trivialize the political significance of the 1956 Women’s March, but it is “also a distressing act of post-apartheid erasure of women’s political agency.” Considering women’s exclusion in post-apartheid commemorative sites, the invisibility of this site further impacts women’s ability to engage and be active in political life.

Other academics who have written about this monument have had similar difficulty accessing the Monument to the Women of South Africa. Those who intended to visit the site have described the process as extremely laborious and have had unpredictable experiences trying to view it. Despite its status as “public” monument, Annie Coombes was required to apply for ministerial approval through DACST to view the monument. Receiving this sort of permission is not something an average South African or tourist would be able to receive. Even the creator of the monument, Wilma

201 Miller, 295.
202 Miller, 295.
203 Coombes, History After Apartheid, 110.
Cruise, was not able to view her work for eight years after its unveiling, because of the inaccessibility of the Union Buildings.\textsuperscript{204} Miller was only able to visit with Wilma Cruise in 2008 upon receiving written permission from DACST and the Office of the President. These women still found it a struggle to finally access the monument and to prove their legitimacy. Miller describes that there “is, in fact, no reliable process for gaining access to this section of the Union Buildings, or to the site of the Monument.”\textsuperscript{205} Furthermore, if somehow visitors are allowed access, they are not allowed to take photographs. This rule exacerbates the problem of visibility as there are very few images of the monument, resulting in the same few images being recycled to represent a public monument that no one can visit.

For those able to access the monument, through special request and persistence, observed that the monument has been tragically ill-maintained and neglected. It needs restoration and is no longer equipped with the full ensemble of its exhibition, which included lighting and sound clips of women’s voices. The audio installation was reportedly moved within a year of the monument’s unveiling because of complaints from employees at the Union Buildings. While Annie Coombes was able to negotiate to have the full elements of the installation functioning during her visit, Miller witnessed the monument more in a state of decay. She writes:

\begin{quote}
A few individual letters had come loose. When we reached the vestibule and the imbokodo, its bronze base was rusted and in clear need of renovation. Furthermore, the lights and sound of the women’s voices had all been turned off, with silence now filling the empty space.\textsuperscript{206}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{204} Miller, “Selective Silence,” 309.
\textsuperscript{205} Miller, 308-309.
\textsuperscript{206} Miller, 309.
\end{flushright}
The deteriorating state of the monument and its apparent complete lack of accessibility not only undermines the value of the monument as one that recognizes women but also demonstrates some of the underlying attitudes within the government about women. Demonstrated here is an active silencing or literal “turning-off” of women’s voices, tangibly evidencing the erasure of history that happens on a national scale.\textsuperscript{207} Sabine Marschall describes the monument to women as playing

\begin{quote}

a token role in a national context of memorialisation heavily skewed towards the enshrining of a patriarchal ‘ancestry’ and masculine value systems, despite the South African government’s professed commitment to gender equality.\textsuperscript{208}
\end{quote}

If the state’s approach to women reflected its public rhetoric on women’s issues, not only would there be more than one monument to women, but it would be both maintained and accessible to the public.

Having read these other disappointing accounts of researchers’ attempts to visit the site, I too embarked on a journey to see if I could visit the only monument to women in the new South Africa that I knew of. The Union Buildings are formidable in many aspects – it sits atop a very steep hill that overlooks the city of Pretoria. It has a large center flanked by two massive wings with domed towers sticking out and columns supporting the structure, creating an over 200-meter-long sandstone building. The complex has perfectly manicured gardens and tall bronze statues atop towering pillars, creating an overbearing sense of authority, prestige, governance and officialism but also imperialism, wealth and unapproachability. I visited a side of the buildings not often featured in photos which show even more features of inaccessibility.

\textsuperscript{207} Miller, 309.
\textsuperscript{208} Sabine Marschall, \textit{Landscape of Memory}, 17.
I entered the only obvious entry I could see, obstructed by security guards and police officers. No part of my presence seemed normal to myself or the officers at the gate and an atmosphere was present from the beginning that dictated I was very unlikely to proceed from the point in which I was standing. I engaged in conversation with the women officers who were sitting behind the official desk and told them that I wished to see the Women’s Monument inside the Union Buildings. They looked at me with confusion and were not aware of what I was referring to until I described the monument as an imbokodo. With this description they realized what I was referring to and laughed. I was not allowed access to that part of the buildings. I tried to emphasize that it is supposed to be a public monument and thus open to everyone. The one officer called over her shoulder at one of the male guards to check and it was confirmed that it was laughably impossible for a citizen to gain access to the insides of the buildings to see this monument. The fact that I, as an intended visitor, could not visit the monument freely was disappointing, but even more so was the failure of the monument’s ability to commemorate and make women’s contributions known. The young black women working at the Union Buildings appeared to have no knowledge about what the imbokodo symbolized, unaware of its potential connection to their lives.

Formal Questions in Memorializing Women at the Women’s Monument

The monument was not warmly received all around, as critics did not agree with the imbokodo as a form of representation. The imbokodo, as a grinding stone and rock traditionally used to grind maize, a staple in women’s production of food. Some critics favored the imbokodo as a choice of representation because it “acknowledges that the economic and political challenges faced by women frequently differ from those faced
by men and that there may be gendered issues that compel women to activism.²⁰⁹ In other words, the reference to women’s historically gendered role as domestic caregiver and sustenance provider cannot be separated, nor negated, from women’s activism. Miller also argues that the rock offers connotations of physical power, women’s militancy and their potential for violence,²¹⁰ alluding to the famous women’s liberation phrase, "you strike the woman you strike the rock."²¹¹ The imbokodo embodies the gendered work of women’s labor, inviting visitors to kneel beside the grinding stone.²¹²

This symbolic form also made specific reference to rural women, who are often forgotten but key actors in the resistance against apartheid. They also still bear the brunt of poverty in South Africa today. However, these references also provoke a timelessness towards women and their work; that women are somehow memorialized through a no longer representative form of technology and are perceived through their domestic roles and not also as primary agents or as militant women, for example. This form of representation risks further exclusion of women from the political sphere in the public’s imaginary. Thus, it might not be the most effective choice of representing women for the specific purpose of commemorating the 1956 Women’s March, a very political, organized, and autonomous vanguard event in history.

One of the central questions raised (which the designers of the monument asked themselves) was: when trying to resist the common “heroic” monument which is so prevalent in the rest of South Africa’s memorialization, does this not “cheat” women

²⁰⁹ Miller, “Selective Silence,” 301.
²¹⁰ Miller, 303.
²¹¹ Miller, 303.
²¹² Coombes, History After Apartheid, 108.
out of their heroism? The monument lacks the invocation of actual women leaders. When men leaders are celebrated through grandiose, figurative, elevated, large statues, does a proportionally small, de-elevated abstract monument have the same effect for women? The imbokodo grapples with trying to create a “feminist heroism” that differs from typical masculine expressions in a context where there is such a lack of female heroic iconography. As Miller argues, the absence of heroism in this monument “naturalizes the idea that women do not inhabit history as agents, and makes it easy to disconnect women’s accomplishments from historical progress or political achievement.” The disadvantage, however, of creating a popular heroic woman icon is that it erases a more holistic and complex history. As Marschall writes, “Monuments… tend to shy away from ambiguity, preferring instead to ‘fix’ meaning (using images and text)… [and] to cast one version of history in stone or bronze.”

Thus, the Women’s Monument attempts to push back against this drive to create a simple, digestible narrative, to lift certain individuals above others in their struggle, and thus “compels us to enlarge our own understanding of heroism” to the everyday person or woman. However, I would argue that this approach jumps the gun, so to speak, as women have yet to even take a nominal place in the overarching narrative, which is so dominated by individual stories of heroism. In a country that is almost deaf to women’s voices, it is required that memorialization of women is shouted out and made clear, rather than being hidden in obscure locations in abstract forms that only

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214 Miller, 306
215 Miller, 306
216 Miller, 307.
National Monument to Women 2.0: Another Failed Monument

Regardless of the favored interpretations of its formal symbolism, the nuances of the Women’s Monument are lost because of its inaccessibility. The monument cannot serve its purpose as a tool for public education, commemoration, and remembrance, nor can it effectively inform the shaping of the county’s identity because it is ostensibly closed to the public. The story does not end here, however. In response to some of the criticisms of the form of the imbokodo as a monument and its lack of acceptance from employees within the building, another artist’s work was chosen to form another monument to women. This new monument was to be placed in a fully accessible part of the Union Building grounds. This development presented a possible opportunity to redeem some of the more upsetting forms of neglect and indifference displayed towards the initial monument. This time with greater access to the public, the new monument was also intended to be a permanent national tribute to women’s role in the struggle, just like the previous monument.

The selected artist was a Venda-based artist called Noria Mabasa, who designed a monument that also appeared to tactfully navigate some of the contradictions presents

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219 The monument also has a very thin online presence. It is difficult to find information about it as any search for information is overbear by the National Women’s Monument/Vrouemonument in Bloemfontein (created in 1913 to honor 27 000 Boer women and children who died in British concentration camps.) This pre-apartheid era monument has far more notoriety and public awareness than any other post-apartheid monument that has been created for South African women. As such, there is also confusion around the naming of the monument, as it is referred to as the Pretoria Women’s Monument, the Women’s Monument and the Monument to the Women of South Africa.

220 Miller, 308.

221 Miller, 310.
in the gendered form of monument-making. Mabasa had made the piece in 1999, which took nine months to carve and a further five months to sand down and was purchased in 2002 by the government to place at the Union Buildings.\textsuperscript{222} Mabasa’s piece is a massive, detailed, carved wooden sculpture depicting a crowd of fourteen women gathered and marching, speaking or singing, with some holding banners.\textsuperscript{223} It is carved on all sides, forcing the viewer to walk around it to understand the full story, which includes references to discarded passbooks and includes a solitary man separated from the women of the sculpture, running away. This is a clever reference to the many male figures captured in photographs of the 1956 Women’s March that were passive and disengaged observers.\textsuperscript{224} Mabasa also includes the names of the four female leaders of the march, to acknowledge their leadership, but chooses not to elevate them above the other marchers. Thus, both these types of monuments “rejects hierarchy” and attempts to embody the broad-based spirit of the Women’s March.\textsuperscript{225}

In the presence of many other white male statues of “great men” that are dotted around the Union Buildings, these two monuments would have been transformative disruptions of these masculinized political spaces. However, neither of these monuments have been accorded their due. Mabasa’s sculpture was moved offsite not too long after it was placed. It was deemed “too difficult” to conserve and “too big” for the Union Buildings. There was no explanation as to why these were problems in the first place. As Miller asserts, without it “there is no visual trace of women’s

\textsuperscript{223} Miller, “Selective Silence,” 310.
\textsuperscript{224} Miller, 311.
\textsuperscript{225} Miller, 311
intervention, no visual markings of that particular historical moment.”  

Miller has attempted to track down Mabasa’s statue, which proved very difficult and disheartening as most people had not heard of its existence. Tragically, and very tellingly, in 2009 the sculpture was housed at the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria, not part of any exhibition or curatorship. It was placed in the back of the museum with no label, or information to explain its creator or meaning, and is almost entirely concealed by other works and exhibitions. The failure of not one, but two, attempts at a national monument to women’s role in the struggle that resulted in neglect and acts of removal or rendering invisible, demonstrates the pervasive attitudes towards women. Women’s roles are not merely overlooked or forgotten but actively obscured, hidden, and concealed in the inaccessible lofts of a state building or the warehouses of an unfrequented museum. Thus, despite what these monuments are meant to symbolize and represent through their honoring and commemoration, they are unable to remain permanent, seen or heard.

*Women’s Memorialization Update: Contemporary Projects and Their Effect*

The active erasure of women’s participation in the struggle, and thus their erasure as political agents and legitimate citizens, demonstrates that the construction of South Africa’s national identity has been an oppressively patriarchal project. The absencing of women from public memorials, monuments, and commemorative efforts is a form of symbolic violence that the state enacts on women, despite the government’s rhetoric supporting and acknowledging women. It demonstrates a lack of investment in the

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226 Miller, 312.
227 Miller, 312.
women of South Africa. Is more recent rhetoric around key women figures a sign of progress or more lip service? Are recent projects around women’s activism a sign of change, and if so, are they doing enough to rectify the imbalance and past erasure of South African women? Why did the transition moment not bring liberation for women as they had hoped and why won’t South Africa remember its women?

In my attempt to assess these questions, and to see what the status of women is in South Africa’s memorialization project, I returned home to South Africa and ventured on an apartheid sightseeing journey. In my research, I attempted to visit some of the sites in primary metropolitan areas that represented in some form, the memory of anti-apartheid activism and resistance. I was ultimately concerned with specifically state-sponsored and supported attempts at the historicization of the struggle and its relationship to contemporary democratic South Africa. I visited various accessible and well-known sites where many tourists, school trips and South Africans might frequent, in the form of memorials, monuments, and museums, and took note of any street name changes. Thus, I visited accessible sites that could be found online and were part of the explicit representations of South African history. I chose not to explore the decentralized, more hidden and perhaps nuanced forms of a city’s grappling with the past. I wanted to analyze memorialization from the point of view of a person who would either have engaged with it by choice, out of interest, or would be exposed to it through a manner of living and existing in a place that has a history.

I choose to focus on a few key sites that I visited in Johannesburg, to provide depth of analysis and because they demonstrate positive counter-examples of women’s visibility that did not exist in the early 2000s. They, however, also point to the ways in
which the government is still failing to prioritize and represent women’s experiences. Historical narratives that center women are still compromised by monuments and memorials that abstract women in disorganized and incoherent representations.

A New National Monument: Women’s Living Heritage Monument

Prior to visiting South Africa, my online research had shown promise of a possible second national monument to women that was not widely publicized but that I had only seen in a handful of images on a few websites. These were published in a small group of online articles during August 2016, which is Women’s Month in South Africa, and happened to be the sixtieth anniversary of the famous 1956 Women’s March. The government held an event on Women’s Day, the 9\(^{th}\) of August, at the Lillian Ngoyi Square\(^{228}\) in Tshwane, Pretoria to unveil the “Women’s Living Heritage Monument.” (WLHM) It was attended by several key political figures, including then-president Jacob Zuma and vice-president, now incumbent President Cyril Ramaphosa. Women struggle stalwarts and even marchers from the 1956 March were present.

The online articles represented a somewhat ambiguous description of what the WLHM, in fact, was, noting that it “told” the story of the Women’s March or “commemorated women’s contribution to the liberation struggle” while describing the four statues that were present in the images.\(^{229}\) From the images, it appeared that the monument primarily took the form of four life-size bronze statues of the four leaders of the 1956 Women’s March: Lillian Ngoyi, Sophia Williams-de Bruyn, Helen Joseph

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\(^{228}\) This square was renamed from Strijdom Square to Lillian Ngoyi square on 9 August 2006, on the 50\(^{th}\) anniversary of the 1956 Women’s March.

and Rahima Moosa. (See Fig. 15 and 16) The statues were raised a few inches off the ground on individual astro-like grass platforms. The statues were no doubt modeled after a famous set of photographs of these four leaders each carrying a large stack of petitions with signatures of tens of thousands of women throughout the country who opposed the new pass laws restricting their freedom and movement in 1956. All women of different races, the bronze statues color these leaders’ skin to the same dark bronze hue yet feature color in the replication of each woman’s unique outfit that they wore on that historical day. The homogenization of race aligns with the post-apartheid non-sexist, non-racial narrative of unity espoused by the government, but also seems to erase the cross-racial alliances that women’s activism was often attributed with pioneering. The statues are placed side by side, marching forward, each with their right arm raised with their thumbs up, a creative twist on the historical photo.

Firstly, this type of conventional representation of women figures as bronze, life-size statues is scarce among the many statues and monuments dispersed throughout South Africa. In South Africa’s history of memorialization, there is a considerable disparity between the representation of men and women in the forms of monuments
from the past several hundred years up until today. Within the very few examples of women’s representation in the post-colonial era, it is far more common to see women represented in abstracted, symbolic, non-human forms than physical embodiments of the person or people being honored. This is typified by the imbokodo used to represent women at the first National Monument to Women at the Union Buildings. Other examples of these abstract monuments are ones dedicated to figures such as Cissie Gool, Lilian Ngoyi and Ingrid Jonker. Thus, the creation of four life-size figurative bronze statues, and not abstract forms, of these women is progressive.

However, I was disappointed to visit the site in person at Lillian Ngoyi Square to find that the statues were no longer on display. I also came to learn, somewhat as a pleasant surprise mixed with some disappointment, that the WLHM did not just consist of these four statues but was a much larger project encompassing a women’s museum solely dedicated to the efforts of women in the struggle against apartheid. It is described by one of its developers on its website as “the first institution in the world devoted to women’s role in the history of the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa and Africa.” The prospect of a museum dedicated to women’s activism appears to be a dramatic shift from a history of marginalizing women in South African history. However, information on the project is scarce. Its expected completion date, who is ultimately responsible for the site as well as how it will be promoted to a broad spectrum of South Africans is either vague or undetermined.

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Available information shows that the WLHM was commissioned by the Gauteng Provincial Government’s Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation in early 2014. Although its intended timeline for the project is unavailable. A company called Koketso Growth, a “cultural heritage and tourism specialists” company that claims to be “currently leading South Africa’s most prominent heritage and tourism initiatives,”\(^{232}\) won the bid to design, commission, develop and install artworks for the women’s monument. There are conflicting dates as to when the monument is set to be open officially on Koketso’s website. However, Koketso provides links to news publications on the “unveiling” of the monument and has a media piece that makes it appear as if the WLHM was completed and unveiled. It appears that the construction, development, and curation of the monument (including a museum) is an ongoing process. It has also been used as a site of commemoration for women in both 2016 and 2017, despite the museum still being unopened.

A separate company, the “Library Special Projects” (LSP) won a bid to design and build “the permanent large-scale exhibitions,” a visibly vital component of the success of the museum portion of the monument.\(^ {233}\) LSP has a video on its website showcasing a brief and somewhat abstract introduction to the museum. Accompanied by audio and visual material of women in the struggle, the video shows one of the primary museum installations in-progress. It showcases a massive structure made out of twenty kilometers of rebar steel, reaching the high ceiling and forming an overbearing cage-like structure. The purpose or context of the structure is difficult to

\(^{232}\) Koketso Growth (Website Homepage), www.koketso.co.za, accessed February 2, 2019.
garner from the video, making it currently undetermined as to whether it will be another abstract representation or transformative use of museum space. At the end of the video, it is written that the WLHM would be open at the “end of 2018.” Judging from Koketso Growth’s past project of a famous nine-meter tall statue of Nelson Mandela, and LSP’s more than two dozen other heritage and memorial exhibitions at well-known sites, the potential for this new women’s monument seems immense. Yet, its effect is diluted by the apparent lack of information and further inaccessibility of the WLHM, marked by further examples of erasure even within this attempt to acknowledge women.

When I visited the site at the very end of December 2018, it appeared that the WLHM was still some time from opening. The entire area was fenced off and there were no statues in sight. The positioning of this site has an overall positive effect by placing itself at Tshwane’s city center, where many average South Africans traverse. However, because it is still unopened, the property and large courtyard area are fenced off with expensive gating and monitored by two security guards. The statues are not on display for the public to see in the interim. The intended purpose of the project is still disconnected from the public as a result. Even after sending emails and trying to talk to individuals about the timeline of the project, I have not been able to find a reliable source to determine the reasons for the delay or the expected opening of the WLHM. These circumstances indicate a lack of public input and transparency about the project. I only understood the real function of the monument once I visited the site and could not garner this information from the sources accessible online. Whether or not state bureaucracy is to blame for the ongoing delays and inactivity, it does indicate a lack of
prioritization on behalf of the government departments responsible for the WLHM and a lack of prioritization of women’s memorialization.

The optics of the WLHM have thus far reproduced some of the historical failings of women’s memorialization. It seems that women’s monuments are never guaranteed the same permanence and stability that should and generally do accompany monuments, especially bronze statues, of men. The annual display, and subsequent removal, of the statues on women’s day to an unknown date or location, mirrors the lack of visibility and erasure that women are afforded for the majority of the year until an annual women’s “day” or “month” takes place. The process of making these women statues physically visible at certain important moments, where it can garner media and publicity, and then to actively remove them, demonstrates the symbolic relationship of the state to women in public history. Also, these statues were once visible in a site that remains inaccessible and partially hidden. The effect is the insecurity of women’s place in history, as even the process of immortalization through statue-making is not equal to the process for men.

The WLHM is also advertised as a multi-use space where it is used not only as a museum and a monument but also as a site to “provide space for formal training for women [and] to provide market access platform for local crafters.”234 Ostensibly, the multi-faceted purpose of the space might be appealing in its ability to connect to real women in their everyday lives and be of more use than just a place of remembrance. Nevertheless, this collation of uses also speaks to the lack of spaces that perform these individual functions for women as well as the state’s attempt to use the WLHM as a

“one-stop shop” for South African women. The WLHM is a home for a monument of statues to women in the 1956 Women’s March, but it is also a museum about South African women in the struggle, as well as a space to provide local employment for women, and a space to build community and provide training for women. Through the lumping together of these different purposes, the overall effect of each becomes diluted.

Overall, the WLHM is a first of its kind and has immense potential to be a world-class museum and place of remembrance for South African women. It represents progress in the representation of women in South Africa’s historical narrative and the state’s investment in acknowledging women in more figurative, less abstract forms. Yet, this promise is countered by its uncertain fulfillment. The WLHM demonstrates ongoing issues of inaccessibility, invisibility, and incoherent narratives of women.

Constitution Hill: A Lack of Overarching Cohesion in Women’s Narratives

The successes and failures of the WLHM are somewhat mirrored in the representation of women at Constitution Hill, one of the primary sites of apartheid memory in Johannesburg. It was a former prison and military fort and is also home to South Africa’s highest court, the Constitutional Court – bridging both the past and present as part of a “living museum that tells the story of South Africa’s journey to democracy.”

The grounds of the Constitutional Hill are vast, as it houses not only the Constitutional Court but its key locations: the Old Fort, Number Four (prison quarters for black male prisoners) and the Women’s Jail, which are all sprawled across the hill. In between these smaller sites, there are different sculptures, mosaic artworks, murals and other

remnants of the site to be felt, walked through and experienced. It is one of the more accessible iconic apartheid history sites due to its location in Braamfontein, Johannesburg’s city center. It is also accessible via foot and public transport, and its free cost to visit most of the site. The site once held an unmatched number of incarcerations of famous liberation leaders including Nelson Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Fatima Meer, Mahatma Gandhi, and Joe Slovo. Tens of thousands of additional prisoners were kept at one time or another, serving time for various crimes or as political enemies. As stated on its website, during Constitution Hill’s 100-year history, the site housed “men and women of all races, creeds, ages, and political agendas; the indigenous and the immigrant the everyman and the elite. In this way, the history of every South African lives here.” Most importantly, it houses the Women’s Jail, one of the country’s first successful contemporary memorialization to women and one of the only sites to memorialize women’s jailing, torture and gendered violence that women were subjected to.

Considered part of the post-apartheid symbolic reparations, Constitution Hill is paid for by public funds and was developed by the City of Johannesburg’s Development Agency (JDA) in collaboration with Gauteng province as part of the national Legacy Project. The museum has received various awards and was named a National Heritage site in March 2017. It receives at least 11 000 visitors a month, the

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239 King and Flynn, “Post-Apartheid City,” 72, 71.
most substantial proportion of which is organized tours of school children. It is exemplary in its presentation, organization, curation, and maintenance. It also serves as a meeting venue for women’s rights organizations. Constitution Hill is also used as a multi-use space, housing monuments, and museum spaces, but also hosts events and lekgotlas (public meetings to discuss social matters, host debates, seminars, workshops and lectures). Because of the multi-purpose articulation of Constitution Hill, the space has been criticized for the confusion over its ultimate purpose.

This confusion around narrative and purpose is mirrored in parts of Constitution Hill’s representation of women, although arguably it is one of the best memorialization efforts of women in the country. Bonnes and Jacobs argue that the museum’s focus on “women’s arrest, dehumanization, and humiliation contributes to a greater understanding of how apartheid functioned within a gendered and racialized system of oppression.” This representation of women is unique because it allows the stories of women’s incarceration to be remembered and to hold space alongside the stories of men within the physical spaces and remnants of women’s presence. In this regard, it is more effective than other memorialization efforts. It shows women’s suffering and activism not as something separate to the national story, or to what men were doing, but rather as part of the same complex history. However, the Women’s Jail is also subject to some failures that undermine its overall effect.

What I found particularly noticeable about the curation of the Women’s Jail was that the formal decisions were different from the other exhibitions throughout the

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240 King and Flynn, 73.
241 King and Flynn, 74.
242 King and Flynn, 79.
heritage site. Other parts of Constitution Hill, such as the Number Four prison for black males, have information written on large glass plaques, covered with an almost-opaque white veneer upon which there is black text describing different aspects of the jail, its history, or quotations from previous prisoners or wardens. Additionally, for parts of the exhibition which are situated outside in the open, the displays become more opaque with either white or grey backgrounds behind the text, to make them easier to read. There is a marked contrast between these displays and the displays that are used in the Women’s Jail, which are more difficult to read. (Compare Fig. 16 and 17.)

![Fig. 17](image1.png) An example of the signage outside of Number Four, the black male prison quarter, describing the daily diet of prisoners. Black text is contrasted on white backgrounds. Source: Maxine Gibb

![Fig. 18](image2.png) An example of the signage in the Women’s Jail courtyard, describing treatment of prisoners. Black text on transparent glass. Source: Maxine Gibb

The Women’s Jail displays follow the same aesthetic depicted in the other exhibitions, arguably to align them thematically with the rest of the heritage site. However, there is a distinct difference that one notices when they move into the Women’s Jail area. No veneer or layer is contrasting the text, as all the signs are made of transparent glass. It does serve the purpose of differentiating the Women’s Jail from
the surrounding areas and sites, but the text is at times unreadable. Much of the Women’s Jail includes outside courtyard areas, where the text is most challenging to read or photograph due to glares and buildings in the background. This visual effect either results in a visitor skimming over the text or having to maneuver their way around the display to read all the text, especially when outside. At times, I had to crouch down on the ground and take pictures from below to try contrast the text against the sky above. Thus, even as these women’s voices are being articulated and raised through the act of their memorialization, they are still struggling to be visible in the same way that their male counterparts are. Perhaps the curator of the exhibits made an active choice in the forms of the displays, forcing viewers to engage in a more active way, and was commenting on the lack of visibility that usually accompanies women’s activism. However, I would question this formal decision based on some of the more practical aspects of the readability of the text and whether this form of exhibit asserts itself firmly enough to transform the commemorative field.

Outside of these few formal differences, the Women’s Jail is unlike any other commemorative site for women in that is it exclusively dedicated to women’s experiences in apartheid and their resistance. The Women’s Jail consists of a central building with a large cylindrical entryway that splits off into separate sections of the prisons and reaches up to the second floor. Around the building, there are at least two courtyard areas and other smaller outside portions, all of which are part of the overall exhibit. In this regard, the Jail has ample space and can take at least two hours to walk around if one is engaging adequately with all the material. While the Women’s Jail only memorializes women who were imprisoned at this jail, it speaks as a proxy for
different women’s activism from both the perspective of key women figures but also lesser known women were who part of the struggle.

This site is unique in that it has held many high-profile women activists, including Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Fatima Meer, Albertina Sisulu, and Ellen Kuzwayo. However, it also holds stories of lesser-known prisoners like Maggie Resha, Assienah Mnisi, Oshadi Mangena-Phakathi and Mapitso Lolo Tabane, centering their voices and physical representations in different ways. Many of the displays include pictures, as well as quotes and information, with a special effort to include the names of women who spent time within the prison walls. The first floor of the museum is dedicated to more personal stories of individual women prisoners. For example, there is a section of solitary confinement cells that each house a personal object of women who stayed in one of the cells, including dresses, beer-brewing equipment and clothing women were arrested in. Each cell’s door is open with a display of an object, and opposite each door with a biography, with large photographs, and quotes from women who stayed in the solitary confinement cells. Women featured include Albertina Sisulu, Lilian Keagile, Nikiwe Deborah Matshoba, Sibongile Tshabalala, Yvonne Ntonto Mhlauli and Nolundi Ntamo. This exhibit is key for acknowledging the solitary confinement women prisoners experienced, as women were often separated more than men when imprisoned and spent more time in solitary confinement.

The second-floor houses less individualized narratives and more generalized experiences. Physical objects are displayed around the circumference of the room. One display exhibits underwear worn by women in the jail accompanied by descriptions of how women’s underwear were taken when they arrived at the jail, and the wardens
would not issue shoes or underwear in order to humiliate women prisoners. This form of abuse is specifically gendered, the memorialization of which is unique and purposeful. Explicit references to gendered forms of suffering, especially in visual form is an area which is under-memorialized and thus silenced.\textsuperscript{244}

The denial of underwear was particularly traumatizing for women when they had their periods and could not hold their sanitary pads in place. Women had to prove they had their periods by showing that they were bleeding and would receive a limited supply of pads without means to tie them. Women had to source shoelaces to thread the pads and hold them in place. These issues were fought against by some of the Jail’s political prisoners like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.\textsuperscript{245} Other displays included information about the abuse and violence that women received at the hands of police officials and prison guards, the experience of daily life in prison, women’s passbooks and forms of unity between women prisoners. The exhibition of these sorts of gendered experiences within prison is integral to representing women’s role in the struggle, as these more specific degradations that women experienced as women are often completely ignored in struggle histories.

Because the Women’s Jail is encompassed within this larger complex of the Constitution Hill, the site includes multiple elements referencing women that contribute to the lack of an overarching narrative or argument about women in the struggle. As referenced before, the multi-use space of the site disorders the intended messaging around the struggles of apartheid and the associated references to human

\textsuperscript{244} I discuss this in more detail in the following chapter.
\textsuperscript{245} Museum Display, Women’s Jail, Panties and Sanitary Pad, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, December 2019.
rights as embodied in the South African constitution. Odd monuments to women have been inserted into the space seemingly under the theme of human rights and activism yet serve to detract from the overall coherence of the site.

The courtyard at the back of the Women’s Jail demonstrates these competing elements. The courtyard looks onto buildings on three of its sides, one of which is a new building where mid-size events and meetings take place. This building is the first misplaced addition attached to the women’s jail. However, it does serve community purposes. Placed in the middle of a large patch of grass is one of the main features of this spacious courtyard space. A roughly four by six-meter platform made of grey shale stone forms the base upon which three waist-level white granite slanted slabs are placed. One of the slabs houses a flag, and the other is engraved with a dedication to the women of South Africa’s first democratic government. It is titled “Women in the First National Assembly of the Republic of South Africa 1994-1999” and includes a description of the monument as the “Women’s Development Foundation celebrating women’s contribution to a non-sexist, non-racial and democratic South Africa.” The biggest of the granite stones lists the 179 names of women were part of South Africa’s first democratic government. (See Fig. 19)

This monument typifies some of the abstracted forms that women’s monuments are usually fashioned in. While undoubtedly a significant monument to women in South Africa’s new government, its position in the Women’s Jail which depicts stories of imprisonment and dehumanization is tangential. Indeed, there are some linkages in that there were some dedicated and vocal activists who were political prisoners and were also listed on the granite stone as members of in 1994. However, Constitutional Hill is
a site of remembrance primarily for political prisoners and draws its theme from the presence of the Constitutional Court and its legal structures around democracy and the South African Constitution. While the monument to women in parliament is somewhat relevant, its presence is also awkward. A far more suitable venue for this type of monument would be at the Union Buildings, of which there is no such monument.

Another similarly oddly themed addition is one of the first sights visitors see when they enter the grounds. In the middle of one of the pathways stands a four-meter-high bronze statue of a young black girl in a dress, smiling broadly with her arms moving to indicate her forward movement. (See Fig. 20) There is no plaque explaining its significance or its origin to visitors. The statue is, in fact, modeled after ten-year-old Michelle Nkamakeng, a young South African girl who is one of the world’s youngest published authors. The statue was commissioned by a corporate partner of UNICEF as part of World Children’s Day in 2017 and found its permanent home at the Constitutional Hill in 2018, also unveiled on World Children’s Day.\textsuperscript{246}

Named “Hope,” the statue is placed in front of the Women’s Jail, and according to representatives for the Constitution Hill site it, “symbolically [acknowledges] the historical presence of children within the Women’s Jail prison complex where, historically, they would often be imprisoned with their mothers.” While it is not modelled after an historical figure, the symbolic reference to the struggles of women and children during apartheid is at least an improvement on the usual invisibility of these stories. However, this representation presents a strange overlapping of time through monuments and is somewhat random. While having large, heroic statues of young black girls defies persistent narratives, the lack of explanation dilutes its presence and effect, making it more of a novelty than a powerful statement. More glaringly, the unexplained presence of a large statue of a young girl with no apparent links to the stories of dehumanization and imprisonment of women a few feet away depicts it as another “add-on” monument, struggling to find cohesion in the different aspects of Constitution Hill. Indeed, Michelle Nkamakeng rightly deserves recognition for her literary achievements in her own right. Yet, she is not even named in the exhibit celebrating her.

These odd placements of statues and monuments amidst an already thematically thinly-spread Constitution Hill, even as a high caliber and impressive site, make it a depository for many forms of memorialization that perhaps do not have other welcoming public venues. While the site’s presence and accessibility in Johannesburg’s city center, as well as Constitution Hill’s physical history makes it

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useful to embrace a diverse range of commemorative topics, it also speaks to the lack of official and thematic spaces that could adequately address these different themes of women’s resistance and achievements. As a trend, memorials to individual men or masculinized events are not compromised by multiple themes and purposes, nor do they have such large mandates that they require overlapping time periods and illustrating an abstracted or vast narrative. Sites that feature men are almost always organized, accessible, legible, thematic and focused, in their purpose. Yet women’s narratives are somewhat disordered in the existing public memorials. It appears acceptable to put a monument to women parliamentarians next to a women’s jail, with a UNICEF statue of a young girl, simply because they are all women. Overall, this makes women’s stories incoherent, harder to read and seemingly less important.

When trying to address South Africa’s absencing of women in its history-making and memorializing project, the monuments and museums that have been devoted to women in the struggle have primarily failed, through their inaccessibility, lack of care, and overall attitudes of disapproval. In the examples where representations of women and their stories have been more successful or pose much potential, they have been diluted and compromised by continued patterns of visual erasure, confused narratives and disorganization. These examples indicate not only a formal resistance to centering women’s stories but also a demonstrated lack of being able to create permanent, transformative and coherent monuments to women in the struggle.
Chapter Four

Gender-based Violence in South Africa: Silenced Memory in the Present

I’ve been thinking about the question... what makes men brutalise women...? It seems to me that the answer is a terribly simple one. Men violate women because they can, because religious, political, educational, scientific institutions all permit the violence to be perpetrated against women. The only thing we can do is to attempt to address these institutions and make sure that these institutions don’t allow it.248

Vanessa Farr at the 1999 conference on The Aftermath: Women in post-war Reconstruction

We are not speaking these truths, and until we are able to address them as well as the long histories we come from, we will continue to live with the scourge of gender-based violence.

Pumla Dineo Gqola249

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**What Happens when Powerful Women are Celebrated?**

It is January 26, 2011, in a small South African town, Bethel, in the province of Mpumalanga. Two white men are tying a rope around the neck of a life-sized bronze statue of Nokuthula Simelane, a woman ANC activist and MK member. The men tie the rope to the back of their truck and drive away, far enough until they warp Simelane and she breaks from her podium, leaving but a foot behind, as the two men drive her body through the streets of Bethel. In 1983, Nokuthula Simelane was abducted, tortured for several weeks and murdered by apartheid police operatives at the age of twenty-three. All too similar to the violence that was enacted on Simelane before her brutal murder, this new violence of 2011 was “enacted on the symbolic body of a militant black woman,” as Miller describes. It is a disturbing reminder of the ever-present vestiges of apartheid violence, of the diminished value placed on women’s contribution to national history, as well as the value of their very lives.²⁵⁰ Having been reassembled, Simelane’s statue was vandalized again in April 2015, when vandals threw yellow paint on her body.²⁵¹ (See Fig. 21) The repeated destruction of a statue commemorating a strong black woman who was also a struggle hero is a violent act against memory, but also a display of South Africans’ intolerance to the visibility of strong, women agents.

The lack of memorialization for women activists is already an act of violence against women’s collective memory perpetuated by the state. However, even in cases where women are memorialized, women continue to be at risk of erasure and repeated violence. Every day, women in real life are at high risk of rape or other forms of gender

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²⁵⁰ Miller, “Pain of Memory,” 144.
violence. Women suffered these forms of attacks on a regular basis during apartheid. This tragic fact has yet to be remotely and adequately grappled with in South Africa’s public memory and consciousness. Without this reckoning, how can South Africa and its women heal?

Simelane’s real body was never found. A statue of Simelane was sponsored and commissioned by the Mpumalanga provincial government in 2009, making it, at the time, the only woman liberation hero to be honored with a figurative statue. As a result, the establishment of her statue in corporeal form has served as a stand-in grave site for Simelane’s family. It offers a physical connection with their sister and daughter, helping facilitate a type of healing by visualizing her memory and giving space to figures like Simelane who were made to disappear and rendered invisible by apartheid

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252 Miller, “Pain of Memory,” 144, 151.
forces. However, the violent acts of vandalism enacted on the statue have also made it a site of renewed trauma and re-enacting of the circumstances of Simelane’s death.

Simelane’s family was very personally affected by the destruction of what they perceived as their daughter’s gravesite, and as Simelane’s sister, Thembisile Nkadimeng, described, “what [Nokuthula] went through while alive, she has gone through again in death.” This story exposes the intolerance of public displays of female strength, authority and militancy in the public sphere. As Miller argues, “the destruction of Simelane’s statue is symbolic of a larger failure to adequately memorialize South Africa’s heroic women,” and points to “the broader critique of the post-apartheid state (the ANC) and its failure to live up to its own democratic, gender progressive ideals, and the unresolved gender-based violence committed by the apartheid state.” I would expand this argument to include that the state has yet to take responsibility for or sufficiently acknowledge the violence that was pervasively used against women during apartheid, by both apartheid forces and men “on the same side.” The legacy of this hidden violence shows itself in the ongoing levels of gender-based violence.

In this chapter I will discuss why memorialization of all aspects of women’s experience including past experiences of sexual violence should be considered in relation to ongoing high levels of gender-based violence. The bulk of the chapter will analyze the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a form of memorialization.

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253 Miller, 145.
254 Miller, 146.
255 Miller, 159.
256 Miller, 147.
257 Miller, 147.
and narrative-making that had the potential to make visible women’s gendered experience of violence, but failed in doing so, and thereby contributing to the ongoing silencing of sexual violence in South Africa’s history. I will also provide an overview of South Africa’s persistent crisis of rape and gender-based violence against women and the government’s response. In addition, I will discuss the role of the ANC in manifesting and perpetuating a culture of condoning sexual abuse, in the presence of non-sexist rhetoric. This examination will provide context to my overarching argument of the state’s, and thus the ANC’s, past failures in memorializing this aspect of women’s history. Lastly, I propose the importance of centering conversations of gender-based violence in public discussion as also requiring the memorialization of these aspects of women’s history as integral to combating gender-based violence in the present.

Why Memorialize the Suffering of Women?

Ingrid de Kock argues that in South Africa’s case, reconciliation is only possible if “the physical evidence of our suffering and complicity [is] displayed,”258 De Kock alludes to the reasons as to why memorialization exists as an important concern for society and why the statue of Simelane was put up in the first place. In order to push against forms of erasure, and forms of violence, society memorializes events such that the evidence of their occurrence is present. In so doing, this display of historic violence against women assures that suffering and sacrifice is acknowledged. In short, memorialization of women pushes back against the violent act of their erasure.

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However, the reconciliatory effects of visualizing women in history continue to fail women in its blindness to gender-specific suffering. Controversial and difficult issues like women’s sexual trauma or abuse by both the apartheid state but also by ANC men remain invisible in public history. Nuttall and Coetzee describe the urgency to reconcile the nation after apartheid as one of the reasons behind privileging and maintaining “a few master narratives that offer a sense of unity at the cost of ignoring fracture and dissonance.” This dissonance has also been exacerbated by the commodification of the heritage industry which has curated and shaped the struggle history in a way that might be more appealing to an external audience, by changing its content or tone. This tendency places economic concerns ahead of the potential transformative healing process of grappling with the country’s past. The resulting unified, palatable history that shies away from uncomfortable and controversial historical issues limits prospects for cultural or material shifts in women’s lives.

Must the uncomfortable parts of women’s histories still be buried in silence to appeal to tourists, and ensure a false sense of unity and reconciliation? Is South Africa’s current disorder reflective of its citizen's inability to process the traumas of the past? Would symbolic reparations and better commemorative efforts have soothed the country’s wounds and better positioned it to build gender equality? Referencing the words of Mahmood Mamdani, de Kock writes that “healing in the aftermath of a trauma or conflict is not a foregone conclusion” and the decisions that the state makes with reconciliation effects has had long-lasting consequences. The current absencing of

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259 Nuttall and Coetzee, introduction to Negotiating the Past, 14.
women, including some of the most serious problems they have faced and continue to face, has had and continues to have negative consequences across society. As Miller has argued throughout her work,

women’s agency is increasingly invisible in South Africa’s public sphere, even as the telling of South Africa’s struggle history is in the process of unfolding. This has long-lasting and dire consequences for our understanding of women as viable political subjects.261

Thus, if women are not visible in public memory as having had an historical precedent, their place within the public sphere is not stable. Moreover, when efforts are made to make women visible in public memory, and they do not tackle and acknowledge the gendered aspects of women’s experiences like gender-violence, the state continues to perpetuate a system which devalues women and places them as second-tier citizens.

*The TRC as a Symbol of Memory Making and Its Mis/Underrepresentation of Women*

One of the key forms of memory making in the post-apartheid moment that was arguably more equipped and suitable to dealing with gendered violence that women experienced during apartheid, was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). However, the TRC demonstrated that from the onset of reconciliation efforts, women were not going to be perceived as individuals in the same way that men were, and that their traumas would largely remain uncovered. The TRC was set up under the National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, which mandated a committee to hear confessions of perpetrators of human rights abuses and the stories of the victims of

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261 Miller, “Pain of Memory,” 160.
those abuses. The TRC also had the power to grant amnesty to those who gave full disclosure of crimes that had “an express political motive before 6 December 1993.”

Notably, the TRC was a public forum where some of the confessions and hearings were broadcast to the public, as part of a process of healing and reconciliation for South Africans. It also played a formative role in South Africa’s public memory of apartheid and was in many ways the “official” narrative of the events of apartheid. It was controversial, painful and for some participants and observers, healing. As Njabulo Ndebele writes, the TRC acted as “the restoration of narrative,” where South Africans could reinvent themselves and speak their story into existence. However, the setting-up of the TRC also prohibited victims from retribution through legal forms, favoring reconciliation and the emergence of “truth” over individual needs of retribution. Women frequently appeared during the hearings but were not often a feature, instead providing witness testimonies and supporting evidence. They were instrumental in testifying to construct a national narrative to facilitate reconciliation but were the least likely to be the TRC’s beneficiaries or benefit from a “restoration of a narrative.”

The TRC hearing on Nokuthula Simelane’s disappearance and murder revealed the details of her torture. Security forces, having established her role within MK and the ANC, lured her under false pretenses and abducted her. From the TRC hearing, South Africans learned that Simelane suffered torture of suffocation, punching, slapping (by multiple men at one time), sleep deprivation, was deprived of medical

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264 Holiday, “Forgiving and Forgetting,” 47.
attention, was given electric shock treatment, drowned in freezing water, over the course of five weeks such that her face and body’s physical appearance and condition had changed beyond recognition.\textsuperscript{265} Her torture became progressively worse over time as she continued to refuse to cooperate. At the TRC hearings, of the five male assailants were giving testimony, two were black and three were white, with the two camps providing differing narratives on the disappearance of Simelane. By the end of the commission, it was still unclear as to exactly how and where Simelane died. As such, the men were denied amnesty on torture and murder but were given amnesty for the abduction of Simelane.\textsuperscript{266} Ultimately, the TRC failed to provide Simelane’s family with their biggest hope of closure, the location of Simelane’s body. Instead, the TRC concluded that “it [was] not necessary for the purposes of this matter to make a definitive finding on the eventual fate of Ms. Simelane.”\textsuperscript{267}

As a result, it has taken Simelane’s family over the past three decades to try and receive closure, transparency, accountability and justice for Simelane’s disappearance and death through prosecution. In 2016, the National Prosecuting Agency (NPA) finally charged four of the perpetrators for the murder and kidnapping of Simelane.\textsuperscript{268} This case was one of a handful of the four hundred cases that were recommended for prosecution after the TRC, demonstrating a lack of accountability given to apartheid perpetrated crimes that could not be resolved under the TRC. The lack of prosecution of recommended TRC cases has chiefly been attributed to political obstructions to

\textsuperscript{265} Miller, “Pain of Memory,” 148-149.  
\textsuperscript{266} Miller, 150.  
\textsuperscript{267} Miller, 150.  
justice, around the fear of seated government officials being reinvestigated around apartheid crimes. Additionally, the prosecution of Simelane’s case has also primarily taken place because of the persistence of her sister, Thembisile, who has been in public office and was the executive mayor of Polokwane while pursuing this case. Obviously, not all those who pursue justice have the means or influence to do so. The case has gone through multiple postponements and is still ongoing. Thus, one of very few TRC cases that centered on injustices against a woman remains unresolved. Because the TRC, as a central memory-making and memorializing tool, had a finite lifespan, the stories of women it would not hear now remain a permanent silence.

I argue that the major failing, among others, of the TRC that has had the most visible impact on the lack of representation in public memory and forms, is the TRC’s lack of testimony from women who were victims of sexual violence. The lack of dialogue around sexual violence is part of the TRC’s failure, as Rosemary Jolly argues, to listen to women as agents of their own narratives, hearing their testimonies largely as supporting evidence or witness testimony. Critics argue that the proceedings failed to center women in the hearings and women were almost always positioned as secondary actors, who gave evidence as victims’ mothers and wives, or were bystanders rather than primary agents of the struggle. Thus, the TRC perpetuated narratives that placed value only on women’s roles as wives and mothers to heroes or activists. Goldblatt and Meintjes also point to the TRC’s restrictions on who and what was heard based on severe human rights transgressions, the failure to give voice to the day-to-day violations of apartheid that women “bore the brunt of … through forced

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removals, and pass arrests.”270 This sidelining and erasure mirror the same patterns demonstrated in memorializing projects.

Kim Miller argues that the “commission’s failure to effectively deal with women’s experience with violence, especially torture and sexual violence,”271 creates a narrative of gender blindness in the apartheid narrative, reflected in public art and commemoration. As I will demonstrate, the TRC’s mishandling of women’s testimony on sexual violence, as well as its lack of opportunity to give such testimony, is part of the overarching resistance to discussing issues of sexual violence in the public sphere. It has contributed to a lack of cultural tolerance towards issues of gender-based violence. This intolerance is both displayed and perpetuated by South Africa’s blind spot in memorializing the more controversial, complex, difficult and regime-challenging parts of women’s testimonies.

Maki Skosana is woman victim whose case was brought before the general TRC. Maki Skosana was wrongly identified as a police informant and was necklaced272 by a frenzied mob in 1985 at the age of twenty-four. It was the first necklacing to be seen on national television and was a truly gruesome display of murder. Maki Skosana’s body was tied as she was lit on fire, surrounded by a mob of men and women from her own community, she was kicked, hit and stomped on and had large rocks thrown onto her face and body, while people in crowed chanted “Viva Mandela!”273

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271 Miller, “Pain of Memory,” 147
272 As mentioned in Chapter Two, page 45, necklacing is an extralegal form of vigilante justice often used against suspected informers where the victim is burned alive with a rubber tire around their body or neck.
Her sister, Evalina Moloko, brought evidence and testified at the TRC hearings in 1997, which was broadcast by the South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC).

In the footage edited for broadcast, Moloko describes visiting her sister’s body at the mortuary in an abridged version that only includes some of her overall testimony. Moloko describes when looking at her sister’s body, “Her legs were taken apart and there were pieces of broken glass that had been pushed into her vagina.”

In the video, her testimony stops there and cuts to one of the commissioners who commends Skosana and her family for being noble heroes. The same commissioner asks the audience to stand for a moment of silence. Moloko does not stand. Rather, the expression on her face communicates dissatisfaction. Although it may be hard to draw conclusions from the attitude of Moloko on testifying after her sister’s murder, the editing of the SABC broadcast addresses some of the more brutal aspects of Skosana’s murder. It includes the post-mortem act of sexual violence but in effect makes it appear as if the testimony was cut off, not addressing the details of her death, or her as a woman victim. In effect, Moloko is silenced as the commissioner himself asked for a moment of silence for the victim.

This video is an example of how a state institution like the SABC, whether intentional or not, managed to portray the subtle silencing of women’s narratives, especially around issues of sexual violence.

The actual events of the Skosana hearing proceeded somewhat differently, as the request for a moment of silence only occurred at the end of the hearing, not right after Moloko’s description of her sister’s body. This can be seen in the written

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transcripts of the hearing in the archive on the South African Department of Justice and Constitutional Development website. The excerpt of the transcript follows almost exactly from what was seen in the video, however, what is notable is that the transcript leaves out Moloko’s statement about the evidence of sexual violence that she saw. Instead, the transcript reads precisely: “Her legs were taken apart … and I went to the nearby house to go and enlist some help.” This is highly troubling, as the official transcript of these events has erased the portion of the testimony that relates to circumstances of Maki Skosana’s death that pertains to gender violence. Furthermore, the official transcript negated an act of sexual violence by liberation supporters by omitting it from the official record, denying its existence and in effect making the narrative blind to this specific gendered form of trauma. These physical and symbolic erasures of gender-specific forms of violence and trauma are indicative of South Africa’s failure and ability to address the sexual violence and gender-specific oppressions that women endured during apartheid and continue to endure today.

In fact, very few women gave evidence in the TRC hearings relating to sexual violence. The majority of evidence for forms of sexual violence was only given once all-women hearings were created. Soon after the TRC hearings began, different human rights and women’s groups were concerned about the gender issues arising


\[277\] Jolly, “Narrating Women,” 624. Jolly also argues that because of the formal methods of transcribing TRC hearings, transcripts do not make records of witnesses’ body language nor incoherent words spoken “in extreme motion … as certain statements … were screamed in agony rather than merely ‘stated’,” thus compromising the TRC’s ability to represent or comprehend women’s experiences and personhood.

\[278\] Goldblatt and Meintjes, “Dealing with the Aftermath,” 10.
within the hearings and created workshops to propose changes to the format. Although over half of those giving depositions at the TRC were women, it was rare for those women to speak of their experiences as women.

When it was shown that women’s experiences were not coming through in the general hearings, proposals were made and acted upon to hold a special set of hearing for women, of which there were only three in total. This included the option where women could testify behind screens before a panel of all-women Commissioners and a majority women audience, showing women’s fear of prejudice and stigma they might be more likely to face in front of men. These hearings led to many women testifying who originally decided against it, and provided a space for women to testify about their experiences of torture, abduction, imprisonment and sexual violence. For example, “Evidence was given of women prisoners forced to do star-jumps naked, of rapes and other objects being inserted into women’s vaginas, of women being told their children were ill or dead.” This platform was particularly important because women experienced a lot of the stigma and shame surrounding rape and assault, such as the stigma of collusion or having “sold out to the system.” Many women did not want to give testimony relating to sexual violence, because of this shame or having to relive the trauma of the events.

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279 Goldblatt and Meintjes, 8.
280 Farr, “How Do We Know We are at Peace?” 28.
283 These focused on, but were not limited to, crimes committed by the apartheid state.
284 “National Women’s Day,” 121.
Of the 8,000 statements received by the TRC, only 300 dealt with sexual assault, of which only 80 were about sexual assault on women, of which only 17 were about rape. However, there is evidence that during the apartheid era many more women were raped while imprisoned or while being transported to detention. Women’s lack of testimony can also be attributed to women perceiving their experiences as not important enough or political enough to speak about publicly. As a result, there were very few accusations of sexual assault and even fewer applications for amnesty by perpetrators. This reflects the general attitude that these were not crimes that needed to be confessed or atoned for, and that majority of victims did not come forward to testify because these crimes were not considered as significant among the general population, or as “gross” human rights violations. Joyce Seroke, Chairperson of the Commission for Gender Equality in South Africa and member of the TRC, stated that “it was only in these [women-only] hearings that the gruesome stories of sexual torture and violence began to surface. I emphasize the word surface. For we only began to scratch the surface. The true depth of that horror we shall perhaps never know.” Sexual violence against women transcends the usual boundaries between enemy and ally, as women were victims of assault by both the apartheid state

286 More men than women testified in general TRC hearings about forms of sexual violence including genital electric shocks, rape, forced nudity and other sexual abuses. However, these crimes were classified as “torture” and not sexual violations and men were not given the opportunity to testify in closed hearings. The failure the state to recognize rape against men as a form of sexual violence also contributes to the lack of formal recognition of these crimes against both men and women and thus a lack of justice and healing in the post-apartheid era. See “When No One Calls It Rape: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys,” International Center for Transitional Justice, July 12, 2016, https://www.ictj.org/news/sexual-violence-against-men-boys.
288 Goldblatt and Meintjes, 10.
289 Farr, “How Do We Know We are at Peace?” 28.
290 Farr, 28.
as well as comrades and ANC leaders, for example. Thus, many of the gendered crimes committed during apartheid remain silenced, which the state perpetuates and fails to bring to public consciousness through forms like memorialization.

Even though separate women’s hearings were created in the TRC, there was very little public coverage given to them by the media, limiting its visibility and ultimately its ability to influence the overarching narrative. This lack of coverage limited the hearings’ ability to influence the overarching historical “truth” that was being constructed through the TRC process, and the stories of women’s abuse did not penetrate large portions of the population in the same way that other TRC trials did. As Goldblatt and Meintjes argue, this limited coverage might be because “violence against women is not regarded as particularly sensational given its almost commonplace nature in our society.” Others like Vanessa Farr, have argued that South Africans “may simply not want to hear the truth about what women have to endure.” This is evidenced in a lack of interest and empathy during the TRC hearings, as well as the attitude of some South Africans towards anti-gender violence campaigns. Not only was the TRC marked by its treatment of women as secondary witnesses but, of the small portion of testimony given by women victims of sexual violence, they received non-serious treatment from the commission. The testimonies given in TRC hearings did not shift the cultural sentiments towards sexual violence, and the evidence that came to the fore was not effectively used in memorial efforts, thus perpetuating the silence on gendered violence.

292 Goldblatt and Meintjes, 10.
293 Farr, “How Do We Know We are at Peace?” 28.
A Legacy of Violence: Rape and Gender-Violence in South Africa

The symbolic and embodied assaults on women’s bodies and senses are relentless. It sometimes feels deliberately genocidal.

*Pumla Dineo Gqola*  

Deplorably, South Africa has one of the highest murder rates for women in the world, where a woman is killed every four hours, not including the many under 18-year-old females that suffer the same fate. Rates of rape are even higher, and of the cases that are reported to the police, over 40% of the rape victims are minors. Even worse, it is estimated that only one in three crimes are reported to the police, making these statistics conservative. South Africa has been referred to as the Rape Capital of the world.  

While crime rates are high for both men and women, 68.5% of victims of sexual offenses are women. Furthermore, in a report by Statistics South Africa named *Crime against Women in South Africa (2018)*, had findings that levels of crime against women “show that the fear of crime limit women’s engagement in various daily activities.” Even as crime rates have decreased marginally over the past three years, violent crimes against women like sexual assault have drastically increased.  

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murder rate for women increased by 117% from 2015 to 2016/2017, while sexual offenses increased by 53%.

The most recent statistics also record an increased in rapes from 2017 to 2018, recording an average of 110 rapes recorded every day. These statistics only take into account the rapes that are reported to the police, making these still an inaccurate measure, as there is still no accurate measure of underreporting rate and thus, we are not able to establish the number of committed rapes.

Pumla Dineo Gqola, black feminist, author, and professor at Wits University, argues in her book Rape: A South African Nightmare (2015) that high incidents of rape are not a post-apartheid phenomenon, and is linked to a long history of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid that has given rise to this harsh reality. She provides some even harsher statistics noting that a 2005 Medical Research Council report found that only one in nine women reported their rape to the police, and data from the South African Police Service showed that of the sixty-six thousand rapes that were reported from April 2010 and March 2011, over half of the victims were children. Reports on rape statistics phrase this problem as due to non-progressive attitudes and beliefs among both South African men and woman that pose major challenges in fighting crime against women. Gqola argues that these attitudes work in “very specific ways in which collective behaviors make it seem okay” emphasizing the need for a massive disruption of the narratives that support rape culture to end rape. As public

307 Gqola, 17.
opinion and cultural acceptance play such a large role in the perpetuating of rape and sexual violence, narrative is an essential component in either combating or preserving a culture of rape.

While the government espouses politically correct rhetoric that opposes gender-based-violence and rape in South Africa, it is not reflected in policy-making and the government’s own ability to address issues of gender violence within its own structures. The creation of the National Council on Gender-Based Violence in 2012, tasked with rolling out a national strategic plan to combat gender-based violence, has yet to deliver a plan and has failed under poor leadership and lack of funding.\(^{308}\) Whenever accusations are made against ANC members or leaders, the ANC demonstrates a lack of commitment to their ideals, demonstrating nonchalance and deferring investigations to law enforcement with no internal disciplinary processes, internal record keeping of those accused.\(^{309}\) Does the invisibility of women’s gendered trauma in public memory contribute to this epidemic? It is surely a symptom of the country’s inability to address these pressing issues. However, the invisibility of women’s trauma might also be contributing to the ongoing cultural acceptance of women’s abuse because the country has not grappled with its legacy of violence and gendered violence. Without acknowledging women’s past in all their dimensions, including their worst sufferings, these real events remain veiled from public memory, and the public consciousness is not implored to confront its beliefs.

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One of the ways in which pervasive attitudes and practices that perpetuate gender-based violence are combated is through reparations and rehabilitative methods towards women who were victims of violence. This approach requires a grappling with history and narrative that has historically been silenced. These reparations include the symbolic reparations of proper burials, memorials, renaming ceremonies, and other figurative forms of memorialization. Recommendations for symbolic reparations from academics like Goldblatt and Meintjes included that “public acknowledgement of the role of women in the struggle to end apartheid must be made, possibly in the form of monuments in communities.”

Thus, the underperformance of the state to deliver on these necessary symbolic reparations, in addition to the lack of resources and functioning policies that protect women, contributes to South Africa’s ongoing rape and gender violence epidemic to this day.

I would argue the failure to adequately address the prevalence of rape and gender-based violence as an aspect of South African history that ought to be brought into the light and remembered, is symptomatic of an overarching erasure of women’s social and political value and contributes towards the ongoing devaluing of South African women. Sexual trauma is the most ignored part of women’s experience in apartheid history and memory and one of the biggest threats to women’s safety daily. There is an unspoken narrative of violence against women that has not been recovered in all the forms of heritage-making, identity-formation, archival research, memorializing and truth-seeking that is also intimately linked to the ANC as a patriarchal organization. Even with women in leadership, the functioning of a separate

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310 Goldblatt and Meintjes, “Dealing with the Aftermath,” 16.
Women’s League, and continued rhetoric supporting women’s rights, the tacit codes sanction behaviors that are historically unchallenged and covered up.

**ANC: A Gatekeeper of History that Implicates Itself**

Gender discrimination and sexual violence within ANC training camps is one of the taboo topics that many women were, and still are, hesitant to publicly speak out about either because of their personal difficulties of doing so, or for political reasons whereby they did not want to compromise the ANC’s reputation in the face of apartheid’s moral wrongdoings. Despite some women speaking out, like Thandi Modise and Thenjiwe Mntinsto on gendered issues within MK camps, the ANC has failed to adequately acknowledge or address these transgressions that happened under the ANC’s purview. In 1993 Raymond Suttner, an ANC and NEC member, was interviewed and stated,

> The acceptance of non-sexism as a principle in the ANC, or any male-dominated organization, appears in the first place at the level of lip-service. There is a strong commitment to the principle of non-sexism. But… I am not sure there is a real and full understanding of what it means for people in their personal lives. My experience in the democratic movement is that there was quite a lot of abuse of women. I remember, in the days before the unbannings, cases of women being beaten up by men and even rapes. So I think there is a lot of work to do to make non-sexism a reality.

It appears this position has not changed much since 1993, as prominent ANC men continue to be accused of sexual harassment and rape. Continued displays of sexual

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311 Goldblatt and Meintjes, 10.
313 ANC Head of Presidency Zizi Kodwa was accused of rape in February 2019. ANC Spokesperson Pule Mabe was accused of sexual harassment by his personal assistant and found not guilty by ANC panel in February 2019. The ANC has only since reiterated the need for sexual harassment policy. Former Deputy Minister of Higher Education Mduduzi Manana remained an ANC National Executive Member despite assaulting women in a Johannesburg nightclub while being filmed. Former Western Cape ANC leader, Marius Fransman, is under prosecution for sexual assault from 2016.
violence by prominent ANC leaders is not surprising considering that the ANC’s history of sexual violence was never fully acknowledged. Some evidence of the abuse of women was given as testimony in the TRC. For example, Wellington Sejake described widespread sexual abuse of women recruits at an ANC training camp in Angola, which has been corroborated by other testimonies.\(^{314}\) Lita Mazibuko testified that whilst she was an MK soldier, she was raped three times and also sexually tortured. Mazibuko also testified that ANC members tried to silence her before giving testimony in order “to protect” the ANC.\(^{315}\) Many women did not come forward with allegations of abuse during the TRC, largely because of the pervasive belief in a “political code” that favored loyalty to the ANC, forcing many women to keep quiet about their experiences.\(^{316}\) Certainly, many women did not experience first-hand sexual violations as MK members, and a few camps were particularly progressive in their treatment of women. However, this fact does not negate the fact that many women experienced instances of abuse and remain victims of a culture of silence that the ANC helped cultivate. Sexual abuse was also present in other military wings such as PAC’s APLA. Women have tended to come out around key events like Jacob Zuma’s rape trial and the #MeToo movement, such as Sibongile Khumalo who accused Potlako Leballo, then president of PAC, of raping her, and other women, when she was 15 years old.\(^{317}\) Given


the evidence of the abuse of women within major liberation parties, the ANC’s official position on the treatment of women in MK camps, the potential crimes that were committed, and the possible consequences leave a lot to be desired.  

For a long time, the ANC’s position towards violence against women was unclear, as it did not outwardly condemn these acts. At the beginning of the era of its rule, the ANC did not make any firm statements opposing violence against women within the ANC, nor did the organization apologize to any of the women victims who came forward. As such, Goldblatt and Meintjes argue that “gender violence within the liberation movement has not been fully aired and remains an unwritten chapter of our history.” Without the governing party’s recognition and action around a history of sexual violence within its ranks, the state will continue to condone these acts tacitly, and it will continue to condone these acts within its own ranks.

What are the consequences of this silence? Public visibility and the treatment of issues of gendered and sexual violence by state authorities have all failed to bring these issues to bear in the post-apartheid context. Both men and women continue to hold beliefs and attitudes that make the pervasiveness of gender violence permissible. This attitude is also imbued within the ANC itself. There are no doubt perpetrators of sexual crimes within the ANC that have been, and are still, in power in government. Seeing as the ANC does not demonstrate transparency around crimes committed within the ANC during apartheid, the presence of perpetrators at even the highest position of power, the presidency, is not surprising. The fact that Jacob Zuma, who was accused

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318 Goldblatt and Meintjes, “Dealing with the Aftermath,” 12.
319 Goldblatt and Meintjes, 14.
320 Goldblatt and Meintjes, 13.
of rape by “Khwezi” Fezeka Ntsukela Kuzwayo in 2005 before his election to the presidency in 2009 and was still elected by ANC members as the party-president, and then by popular vote shows the cultural acceptance and institutionalization of rape and sexual violence.

Kuzwayo has since passed away but was raised in exile and claimed to have been raped and abused by ANC members from the age of five. Kuzwayo was vilified, humiliated and attacked as the accuser of Jacob Zuma. South African History Online describes her treatments as:

In the period of the trial [Kuzwayo] was called a bitch by the ANCWL, threatened by the ANCYL and SACP, spat upon by the Zuma supporters outside the courthouse, her and her mother’s house was burnt down and the mob outside the courthouse threw rocks at a woman who they suspected was her.\(^{321}\)

The lack of support and opposition towards Kuzwayo received from women including key organizations like the ANCWL highlights imbedded belief systems and structures that oppose any challenge to authority based on issues of gender and sexual assault. Some ANC women who supported Zuma even held up posters saying, “Zuma, rape me,” as a way to mock and discredit Kuzwayo.\(^{322}\) In discussing the ANCWL stance on the rape trial and the League’s support of Zuma on his ascent to the presidency, Shireen Hassim writes, “The ANCWL’s reputation as defender of the rights of women, already shaky, had been irretrievably shattered.”\(^{323}\) Given these political undercurrents and the public displays of damaging discourse around issues of gender violence, any state-sponsored move towards women’s memorialization in the struggle is challenged by


\(^{323}\) Hassim, 140.
pervasive attitudes and will likely preclude any discussion of gender violence in public memory, if current discourse continues to invalidate victims.

Thus, the government has failed to narrate a history that does not silence women’s vulnerable histories of gendered violence. This history that lacks the most memorialization, also speaks to behaviors entrenched within ANC’s political cultural and patriarchal belief systems that manifest in the acceptance of gendered abuse. The country's epidemic of gender-based violence cannot be tackled without a demonstrated shift in leadership behavior and not just rhetoric. It requires recognition and reckoning with the aspects of South African history that precedes and links to gender-based violence. Memorialization is key to entering into the public consciousness a context from which to perceive society. Amanda Gouws aptly describes that gender-based violence will not be tackled if society continues to focus on individual perpetrators rather the “complex social conditions” that lead to the pervasiveness of men’s violent behavior.\(^{324}\) The rhetoric that advocates for more incarceration and retribution rather than overarching interventions that reduce rates of gender-based violence cannot look backward or forward in understanding such a societal ill.\(^{325}\) Having issues of sexual violence present in the public memory is integral to fostering a context whereupon rape and abuse is not understood as an anomaly but as part of a system rooted within South Africa’s colonial, apartheid, and cultural past. Such recognition is necessary to the process of changing collective understandings of the very real problem of gender-based violence.

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\(^{325}\) Gouws, “Gender-based Violence.”
**Conclusion**

Women’s resistance against the apartheid regime is an undeniably prolific history. Yet, women’s activism has been left out of post-apartheid South Africa’s official forms of heritage-making and memorialization. Even in the select few cases of women’s inclusion, such as the exhibits at the Women’s Jail, women are still subject to conflation, confused narratives, and incoherence; or in the case of Nokuthula Simelane’s statue, violent opposition. Not only do the memories of South African women deserve tenfold the amount of recognition and respect they are only beginning to receive, but the erasure of their memory has serious consequences. South African women are silenced and made invisible daily, often in the gravest terms. Memorializing women’s activism in the public memory challenges the assumptions society holds that permits this silencing.

Questions of representation, visualization and memorialization are grounded throughout this thesis in some of the more pressing concerns the average South African woman faces. The reality of the high levels of gender-based violence in South Africa is daunting. Yet, two recent events provide further insight into how this current social issue intersects with public representation, and how South African women are presently fighting against issues of gender-based violence. At the start of Women’s Month 2018, on August 1\textsuperscript{st}, thousands of women, across the identity spectrum, took to the streets to protest South Africa’s increasing rates of gender-based violence and murder of women. Under the banner #TotalShutDown, organizers facilitated 19 simultaneous marches across South Africa and presented 24 demands to the President to address and eradicate
gender-based violence, referencing the 24 years of post-apartheid South Africa. The protesting women wore black and red. Their images flooded social media and news publications. The organization for this event no doubt built off the organizing experience of their foremothers. Garnering much international attention and being one of the largest coordinated actions against gender-based violence, President Cyril Ramaphosa agreed to a gender summit to raise awareness around women’s abuse.

In surprising timeliness, the National Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Summit was held on 1 November 2018. Survivors of brutal and devastating acts of gender-based violence testified and shared their experiences in front of Cyril Ramaphosa, who was forced to reckon with the very personal and relentless stories of assault. Notably, this summit demonstrated women’s awareness around issues of narrative and visibility. Women protested at the event by holding up blood-stained underwear with messages like “my grandson raped and murdered me.” Other women displayed the words “Dros Survivor,”327 and the call to action “gender-based violence anywhere is a threat to peace and security everywhere.”328 Even as women addressed ongoing threats to their safety and lives, they were aware of their historical erasure, resisting it by forcing themselves into the public spaces where their memories have yet to be memorialized. (See Fig. 22)

327 This is a reference to a case of a 7-year-old girl who was raped in the bathroom of a restaurant chain called Dros and garnered a lot of national attention.
A survivor, only identified as Phindile, gave testimony of how she was raped and subsequently failed by the justice system. The woman proceeded to stand up and lift her dress, exposing to the President the brutal scars she had received from the rape and subsequent five surgeries she required. Phindile pushed back against the many societal norms that prohibit women from speaking about these experiences, as well as the aversion society has towards visualizing the suffering gender-based violence causes. This event was broadcasted by the SABC, and in the recording, Ramaphosa is visibly shaken and distraught. A video of this reaction was subsequently shared all over social media. (See Fig. 23) Phindile’s message was a powerful one because she confronted a man with the country’s highest office and forced him to witness the reality many women face. His display of distress, and even shame, is not a common image because it is not often that men are encouraged to confront issues of women’s rape in

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the same way that women must. The public display of a woman shaming the president through the visualization of her suffering legitimizes women’s experiences. It is an act of memorialization that brings these issues into the public’s consciousness. I would argue that to date, the events of the gender summit have been the most public and visualized form of memorialization of women’s experience of gender-based violence. It speaks powerfully to a legacy of violence that has been so widely ignored, the silencing of which is now being challenged and thrust into the public sphere.

![Screenshot of SABC news broadcast of President Cyril Ramaphosa’s distressed response to a rape victim, Phindile, and her demonstrating her scars from surgery at the National Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Summit 2018. Source: SABC News](image)

Throughout the research of this project, I have become dismayed by the grand narrative scrubbed of women’s experiences and the discovery of events testifying to women’s courage and sacrifice that I was not exposed to as a young woman growing up in South Africa, nor as a student of history. Delving deeper into this prevailing and public history, I have realized the depth to which women have been simply, boldly and systematically erased. South African women have also been misrepresented, devalued and minimized. This realization has been disheartening, to say the least. However, I
have also recognized moments of surprise and hope. Firstly, the potential for the Women’s Living Heritage Museum to dedicate an entire museum to women’s liberation activism, makes leaps and strides from the dearth of memorialization that currently exists. In addition, I have witnessed signs of a different level of consciousness around women’s activism in memorialization most clearly in the sites I visited in Johannesburg, where I was able to find references to women’s memory in unexpected ways. When I visited book stores, I saw many more memoirs written by and about women than I would have been exposed to in prior years. More roads and streets are being named after women. Albertina Sisulu is now on a South African postage stamp.

Women are also memorialized in a new and budding heritage project that is steadily growing, which represents both men and women in a procession of hundreds of life-size bronze figures. Growing from fifty-five at its first unveiling and set to grow to five hundred statues, this new project, once completed, will be called “The Long Walk to Freedom,” a popular reference to Nelson Mandela’s autobiography. It forms one of the centerpieces to a ZAR1 billion heritage project, called the National Heritage Monument to South Africa. The long procession features statues all facing and walking in the same direction, spaced out between one another. Figures at the back come from the 1700s while Nelson Mandela stands at the front, representing democracy in 1994. The monument is mostly successful because it honors South Africa’s penchant for monolithic, hero-based forms of representation by providing each hero their own detailed and personalized bronze immortalization. However, it pushes against this articulation by placing each hero within a sea of figures, situating individuals within a group who fought for democracy. By each figure being a part of a large mass, walking
in the same direction, at the same level, and of the same size, all figures are equalized in their contribution to South Africa’s liberation.

Although women are only 21 of the 95 statues, women are represented almost on par with the figures of men that were activists in the last few decades. It has allowed for the immortalization and memorialization of many of the significant women figures that I have referenced throughout this thesis. It is still to be determined how many women will end up as part of the total 500 hundred statues. While this monument is not a panacea to the memorialization issues I have posed in this thesis, it depicts a potential changing trajectory for future memorialization projects, having already included a variety of women activists within a larger activist narrative.

Similarly encouraging, the country is currently debating over whom to rename the Cape Town International Airport after, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela has been a strong contender. The renaming of the airport after one of South Africa’s most dedicated, militant and feminist women activists would be revolutionary. Almost unsurprisingly, however, in March 2019, the ANC voted in parliament against the renaming of the airport on behalf of Madikizela-Mandela. ANC member of the National Congress, and member on the Multiparty Women's Caucus, Dikeledi Magadzi, stated in parliament that “as the African National Congress we believe that it is very vital that such a significant airport should be named after someone who is tried and tested. It must be named after someone who has got substance virtue in society.”

In many ways, his twisted and disconcerting description of one of the most “tried and

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“tried and tested” figures in South Africa’s history represents the failure of South Africa’s memorialization project.

This example highlights the plague of rhetoric that continues to purport an appreciation for women’s activism but in practice deprioritizes and decidedly devalues it. April 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2019 marked the one-year death of Madikizela-Mandela. It also falls just under one month before the 2019 South African presidential elections. On this day, around the same time as the media was writing about the ANC’s statements about Madikizela-Mandela, the ANC’s twitter page @MYANC was tweeting multiple posts honoring and “celebrating” Madikizela-Mandela, with photos, videos and quotes.\textsuperscript{331} The majority of the comments, however, pointed out the ANC’s hypocrisy at celebrating a comrade whom the ANC deemed as not “tried and tested.”

The ANC will most likely continue to propagate rhetoric of gender equality, using key women figures to further political and national incentives without delivering the tangible and material acknowledgment that would support this rhetoric. The state’s influence on dictating national narratives through producing public history cannot be underestimated. By default, the state will likely continue to construct these silences I have discussed throughout this thesis. The symbolic and visual erasure of women that were once visible is an active construction. Without vigilance, these silences grow stronger. In 1998, before the Women’s Monument to the Women of South Africa was installed, the state held a Women’s Day (August 9\textsuperscript{th}) ceremony at the Union Buildings. On this day, the government renamed the main amphitheater Malibongwe Mabandla,

meaning “give thanks to the name of women.” Yet, in December 2013, the amphitheater was renamed the “Nelson Mandela Amphitheatre,” after Mandela’s death. In Jacob Zuma’s speech at the naming ceremony, there was no reference to the removal of the existing name referencing women. This fact is barely known. This event was not just a failure to acknowledge women but was the actual undoing of a past commemoration to women. This inconspicuous erasure is but one part of a composite of silencing of women by the state. It may very well, then, be up to the people of South Africa to remain vigilant and to continue to deconstruct and disrupt these silences.

Women need to be placed so prominently in the nation’s consciousness that it is impossible to misconstrue women’s central place in society. We need individuals to grapple with the repressed visualization of militant women, with narratives of violence exerted by and on women. Only then can individuals contextualize themselves and society around them, valuing women for their contribution and all facets of their experience. Only then will women no longer be existing in silence. We need international airports named after Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. We need larger-than-life-size statues of Albertina Sisulu. We need more buildings and streets named after Lillian Ngoyi and Charlotte Maxeke. We need Miriam Makeba and on the South African rand and on postage stamps. We need substantial, well-known, and well-maintained memorials for Victoria Mxenge and Maki Skosana. If the state cannot even memorialize its greatest women heroes, how will it protect and value its women today?

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Pretoria: Union Buildings, The National Heritage Monument, Women’s Living Heritage Monument, Pretoria

Cape Town: Robben Island, District Six Museum, Iziko Slave Lodge, Bo-Kaap Museum

Images

Fig. 1: Wells, Julia. We Have Done with Pleading: The Women’s 1913 Anti-pass Campaign. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1991, 2.


Fig. 15: ANC Limpopo (@ANCLimpopo). 2016. “2. The Women's Living Heritage Monument at Lillian Ngoyi Square in PTA #WomensDay.” Twitter, August 9, 2016, 2:25 am. shorturl.at/tPQT8


Fig. 17: Maxine Gibb. Photograph. Museum Display, *Daily Diet*. Number Four, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg.

Fig. 18: Maxine Gibb. Photograph. Museum Display, *Treatment*. Women’s Jail, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg.


Fig. 20: Constitution Hill SA (@VisitConHill). Digital Photo. 2018. “It’s World Children’s Day & this evening we are launching “Hope”.” Twitter, November 20, 2018, 7:25 am. https://twitter.com/VisitConHill/status/1064902638507036672.

