

**MAKING HISTORY, GENDERING YOUTH: Young  
Women and South Africa's Liberation Struggles after 1976.**

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## CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>9</b>
I. History and Nationalism.....	12
II. Silence.....	15
<b>CHAPTER ONE: How to write a history of youth? .....</b>	<b>19</b>
I. Theorising Youth.....	20
II. The Historiography of Youth in South Africa .....	26
III. A Living Archive .....	48
<b>CHAPTER TWO: The meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the gendering of youth in South African histories. ....</b>	<b>54</b>
I. The Nature of Newspapers .....	56
II. June 16 <sup>th</sup> an episode within the struggle 1977-1986.....	63
III. June 16 <sup>th</sup> as the symbol of youth in the wider struggle 1987-1996 .....	84
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Real Absence and Symbolic Presence? Young women in political organisations.....</b>	<b>106</b>
I. 1970s: Black Consciousness, the YWCA and a womanhood of tested steel.	110

II.	1980s: COSAS, youth groups and ‘women’s participation for victory’.....	118
III.	1990s: the re-launch of the ANCYL, <i>Agenda</i> , and ‘a voice for young women’.....	134

**CHAPTER FOUR: Criminality, victimhood and youth politicisation..... 145**

I.	‘These are schoolchildren not the African National Congress’: the Soweto Student’s Representative Council sedition trial.....	147
II.	‘Freedom is indivisible. Silence betokens consent’: the daybooks of the Detainee Parents’ Support Committee.....	160
III.	‘What were the girls up to?’ the Truth and Reconciliation Commission youth hearings.....	178

**CHAPTER FIVE: Women’s auto/biographies of the struggle, 1985-2007 ..... 195**

I.	1980s: Motherism, the International Audience and Feminist Publishers.....	200
II.	1990s: Breaking Silences and Stretching Boundaries.....	217
III.	2000s: Tales of reconciliation and a heritage economy of oral history.....	229

**CONCLUSIONS ..... 241**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 249**

1.	Primary Sources.....	249
2.	Secondary Sources.....	256

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## SUMMARY

This thesis is a study of youth, nationalism, silence, gender and history-making. It explores the study of a distinct 'youth politics' after 1976 within histories of South Africa's liberation struggles. In particular it examines a narrative that has suggested youth politics became a masculine pursuit from the mid-1980s onwards. Within the historiographic narratives of youth politics young women often appear as a silent absence. However, it is argued that a project that aimed solely to fill in this historiographic gap would misunderstand the nature of young women's absence from struggle history. This thesis argues instead for a more complex understanding of liberation politics and the production of history as arenas for reifying, contesting and creating gender ideologies. The shifting subjectivities of young women are examined through an exploration of the politics of voice and silence in five connected contexts: the historiography of the struggle; commemorations of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976; the public discussions of self-identified youth activists; the legal entanglements between the State and activists (trials, detention and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission); and black women's autobiographical projects. It is argued that the absence of young women from struggle histories is not just a banal twist in the historical record but rather an active, contested and ongoing process.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**ANC** African National Congress  
**ANCYL** African National Congress Youth League  
**AWB** Afrikaaner Weestandsbeweging  
**AYCO** Alexandra Youth Congress  
**AZANYU** Azanian National Youth Unity  
**AZAPO** Azanian People's Organisation  
**AZASO** Azanian Students' Organisation  
**BC** Black Consciousness  
**CASE** Community Agency for Social Enquiry  
**CCAWUSA** Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union  
**CODESA** Convention for a Democratic South Africa  
**COSAS** Congress of South African Students  
**COSATU** Congress of South African Trade Unions  
**BMW** Bonteheuwel Military Wing  
**DPSC** Detainee Parents' Support Committee  
**FEDTRAW** Federation of Transvaal Women  
**GAWU** Garment and Allied Workers' Union  
**HRV** Human Rights Violation  
**IDAF** International Defence and Aid Fund  
**LYL** Lenasia Youth League  
**MK** Umkhonto we Sizwe  
**MUCCOR** Ministers United for Christian Co-responsibility  
**NCRC** National Children's Rights Committee  
**NF** National Forum  
**NOW** Natal Women's Organisation  
**NUSAS** National Union of South African Students  
**NYDCC** National Youth Development Co-ordinating Committee  
**PAC** Pan African Congress  
**PEWO** Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation  
**SAAWU** South African Allied Workers' Union  
**SANSCO** South African National Student's Congress  
**SASM** South African Students' Movement  
**SASO** South African Students' Organisation  
**SAYCO** South African Youth Congress  
**SDU** Self Defence Unit  
**SOYCO** Soweto Youth Congress  
**SRC** Students' Representative Council  
**SSL** Soweto Student's League  
**SSRC** Soweto Student's Representative Council  
**TRC** Truth and Reconciliation Commission  
**UDF** United Democratic Front  
**UWC** United Women's Congress  
**UWO** United Women's Organisation  
**VASCO** Vaal Students' Congress

**WAR Women against Repression  
YWCA Young Women's Christian Association**



## INTRODUCTION

In March of 2006, as I applied for funding to undertake a PhD researching the history of young women's participation in South Africa's liberation struggles, Jacob Zuma's rape trial hit the headlines of the South African and international media. The trial, in which Zuma was eventually acquitted of the rape charge, was a huge event in contemporary South African politics. Jacob Zuma, as deputy president had been the heir apparent to the presidency and his supporters claimed that the rape accusation was part of a larger conspiracy orchestrated to keep him from obtaining the office of President. The 31-year-old accuser, nick-named 'Khwezi' in the media was a woman whose father had been a comrade of Zuma's in exile and who described her relationship with Zuma as that of an uncle. During the trial her sexual history was presented as evidence against her by Zuma's defence team who argued that several earlier rapes which she had reportedly been subjected to at the ages of five, 13 and 14 whilst living in exile, undermined her credibility. During the trial South Africa discussed young women as silent victims of the liberation struggle; appropriate forms of behaviour for men and women; and saw Zuma perform a sexualised struggle masculinity to galvanise his supporters who gathered daily outside the courthouse, as he sang 'bring me my machine gun' in celebration of his past in the African National Congress' armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

For many commentators and observers the trial became not only a test of Zuma's guilt but of South African politics and society and its commitment to the ideals of gender equality enshrined in the 1996 Constitution. For gender violence activist Mmatshilo Motsei the verdict on this latter test was clear:

It was on waking up to the headline 'Burn the Bitch' at Jacob Zuma's rape trial on International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006, twelve years into South Africa's new democracy, ten years after the implementation of the new constitution and fifty years after women marched to the Union Buildings to demand their rights, that the pervasive disrespect of women and women's rights was brought home.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mmatshilo Motsei, *The Kanga and the Kangaroo Court: Reflections on the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma* (Sunnyside: Jacana, 2007), p.18.

For others the trial highlighted the pervasive silencing of raped women in South Africa and symbolically, those who had been raped during the liberation struggle by comrades. This was a fraught and complicated subject. One woman wrote to the *Sunday Times* telling them that she had been raped as a young woman in exile and that ‘she was afraid that, if she spoke out, her trauma would have derailed the process of attaining freedom for South Africa and “us going back home”’.<sup>2</sup>

In this light, Zuma’s performance of ‘male revolutionary as sex symbol’ did not go uncontested. Njabulo Ndebele, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town saw in Zuma’s trial the workings of the ANC’s internal ‘family’ politics, played out in front of a national audience. In a controversial newspaper article he referred to a sense of family decency in asking Zuma to,

Spare me and others among the public, the pain and revulsion I felt when I saw him on my television screen calling for *umshini wami* [his machine gun]. Was he knowingly and defiantly inviting me to make horrible connections between the Ak-47 and the invasive penis? The public morality issues at stake are as graphic as this. That is why, as he sang and danced with his supporters, images of South Africa’s raped mothers, sisters, daughters (some infants), nieces, aunts and grandmothers, raced through my mind, torturing me. Are their pain and the broad sense of public morality of little consequence in the settling of ‘family’ scores?<sup>3</sup>

Muff Anderson complained in May 2006 in veiled terms about the appropriation of Umkhonto we Sizwe’s heritage,

We live in an upside down world. Old men have sex with troubled young women in search of father figures and then apologise for not using a condom (as if HIV is the issue instead of the blurring of the boundaries of trust and the human rights dimensions!)... We have seen many old men tamper with confused, tender young things in political structures and get away with it. We have seen imposters who sprang from nowhere in 1994 and who claimed to be part of us. We all know who landed us in jail (though we do not speak about it) or raped a woman and

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<sup>2</sup> *Sunday Times*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, ‘Why Zuma’s bravado is brutalising the public’, *Sunday Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

got a promotion. That, however, was never the way of MK. Such behaviour in MK would be inappropriate.<sup>4</sup>

Zuma was acquitted of the rape charge and went on to attain the presidency of the ANC and South Africa in 2009. His accuser was given asylum in Holland. As I finish writing-up three years of research in March 2010 the reverberations of the trial are still being felt. The leader of the African National Congress Youth League, Julius Malema has been found guilty on charges of hate speech and harassment brought by the Sonke Gender Justice Network after comments he made at a rally in January 2009 suggesting that Zuma's rape accuser had 'a nice time'. According to the Network this comment was 'damaging to rape victims and women who were afraid to lodge complaints of rape'.<sup>5</sup> This particular political drama has continually reminded me as it has unfolded during my research that young women have been a troubling presence in the national narratives of the liberation struggle; potentially disruptive in both their silence and their speech.

The trial and its aftermath brought to the fore many of the themes that this thesis aims to explore: the masculinisation of struggle history through public rituals and the simultaneous creation of the ANC's reputation as a champion of women's rights; the inextricable role of the courts in shaping the relationship between criminality, victimhood and the liberation struggle; and the salience of struggle biographies in the everyday practice of South African politics. The trial also provoked discussions of inter-generational relations, bound up with discourses of modernity and tradition.<sup>6</sup> A street interview during the trial solicited the following response from one woman, 'This young girl is crazy and does not respect older people. She has insulted all women in this country, even those supporting her. She's a bitch and deserves to be jailed for dragging Zuma's name in the mud'.<sup>7</sup> The perils of negotiating a national struggle history, young womanhood and moral gender discourses were all publicly laid bare by the trial. The

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<sup>4</sup> Muff Anderson, 'Foreword' to Nokuthula Mazibuko, *Spring Offensive* (Limpopo, South Africa: Timbila Pub, 2006), p.iv.

<sup>5</sup> For the unfolding of this aspect of the drama, see: Jenni O'Grady, 'Malema: I am a defender of Women', *Mail and Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009; *Mail and Guardian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2009; *Mail and Guardian*, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Vasu Reddy and Cheryl Potgieter, "'Real men stand up for the truth': discursive meanings in the Jacob Zuma rape trial," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 24, no. 4 (2006): p.517.

<sup>7</sup> M. Tolsi, K. Sosibo, T Makgetla and M. Dibetle, 'This mama is speaking lies', *Mail and Guardian*, 24-30 March, 2006.

introduction that follows aims to set out an approach to the history of young women in South Africa's liberation struggle that is sensitive to the ongoing contestation surrounding these fraught public historical narratives.

## I. History and Nationalism

*To you, African nationalism and what it means to us who have suffered under colonial rule for sixty years can only be an intellectual abstraction. But to me, my whole being – I am involved in it.*<sup>8</sup>

In several ways this thesis is a study of nationalism. It aims first of all to treat nationalism as an embodied ideology that can not be abstracted from the 'being' of those involved.<sup>9</sup> The approach here is to consider the practice of politics as a social activity, 'through which social difference is both invented and performed'.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the thesis explores the history-making of everyday politics and the politics of academic historical practices as intertwined. In this endeavor the work of David William Cohen, outlined below has been particularly instructive.<sup>11</sup> The result is not a reconstruction of the political lives of young women but an analysis of the gendering practices of formal political resistance to the apartheid government. The thesis considers how young women's lives have been produced and archived by these processes. In the words of Joan W. Scott, 'it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience' and it is the emergence of youth and women as political actors through the practices of the struggle that this thesis traces.<sup>12</sup> I seek to understand how and why youth became a category of social and political analysis 'suffused with

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<sup>8</sup> Remi talks to his white girlfriend Jane in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The Black Hermit*, African Writers Series 51 (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational, 1968), p.47.

<sup>9</sup> As Bayart has put it, 'one cannot separate the Word of society, from the Flesh that created it'. Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), p.xx.

<sup>10</sup> McClintock, Anne, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven": Gender, Race and Nationalism," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.89.

<sup>11</sup> David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); David William Cohen, "Further Thoughts on the Production of History," in *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, ed. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 300-310; David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, "Silences of the Living, Orations of the Dead: The Struggle in Kenya for SM Otieno's body, 20 December 1986 to 23 May 1987," in *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, ed. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 180-198.

<sup>12</sup> Joan W Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott (Routledge, 1992), p.26.

gender assumptions'.<sup>13</sup> I also want to think about the way in which certain political experiences have been recorded through different discourses.

My approach here draws upon feminist analyses of nationalism that, at the suggestion of Anne McClintock, may have more than one focus:

A feminist theory of nationalism might thus be strategically fourfold: investigating the gendered formation of sanctioned male theories; bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in national formations; bringing nationalist institutions into critical relation with other social structures and institutions; and at the same time paying scrupulous attention to the structures of racial, ethnic, and class power that continue to bedevil privileged forms of feminism.<sup>14</sup>

South African historiography has been criticised by Linzi Manicom, Helen Bradford and others for ignoring the call from gender historians to incorporate the analysis of gender relations into the mainstream historical narratives of conquest, colonialism, and the development of capitalism, state-formation and nationalism.<sup>15</sup> By and large the study of South African nationalisms has taken particular organisations like the National Party, the African National Congress or the United Democratic Front; sectors, for example women, youth, workers; or specific localities as the framework of analysis. Within these histories of nationalism the project most often pursued by gender historians has been that of 'bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in national formations'.<sup>16</sup> My own work is indebted to these projects of historical reconstruction. However, this history has often figured young black women as an absence.<sup>17</sup> This research started out with the question as to how and why young black

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<sup>13</sup> Linzi Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History," *The Journal of African History* 33, no. 3 (1992): p.464.

<sup>14</sup> McClintock, Anne, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism," p.90.

<sup>15</sup> Manicom, "Ruling Relations," p.443; Helen Bradford, "Not a Nongqawuse story: An anti-heroine in historical perspective," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), p.49.

<sup>16</sup> McClintock, Anne, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism," p.90; See for example, Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Some important exceptions, which are explored further below, are Janet Cherry, "'We were not afraid': The role of women in the 1980s township uprising in the Eastern Cape," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 281-314; S. Nombuso Dlamini, *Youth and identity politics in South Africa, 1990-1994* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Deborah Gaitskell, "'Christian Compounds for Girls': Church Hostels for African Women in Johannesburg, 1907-1970," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979):

women were being largely ignored as social and political actors. However, as Helen Bradford has commented in her work on one of the most infamous young black women in South African history, Nongqawuse, 'adding women to extant paradigms...is a flawed project; much broader issues need to be addressed'.<sup>18</sup> The thesis explains how the silencing of young women's voices is an active and contested process, not just a banal twist in the historical record.

I argue following David William Cohen that it is instructive to view works of history produced in the academy as interlinked with wider discussions of the past within societies. Cohen has suggested accordingly that historians and anthropologists turn their attention to 'the production of history'. Cohen's definition of 'the production of history' is quoted at length below:

A frame of reference that augments the conventional senses of meaning of history and historiography, and refers to the processing of the past in societies and historical settings all over the world and in struggles for control of voices and texts in innumerable settings which animate this processing of knowledge of the past. This field of practice encompasses conventions and paradigms in the formation of historical knowledge and historical texts: the organising sociologies of historicizing projects and events, including commemorations and exhibitions; the structuring of frames of record keeping; the culturally specific glossing of texts; the deployment of powerfully nuanced vocabularies; the confronting of patterns and forces underlying interpretation; the workings of audience in managing and responding to presentations of historical knowledge; and the contentions and struggles which evoke and produce texts and which also produce historical literatures.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis aims to explore the production of the history of youth in South Africa's liberation struggle. Natasha Erlank has argued that in the first half of the twentieth century, 'black nationalist activity was not only premised on the exclusion of women, but also relied on the exclusion of women for its own legitimation'.<sup>20</sup> By the latter half

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44-69; Deborah Gaitskell, "Wailing for Purity": prayer unions, African mothers and adolescent daughters 1912-1940," in *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930*, ed. Shula Marks and R. J. A. R. Rathbone (Harlow: Longman, 1982), 338-357; Monique Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Bradford, "Not a Nongqawuse story: An anti-heroine in historical perspective," p.49.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, "Further Thoughts on the Production of History," p.300.

<sup>20</sup> Natasha Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912-1950," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 3 (2003): p.666.

of the century this picture was infinitely more complicated, but the contention of this thesis is that the apparent absence of young black women from the history of the liberation struggle is worth investigating for what it reveals about the shifting legitimating strategies of South African nationalisms. As Cohen again argues, ‘there are critical areas in the shadows, critical silences in the social worlds that we study. They are there not because we are few in number and sources are recondite, but because the attentions of anthropologists and historians tend to follow the visible wake of the past, ignoring the quiet eddies of potentially critical materials that form at the same time’.<sup>21</sup>

## II. Silence

*Silences have multiple sources.*<sup>22</sup>

This thesis also aims to take seriously my own position as an academic placed at a distance from the ongoing, embodied struggles of the people I discuss. I therefore inscribe certain important limits to my arguments: I do not claim to speak for anyone but myself; I do not claim to be studying people themselves but rather the historical record that has been created through their practices; I hope that when I have reproduced people’s speech, writings or silence I have done so with sensitivity and with attention to the context of the initial pronouncement. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith have noted the problematic notions inherent in social history projects that aim to ‘give voice’, arguing that, ‘far more than we have admitted, it is not simply the silence of the vulnerable that matters – but the silence of the dominant society, and other groups of the poor and the oppressed, about their or each others suffering’.<sup>23</sup> They go on to note, ‘the silenced, may be particularly silent *precisely to us*, and that silence, rather than what we might wish it, may be a politically significant component of their consciousness of class.’<sup>24</sup>

Silence is central theme within this thesis that requires some elaboration. The apartheid government wrote and archived its own history as part of its practices of racialised minority rule. In South Africa, as in the rest of Africa and other parts of the

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen, *The Combing of History*, p.118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.247.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith, “Introduction,” in *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, ed. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p.14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

previously colonized world, oral history has been seen as a means of 'freeing a continent from the silences of immovable and inflexible western historiography, unable to see beyond the written document'.<sup>25</sup> This was institutionalized in South Africa through the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As Nthabiseng Motsemme has noted of the TRC, 'in its performance and ritualisation it created a space in which the spoken word would be transformed into truth and history'.<sup>26</sup> Motsemme argues that this privileging of voice has led to a neglect of silence as another means of expression, and that we should 'begin to read these silences, just as we invest in reading speech and action'.<sup>27</sup> Fiona Ross has questioned the assumption that 'what preceded the TRC's work was voicelessness and silence about the apartheid past'.<sup>28</sup> She argues that 'much was already known about apartheid, told in diverse genres – in stories, songs, political rhetoric, magisterial orders, court cases, newspapers, scholarly work, parliamentary debates, at funerals, rallies and so on', and that the TRC offered simply a 'new structure'.<sup>29</sup> I aim to incorporate both of these insights into my approach to silence and practices of 'breaking silence'.

My own forays into oral history collection in 2007-8 met with exhaustion from a number of women who had previously been interviewed and cynicism from others who felt their stories had already been taken from them, to the benefit of others and not themselves.<sup>30</sup> I accepted their refusals to further interviews as a reassertion of control over their own pasts. I concluded that these women were, to paraphrase Sider and Smith, silent *precisely to me*. Woodward *et al* have recently argued the binaries of visibility/invisibility and voice/silence that have structured much feminist historical

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<sup>25</sup> Cohen, "Further Thoughts on the Production of History," p.307.

<sup>26</sup> Nthabiseng Motsemme, "The Mute Always Speaks: On Women's Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Current Sociology* 52, no. 5 (2004): p.911.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.910.

<sup>28</sup> Fiona Ross, "On having voice and being heard: some after effects of testifying before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Anthropological Theory* 3 (2003): p.327.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Such sentiments have been documented by others such as Christopher Colvin and Fiona Ross. Colvin argues that 'a story' has become a commodity in post-apartheid and post-TRC South Africa: C. Colvin, "Limiting Memory: The Roots and Routes of Storytelling in Post-Apartheid, Post-TRC South Africa," in *Telling Wounds, published proceedings of the conference on Narrative, Memory and Trauma: Working through the South African Armed Conflicts of the Twentieth Century*, ed. C. van der Merwe (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2002); See also discussion in Ross, "On having voice and being heard: some after effects of testifying before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," pp.330-331.



work need problematising.<sup>31</sup> I follow their suggestions here to trace ‘spirals’ or ‘cycles’ of silencing and voicing. I returned to the archives formed by apartheid and the liberation struggles, believing as Jean and John Comaroff do, that:

There is no basis to assume that the histories of the repressed in themselves hold a special key to revelation, the discourses of the dominant also yield vital insights into the contexts and processes of which they were part. The corollary: there is no great historiographic balance that may be restored, set to rights once and for all.<sup>32</sup>

I set out to understand the apparently persistent absence of young black women through the sources that were available to me. This thesis is by no means a comprehensive answer to the question of young women’s silence – it is rather an exploration of the politics of voice and history in five connected contexts.

Each chapter deals with a different body of sources and questions the discourses on youth and young womanhood that are found there. The first deals with academic/activist responses to the phenomenon of youth politicisation in South Africa after 1976.<sup>33</sup> Across the disciplines of history, politics, sociology, anthropology and psychology academics discussed and theorised the dynamics of youth politics as they unfolded in South Africa. The chapter explores the apparent absence of young black women from history by examining ‘history making’ as a social and political activity. The second chapter follows on from this with an examination of public historical discourses on youth surrounding the 1976 Soweto uprisings. I focus upon the public remembrance of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 as it can be read through newspaper reports from the first anniversary in 1977 up to the twentieth in 1996. The roles of newspaper reporting by black journalists in the initial uprising makes this a particularly interesting space to explore the politics of authenticity and contests over the moral authority of youth. The third chapter examines the somewhat fragmentary document archives left by youth

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<sup>31</sup> Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley, eds., *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p.xxiv.

<sup>32</sup> John L Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, Studies in the Ethnographic Imagination (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p.17.

<sup>33</sup> I have used the formulation ‘academic/activist’ since as Ineke Van Kessel has commented such categories were overlapping during the 1970s and 1980s. As she puts it, ‘in the unfolding of the South African drama, there were few dispassionate observers’. Ineke Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.48.

organisations themselves, as such organisations became increasingly politicised during the 1980s. It explores the apparent turn of the ANC Youth League after its re-launch in 1991 to discourses of gender equality. The fourth chapter looks at sources produced at the interface between the apartheid government and politicised young people. It examines the sedition trial of student activists in 1977-9 and the records of human rights reportage groups that emerged with the aim of documenting the government's oppressive practices under successive states of emergency. The chapter follows this human rights discourse after its adoption by the post-apartheid state in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The fifth and final chapter explores the production of women's struggle autobiographies from the mid-1980s onwards as a space for the articulation or silencing of gender politics within the liberation struggle. Within this I consider the politics of oral history practices in post-apartheid South Africa.

Before turning to the first chapter and a discussion of 'youth', there are several other terms used throughout the thesis that need a short introduction. A number of conventions were developed amongst anti-apartheid historians for the use of apartheid racial terminology in writings that sought not to reproduce the racial politics of that era. I have followed those conventions. So, 'black' is used to refer to all those groups of people excluded from full political citizenship in the apartheid era. Where necessary, for example in highlighting a particular group's position in relation to the apartheid state, the terms African, Indian or Coloured have been used. These terms should be prefaced in the reader's mind with the well known phrase 'so-called'. Finally, when spelling Hector Pieterse's surname I have used "Pieterse" as this is the spelling used in accordance with his family's wishes and by the Museum dedicated to him that opened in 2002.

## CHAPTER ONE: How to write a history of youth?

*The story of being young is a fascinating one precisely because of the strange accretions and sedimentations it draws to itself: its crystalline nature.*<sup>34</sup>

It seems appropriate that this thesis should begin with a definition of 'youth'. However, this is no straightforward task. The emergence of youth as a political constituency and an academic object of interest were processes interlinked through the practice of history in twentieth century South Africa. There is also a wider history of youth as a theoretical concept that has interacted with academic and public discourses on South Africa's youth. The Hector Pieterse Museum which opened in 2002 to commemorate the June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 uprisings in Soweto asks on an information board: 'Who were the Youth of 1976?' The answer highlights the diversity of young people who might be encompassed by such a term, 'workers (miners, 'spanner boys', those selling coal or firewood), student activists, youth recreation club members, sports clubs, unemployed youths and gangs, young men and women in their twenties'.<sup>35</sup> Clearly not everybody who used the term youth meant to refer to such a list. The concept became highly racialised in South Africa. Indeed there was a pervasive infantilisation of Africans in white South African society, with adult employees referred to as 'boys' or 'girls'.<sup>36</sup> David Everatt, an academic involved in studying youth through the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) in the 1990s, commented that 'South Africa has white teenagers but black youth'.<sup>37</sup> The term has also been highly gendered, typically referring to black, urban, young men. When the term 'youth' is used in this thesis it refers to the product of these joint process, a constructed identity, imposed upon, rejected, embraced or aspired to by people, not all of whom were necessarily young. What now follows is a brief overview of influential theories on youth, the historiography of South Africa's youth and an outline of my own approaches.

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<sup>34</sup> Henrietta L. Moore, "On Being Young," *Anthropological Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2004): p.745.

<sup>35</sup> Information Board, Hector Pieterse Museum, visited October 2008.

<sup>36</sup> One could go further and highlight the West's infantilisation of African societies generally as 'dependent' and 'immature'. See discussion in Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), p.1-3.

<sup>37</sup> 'Introduction' to David Everatt and Elinor Sisulu, eds., *Black Youth in Crisis: Facing the Future* (Braamfontein: Ravan, 1992).

## I. Theorising Youth

The major work on youth and generations in sociological theory appeared in 1952 and continues to be cited by sociologists and historians alike. In his *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Karl Mannheim elaborated a theory of generations as historical actors that set out some of the fundamentals of studying youth.<sup>38</sup> From Mannheim are borrowed concepts to explain generations not as biological manifestations but as sociologically created. So generations are not necessarily made up of people all born within a certain set of years but by those who share a historical location. For Mannheim, generation is like class, in that it endows individuals with a common location in the social and historical process. It thereby 'limits them, to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for certain characteristic modes of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action'.<sup>39</sup> Contemporaries must be in a position (or 'location') to share common experiences for a 'community of location of a generation' to arise.<sup>40</sup> Biological age is a factor but not a rigid criterion of inclusion.

Mannheim then has further theories on generations as actors in the historical process. Beyond generations themselves he goes on to elaborate the concept of generation units. In his view, peasants and urban youth cannot be said to be 'in the same generation' in a meaningful or 'active' way.<sup>41</sup> He suggests that there may be in some societies at certain moments 'polar forms of the intellectual and social response to a historical stimulus experienced by all of the same generation in common' and that these should be understood as 'separate generational units'.<sup>42</sup> Mannheim claims that 'within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated, antagonistic generation-units'.<sup>43</sup> These units Mannheim associates with 'an identity of responses'.<sup>44</sup> It is here that is found one of the major characteristics of youth as an object of sociological study. Youth, or a generation is studied when they become visible, when their 'identity of

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.291.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.298.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.303.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.304.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.306.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

response' can be recognised and read as such by the academic. Subjects have to be acting like a generation to be identified, yet there is no room in Mannheim's theories for generation or age as a creative concept, a social resource that might be used by social groupings either to their advantage or against others.<sup>45</sup> In short Mannheim reifies generations where he finds them. Subsequent work by Phillip Abrams does little to change this fundamental position.<sup>46</sup> However, Bourdeiu as a sociological theorist has in some short remarks 'on youth' pointed to a theory of generation that is active in society rather than simply read and identified by the sociologist. He commented in an interview in 1978, 'classification by age (but also by sex and of course class), always means imposing limits and producing an order to which each person must keep, keeping himself in his place'.<sup>47</sup> Bourdeiu has had limited influence on youth as an object of study in South Africa, it was Mannheim that dominated the academic conceptualisations of the 1970s and 1980s.

A second strand of theory, the study of youth in anthropology, is of particular resonance in the post-colonial field of African youth studies. Detailed ethnographical studies of kinship and familial structures are often some of the richest sources for historians looking to explore the position of young people within pre-colonial and colonised African societies. The focus in anthropological work on youth and generations is often on cultures of age, which allows for a notion of age as a creative and culturally diverse concept. Youth is most often understood as a phase of socialisation and the subjects of study as incomplete adults. The implication for studying youth culture is either a focus on how youths learn the culture of (adult) society or a view of youth culture as simply a variant of societal/adult cultures; a kind of cultural dialect,

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<sup>45</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp.88-123.

<sup>46</sup> Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Shepton Mallet, Somerset: Open Books, 1982).

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Youth is just a word," in *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), p.94.

momentary and eventually absorbed.<sup>48</sup> Never-the-less the definition of youth as a phase of socialisation is an important and influential one for youth culture studies.<sup>49</sup>

In the late 1970s a large body of sociological studies on 'youth culture' emerged in Britain. The object of study was more precisely male working class urban youth and started from the premise that this particular social group were a problem for society at large. These studies emphasised the idea of youth subcultures that were oppositional to mainstream culture. They emerged from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, becoming known as the Birmingham School. Helena Wuiff describes the arguments of the Birmingham School somewhat dismissively as; 'working class boys were portrayed as temporary resisters fighting a symbolic class war that they would lose in the long run and hence end up as victims anyway'.<sup>50</sup> The Birmingham School saw their work as closely related to societal changes, and they argued that before the Second World War there had never been such a thing as youth culture to study. Youth culture had emerged due to the increased spending power of British young people, the availability of cheap mass produced goods and the development of a new leisure industry in Post-War Britain.<sup>51</sup> From this position it is easy to recognise, as Jean and John Comaroff do, that youth is, in this form, a category of modernity, heavily associated with consumerism and notions of progress.<sup>52</sup> The strongest element within these studies was that of youth as a social problem and with that a focus upon young urban men. In South African academic discourse and popular politics a concept of youth as a social problem has been opposed and at times combined with Marxist-Leninist theories of youth as potential revolutionaries. Jeremy Seekings

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<sup>48</sup> Vered Amit and Helena Wulff, eds., *Youth Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.224.

<sup>49</sup> This is the definition of youth used by Clive Glaser in his important work upon urban youth gangs in Soweto, Clive Glaser, *Bo Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Amit and Wulff, *Youth Cultures*, p.3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.226.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Reflections on youth, from the past to the post-colony," in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Alcinda Manuel Honwana and Filip de Boeck (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), p.19.

has described this as the existence of two stereotypical views of youth – the apocalyptic and liberatory.<sup>53</sup>

Marxist-Leninist theories of youth had a profound influence upon the African National Congress through the South African Communist Party but also contemporaneous academic studies of the liberation struggle. Youth are often analysed by such an approach in terms of how likely they are to cause a full-scale revolution or in terms of their vanguard role in revolutionary situations. *Lenin on Youth* a collection of Lenin's works related to youth can, and has been mined for generalised comments on the characteristics of youth political action. So, for example Colin Bundy's examination of student protest in Cape Town in 1985 uses Lenin's judgement of youth politics as 'a hybrid of precocity and immaturity' in his concluding statements.<sup>54</sup> In these collected works Lenin could also be quoted as describing youth politics as full of 'characteristic energy and fervour' or lacking 'theoretical clarity and consistency' because youth was 'seething, turbulent and inquiring'.<sup>55</sup> In his writings Lenin also repeatedly cajoled his comrades not to be afraid of the youth as a political force. This kind of analysis and judgement is bound up with debates over where power should lie within revolutionary political movements. Even when it is removed from immediate political debates, academic judgements of youthfulness can be used as an unproblematic characterisation of certain political actions and actors. Eric Hobsbawm is worth quoting at length for his characterisation of youth politics:

Such movements are by their nature impermanent and discontinuous. Being young or a student is the prelude to being adult and earning one's living: it is not a career in itself...hence a political youth or student movement is not comparable to movements whose members can remain in them all their lives, like those of workers, or women, or blacks, all of whom belong to their respective category from birth until death.<sup>56</sup>

The special character of youth is that it provides the opportunity but is inherently limited. Hobsbawm views age as something that cannot be analysed alongside race,

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<sup>53</sup> Jeremy Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), p.xi.

<sup>54</sup> Colin Bundy, "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 13, no. 3 (April 1987): p.330.

<sup>55</sup> Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *On Youth*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), p.167.

<sup>56</sup> E. J Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London: Abacus, 1999), 311-312.

gender or class. In contrast this thesis will argue that age does in fact mitigate and interact with these categories of social organisation in important ways. Interestingly, Thomas Burgess has argued that ‘the manner in which juniors in Africa have historically been cast as clients in relation to their elders has been as real as class divisions between workers and capitalists in Europe’.<sup>57</sup> In my approach I also follow the work of Benedict Carton, who has argued that ‘the pivotal conceptual category in any analysis of women and patriarchy – that is generation – has been under-researched’.<sup>58</sup>

In the relatively new field of African youth studies there have been attempts to give youth a different theoretical definition and shift the focus of study. This new approach has been summed up as ‘fragmenting the notion of identity, recognising fleeting gatherings as opposed to group bonds and locating the cultural practices of youth within consumer and lifestyle niches rather than “dominant” and “subordinate” cultures’.<sup>59</sup> This has also resulted in a different definition of youth itself. Deborah Durham thinks of youth, ‘less as a specific age group, or cohort, but more as a social “shifter”- a term borrowed from linguistics’.<sup>60</sup> Her definition of a ‘social shifter’ is ‘a term that works not through absolute referentiality to a fixed context, but one that relates the speaker to a relational or indexical context’.<sup>61</sup> The epigraph to this chapter from Henrietta L. Moore pointing out the ‘crystalline nature’ of youth suggests a very similar approach. Durham argues ‘when people bring the concept [of youth] to bear on situations, they situate themselves in a social landscape of power, rights, expectations,

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Burgess, “Imagined Generations: Constructing Youth in Revolutionary Zanzibar,” in *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics, and Conflict in Africa*, ed. John Abbink and Ineke Van Kessel (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p.73; See also, Thomas Burgess, “Cinema, Bell Bottoms and Miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, no. 2/3 (2002): pp.287-313.

<sup>58</sup> Benedict Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.8; For two examples of an integrated analysis of gender and generation in African historiography see Thomas V McClendon, *Genders and Generations Apart: Labor Tenants and Customary Law in Segregation-Era South Africa, 1920s to 1940s*, Social History of Africa (Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 2002); Lynn M Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> Hillary Pilkington and Richard Johnson, “Peripheral youth. Relations of identity and power in global/local context,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): p.27.

<sup>60</sup> Deborah Durham, “Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts 1 and 2,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (July 2000): p.116.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



and relationships- indexing both themselves and the topology of that social landscape'.<sup>62</sup> The usefulness of this definition is that it enables us to index not only societal or popular usages of age categories but also academic usages and within that, our own. Henrietta L. Moore's approach to gender discourses might just as well instruct our approach to multiple discourses on youth,

Discourses in any given context are hierarchically organised, some are more powerful and carry greater social sanction than others. Such coexisting discourses are dynamically interrelated and their mutually defining inclusions and exclusions shift over time. This is because their hierarchisation is linked to inequalities of power and resource, and to overarching ideological formations such as nationalism, the market and the role of the state, which frequently seek to reformulate identities in categorical and sometimes fixed terms.<sup>63</sup>

Surprisingly, in the new field of African youth studies there has still been no sustained attempt to address the gendering of youth. John Abbink has commented that 'the gender perspective is not yet sufficiently integrated into youth studies'.<sup>64</sup> This is not to say there have not been occasional studies of female youth but these have not involved any critical engagement with the interplay between gender and generation. The study of youth appears to have remained blind to the gendering of its subject matter. Arguably the apparent shift in focus to the social marginalisation of youth is in actuality a variant upon the (male) youth as social problem that has been a recurrent modernist nightmare.<sup>65</sup> Needless to say this ensures a continued preoccupation with male youth. The South African interest in youth as problematic political actors has subsequently been taken up in the extensive literature on child soldiers elsewhere in Africa. In this literature young women only appear as victims; albeit in some cases as so-called 'active victims'.<sup>66</sup> As Carolyn Nordstrom notes, too often in literature that investigates children in violent conflicts there is a concurrent focus upon women which 'works to enforce two

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Henrietta L Moore, *The Subject of Anthropology: Gender, Symbolism and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p.35.

<sup>64</sup> John Abbink, "Being young in Africa: the politics of despair and renewal," in *Vanguard or Vandals? Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*, ed. John Abbink and Ineke van Kessel (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p.6.

<sup>65</sup> Abbink argues that female youth should not be ignored because they have a lower nuisance factor, *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>66</sup> Mats Utas, "Agency of Victims: young women in the Liberian Civil War," in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Alcinda Manuel Honwana and Filip de Boeck (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), pp.53-80. The notable exception to this is the work of Carolyn Nordstrom; Carolyn Nordstrom, *Girls and Warzones: Troubling Questions* (Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 1997).

dangerous ideas: that women are interchangeable with children, and are thus infantilised: and that girls drop out of public recognition altogether'.<sup>67</sup>

## II. The Historiography of Youth in South Africa

Young people rose to prominence as national political actors in South Africa's Liberation Struggle on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 in Soweto. The police disruption of the June 16<sup>th</sup> protest march against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in secondary schools sparked a wave of protest and violence that continued into 1977. This event has come to hold huge symbolic importance in historical narratives of the end of apartheid and was accordingly instituted as National Youth Day by the ANC-led government in 1995. The second chapter of this thesis deals with the changing commemorative practices surrounding June 16<sup>th</sup> from 1976 to 1996. Here I want to outline the academic/activist histories of June 16<sup>th</sup> that emerged in the uprisings' aftermath as the first academic attempts to grapple with youth politics. The events of 1976-77 immediately resulted in contestations over explaining and understanding the significance of the violence and the political development of the Soweto Student's Representative Council (SSRC). Youth emerged simultaneously in South Africa as political actors and the object of academic interest.

The National Party government's immediate response was to describe the uprisings as a problem of law and order to be dealt with by the police. The Government appointed Justice Cillie to head an *Investigation into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere* on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1976 but his report was not released to Parliament until 29<sup>th</sup> February 1980. In the intervening years there was intermittent grumbling in the English-language press that its findings would be horribly out of date when they were released. During this time several attempts to outline the historical causes and understand the possible consequences of the uprisings were made by a number of journalists and academic/activists both inside and outside South Africa. The authors of these early explanatory histories of June 16<sup>th</sup> were located at varying geographical and political distance from the uprising's student protagonists. There were accounts from authors

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<sup>67</sup> Nordstrom, *Girls and Warzones*, p.44.

such as Bob Hitchcock whose *Flashpoint South Africa* read, according to one contemporary, 'like a communiqué straight from the regime's trenches'.<sup>68</sup> In contrast someone like Baruch Hirson wrote from a position on the far left of South African politics.

There had been a call in the late seventies from Frank Molteno of the University of Cape Town for serious academic attempts to understand the Soweto uprisings.<sup>69</sup> In 1979 he wrote a review article for *Social Dynamics* in which he lamented the 'paucity of serious analyses'.<sup>70</sup> In an interesting passage he laid out what he believed were the imperatives and burdens of the (leftist) academic/activist in grappling with the significance of June 16<sup>th</sup>.

During 1976 it was popularly believed that things would never be the same again – nor are they. And yet, what precisely has changed? History is filled with devastation and death. To what extent these things happen to no end depends on what happens subsequently and this in turn depends in large measure on whether the lessons of history are grasped and what is done. Here lies the burden of the social analyst's full responsibility. For we are not just talking about the deaths of children and why they died; we are talking about the lives of future generations and how they are going to live.<sup>71</sup>

Three historical accounts that can be seen to have responded to the spirit of that call were John Kane-Berman's *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* published in 1978, Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill's *Whirlwind Before the Storm* and Baruch Hirson's *Year of Fire, Year of Ash* both published in 1980. All of these accounts aimed to place June 16<sup>th</sup> in an explanatory narrative. The three historical academic/activist accounts were in a close dialogue and disagreement with the public historical discourse as it appeared in newspapers. All of the authors recognised the central importance of newspaper reports as source material for their analyses but also aimed to distance themselves from the government line about agitators that many newspapers had followed. The importance of newspapers rested upon the reports from black journalists who were permitted access to the townships, an issue explored further in chapter two of

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<sup>68</sup> Frank Molteno, "The uprising of 16th June: A review of the literature on events in South Africa 1976," *Social Dynamics* 5, no. 1 (June 1979): p.58.

<sup>69</sup> Molteno, "The uprising of 16th June: A review of the literature on events in South Africa 1976."

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

the thesis. These three histories aimed to analyse June 16<sup>th</sup> and the uprisings in a search for causes, lessons and finally programmes for reform or revolution. One of the prime questions in these early analyses was a historical comparison with Sharpeville; as Molteno phrased it, 'was 1976 a mere repetition of 1960?'<sup>72</sup> By contrast, Brooks, Brickhill and Hirson were preoccupied with the potential of June 16<sup>th</sup> for the future. This was apparent in the titles that they chose; Hirson's subtitle was 'roots of a revolution?' It has been argued elsewhere by Helena Pohlandt-McCormick that, albeit for very different reasons, all of these analyses along with the Cillie Commission report, 'betrayed a fundamental disregard for and underestimation of the students as historical agents and subjects of their own history'.<sup>73</sup> Whilst agreeing with Pohlandt-McCormick's point, it is argued here that the way in which the students and/or youth *do appear* in these initial analyses is of importance, for understanding the subsequent trajectory of historical discourses on June 16<sup>th</sup> and youth.

The question of participation in the uprising was crucial in all of these historical explanations, as the government and the intellectuals of the liberation movements attempted to understand an uprising that had to a certain extent taken them by surprise. Historiographically, the academic accounts were not concerned with the gender dynamics of the uprisings, but in the 'quiet eddies' of their narrative flow, there are details to be gleaned.<sup>74</sup> All four present differently gendered pictures of this participation that we can see as the result of their differing priorities. John Kane-Berman, much later on Director of the Institute of Race Relations, was in 1979 assistant editor of the *Financial Mail*, where he had previously worked as a journalist. His account came from within the internal South African, liberal, English-language, newspaper establishment. For Kane-Berman, significant participation appeared to constitute active involvement in the violence of the uprising. In a breakdown of what he understood as constituting the uprisings John Kane-Berman made suggestions as to the numbers, ages and gender of the participants. His statement that 'girls participated

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>73</sup> Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, *"I Saw a Nightmare..." – Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> The phrase is David William Cohen's, David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.118.

actively in the demonstrations' was supported by statistics on charges of public violence, press photographs and newspaper reports of specific incidents.<sup>75</sup> The idea that participation constituted violence and that youth itself was constituted by violent participation was to be a recurring formulation through the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>76</sup>

Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill's work was published by the International Defence and Aid Fund. Writing from London, they had access to the collections of the IDAF, where Alan Brooks was director of research, including documents and participant interviews. His role at the IDAF was to produce 'objective, factual information about South Africa' in the form of a bi-monthly publication, *Focus*.<sup>77</sup> This research was separate from the IDAF's main work providing legal and welfare aid to political detainees and their families. However, both Brooks and Brickhill, like the IDAF, had links with the ANC. Alan Brooks had been a member of the South African Communist Party since 1962. Brooks and Brickhill's account of June 16<sup>th</sup> was perhaps the most optimistic assessment of student political leadership during the uprisings. Brooks and Brickhill's chapter entitled 'youth ferment' began with an introduction setting out the historical location of an individual Soweto youth aged 21 in 1976 within the narrative of 'the long freedom struggle in South Africa'.<sup>78</sup> They traced the determination and self-confidence of the young participants in the uprisings to 'the collective understanding of a generation reared in a period of defeat but which has never known defeat itself' as well as the ideology of Black Consciousness.<sup>79</sup> The influence of Mannheim is clear. The concept of the generation employed by Brooks and Brickhill, obscured any differentiation within the body of participants and also informed widespread understandings of the significance of June 16<sup>th</sup> as the expression of a generation. Their Soweto youth had an age, a race, and a class position but no gender.

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<sup>75</sup> John Stuart Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978), p.8.

<sup>76</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*

<sup>77</sup> Denis Herbstein, *White Lies: Canon John Collins and the Secret War Against Apartheid* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), p.194.

<sup>78</sup> Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), p.67.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Baruch Hirson was also a political exile, based in London who used the collections of the IDAF in writing his account. However, this is where the similarities with Brooks and Brickhill end. Hirson upheld a Trotskyite position within South Africa's political left, from which he criticised the South African Communist Party's associations with the Soviet Union. He was highly critical of the revolutionary potential of Black Consciousness or any political movement that was not linked closely with working class-based politics. When describing the SSRC he commented; 'A student council, fighting for students rights, is inevitably something different from a council that is directing the population in revolt, and this factor escaped the young men- there were few women in the leadership- who claimed on occasion to be "national leaders"'.<sup>80</sup> The effect of his comment on gender dynamics was to make the SSRC seem as narrowly based and parochial as he could. Later, when dismissing Black Consciousness as a revolutionary ideology, he comments on conscientisation programmes that, 'the programme for women can only be called reactionary, and the political content of the entire set of proposals is (or was) of little relevance to the black workers'.<sup>81</sup> Hirson introduced a different picture of gender dynamics that he used and thus explained as evidence of Black Consciousness as a narrow and reactionary ideology. As ANC-aligned organisations gained pre-eminence in the internal and international struggle during the 1980s, elements of Hirson's criticisms of Black Consciousness and the 1976 students also became more widespread.

The report of the Cillie Commission was one of the most direct attempts by the governing elite to shape the history of June 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>82</sup> The Cillie Commission report, published in 1980, was initially seized upon triumphantly by the English-language press as laying the blame for the Soweto uprisings squarely at the feet of the National Party government in general and the Department of Bantu Education in particular. However, whilst it did highlight apartheid laws as causing grievances amongst the black and coloured populations, it also absolved the police and security forces of any wrongdoing

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<sup>80</sup> Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1979), p.195.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292.

<sup>82</sup> The government also restricted the flow of information coming from the media through censorship and criminalised participants through the courts. These processes are considered in Chapters Two and Four respectively, in this thesis.

during the uprising, beyond a lack of preparation on June 16<sup>th</sup> itself. The report also blamed agitators as being behind the spread of the uprisings, especially to areas outside of Soweto.<sup>83</sup>

The Commission was tasked with investigating 'the facts and causes of the riots' and was not therefore concerned with giving recommendations to the government.<sup>84</sup> The Commission drew upon newspaper reports but also crucially witness testimony. The Commission heard the testimony of 563 witnesses. 340 were white, 39 so-called coloured, and 184 black, of whom 15 were under the age of 18. Less than 10% of the witnesses were women. Justice Cillie noted that the Commission had had a difficult relationship with the people of the townships it relied upon to tell the story of the uprisings. Cillie commented that 'evidence was given especially in Cape Town that many black, coloured and white persons were unwilling to testify before the commission'.<sup>85</sup> He outlined the main reasons as including fear of 'their own people's vengeance'; 'victimisation by the authorities'; and rejection of the commission as an apartheid institution.<sup>86</sup> Although rejecting these fears and suspicions as unfounded, Justice Cillie nonetheless recorded the sentiments as widespread and thus problematised his own version of events.

Interestingly, Cillie also considers the question of the authenticity of youth testimony in particular. He is dismissive of the possibility of an articulate political standpoint espoused by a truly 'young' youth. Two incidents reveal this. He comments upon his belief in the assistance of adults in producing the documents of student grievances:

In one outstanding case, a coloured girl gave very able testimony on grievances before the commission in Cape Town. It subsequently transpired that she had not been expressing her own or local views, but was reciting the contents of a

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<sup>83</sup> For example, Cillie details the arrival of cars without local number plates in proximity to outbreaks of 'rioting'. When considering the Uprising in the Western Cape, Cillie singled out a particular pamphlet produced by University of the Western Cape students as inciting unrest in the region.

<sup>84</sup> South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th of February 1977* (Pretoria: Govt. Printer, 1980), p.3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

pamphlet that had been drawn up in Soweto and distributed from there. She had learned this pamphlet off by heart. It was later handed in to the commission.<sup>87</sup>

Read in the context of the report as a whole it is quite possible that Justice Cillie saw the gender of the witness as adding to both the improbability that the views expressed were 'her own or even local' and to the reprehensibility of those 'using' her.<sup>88</sup> Later in the report Justice Cillie questioned the age of youth leaders and in doing so implied added culpability at the same time as denying the possibility of serious youth led political action.

Witnesses referred in a misleading manner to young people as children. The commission is aware of the difficulty of differentiating in some languages between young men and young boys, and is also mindful of the fact that the witnesses used an interpreter. Nevertheless, the commission remains under the impression that, especially when the police had taken steps against them, young men were sometimes referred to as children with the object of arousing sympathy for them, because they were supposed to be children and not blameworthy.<sup>89</sup>

It is impossible not to notice here that Justice Cillie is referring exclusively to young men in leadership roles and confrontation with the police. Overall the Cillie report does contain passing consideration of the gender dynamics of the uprisings in various different localities. Where these dynamics are brought to the fore however, they again serve the purposes of the author; as part of Justice Cillie's attempts to portray the uprisings as the work of a minority of 'agitators'. When discussing the uprisings as they occurred in Natal, Cillie suggests, 'Black scholars were mainly responsible for the riots in this area. Some of them were at school there but came from Soweto and elsewhere. They influenced local pupils to take part in the riots. There were also cases where boys forced girls to take part in rioting'.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, the report includes within it variances of the idea of a pathological 'Soweto generation' that became widespread during the 1980s. Under the section of the report that deals with the consequences of the uprisings, Cillie included a chapter

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.279.

<sup>88</sup> For example the report commented upon the Pan African Congress' recruitment of young people into its underground structures, 'there is evidence of their even having sent young girls overseas for training'.

*Ibid.*, p.572.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.357.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.212.



entitled 'baptism of fire'. Borrowing the phrase from American Black Power movements in the 1960s, Cillie suggested that in South Africa there had occurred a 'loss of fear of violent action, which has resulted in participation in violence'.<sup>91</sup> He cited an interview conducted in exile with one time student leader Tebello Motapanyane, to argue that, 'the people have become more involved. It was the experience of the struggle at home that had removed this fear, fear of the police, and fear of the government'.<sup>92</sup> Official discourses, academic/activist writings, and newspapers can be seen to have shared many of the same preoccupations with youth and, at this time, many of the same sources for their knowledge. The Tebello Motapanyane interview was conducted and disseminated by the ANC, and also appears in *Whirlwind Before the Storm*.

During the 1980s when school-based protest intensified and township youth organisations emerged the meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> were broadened in historical studies that considered the theoretical position of youth within the anti-apartheid struggles. This move to theorise the different components of anti-apartheid politics was perhaps a belated recognition of its breadth, encompassing the notion of emerging 'struggles within the struggle'.<sup>93</sup> 1987 and 1988 saw the publication of two important academic historical works that looked at youth involvement in anti-apartheid politics in the 1980s. These were Colin Bundy's article 'Street sociology and Pavement politics' and Shaun Johnson's *South Africa, No Turning Back*. They not only demonstrate the way in which subsequent youth political involvement was invariably seen in the light of June 16<sup>th</sup>, but also how it reshaped understandings of the events of 1976.

Colin Bundy's article was not concerned with June 16<sup>th</sup> or any other events of 1976; his focus was upon the actions of student and youth actors in Cape Town in 1985.<sup>94</sup> However, what is interesting about his article is that he considers and argues for the possibility of a structural position for youth in revolutionary politics that would be applicable to most, if not all moments of youth political action. Bundy engages with

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.547.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Interview with Tebello Motapanyane, January 1977, published in (a) *Phakathi* No.4 April 1977; (b) *Sechaba* 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 1977.

<sup>93</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Norma Kriger, Norma Kriger, "The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggles within the Struggle," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 2 (January 1988): pp.304-322.

<sup>94</sup> Bundy, "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics."

Erikson, Lenin and Gramsci and suggests comparisons of youth political activity in France 1968 and Spain in 1956. He argues for the relevance of Mannheim's 'generation unit' to South Africa. He comments that 'studies of the Soweto risings, in particular, show clearly how a self-aware age- group sought generational unity, distanced themselves from their parents and spoke for "we, the youth of South Africa"'.<sup>95</sup> Soweto thus fits into his broader 'neo-Marxist' analysis of the nature of youth politics and its place in the 'organic crises of South Africa's political system. According to Bundy,

By any stretch of the sociological imagination, the recipe for marginalising and alienating a generational unit is comprehensive enough. Take politically rightless, socially subordinate, economically vulnerable youths; educate them in numbers beyond their parent's wildest dreams, but in grotesquely inadequate institutions; ensure that their awareness is shaped by punitive social practises in the world beyond the schoolyard- and then dump them in large numbers on the economic scrapheap.<sup>96</sup>

Bundy argues that youth politics had at its heart an 'essential dualism'; concluding with Lenin that it was a 'hybrid of precocity and immaturity'.<sup>97</sup> Along the way to this conclusion he expresses the concerns of much of the liberal press and academia of the time that young militants were not insulated from trauma and that their discipline during 1985 'did not- could not- hold all the time'.<sup>98</sup>

Sean Johnson was a journalist writing for the *Weekly Mail* during the 1980s who often wrote about the emerging trends of youth politics. In 1988 he published an analysis of South African politics *South Africa; No Turning Back*. In this book a chapter outlines a narrative of the evolution of the youth within liberation politics in South Africa. Johnson argued that the struggle had gone through several stages that he formulated as a narrative of successive political generations. He thus began with the first 'discernible' moment of 'youth consciousness' within resistance organisations as the emergence of a group of young militants of the African National Congress Youth League who shaped the direction of the ANC in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>99</sup> Youth militancy resurfaced in the 1960s through black university students and Black Consciousness. For Johnson, 1976

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.310.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.313.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.330.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.329.

<sup>99</sup> Shaun Johnson, ed., *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.97.

marked 'the birth of a new generation'.<sup>100</sup> His descriptions of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the later uprisings continually emphasise what was in his view their spontaneous nature.<sup>101</sup> In the end, 'a relatively small section of the black youth of South Africa, organised as a distinct component of resistance had almost unwittingly presented a vista of the political potential of the vast pool of angry, politicised young blacks'.<sup>102</sup> Following 1976, the next stage in youth politics was symbolised by a 'rediscovery of the past' through organisations like the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) that delved into the history of the ANC and Black Consciousness respectively in the search for a more considered ideology.<sup>103</sup> Johnson argued with reference to Bundy that the 1980 classroom boycotts were almost an 'action replay of Soweto' but that this time youth leaders had integrated their concerns 'more explicitly with the broader political fight' against apartheid.<sup>104</sup> The locus of comparison had shifted and June 16<sup>th</sup> was no longer measured against Sharpeville, it had become a model in itself.

According to Johnson township rebellions that began in the second half of 1984 witnessed the 'youth' moving closer to other community groups and trade unions through affiliation with the United Democratic Front or the National Forum. However, a crisis of leadership in the face of government repression 'dislocated large numbers of excited, angry youth activists from their leaders and from a necessary process of political education and development'.<sup>105</sup> Johnson saw the 1986 declaration of a state of emergency as a turning point: 'youth' had demonstrated 'their courage and resilience' but also the 'apparent lack of direction of their sacrifices'.<sup>106</sup> The last stage Johnson considered was the formation of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) in the late 1980s as the first national, non-student youth organisation with a much closer, subordinate relationship to union political leadership. Johnson's chapter is perhaps the most clearly stated example of 1976 within a narrative of plural, evolving, national

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100, 102.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

liberation struggles. It is clearly informed and shaped by the theorising Bundy highlighted whereby youth actions were always measured against inherent potentialities and boundaries.

These early studies of youth politics produced within academic/activist or official circles rarely considered the gender of the so-called youth an issue worth considering. This was then challenged by a post-apartheid historiography of youth political participation that began to consider the gender dynamics of youth politics and even offer explanatory frameworks. These were produced at a time when discourses of a pathologically damaged or 'lost' generation were widespread and attempts were being made to ensure 'marginalised' youth were included in the new dispensation of the 1990s. Arguments about gendered youth were bound up with these concerns.<sup>107</sup>

The major argument that has dominated the post-apartheid historiography of youth politics was made by Jeremy Seekings in the early 1990s. Seekings argued that in the mid-1980s the 'politics of confrontation' and the township-based violence that accompanied it marginalised young women from a youth politics of the street. He argued that young women, whilst not occupying leadership positions, did make up 'a much higher proportion of the active membership' in the youth congresses of 1983-4.<sup>108</sup> He cited evidence of his own work on the Tumahole Youth Congress and Charles Carter's study of the Alexandra Youth Congress to argue that these female members were much younger than their male counterparts and had found their way into the youth congress' through initial involvement in school-based protests.<sup>109</sup> Subsequently however, 'the gender ideologies of the youth of the early 1980s were sharpened in mid-decade, either because of the context of increasing confrontation or because of the growing influence of former or potential township gang members'.<sup>110</sup> An apparent shift to a much more aggressively masculine youth politics was supported by Catherine Campbell's work on youth politicisation in Durban, through which Seekings suggested

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<sup>107</sup> For the background to Seekings book see Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, pp.105-108; and the Introduction to Gill Straker, *Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992), pp.1-5.

<sup>108</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p.82.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>110</sup> Jeremy Seekings, "Gender ideology and township politics in the 1980s," *Agenda* 10 (1991): p.82.

that 'rising violence and the assertion of male dominance were closely linked, rooted in the "crisis of masculinity"'.<sup>111</sup>

This argument has been widely cited and at times developed by other academics.<sup>112</sup> Clive Glaser in his work on township gangs argued that some features of the politics of confrontation were 'in many ways consistent with the territoriality of gang culture' and that comrade sub-culture was a 'fusion' of student and gang cultures. The gang culture Glaser described involved young men's bodily control over young women as an extension of territory. He argued that 'by the mid-1980s the comrade bands were made up almost entirely of males. The street youth expressed their masculinity in militarized political activity'.<sup>113</sup> Isak Niehaus in his work upon the village of Impalahoek in the former Northern Sotho Bantustan of Lebowa also argued that in the 1980s the youth congress in that area was dominated by young men. Apparently, 'men accounted for the poor representation of women by saying that women feared the police'.<sup>114</sup> In subsequent work on youth sexualisation Clive Glaser and Peter Delius argued that while gang and school cultures blurred in the 1980s, in the 1970s they had offered different and competing identities and versions of gender relations:

Importantly, through force of numbers and a heightened sense of solidarity, schools could offer girls some protection from marauding youth gangs. And the form of masculinity that emerged among the leadership of these schools was less physically aggressive and more respectful of women's sexual choices.<sup>115</sup>

What Glaser and Delius seem to be identifying here is an overlap in gender ideologies but a difference in the behaviours through which ideas about male control over women were enacted. Students were different by degree; 'less aggressive' and 'more respectful'. However, taken together these studies did not consider the nature of their evidence;

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<sup>111</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p.84.

<sup>112</sup> For another example see the reproduction of Seekings argument in Ineke Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp.68-69.

<sup>113</sup> Glaser, *Bo Tsotsi*, p.189.

<sup>114</sup> Isak Niehaus, "Towards a Dubious Liberation: Masculinity, Sexuality and Power in South African Lowveld Schools, 1953-1999," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 3 (September 2000): p.396.

<sup>115</sup> Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, "Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: a Historical Perspective," *African Studies* 61, no. 1 (2002): p.48.

evidence; overwhelmingly oral interviews, the vast majority of which were conducted with young men.

Seekings' main evidence for the violent marginalisation of young women from youth politics came from his interviews with comrades of the Tumahole Youth Congress conducted in early 1986. Seekings did comment on the young men's apparent ability to contradict other evidence he had. He noted that 'young male comrades dismissed the idea that women could be involved in any political activity despite the extensive involvement of women in rent protests, student organisation and even the youth congress one or two years before!'<sup>116</sup> He argued that 'fighting – and indeed "political" activity in general – came to be seen (by men at least) as a matter for men alone'.<sup>117</sup> The jump that he then made was that political activity was a matter for men, because they said it was. Seekings was not alone in only hearing young men's versions of youth politics. Ineke Van Kessel, in her research upon the Sekhukhuneland Youth Organisation discussed with male activists a 'building soldiers' campaign that did involve the forced participation of young women. One male activist recalled:

Since the Boers were killing many people, there was a need to make soldiers. The girls should abandon the preventions. So the youth carried out attacks on clinics, because at the clinics, contraceptives were given to the girls. And girls were forced out of their house, to join the comrades. And then the girls would only come home the next morning. Most girls got pregnant in 1986.<sup>118</sup>

Van Kessel commented in a footnote that 'unfortunately, I did not succeed in attempts to hear the story from the point of view of the girls'.<sup>119</sup> This silence was not probed or questioned any further. My argument here is that the relative absence of young women's voices from oral histories of youth politics needs to be recognised as a related but separate issue from the extent of their past participation in youth political organisations. How we should read this silence is debatable.

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<sup>116</sup> Seekings, "Gender ideology and township politics in the 1980s," p.82.

<sup>117</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p.83.

<sup>118</sup> Ineke Van Kessel, "From Confusion to Lusaka: The Youth Revolt in Sekhukhuneland," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 4 (December 1993): p.606.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

Where young women's voices can be found is in a number of social psychology studies conducted in the early 1990s. This included the work of Catherine Campbell and Gill Straker. Catherine Campbell's work, upon which Seekings draws, did interview both young men and young women. Her study focused upon 20 male and 20 female young people aged between 17 and 23 years from Umlazi Township, outside Durban. Her interviews were conducted in 1989 and 1990 in the 12 months immediately preceding the unbanning of the ANC.<sup>120</sup> The context of her particular arguments concerning violence in youth politics should be understood in relation to her wider argument and the particular violence between Inkatha and ANC supporters in KwaZulu-Natal. Campbell argued that most discussions of this political violence had 'failed to take explicit account of the fact that the conflict has almost always taken the form of men fighting men'.<sup>121</sup> Campbell argued that in Umlazi 'the political terrain was seen as dangerous, conflictual and violent, and demarcated as a male preserve'.<sup>122</sup> Her male informants made statements such as:

Women are ashamed to hit someone or to kill them. When someone has been murdered women feel ashamed to see the body. Whereas men have no shame in these matters...Girls don't feel ashamed of being attacked by Inkatha. And there are no girls who do the attacking, only men. And we go out as men to meet these men.<sup>123</sup>

However, as Campbell herself notes 'this emphasis on violence was *one of a range of mechanisms* that operated to exclude women from informal grassroots politics' (emphasis added).<sup>124</sup> Violence was not mentioned in a list of five reasons Campbell gave for female non-involvement in politics. Firstly under 'politics was a male domain' Campbell quoted from informants discussing the fact that 'it's mostly boys that go to meetings'.<sup>125</sup> Young women suggested they would rather be at home, young men commented that girls had 'the job of cooking and cleaning' and also that a woman who

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<sup>120</sup> Catherine Campbell, "Identity and Gender in a changing society: The social identity of South African township youth" (Department of Psychology, University of Bristol, 1992), p.58.

<sup>121</sup> Catherine Campbell, "Learning to Kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 1992): p.614.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.624.

<sup>123</sup> 'Themba N', 22 years old quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.625.

<sup>125</sup> Campbell, "Identity and Gender in a changing society: The social identity of South African township youth," p.225.

attended political meetings 'gets the reputation of being a woman who goes after men'.<sup>126</sup> Added to this first reason Campbell listed 'a lack of interest or knowledge'; 'satisfaction with the country's social system'; a 'lack of faith in political organisations'; and finally, 'a belief that black people were less competent than white people'.<sup>127</sup> Campbell's study thus presented a complex picture of the ways in which gender ideologies shaped the 'social identities' of her informants and how violence shaped the political arena in KwaZulu-Natal in 1989-1990.

Gill Straker described her study of a group of youth activists from Leandra on the East Rand as 'individual and psychological rather than sociological and historical'. However, it is the very nature of this approach which makes her study useful for the historian. In the individual narratives that emerge in *Faces in the Revolution* are multiple exceptions and contradictions as well as confirmation of the general historical narratives of youth political participation. For example, Straker discusses one young woman 'Pretty' as an archetypal 'conformist' within the group who's 'engagement with the struggle was passive rather than active'.<sup>128</sup> Straker argues that, her 'conformist mode of coping was characteristic of a fair number of individuals in the follower group, especially among the girls'.<sup>129</sup> This was evidenced by the fact that Pretty's involvement in activism seemed to stem from that of her boyfriend's. Jeremy Seekings cited Pretty as evidence of young women's tangential involvement in the politics of confrontation.<sup>130</sup> However, Straker's study also includes a portrait of another young woman, 'Sisi' as an example of a leader within the group. This particular portrait, that appeared to contradict Seekings' arguments, was not mentioned by him.

Straker describes Sisi as 'comfortable with herself and her views', 'old beyond her years', 'warm' and 'very level-headed and clear thinking'.<sup>131</sup> She 'joined the

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<sup>126</sup> 'F15' quoted in Campbell, "Identity and Gender in a changing society: The social identity of South African township youth," p.225; 'Lungisile M, 22 years' and 'Vela N', 19 years in Campbell, "Learning to Kill?", p.625.

<sup>127</sup> Campbell, "Identity and Gender in a changing society: The social identity of South African township youth," pp.225-226.

<sup>128</sup> Straker, *Faces in the Revolution*, p.59.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>130</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p.83.

<sup>131</sup> Straker, *Faces in the Revolution*, p.28.



struggle at 13' and was forced to leave the township twice due to her involvement.<sup>132</sup>

When describing the circumstances of her first flight from Leandra, at the age of 14, Sisi recalled her intimate involvement in an attack on a city councillor's house and the confrontation of an informer in 1984:

The day after his house was burned the group most heavily involved in this action was informed upon by a young woman of the township called Joy. The township was then raided by the police who arrested the wrong people, but these people on their release tipped us off as to who was informing on us. A meeting was held which involved about 50 of those who had been involved in the incident, and it was decided that Joy would be confronted. The boys at the meeting decided that the girls should handle the situation and a group of twenty for of us women then marched to her house, singing songs and dancing. We were in an angry mood.<sup>133</sup>

Straker's interview with Sisi complicates any picture of confrontation as a purely male-led activity. There are obviously more complicated gender dynamics at play. In this instance a decision was taken, albeit as Sisi recalls by the boys, that this confrontation of a female informer should be led by the girls.

Straker's study includes other examples of individual experience contradicting the dominant narratives of youth politicisation. Straker comments on another young activist 'Nicholas' that,

In reflecting on his past, Nicholas commented on the degree to which his initial involvement in the struggle and his continued participation in it were inspired by his female friends. In acknowledging this he was unusual. Very few of the young men and boys who were interviewed believed they had been influenced by their female peers despite the fact that number of women occupied leadership positions during this period. Nicolas on the other hand believed he drew strength from his women friends.<sup>134</sup>

Straker's words here echo Seekings' comment that young men dismissed the possibility of female participation that had existed. What Nicolas shows is that individual experience could contradict and therefore highlight what constituted normative discourses about male and female positions within the struggle.

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

Seekings' straightforward equation of increasing violence with a dominant masculinity has also been complicated by Beall *et al* who argue that older women were empowered through the politics of confrontation in Durban townships under the states of emergency.<sup>135</sup> They argue that in the early years of United Democratic Front (UDF) organisation in Natal there was an absence of women (of any age) at mass meetings. 'Whilst they participated confidently in the day-to-day activities of community organisations, they were significantly absent from the platform at mass meetings'.<sup>136</sup> As some of these more formal aspects of politics altered under the repression of the state of emergency, which was extended to Natal in August of 1985, Beall *et al* argue that older women 'became centrally involved because the struggle had moved on to women's terrain, namely the defence of children and home'.<sup>137</sup> They argue that in the performance of these 'motherist' concerns some women actually transcended the apparent limits of 'traditional' gender ideologies. Crucially in 1987 they suggested that 'while mothers are creating space for themselves, they may be limiting it for their daughters'.<sup>138</sup> One cannot surely argue that a straightforward masculine politics of confrontation marginalised young women from youth politics if we take seriously the simultaneous possibilities for older women to expand a politics of motherhood. Any argument of marginalisation needs to be made in a much more nuanced way.

That there could be a more complicated relationship between violence, confrontation and gender ideologies in youth politics has been acknowledged more recently by Monique Marks and Janet Cherry. In her 2001 study of ANC aligned youth activists in Diepkloof, based upon interviews and participant observations made in 1991, Monique Marks suggested 'the dichotomy between militant macho males and empathetic alienated females is perhaps a false one'.<sup>139</sup> She argued that:

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<sup>135</sup> This contradiction has also been noted recently by Janet Cherry, "We were not afraid": The role of women in the 1980s township uprising in the Eastern Cape," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), pp.291-2.

<sup>136</sup> Jo Beall, Shireen Hassim, and Alison Todes, "A Bit on the Side?": Gender Struggles in the Politics of Transformation in South Africa," *Feminist Review*, no. 33 (Autumn 1989): p.40.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>138</sup> Jo Beall et al., "African Women in the Durban Struggle, 1985-6: Towards a Transformation of Roles," ed. G Moss and I Obery, *South African Review* 4 (1987): p.102.

<sup>139</sup> Monique Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), p.103.

It also seems that the role men in these situations attribute to women, and those that women attribute to themselves, can be dissimilar. In Diepkloof, I met women comrades who not only repudiated the notion of themselves as inherently more peace-loving than their male counterparts, but who wanted to be directly engaged in activities involving 'hard violence'. Young women in Diepkloof did participate in political violence, particularly in acts of arson.<sup>140</sup>

Janet Cherry has come to similar conclusions in her study based upon interviews with former women activists (of all ages) in the Eastern Cape. She argues that some women activists acknowledged young men had excluded them from certain violent practices by invoking gender ideologies,

The men were not trusting us, though we were willing to take part. We wanted to. They thought we were weak; but we were strong, we were fighting with our hands. They were not saying directly [that we should not fight]; the main thing is that action was never discussed with women...they say...'Go and discuss politics; you are not fit for action, you are fit for support'.<sup>141</sup>

This quotation contradicts any notion that violence was an inherently masculine activity, or that young women did not want to participate. Rather it suggests that 'violence as male' was an idea and practice *actively created and maintained* by young men. Through these practices the potential participation of young women was at times prevented. Cherry argues that in spite of such attitudes 'teenage girls, often high school students and COSAS members' participated fully in combative roles within the *amabutho* or youth structures. Kholeka Nkwinti, an organiser of the Port Alfred Women's Organisation recalled:

Girls in Port Alfred were so militant. They were just like men. They would even come to me at night, and disguise themselves, you wouldn't think they were girls, they were wearing coats; they would call and you would realize its so-and-so, they are in a mission, they will go and do it. Even if you won't say who did something, you would know, it wasn't the men. And they wouldn't put up with anything from the male comrades, they were just equal. We were all equal. Nobody would succumb to their husband.<sup>142</sup>

One of the most interesting things about the recollections of the women activists from the Eastern Cape is a certain ambiguous pride in remembering such challenges to male

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>141</sup> Cherry, "We were not afraid": The role of women in the 1980s township uprising in the Eastern Cape," p.308.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.309.

dominance. Most of the recollections that Cherry cites involve women discussing the transgressive behaviour of other women. For example, in the above quotation from Kholeka Nkwinti, she as an older woman activist remembers the behaviour of some younger women. She seems proud of their behaviour and suggests that it was indicative of the attitudes of the older activists too, 'we were all equal; nobody would succumb to their husband'. Yet Cherry does not have direct testimony from young women activists discussing their own involvement in such activities. The three young women activists she interviewed Nontobeko Madlala, Mpumi Lutywantsi and Nobahle Ngwane, who were quoted earlier remembering their exclusion from violent activities, nevertheless talked about the late Comrade Pamela who had been involved,

Pamela, she would dress like a boy; she can identify with the boys. If you looked at her face, she was very beautiful, you would know that this is a girl, but she would dress like a boy, wearing a cap, that old jacket of hers, and she would walk like a boy.<sup>143</sup>

Interestingly, when these young women do remember direct involvement in violent activities, this was in conflict with AZAPO activists, rather than the state, and they also remembered the involvement of older women activists too.

And that day of the funeral, when those AZAPO guys attacked Mpumi Veto, we came out to defend him. And it was physical fighting then. There...there was stone throwing and fist fighting. It was a toe-to-toe fight. We lifted up our skirts. We were fighting AZAPO with our fists. As young women, we were fighting with the men. Not a cat fight – a toe-to-toe fight! We were very angry, very frustrated...Mama Nyo – an older Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation member – she was at the front line of the fight, throwing stones. Now talking about her age, she was supposed to be saying 'No – don't do this!' but she was at the forefront – she was our age [now] at that time, she was like a mother to us, but she was leading the fight. She carried a big sword. Serious. A sword, like a panga, used for cutting grass.<sup>144</sup>

I would tentatively argue that the involvement of Mama Nyo enabled the participation of the younger women, both at the time and in remembering this incident. Whilst there was pride in recollections of involvement in 'male violence' there was also a sense that such behaviour may not have been that widely acceptable within the women's

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.310.

organisations. Nontobeko Madlala, Mpumi Lutywantsi and Nobahle Ngwane also recalled that as members of PEWO they were asked not to wear trousers (the outward sign of Comrade Pamela's involvement with the youth) by the older women, 'they wanted us to wear long skirts, and no trousers, strictly no trousers'.<sup>145</sup>

A substantial academic literature on women's involvement in South Africa's liberation struggles confirms Cherry's suggestion of tensions within the women's organisations of the 1980s between older, township women activists and young women who were often university students or had links with youth organisations and trade unions. However, Deborah Gaitskell's work on an earlier period remains the only explicit attempt to tackle the relationship between younger and older women within township societies.<sup>146</sup> Shireen Hassim suggests a trajectory of women's mobilisation and organisation within and outside of the mainstream liberation struggle through the 1980s. According to Hassim the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of 'highly localised, neighbourhood-based associations' of women in a number of areas that 'developed into larger politically orientated organisations' like the United Women's Organisation (UWO), the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) and the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW).<sup>147</sup> Several important factors shaped the growth and character of these organisations: firstly, the tangible success of local, practical campaigns attracted new members; secondly, this approach was expanded through ideologies which emerged from Unions about 'the relationship between public struggles for democracy and gender relations at home'; and thirdly, due to male opposition to women's union-based activism it was much easier to be involved in community-based women's organisations 'where mobilisation took place at church and the market'.<sup>148</sup> Hassim argues that these women's organisations were plagued by a kind of 'political schizophrenia' with some activists viewing them as 'safe spaces' within which women's

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p.286..

<sup>146</sup> Deborah Gaitskell, "'Wailing for Purity': prayer unions, African mothers and adolescent daughters 1912-1940," in *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930*, ed. Shula Marks and R. J. A. R Rathbone (Harlow: Longman, 1982), 383.

<sup>147</sup> Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority, Women in Africa and the diaspora* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p.49.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.51-52.

struggles could emerge and others who regarded them as 'purely instrumental in encouraging the local development of the anti-apartheid movement'.<sup>149</sup>

Hassim's profile of the Natal Women's Organisation (NOW) is very interesting in light of the work on youth organisations in and around Durban, some of which was examined earlier. What emerges from it is an atmosphere of social conservatism that seemed to pervade both Inkatha and ANC or UDF-aligned organisations. Hassim's outline of NOW is worth quoting at length:

The majority of NOW's members were older African women whose children were active in student organisations such as the Congress of South African Students. NOW became characterised as a *gogo's* [grandmother's] organisation, and many politically active young women tended to work within the civics movement or trade unions. Older women were wary of the younger women who belonged to NOW, often considering them to be disrespectful and "too westernised". The older women were by no means apolitical. Many had participated in ANC and federation activities in the 1950s, and almost all supported the UDF and goals of national liberation. Despite their earlier activism, they represented a socially conservative constituency, perhaps because women's organisations in the 1950s had chosen to limit their political focus to national liberation and steered away from issues relating to the private sphere.<sup>150</sup>

Gertrude Fester's research on the United Women's Organisation (UWO), which after a merger with another women's organisation the Women's Front, became the United Women's Congress (UWCO) in 1986, suggests young women activists also faced difficulties participating in the Western Cape:

Although it was never openly discussed, younger women (below 35) were encouraged to join the youth groups. There has been some criticism of the UWO/UWCO that they never seriously addressed younger women's issues. Often younger women (especially coloured and white) felt they were not taken seriously in the organisation. Lynne Brown recalls that when she first joined UWO and ventured to speak in a meeting, the older women often never commented on her contribution but rather commented on 'how cute she was'. However, after considerable time these 'young women' became secretaries.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>151</sup> However, it should be noted this is not a major focus of her work and the argument is found in a footnote in Appendix B of her thesis. Gertrude M.N. Fester, "Women and citizenship struggles: A case of the Western Cape, South Africa 1980-2004" (PhD, Gender Institute L.S.E., 2007), p.272.

Lynne Brown's experiences suggest that the nature of women's organisations only offered young women an unstable basis for politicisation.

These details certainly do not add up to a comprehensive picture of the scale or scope of young women's participation in youth or women's organisations linked to the liberation struggle. The works these details are drawn from rarely attempt to explore liberation organisations as a space in which gender ideologies were reinforced, performed, contested, and created. Rather the implicit suggestion seems to be that organisations were simply shaped by the existing gender ideologies of the township, or the school, or the street. Undoubtedly such spaces and ideologies were important but as studies such as Monique Marks' and Sibusisiwe Nombuso Dlamini's have shown such political groupings were also *new social spaces* in which moralities and cultures were forged.<sup>152</sup> Whilst there has been some recent discussion of the 'masculinities' of the ANC there has been even less consideration of the 'femininities' liberation organisations encouraged. Debate on the nature of women's political mobilisation has often focused upon whether 'motherism' can be judged to have been feminist or not.<sup>153</sup> The approach in this thesis involves separating the issue of young women's participation from the normative femininities youth and women's organisations espoused, encouraged and attacked. This is not to suggest the symbolic or discursive presence of young women was more important than their actual participation but rather to argue that the two were intimately linked. The real absence of young women can I believe be in part explained by the nature of their symbolic presence. As part of this approach, historians of liberation politics must consider more critically the way in which gender ideologies not only shaped what was doable in the 1980s but also what is 'sayable' about that past in the present. I thus aim to consider the continued silencing of young women's political experiences as worthy of explanation.

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<sup>152</sup> Marks, *Young Warriors*; S. Nombuso Dlamini, *Youth and identity politics in South Africa, 1990-1994* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,, 2005).

<sup>153</sup> For a good summary see Cheryl Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, no. 3 (September 1995): pp.417-437.

### III. A Living Archive

By way of an introduction to the limits of this project I would like to describe one oral history interview I conducted that was different from the other, more limited responses I got. It points to the potential work that remains to be done, perhaps by better situated historians. Rebecca Musi is a former student activist who became involved in Black Consciousness groups and the Student Representative Council during her studies at the University of the North to such an extent that in 1977 she was detained by the apartheid government. My encounter with Rebecca Musi brought into focus for me the contours of a post-apartheid economy of knowledge and the position of my own research project within that context.

I met Rebecca Musi in September 2008 at the guesthouse at which I was staying in Melville, Johannesburg. She had agreed to an interview after I had contacted her via email through the Breast Health Foundation for whom she currently works.<sup>154</sup> Ms Musi was very curious as to how I had found out about her and her activist past. I explained that she was mentioned as a fellow detainee in Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiographical account of her time in prison.<sup>155</sup> She commented that she had been going to bring a copy of *Call Me Woman* with her. I told her that I had searched with her name on the internet and found out that she worked for the Breast Health Foundation; an online interview with a journalist had confirmed that she was the same Rebecca Musi. I asked why she had first of all replied to me and then agreed to an interview. Ms Musi told me it took her two days to think about my email and that she had been initially reluctant but had then decided that it would be kind to reply. Later, when I was recording our conversation we discussed her choice again:

RM: Like I said, it took me two days to come back to your email. I had to do some introspection. Its information, why are you selfish with information?

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<sup>154</sup> The role that email played in my encounter with Rebecca is interesting to consider in the light of Derrida's suggestion that email 'is on the way to transforming the entire public and private space of humanity, and first of all the limit between the private, the secret (private or public), and the public or phenomenal'. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.17.

<sup>155</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo wrote of being detained with 'Thenjiwe Mthintso, Mathabo Pharase and Rebecca Musi, all young girls of my children's age group'. Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1985), p.209.



RJ: Yes, but its personal information, you know so it's...

RM: No, no, you are going to use it to better yourself. You're going to use it for whatever, for your PhD. Why am I depriving you of something? I feel jealous because I never had the opportunity to study that far. You know, yes? So, I've learnt to introspect. I had a lot of time on my own.<sup>156</sup>

I also asked if she had testified to the TRC or thought about doing so. Her reply suggested that what other commentators have identified as the Commission's 'rubric of harm' which focused upon bodily injury and loss had informed her idea of who should testify. Rebecca Musi also said that she felt a period of working at Orlando High School as a teacher after her release from detention had provided her the time and space to heal that the TRC was offering to others.

RJ: Did you, you know when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission happened, what did you think of that, did you, did you go to tell your story to them, or did you not want to?

RM: No, I didn't. I listened to one, two, three stories. Having listened to Thenjiwe [Mtintso]'s story I thought she deserves to be there, than me. She's had more than I've had a share. Thank god, I didn't lose my life. My family wasn't harassed so much. I know, now and then they would come looking for me. But for me, it was like, when I look at what other people had to go through, I really felt, no mine is little bit. Those people who had gone, as I listened to the stories, to the TRC. If I go there I think I'll be wasting their time. For me, this is very minor compared to what other people had to go through, they had lost parents, they had lost limbs. You know, all those things and some were in wheelchairs and I thought, well, I came out quote unquote, unscathed, if I can use that. Well, when you look at it, you would say, no Rebecca you were not, what you wanted to achieve educationally you didn't, however, comparing it to what other people really lost, I felt, it's not really worth it. Some of those stories, I think, I don't want to listen to them again. For me, I also felt, I had managed, having taught at Orlando High, not having been involved with whites on a daily basis that was healing.<sup>157</sup>

What was clear from our interview was that Ellen Kuzwayo's auto/biography and Thenjiwe Mtintso's TRC testimony informed Rebecca Musi's understanding of her own voice and position. Rebecca Musi was clearly a keen follower of politics, even though

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<sup>156</sup> Rebecca Musi, Interview with Rachel Johnson, Johannesburg, September 2008.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

what she described as her front line involvement had ended after her release from detention. She described a personal philosophy of involvement in the community,

RM: However, now what this experience did to me, what this whole experience did to me, was I actually said the struggle that my father started its not yet over, however I'm not going to rush and you know after Steve Biko was murdered the black consciousness movement was banned and any other political movement and then slowly, we had the UDM that came in, and I thought, you know, being in the frontline, meetings etc. It's not productive. That was me personally.

RJ: Your feeling.

RM: yes, it's not productive. You know if one takes a back step, and you do things in a certain way, quietly, you'll be able to impact on people. I saw myself, even just as a South Sotho and English teacher I was able to share with them just a bit about the black consciousness philosophy, and tell them these are the values that you need to carry with you. I'm not going to pursue that route anymore of belonging to a political organisation, making noise, running up and down with police, I thought no, it's too stressful for me. However, I can still contribute.<sup>158</sup>

One could possibly read into this Jeremy Seekings' thesis of marginalisation through the politics of confrontation but that would seem to negate Ms Musi's strong sense of continuity between her role as student activist on the Student's Representative Council at the University of the North and her later jobs. Perhaps part of what made Rebecca Musi an un-typical interviewee was that her sense of self was not wholly bound up with straightforward 'political' work; even whilst she saw a Black Consciousness self in all that she had done.

The only time that Rebecca Musi mentioned her gender as important was when describing her arrest in 1977. She was taken first under Section Six of the Terrorism Act to Pietersburg: 'I remember well we were in Pietersburg, being the only girl I had no communication with anybody, at least they were boys and they were all in together and they could encourage each other'.<sup>159</sup> When I later asked her outright if she felt being a young woman had affected the kind of activism she took part in, she replied that 'I was just young, full of energy, focused'.<sup>160</sup> She went on, 'I'm just trying to think, as a young

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

person then, and I compare myself to, I think, had I not been involved in politics, what would have happened to me? I try to think, what was available then, where would I have fitted in? I think I would have had an empty life'.<sup>161</sup> Rebecca Musi told her detention to me first as a story of resistance,

RM: In all my interrogations etc, you'd have, you always had the good guy, the bad guy, and the mediocre guy (laughs). And the good guy would always come to you and thinking well, speak like we are speaking, and you give them all the information, and the other guy, if the other two guys realised he's not winning then they come and the aggressive guy comes and those are the guys who actually beat you up and you know all sorts of things. But thank god, you know there was no swimming pool there. Because you know some of the other guys, you get stories from other people that, there were swimming pools that actually...um...blindfold them and put them in a swimming pool. And they knew that as blacks, we are not swimmers, so you drown very quickly and immediately say, yeah. They would electrocute you etc and it wasn't easy but, somehow, I don't know, I just got this inner strength. Not to say a lot. And having studied English, and being an English student helped me. Because I remember, at one of the interrogations, they were saying, 'he's your friend', I said 'he's not my friend', they said 'he's your friend', I said 'he's not my friend', 'what do you mean he's not your friend?' I said 'he's an acquaintance, not a friend' (laughs).<sup>162</sup>

Later on, after telling me about the various jobs she had done after coming out of prison, including that of a vote counter at the 1994 election, and her diagnosis with breast cancer, Ms Musi returned to her prison experience and how it had shaped her sense of self:

RJ: Do you see your campaigning [with the Breast Health Foundation] now, and the things that you do and talk about, as linked to the same [Black Consciousness] philosophy?

RM: Yes, I still see a link. And for me, everything else that happened was a foundation to who I am today. I needed the strength for breast cancer, to cope, where would I have found it if I never was a black consciousness philosophy...er... fanatic and saying, 'I can fight, I can fight'? I believe in myself. Being alone in a cell, one of the things I learnt in that cell, ants were my friends. I would speak to those ants, because otherwise I would have nobody to speak to. I would speak to those ants. I ate one apple for three days, because the food was awful. When I was still in Pietersburg, you know when we do pap?

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

Yes, it wasn't white like your mealie meal, I don't know, it was kind of brownish or whatever and I would take it and make stones out of it. And have, there's a game that we play and that would be my game. And after two days or so the ants would be too attracted to it, and then when they came to get my plate I would give them the old one and remain with the fresh pap. And still play. That taught me to be a good listener. I had nothing to read, so I had to just sit and listen to birds, listen to the wind, listen to either a car, or whatever comes by, or an aeroplane. You know, that period just taught me to be a good listener (laughs).<sup>163</sup>

Rebecca Musi's detention and activism also appeared important in mediating her sense of belonging in the new South Africa:

RM: I've met a lot of people, which I'm appreciative of. I wouldn't have bumped into Mrs Kuzwayo, especially because of the position that she held in the community. It wasn't easy. I mean, one time I met with her, at a shopping mall, we made noise and people were like, 'God lord, member of, MP making noise at a shopping mall!' I mean we said, we laughed, we reminisced about those years and we laughed, we had fun. You see? It made me stable. It made me understand this country better.<sup>164</sup>

My interview with Rebecca Musi was clearly given meaning and shape by the broad context of post-apartheid South Africa, in which a young foreign researcher might ask a former woman activist to share her life story in the hope of better understanding the apartheid past, and in order to gain her PhD. Our interview was a space different from the TRC, the publishing industry or a post-apartheid museum but also intimately linked with the stories other women had chosen or felt compelled to tell in those spaces. During my own attempts at oral history collection I became acutely aware of the economies of knowledge that continue to shape understandings of the liberation struggle. For various reasons, including perhaps other employment options and spaces for personal fulfillment, Rebecca Musi had remained outside the formal heritage economy, until I invited her participation. Her name became known to me through a previous economy of knowledge that had produced Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography. There were more names that I couldn't trace because of my own position; there were probably many more names I would never be able to find. The particular position of contemporary historians of South Africa, which is of course by no means a unique but none-the-less compelling one, of working with a living archive, embodied in real, individual, people with material

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

and social needs is what has inspired the eventual direction of this thesis. It seems to me that attention to the production of history in all its forms should focus upon the creation of silences and absences especially when filling those gaps may not be possible.

**CHAPTER TWO: The meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the gendering of youth in  
South African histories.**

*Two pairs of eyes  
met on a sultry morning*

*one belonged  
to a uniformed authority  
equipped for a siege*

*the other  
to a uniformed girl  
fresh and neat<sup>165</sup>*

This chapter is an attempt to historicise various narratives of the June 16<sup>th</sup> Soweto uprising. It examines the dialogue and contestation over the events and meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> as they took place surrounding public commemoration practices. The aim is to trace the changing history of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the characterisations therein of youth and young women as political actors of national significance. The chapter stretches from the first anniversary of the June 16<sup>th</sup> uprising to its twentieth which encompasses a period of huge historical changes. It is divided into two sections examining 1977-1986 and 1987-1996. 1986 is taken as the dividing line for a number of reasons, not least the declaration of the nationwide state of emergency which explicitly targeted planned June 16<sup>th</sup> commemorations. As Jeremy Seekings noted, following the 1986 emergency, the conditions for extra-parliamentary political activity were 'dramatically changed'.<sup>166</sup> However, 1986 is also important within the narrative of the changing commemorations itself, since this was the year that ANC-aligned organisations, who accepted the 1955 Freedom Charter, finally parted company with Africanist or Black Consciousness orientated organisations and joint participation in commemoration services ended. The dynamic after 1986 was one of ANC-aligned/Charterist hegemony over the narrative

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<sup>165</sup> R. Camhee, 'Two pairs of eyes', *Staffrider*, August 1981.

<sup>166</sup> Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), p.20.

and commemoration of June 16<sup>th</sup>, albeit one contested from the sidelines of liberation politics.

The analysis in this chapter takes notice of Jeffery Olick's suggestion that in studying the changing representations of history in commemorative practices, 'commemoration cannot be separated from context [and] part of the context for any new commemoration is the residue of earlier commemorations'.<sup>167</sup> The chapter examines how the changing political context altered the public commemorative practices surrounding the anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> and simultaneously highlights the political work being done by those practices. As David Cohen argues,

Commemorations are socially constructed events in which struggles for the control of knowledge may break out into the open, yet may also be regulated and controlled...In these confrontations, history is remade as a paradiact of property; in struggles over the production of history there is often a pathology of ownership.<sup>168</sup>

Ali Khangela Hlongwane, the curator of the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum that opened in 2002, has observed that June 16<sup>th</sup> is peculiarly placed within the 'founding myth' of South Africa's liberation struggle. He argues that the contestations for political hegemony *within* the struggle that emerged around June 16<sup>th</sup> commemorations have often been 'forgotten' in official narratives of the new nation.<sup>169</sup> In amongst the public debates surrounding the Soweto uprising there has been a growing significance attached to June 16<sup>th</sup> as a symbol of youth participation within broader narratives of youth in the struggle. The argument here is that as the meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> have altered so too has the picture of the uprisings' gender dynamics.

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<sup>167</sup> Jeffrey K Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.57.

<sup>168</sup> David William Cohen, *The Combining of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.246.

<sup>169</sup> Ali Khangela Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2, no. 4 (June 2008): p.140.

## I. The Nature of Newspapers

Prominent amongst the sources underpinning this chapter and the processes it describes are newspapers. Newspapers and journalists have been vital, and at times problematic, intermediary actors in the development of historical narratives around June 16<sup>th</sup>. In the main, this chapter follows newspaper reports of annual commemoration services of June 16<sup>th</sup> starting in 1977 up to the twentieth anniversary of the start of the uprisings on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1996. The nature and significance of the press is consequently of central importance for understanding the meaning of these reports and the interaction between newspaper stories and the other histories of June 16<sup>th</sup> under consideration. In the mid-seventies the mainstream press in South Africa was white-owned. Commentators have generally distinguished between the so-called English-language press, broadly characterised as politically liberal and anti-apartheid, and the Afrikaans press that was tied closely to apartheid ideology and the National Party government. The bulk of the material in this chapter comes from the English-language press and so it is worth considering the nature of its opposition to apartheid in detail.

Elaine Potter and Richard Pollak have argued that during the 1960s, the English-language press constituted the main political opposition force within South Africa to the apartheid government. Potter noted that after 1961, the English-language press began calling for the 'recognition of non-white interests' and thus 'forced an entry for the non-white into the political system'.<sup>170</sup> Potter's use of the term 'non-white' betrays the liberal political persuasion of her argument. Black Consciousness ideology, which was such an important part of the context of June 16<sup>th</sup>, saw liberal ideology as patronising and symptomatic of limited criticism of only the worst excesses of apartheid. In 1981 Richard Pollak combined criticism with praise when pointing out that 'English money also controlled the English-language press' and as a result 'editorials tend to beat around the thorny bush' over the question of total abolition of apartheid.<sup>171</sup> Pollak highlighted the powerful position of English mining capital in the ownership of the English-language press. He argued that nonetheless these newspapers provided 'a highly visible

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<sup>170</sup> Elaine Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p.165.

<sup>171</sup> Richard Pollak, *Up Against Apartheid: The Role and the Plight of the Press in South Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P, 1981), p.9.



visible forum for information and ideas inside South Africa' and also that its stories were 'relayed around the world by a corps of sympathetic foreign correspondents'.<sup>172</sup> This last point is crucial to the dynamics of commemorating June 16<sup>th</sup>. The highly emotive photograph taken of a dying Hector Pieterse by Sam Nimza was published widely in the international press and its global currency undoubtedly inflected the dynamics of local and national commemorative practices.

The political positioning of the English-language press was also affected by an ambiguous dynamic of white-ownership and black-readership. Les and Donna Switzer have argued that by the mid-seventies despite owning newspapers aimed exclusively at a black audience the mainstream English-language press 'found itself increasingly dependent for economic survival on the cultivation of its own black readers'.<sup>173</sup> Circulation figures for the English-language press were generally much higher than those for Afrikaner publications. In 1978 the *Rand Daily Mail* had a circulation of 129, 068. *Die Beeld* had a circulation of 63, 032.<sup>174</sup> Both were dailies and produced in Johannesburg, where the official population was c.1.5 million at the time. According to a 1979 study, 'in Johannesburg more blacks read the *Star*, the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Citizen* taken together than whites. Including the huge black readership of the daily *Post*, blacks now outnumber white readers of Johannesburg's four English-language dailies, by two to one'.<sup>175</sup> Many mainstream dailies at this time were producing 'township' editions of their newspapers, aimed at a black readership and employing black journalists. The Switzers have argued that whilst these supplements have been 'much maligned for polarizing racial stereotypes and entrenching a ghetto press mentality' they were successful in attracting black readers.<sup>176</sup> It was the black journalists of the supplements, who as the only reporters who could enter the townships, brought the story of June 16<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath into the mainstream press. The role of black journalists in the history of June 16<sup>th</sup> is of central importance; their stories appeared not just in

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836-1976* (Boston Mass: G.K. Hall & Co, 1979), p.14.

<sup>174</sup> Pollak, *Up Against Apartheid*, p.14..

<sup>175</sup> William Hachten, "Black Journalists under Apartheid," *Index on Censorship* (June 1979): pp.43-48.

<sup>176</sup> Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*, p.16.

newspapers and academic accounts but they testified before the Cillie Commission of Inquiry into the 'riots' and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The early attempts by academic/activist circles to explain and understand the Soweto uprising involved collating and analysing the material that the English-language newspapers had published.<sup>177</sup> In the early 1980s black novelists such as Mbulelo Mzamane singled out these academic accounts as not having told the true story of June 16<sup>th</sup>, because they were based on English-language newspapers.<sup>178</sup> Debates over the authenticity of reports in the English-language press centred upon the dynamics of white ownership. The two exceptions to the liberalism of the English-language press in 1976 were the *World* and the *Citizen*. The *Citizen* was first published in September 1976, apparently owned by the Afrikaner millionaire Louis Luyt, and took a pro-apartheid political line.<sup>179</sup> In what has been described as the 'greatest scandal in South African political history' it was revealed by the *Sunday Express* and the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1978 that the paper had been funded by public money channelled through secret state funds.<sup>180</sup> The paper continued to exist, bought by Perskor after the 'Info scandal' that had most spectacularly resulted in the resignation of Vorster from the State Presidency.<sup>181</sup> In contrast, the *World* was owned by Argus, but run by a black editor Percy Qoboza and in the words of Guy Berger was 'steeped in Black Consciousness'.<sup>182</sup> According to Berger the *World* 'played a major role in giving national prominence to the

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<sup>177</sup> Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980); Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1979); and John Stuart Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978) all cited newspapers as their central source on the uprisings.

<sup>178</sup> Mzamane was the author of a novel based upon the events of the Soweto uprisings, Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, *The Children of Soweto: A Trilogy* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1982) His arguments are discussed more fully later in the chapter. See also discussions in ; Michael Chapman, ed., *Soweto Poetry* (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill Book Co, 1982), p.130 and ; Helen Lunn, "Antecedents of the Music and Popular Culture of the African Post-1976 Generation" (MA thesis, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1986), pp.263-264.

<sup>179</sup> Adam Jones, "From Rightist to 'Brightest'? The Strange Tale of South Africa's Citizen," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 2 (June 1998): p.329.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.328-9.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p.330.

<sup>182</sup> Guy Berger, "Publishing for the People: The Alternative Press 1980-1999," in *The Politics of Publishing in South Africa*, ed. Nicholas Evans and Monica Seeber (London: Holger Ehling, 2000), p.74.

Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) and the Committee of Ten'.<sup>183</sup> Switzer argues that it was through its coverage of June 16<sup>th</sup> that the *World* 'suddenly became a respected leader of black opinion again'.<sup>184</sup> It has been claimed that in 1977 the *World* was the largest selling newspaper south of the Equator.<sup>185</sup> The nature of the *World's* changed political role and its popularity did not escape the government and the publication was banned in October 1977. Qoboza himself was detained. The *World* was immediately reconstructed and published as the 'increasingly vocal' *Post*, and then, following a further banning, as the much more 'tightly constrained' *Sowetan*.<sup>186</sup> The *World* and the *Citizen* point to one further important force shaping the position of the press in South Africa: government controls on content.

The limits and boundaries set by the government to what the print media could publish during the 1970s and 1980s became hugely important in shaping the utterances and silences of June 16<sup>th</sup> narratives during this period. Pollak argues that the notion of a relatively free press was an important component of the apartheid conceit of white democracy in South Africa, and thus the government tolerated limited criticism.<sup>187</sup> However, Pollak also shows that the extent of criticism was tightly controlled by an extensive array of security legislation constraining the reporting and publishing practices of newspapers, editors and individual journalists during the 1970s and beyond.<sup>188</sup> The declaration of local and national states of emergency during the 1980s constrained newspapers even further. However, this also brought the mainstream English-language press into more direct confrontation with the government. In 1985 the *Rand Daily Mail*

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*, p.124..

<sup>185</sup> Aubrey Mokadi, *Narrative as Creative History: The 1976 Soweto Uprising as Depicted in Black South African Novels* (Johannesburg: Sedibeng Publishing House, 2003), p.51.

<sup>186</sup> Berger, "Publishing for the People: The Alternative Press 1980-1999," p.76.

<sup>187</sup> Pollak, *Up Against Apartheid*, p.18..

<sup>188</sup> The widely used *Newspaperman's Guide to the Law* listed this legislation and its potential pitfalls, including original statutes and their amendments: Suppression of Communism Act, Terrorism Act, Riotous Assemblies Act, Public Safety Act, Criminal Law Amendment Act, Official Secrets Act, Prisons Act and Publications Act, for discussion see: Kelsey Stuart, *The Newspaperman's Guide to the Law*, (Durban, Butterworth and co., 1977).

which had gained a reputation as a strident critic of the government was controversially closed, allegedly for financial reasons.<sup>189</sup>

At the same time in the mid-1980s a so-called alternative press emerged that challenged the predominant voice of the English-language newspapers in criticising apartheid, exemplified by papers such as the *Weekly Mail*, set up by former *Rand Daily Mail* journalists, and *Grassroots*, *New Nation*, *South*, *Vrye Weekblad* and *New African*. These papers aimed to be more overtly critical of apartheid and were aligned with a re-emerging internal liberation politics based in the trade unions and civic organisations. Berger argues that these newspapers were ‘drawn naturally into an “expose and protest” role as human rights violations mounted’ under successive states of emergency.<sup>190</sup> Anthea Jeffery has recently argued that the alternative press ‘consciously used stereotyped images and clichéd rhetoric to romanticise’ organisations like the UDF and obscure its role as an instigator of violence in the mid-1980s.<sup>191</sup> She suggests that the UDF was similarly successful through ‘persistent and determined efforts’ in influencing the commercial English-language press to ‘slant their coverage in favour of the UDF’.<sup>192</sup> Berger also argues that the reportage of the alternative press influenced the mainstream. For example, at the end of 1987 many English-language mainstream newspapers chose to assert their ‘editorial independence’ by printing full-page advertisements marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the banned ANC.<sup>193</sup> In the freer environment of the 1990s all but the *Weekly Mail* disappeared, the latter ultimately surviving through its links with the British newspaper the *Guardian*. According to Berger the more rigorous journalism of the alternative press was eventually adopted by mainstream papers.<sup>194</sup> In 1991 the *Sowetan* was South Africa’s biggest selling daily newspaper with a circulation of 208,591.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> For one account see, Rex Gibson, *Final Deadline: The Last Days of the Rand Daily Mail* (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Pub, 2007).

<sup>190</sup> Berger, “Publishing for the People: The Alternative Press 1980-1999,” p.82.

<sup>191</sup> Anthea Jeffery, *People's War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers SA, 2009), pp.78-80.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Michael Chapman, *Southern African Literatures* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2003), p.428.

<sup>194</sup> Berger, “Publishing for the People: The Alternative Press 1980-1999,” p.89.

<sup>195</sup> Gordon S Jackson, *Breaking Story: The South African Press* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), p.32.

Newspaper reports formed the basis of all the initial academic and government accounts of the uprisings. However, it was only in the work of black novelists such as Miriam Tlali's *Amandla* (published 1980), Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (published 1981), Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* (also published 1981) and Mbulelo Mzamane's *Children of Soweto* (published 1982) that the role of black journalists in shaping the uprisings was critically examined. A number of these authors positioned their narratives of June 16<sup>th</sup> as direct challenges to the white, 'liberal' and government 'explanations'. Mbulelo Mzamane wrote in 1985 describing his novel with reference to his political and cultural aims:

I try to convey, in a way that the several accounts by white reporters do not, what it *felt* like to be one of those involved, and to convey how life in the townships was transformed in response to the call of the students. The book has been written to preserve the memory of these events, as in the "tales" of my people I was told as a child...My story therefore is another effort to "tell more of the truth than the historian's truth".<sup>196</sup>

A part of this critique was the ambivalent attitude all four novels displayed toward newspapers. As Kelwyn Sole has noted of these Soweto novels, 'a constant theme is the abnegation characters in the novels feel for the dominant white ideology fed to them by some black journalists' but this is coupled with dependence upon those same newspapers for vital news and information.<sup>197</sup> In *The Children of Soweto* Mzamane used direct quotes from newspaper reports. In *A Ride on the Whirlwind* each chapter began with a short newspaper headline that the reader was invited to compare with the fuller story that followed. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Serote explored the black journalist's relationship with society as personally dangerous, necessary and ambiguous. In one scene the disillusioned reporter Tsi questioned his colleague about the purpose of his photography:

'I mean, I feel there is something about being there taking pictures while a fight, a clearly unbalanced fight goes on.'

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<sup>196</sup> Mbulelo Mzamane, "The Uses of Traditional Oral Forms in Black South African Literature," in *Literature and Society in South Africa*, ed. Landeg White and Tim Couzens (Harlow: Longman, 1985), pp.158-159..

<sup>197</sup> Kelwyn Sole, "The Days of Power: Depictions of Politics and Community in Four Recent South African Novels," *Research in African Literatures* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1988): p.73.

‘Unbalanced, what do you mean?’

‘Morongwa could be locked up, purely because she is black, fighting a white person- and you know the price of that’.

‘Well, I have a clear stand on that. I am a black photographer and that is how I fight’.

‘What if she was killed?’

‘I have recorded it’

‘What do the records help? Who believes them?’

‘Records are not to be believed, but used, that is how I look at it.’

‘Used? By whom? How can you use a thing if you do not value it?’<sup>198</sup>

In *To Every Birth its Blood*, the position of black reporters working for white newspapers is thus presented as a problematic one, but with radical potential. The character of Dikeledi writes a newspaper column called ‘Window on the Township’ and whilst Serote chose a title that conveyed her position as an intermediary for whites, Dikeledi is portrayed as discussing issues that actually matter to her community and as a result gains an avid readership and respect within the township.<sup>199</sup>

Within this general context the reports that this chapter deals with cannot be read as simple expressions of black or white, English or Afrikaner, liberal or radical monolithic perspectives. Rather they are read as evidence of what was ‘sayable’ about June 16<sup>th</sup> within South Africa’s national press and within a changing national and international political context. The English-language press occupied a central and problematic position as social actors at the heart of the emergence of the stories of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the Soweto uprisings and so it is the reports of these newspapers that are examined here in greatest detail. For the same reasons the chapter also focuses largely

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<sup>198</sup> Mongane Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004), p.106..

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215.

upon those English-language newspapers published in Johannesburg. The newspaper reports examined here are not read as straightforward reflections of reality but as actors in the shaping of the historical narratives of June 16<sup>th</sup>. Commemorative practices appeared in the context of ongoing contests to tell the meanings and narratives of June 16<sup>th</sup> both within South Africa and internationally. Each section will outline the trajectory of these wider debates for the two periods 1977-1986 and 1987-1997 and detail the changing commemorative practices themselves.

## II. June 16<sup>th</sup> an episode within the struggle 1977-1986

The period 1977 to 1986 was one marked by revived internal, urban-based popular protest against the apartheid government and within that the building of an ANC-aligned organisational pre-eminence in the liberation struggle. In the late 1960s the ideas of the Black Consciousness Movement, shaped by black university students, introduced a new philosophical and organisational strand into South Africa's liberation politics.<sup>200</sup> Together with a wave of strikes among South African workers in 1973, Black Consciousness ideology has been seen as bringing to an end a decade of 'apparent political quiescence' that had followed the suppression, banning and exile of nationalist, radical and trade union leaders in 1961.<sup>201</sup> The uprisings of 1976-1977 that began in Soweto on June 16<sup>th</sup> marked a new period of protest and a series of government strategies of, most immediately, repression, and latterly, reform. As 'plausible' leaders of the uprisings beyond the school children of Soweto were not initially identifiable, both the government and the exiled liberation movements began a long searches for causes. In the first ten years after 1976 the English-language newspapers were perhaps the most widely accessible texts through which the South African public could put the Soweto uprisings 'in their place' - trying to understand the significance and meaning of those uprisings within historical narratives. These newspapers performed this function in

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<sup>200</sup> For a discussion of the links between Black Consciousness ideology, the ANC and the Soweto uprisings see, Nozipho Diseko, "The Origins and Development of the South African Student's Movement (SASM): 1968- 1976," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 (1992): pp.40-62.

<sup>201</sup> Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, "South Africa since 1976: An Historical Perspective," in *South Africa: No Turning Back*, ed. Shaun Johnson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.12.

dialogue with government discourses, most importantly: the proceedings and report of the Cillie Commission; a small but significant academic literature; a number of black poets and novelists; and the actions of anti-apartheid groups and public practices of commemoration.

What emerges forcefully from newspaper reports of commemoration practices in the period 1976 to 1986 is a discourse on the moral authority of mourning and sacrifice. Ali Khangela Hlongwane has argued that by 1980, following the formation of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) in 1978, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in 1979 and Azania National Youth Unity (AZANYU) in 1980, ideological differentiation between liberation organisations 'began to tamper with the unity that the [1976] uprisings had inspired'.<sup>202</sup> This was something increasingly noted by journalists covering commemoration services in the 1980s and indeed marked their own claims to speak the true message of June 16<sup>th</sup>. Discussing divisions within the struggle in the context of the overarching power of the apartheid government was and still is a contentious issue.<sup>203</sup> The alternative press had more of a problem in reporting divisions. In an interview with Ineke Van Kessel, a former trade union activist complained of the 'triumphalism' of the Western Cape based paper *Grassroots* arguing, 'the commercial media would cover all our disunity, exploiting the differences. But our own media did not cover the problems...the left media think it's their job to smooth over the problems'.<sup>204</sup> Contestation over the June 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary between organisations that declared adherence to the 1955 Freedom Charter (COSAS, UDF) and those who expressed an 'Africanist' or Black Consciousness ideology (AZAPO, AZANYU) was not openly encouraged by the leaderships until 1986, at which point any attempt at joint commemorative services was abandoned. Antagonism between different liberation organisations as they battled over ideology and resources was exacerbated by government strategies of 'fomenting internal divisions in order to destabilise African political organisation', especially after the renewed outbreak of unrest in township

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<sup>202</sup> Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," p.148.

<sup>203</sup> Ineke Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.58.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p.264.



uprisings from 1984-1986.<sup>205</sup> Increasing levels of violence and the 'vanguard' role of township youth fed into reinterpretations of the meaning of June 16<sup>th</sup> in the mid-1980s.

### **A Day of Mourning.**

From the first anniversary commemorations led by the still ascendant SSRC, June 16<sup>th</sup> was almost always described in the English-language press as a day of mourning. The commemorations reported between 1977 and 1986 were often held in churches or at gravesides. Newspaper editors and political leaders publically called for respectful, dignified behaviour. This was a moral discourse initially voiced by black leaders and journalists that could only be articulated widely through the white-owned English-language press. The practices of public mourning on June 16<sup>th</sup> also presented moments of potential conflict with the apartheid state. They were a part of wider practices instituted in the uprisings of political mobilisation through funerals and night vigils for those killed.<sup>206</sup> As these continued practices of mourning strengthened June 16<sup>th</sup> as a source of moral and political authority, the anniversary, its symbols, and spatial sites became increasingly contested. The discourse of mourning was both expanded and contested through commemorative practices and reporting.

Press coverage of the first anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> in 1977 was inseparable from the reporting practices and discourses of the ongoing uprisings in the Eastern Cape and student political leadership within Soweto itself. The first anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> was unique in still being regarded, both at the time and subsequently, as 'inside' the ongoing uprising. The most sympathetic and focused reporting of the first anniversary was to be found in the *World*, which by this time established a close relationship with the leadership of the SSRC. The message of June 1977 was that the 16<sup>th</sup> should be a time of mourning for the black community, respectful of student sacrifices. On June 10<sup>th</sup> the *World* reported the SSRC call for a four day mourning period beginning on June 13<sup>th</sup>. The report stated that 'the students have called on all the people of Soweto- and all the

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<sup>205</sup> Marks and Trapido, "South Africa since 1976: An Historical Perspective," p.25.

<sup>206</sup> Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," pp.143-144; For more on the politics of funerals in the 1980s see, Michael Tetelman, "The Burial of Canon J.A. Calata and the Revival of Mass- Based Opposition in Cradock, South Africa, 1983," *African Studies* 58, no. 1 (1999): pp.5-32.

blacks in the country- to observe this day as a holiday to commemorate those who died during the riots'.<sup>207</sup> This included instructions to wear black and attend prayer services; that shebeens, discos, cinemas and shops within the townships should be closed; scheduled soccer matches should be suspended; and a minute of silence should be observed by taxi and bus services.

The anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> fell at a time in the ongoing uprising when the legitimacy and power of the SSRC as political actors within Soweto appears to have been strong. The SSRC drew, at least rhetorically, a large part of their legitimacy from the moral authority of sacrifice made on June 16<sup>th</sup>. An SSRC leaflet, which was produced in September of 1976, collected by the International Defence and Aid Fund, and then reproduced *Whirlwind before the storm* stated:

Parents, you should rejoice for having given birth to this type of child. A child who prefers to fight it out with the oppressors rather than to be submerged in drunkenness, frustration and thuggery. A child who prefers to die from a bullet rather than to swallow a poisonous education which relegates him and his parents to a position of perpetual subordination. Aren't you proud of the soldiers of liberation you have given birth to? If you are proud, support them! Do not go to work on Monday.<sup>208</sup>

The heroism of student sacrifice, seen here as mobilising for a stay-away, was intimately linked with the calls for the mourning of student sacrifices on the 1977 anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>209</sup> On June 13<sup>th</sup> the *World* quoted Reverend Lebamang Sebidi addressing a service at the Regina Mundi Catholic Church in Soweto. 'Our children sacrificed themselves to die for the freedom of us all, and they are still prepared to push their struggle for the liberation of the black man further'.<sup>210</sup>

This highlights one final aspect of the first anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup>: that the practices of commemorative mourning were both religious, more especially Christian, and political. An editorial in the *World* on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1977 summed up how tradition,

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<sup>207</sup> *World*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1977.

<sup>208</sup> Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, p.227.

<sup>209</sup> Interestingly, Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill suggest in *Whirlwind before the Storm* that the notion of 'freedom through sacrifice' found in this and many other SSRC leaflets was peculiar to Soweto as it was not a prominent theme to be found in the material produced by the student organisations in the Cape Peninsula. *Ibid.*, p.227.

<sup>210</sup> *World*, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1977.

dignity and respect were invoked through this commemorative mourning and ensured the possession of moral authority in the face of conflict with the apartheid police force:

It is because of our strong and deeply embedded cultural heritage that we treat the memories of those who have departed with the dignity and respect they deserve. Now, more than ever we must exhibit the moral strength to respect that tradition...We must be in the street only as far as it is necessary to walk to the churches or halls where such memorial services are to be held. Congregating on street corners must be avoided at all costs...Many people are expecting trouble tomorrow. We have a duty to disappoint them. We dare NOT make their predictions come true.<sup>211</sup>

*World* editor Percy Qoboza speaks here explicitly as member of the community which is mourning. The emphasis on avoiding the street as the site of potential conflict is contrasted with the church as the appropriate site of commemorative mourning. There was clearly concern about conflict that focused upon June 16<sup>th</sup> itself. However, in general the SSRC called for a four day period of mourning, while the *World's* reporting of commemorative services that took place each day between 13<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> June tended not to place special emphasis on June 16<sup>th</sup> alone.

In 1977 the *Rand Daily Mail's* coverage did not emphasise either June 16<sup>th</sup> as the most significant day of commemoration or Soweto as the epicentre of revolt. On June 18<sup>th</sup> 1977 the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that, 'Soweto yesterday had one of its quietest days since the start of renewed unrest marking the anniversary of the June 16<sup>th</sup> riots last year. Police reported only three incidents, none of them serious'.<sup>212</sup> The same newspaper carried the headline '7 Shot dead in E. Cape' and concentrated on reporting continued 'unrest' in Uitenhage township.<sup>213</sup> Amid the ongoing uprising, June 16<sup>th</sup> was not the symbolic day it was to become. On June 10<sup>th</sup>, the *Rand Daily Mail* had also reported another anniversary celebrated by the students of Naledi High in Soweto that seemed to displace the centrality of June 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>214</sup> According to an interview conducted in exile with Tebello Motapanyane, a former student of Naledi High and general secretary of the South African Students Movement (SASM), on June 8<sup>th</sup> in 1976 student demonstrators

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<sup>211</sup> *World*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1977.

<sup>212</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1977.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1977.

had expelled from the premises two policemen who had entered their school to speak to the headmaster.<sup>215</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> June 1976 they prevented policemen who had returned with reinforcements from entering their school and making arrests. This initial story had barely appeared in the press in 1976, which contrasted, of course, with the immediate coverage that June 16<sup>th</sup> received nationally and internationally.<sup>216</sup> A year later, in 1977, the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that Naledi High students held a demonstration to commemorate the June 8<sup>th</sup> incident.<sup>217</sup> Student heroism, sacrifice and legitimacy as political actors, for students themselves, were apparently not tied so closely with June 16<sup>th</sup> in 1977 as they were to become.

Starting in 1978, the common call through English-language newspapers in the days leading up to June 16<sup>th</sup> was for reverence and respect to be shown for that day in particular. By 1986, this had turned to a concerted demand for a public holiday. This focusing upon June 16<sup>th</sup> as a moment of moral authority brought with it conflict over who could claim the political legitimacy bestowed by commemoration. Before 1986, this was most prominently a contest of who would lead the mourning and appropriate observance in Soweto. However, participation itself could seem to offer political legitimacy. So in 1978, the acting head of the Soweto Students League (SSL) Oupa Mlangeni issued a statement, reported in the *Rand Daily Mail*, that 20, 000 people had attended commemoration services on June 16<sup>th</sup>. He suggested this demonstrated not only the unity that existed in the black community but also that the students had ‘proved to the system we are not stone throwers’.<sup>218</sup>

Two ‘sites of memory’ in Soweto were to become particularly contested in the years before 1986.<sup>219</sup> These sites centred on an annual commemoration service held at the Regina Mundi Catholic Church and the grave of Hector Pieterse, regarded as the first victim of the Soweto uprising. The organisation of the service at Regina Mundi was

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<sup>215</sup> Tebello Motapanyane, January 1977. Published in (a) *Phakathi* No.4 April 1977; (b) *Sechaba* 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 1977. See discussion in Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the storm*, pp.89-90.

<sup>216</sup> See discussion in Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, p.90.

<sup>217</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1977.

<sup>218</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1978.

<sup>219</sup> The phrase is a translation of Pierre Nora's 'lieux de memoire', which are, according to Nora, 'lieux' or 'sites' in three senses - 'material, symbolic and functional'. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989), p.19.

a political issue and over the first 10 years of commemoration it emerged as an indicator of local and later national political legitimacy and authority. The period 1977- 1980 saw the continued dominance of organisations that had come out of the uprisings. In 1978 the Regina Mundi Service was reportedly organised by the Soweto Action Committee. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported the main address was given by Dr Nthato Motlana, chairman of the Committee of Ten. Dr Motlana was to remain the 'main speaker' at this service for the first decade of commemorations.<sup>220</sup>

The *Rand Daily Mail's* coverage of the service on June 17<sup>th</sup> 1978 was for the first time extensive, including a full page of photographs of the service on page two. The main story on page one described the occasion: 'Most of the audience was dressed in black. In the cathedral was a church organ covered with a white cloth. On it were two bowls of roses. It symbolised a coffin'.<sup>221</sup> The photographs showed various parts of the service, including the congregation and an unnamed woman leading the service in song. Some recorded what the paper described as 'pantomimes'. These 'pantomimes' re-enacted 'the shooting of the first victim of the riots, 13 year old Hector Pieterse' and 'the death in detention of Dumisani Mbatha, a schoolboy'.<sup>222</sup> This part of the service shows us something of the processes of public historical narrative-building that commemoration could involve. In 1978 Hector Pieterse's death was clearly important to the public narrative of June 16<sup>th</sup> in Soweto, but he was not the only student commemorated; Dumisani Mbatha's story is also placed at the heart of the event. Over the next few days, the *Rand Daily Mail* continued to publish stories and photographs from the service, and its aftermath when police used 'sneeze machines' to teargas the crowds outside the church. Amongst these additional stories was 'sister weeps as death recalled', showing a photograph of 'Hector Pieterse's sister' crying during the 'pantomime' at Regina Mundi.<sup>223</sup>

The following year in 1979 The *Rand Daily Mail* advertised in advance the location of more services, in Lenasia, Mamelodi, Kagiso, Tembisa and Kwa Thema

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<sup>220</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1978.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1978.

Springs.<sup>224</sup> The Lenasia service was to become an important additional focal point to Regina Mundi. The *Rand Daily Mail's* coverage of the Regina Mundi service organised by the Soweto Committee of Ten in 1979 was accompanied by photographs of the family of Hector Pieterse laying flowers at his grave in Avalon Cemetery. The twin sites of future contestation were emerging as prominent and belonged to the personnel of the uprising itself.

In 1980, the calls for appropriate behaviour took on a different inflection amid renewed action over 'inferior education' initially amongst coloured school students in the Cape. On June 10<sup>th</sup> the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that Leonard Mosala of the Committee of Ten had urged Africans to 'make it their responsibility to stand together in order to avert what happened to black school children during the 1976 disturbances'.<sup>225</sup> Mosala's warning had strong resonance as he had 'prophesised' in the *World* 'another Sharpeville' on the eve of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976. In 1980 the main commemoration services were cancelled after a government ban on meetings in 24 magisterial districts. The government also banned many meetings the following year in 1981, prompting this editorial in the *Rand Daily Mail* on June 16<sup>th</sup>:

It is five years today that a pupils' protest march in Soweto turned into nationwide rioting which raged on and off for four months and left 575 people dead. It was an enormously destructive event, shattering lives, property, inter-racial goodwill, confidence and trust. Each commemoration is marked by dread that there will be renewed conflict. Police are on standby, meetings are banned, and individuals are detained. This time University and coloured school unrest has maintained the tension...such a preoccupation with the maintenance of law and order is unavoidable but it detracts from the dignity and spirit which should mark June 16. Instead of a day of national mourning, it is a day of national preparedness.<sup>226</sup>

The editorial contains what might be seen as a liberal preoccupation with 'inter-racial goodwill' alongside full acceptance of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a non-racial day of 'national mourning'. The reporting of services in 1981 also reflected a growing proliferation of organisations involved in commemorating June 16<sup>th</sup> and a vying for the moral legitimacy invested in the day. On June 15<sup>th</sup> the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that,

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<sup>224</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1978.

<sup>225</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1980.

<sup>226</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1981.

A commemoration meeting called in Durban by the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) for Saturday was banned by Durban's chief magistrate...In Port Elizabeth the chief magistrate Mr J A Coetzee issued a 48-hour order banning weekend meetings in the city ...the banning order, issued on Friday affected an all-night vigil in Walmer on Saturday, a Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation rally yesterday and a mass meeting organised by COSAS. In Alexandra a symbolic wreath with the names of those who died in Alexandra during the unrest in 1976 was displayed at Alexandra stadium when residents celebrated Alexandra Day on Saturday. AZAPO has arranged commemoration services throughout the country. ..In Pretoria COSAS will hold commemoration services in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville tomorrow...In Lenasia a memorial service will be held at the Jiswa Hall on Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup> at 3pm. Speakers from several black organisations have been invited.<sup>227</sup>

This report may indicate two processes at work - a geographical widening of participation in services commemorating June 1976, and/or an increased willingness or awareness of newspapers to cover such services. The report also reveals that there was a separate tradition of commemorating the 1976-77 uprisings in Alexandra centred on 'Alexandra Day'. However, the newspaper's brief descriptions do not give us insight into other ways in which 1976 was remembered within different historical narratives outside of Soweto. The report does not tell an explicit narrative of ideological contestation. However, Seekings has argued that an 'open advocacy of Charterism in 1979-80 intensified ideological and organisational rivalries within extra-parliamentary politics'. He describes 1981 as a year of 'flag planting'.<sup>228</sup> It seems that journalists did not report on these internal political dynamics of commemoration when they first appeared.

Seekings argues that following a takeover of the once BC-aligned AZASO in June, ANC-aligned activists also 'took control of the June 16<sup>th</sup> [1981] commemoration service in Soweto, using the opportunity for another denunciation of BC'.<sup>229</sup> Seekings' description is based upon oral interviews with former activists. Ali Khangela Hlongwane also argues that around 1980 seating arrangements at Regina Mundi began to be arranged along party political lines.<sup>230</sup> Activist Tseko Tshehlana recalled in a 2006

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<sup>227</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1981.

<sup>228</sup> Seekings, *The UDF*, p.37.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>230</sup> Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," p.148.

interview, 'you will find the Charterists sitting that other side. You can identify them by [their] songs. We [Charterists] needed Regina Mundi because that's where the crowds would assemble'.<sup>231</sup> Tshehlana remembered the impact of the MK's attack on the Sasol oil plant in July 1980 on the Regina Mundi service:

Sasol was bombed before June 16, I mean before the 16th of June. When we went to Regina Mundi we were armed now. A song was composed especially to go and boast to the BC and the Africanist camp.

*Nans' I Sasolburg ivuth' umlilo  
abafana bo Mkhonto bayishaye izolo  
Oyaya! Jealous down  
(There is Sasolburg in flames  
MK boys have hit it  
Jealous down)*

When we say jealous down, we look at those other ones and ask what do you have to offer? And at that time that was the down of toyi toyi-slogan, we called it slogan, which was led by other comrades like Murphy. When we were singing that side, Haw! Haw! PAC and Black Consciousness didn't have anything like that. The impact of mobilisation saw a lot of people coming to join the song and going back to that side (laughs) of those other ones. And the speeches right out there, there was no way a person could miss the impact of armed struggle and begin to associate armed struggle with the ANC.<sup>232</sup>

It is clear from these interviews that June 16<sup>th</sup> commemoration services played an important role in political mobilization. That we can know this is because the commemoration continues as an important marker for remembering the struggle.

In 1981 the place of Hector Pieterse within the June 16<sup>th</sup> commemoration practices was also being consolidated. On June 15<sup>th</sup> 1981 the *Sowetan* announced that Dorothy Pieterse, Hector Pieterse's mother would attend the Regina Mundi church service for the first time since the death of her son.<sup>233</sup> It was also reported that a youth organisation AZANYU, together with the Soweto Civic Association, had undertaken to commission a tombstone for Hector's grave<sup>234</sup>. The inscription on the tombstone read:

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>233</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1981.

<sup>234</sup> AZANYU was described by Shaun Johnson as professing an ideology 'most reminiscent of the Africanism of the PAC'. Shaun Johnson, ed., *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 112; However, it has more recently been suggested that this was a much closer relationship, with a PAC directive being behind the formation of the group. Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," p.147.



'Hector Pieterse. 1963-1976. Deeply mourned by his parents, sisters and a nation that remembers. Time is on the side of the oppressed today. Truth is on the side of the oppressed today. One Azania, One Nation, One People'. On June 16<sup>th</sup> 1981, The *Sowetan* carried another story under the headline 'Hector would not turn back' in which Hector's sister and mother were interviewed. Hector's sister Antoinette Tabane was quoted as saying that, 'When the march started primary school children joined in but when the procession reached Mofolo, an instruction went out that the small ones should go home as they would get tired on the way. Some did but others did not and Hector was probably among those who continued on the march'.<sup>235</sup> Hector's bravery in death was emphasised by the newspaper at the same time that his grave was being re-marked as a national site for commemoration of the losses of the uprising.

The sheer number of organisations who were reported as organising the Regina Mundi service in 1982 showed the importance attached to the anniversary by a growing number of political, union and civic organisations.<sup>236</sup> In 1983 the political landscape shifted again after the formation of the broad alliance of Freedom Charter-aligned organisations, the United Democratic Front. However, initially it was affiliates rather than the UDF itself that organised events. In an act of unity in 1983 the UDF affiliates COSAS and AZASO co-operated with AZAPO and the newly formed Black Consciousness-orientated umbrella organisation the National Forum (NF) in the running of the Regina Mundi service. The 1983 service was conducted by Dr Motlana and Saths Cooper convener of the National Forum. By now newspapers were reporting on the political rivalries and the *Rand Daily Mail* described how this show of unity was symbolised by, 'placards, an AZAPO flag, and an ANC flag [which] adorned the stage'.<sup>237</sup>

In 1983 the importance of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day of mourning was magnified when a number of organisations chose to link their commemorations of the Soweto uprising

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<sup>235</sup> *Sowetan*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1981.

<sup>236</sup> The *Sowetan* listed the organisers as: 'COSAS, AZAPO, Detainee's Aid Movement, MDALI, Black Women Unite, Teacher's Action Committee, Black Students Society, Azanian Students Organisation, MWASA, AZANYU, GAWU, Black Municipal Workers Union and other black organisations', June 15<sup>th</sup> 1982.

<sup>237</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1983.

with protest over the recent hanging of the 'ANC Three'.<sup>238</sup> The UDF and COSAS announced the day's commemorations would 'highlight all those who had died under apartheid'.<sup>239</sup> This was really the first time that the symbolic importance of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day of mourning had been expanded to such an extent. That same year, Aggrey Klaaste in his column for the *Sowetan* called for a public holiday on June 16<sup>th</sup>. He commented that he thought his sentiments were widespread and that 'it might be interesting to note in parenthesis that we hardly ever considered or held similar views about Sharpeville Day, which was just as tragic'.<sup>240</sup> A year later in 1984 Klaaste's column reflected the symbolic expansion of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day of sacrifice when he argued,

If, as a white person or whoever, you have problems with the politics that is evoked around this day, then I suggest you do what I have done to the Christian story. Make it a symbol. Children after all are children. Children on this day died. It does not matter what the circumstances but they died. It is a crying shame that all races, including the Jews, Indians and Whites have their public holidays and Blacks don't. Let's have June 16 a public holiday and build a new nation on that.<sup>241</sup>

Klaaste seemed to be suggesting a multi-racial nation with many different traditions. June 16<sup>th</sup> appears to him as a founding day for the black community and potentially a 'new nation'.

The political issue of who was to organise the Regina Mundi service was 'solved' in 1984 by handing control of the service to Ministers United for Christian Co-responsibility (MUCCOR), led by Bishop Desmond Tutu. Another old face returned when Reverend Lebamang Sebidi, a former member of the Committee of Ten was 'unanimously appointed to chair the service at Regina Mundi'.<sup>242</sup> In 1984, the *Sowetan* reported that 'the church of the province of South Africa (Anglican church) has issued a directive to all its churches to observe June 16 as a day of fasting and prayer in commemoration of those who died in the 1976 unrest'.<sup>243</sup> The churches were clearly still

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<sup>238</sup> On June 9<sup>th</sup> 1983 three ANC members were hung after being given the death penalty for attacks on police stations. They were, Mr Jerry Mosololi, Mr Marcus Motoung and Mr Thelle Mogoerane.

<sup>239</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1983.

<sup>240</sup> Aggrey Klaaste, 'On the Line', *Sowetan*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1983.

<sup>241</sup> Aggrey Klaaste, 'On the Line', *Sowetan*, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1984.

<sup>242</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1984.

<sup>243</sup> *Sowetan*, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1984.

in the ascendancy as the proper site for remembering June 16<sup>th</sup>. AZANYU, the organisation that had erected a tombstone for Hector Pieterse, announced that they were holding an all night vigil at his former home as well as a wreath laying ceremony at his graveside.<sup>244</sup> Hector Pieterse's grave remained that year an important site for youth-led mourning.

There is a suggestion in the two major histories of the UDF that the organisation of commemorative services, especially June 16<sup>th</sup> services outside Soweto were, alongside funerals, one of the ways in which local UDF branches consolidated their organisational capacities and channelled popular protest that exploded in many urban areas in 1984. Seekings notes that in 1984 the West Rand UDF Area Committee organised a 'Soweto Day commemoration service' in Kagiso which 'attracted six or seven hundred people, a reflection of the heightened politicisation prevailing in much of the country'.<sup>245</sup> A year later violent protest began in Kagiso on June 16<sup>th</sup> when 'police fired teargas into the crowd after the service in the Methodist Church'.<sup>246</sup> Thus the day also remained a potential moment of confrontation with apartheid authorities. Van Kessel notes that the first casualty of unrest in the Northern Transvaal occurred on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1985 when 'high school student Shadrack Mafokoane was shot and killed by the Lebowa police when fights erupted after a commemoration of the Soweto uprising on the Turfloop campus'.<sup>247</sup>

In 1985 the UDF and NF reportedly met 'under the auspices of a group of clergymen' to form a 'June 16<sup>th</sup> Committee' for organisation of the Regina Mundi service in Soweto.<sup>248</sup> It was clear that the township revolts were prompting re-appraisals of June 16<sup>th</sup>. The new 'alternative' newspaper the *Weekly Mail* carried a number of reports placing the anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> in the context of the ongoing countrywide unrest. One journalist Barbara Ludman commented, 'this year, everyday appears to be June 16 somewhere in the country- in the Eastern Cape, in the Vaal Triangle, even in the

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<sup>244</sup> *Sowetan*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1984.

<sup>245</sup> Seekings, *The UDF*, p.147.

<sup>246</sup> Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, p.183.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>248</sup> *Sowetan*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1985.

Free State'.<sup>249</sup> Tom Lodge was quoted in an article that placed June 16<sup>th</sup> in a narrative of the developing trajectories of liberation politics. Lodge was quoted: 'the current wave of unrest is more aggressive, structured and purposeful than it was in 1976-77. It has a more conscious political content'.<sup>250</sup>

An undated letter from students detained 'under emergency' at Modderbee Prison found in the correspondence of the Detainee Parents' Support Committee suggests that that such reappraisals and negotiations with the legacy of June 16<sup>th</sup> also went on amongst youth activists.<sup>251</sup> In 1984 as part of school based protests, in the context of the UDF campaigns to boycott elections to the tri-cameral parliament, fifteen year old school girl Emma Sathekga was run over by a police vehicle in Atteridgeville near Pretoria. She was in the words of Van Kessel 'a symbolic marker'; 'the first "unrest victim" in the statistics on casualties of political violence, which would exceed five thousand before the decade was over'.<sup>252</sup> The letter, from some time after 1984, communicates a series of suggestions made by detained students as to the direction that should be taken in the continuation of the struggle.<sup>253</sup> They began by suggesting, 'we believe that students who are released from detention are no longer accepted back at schools as full time candidates...those students who are refused readmission should challenge this in court'.<sup>254</sup> The letter goes on, 'We also discussed the issue of Emma Sathekga's day. We reached a consensus. We resolved and therefore suggest that this day should be commemorated together with the students' day June 16. The reason is that peoples' calendar will be full of holidays'.<sup>255</sup> Thus, for apparently pragmatic reasons the actions of young people in later struggles were folded into the meanings of

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<sup>249</sup> Barbara Ludman, 'Maybe things happen faster in Africa', *Weekly Mail*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1985.

<sup>250</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1985.

<sup>251</sup> The DPSC was a UDF affiliate set up to monitor the state's detention of children. For much fuller discussion of this organisation see chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>252</sup> Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, p.26.

<sup>253</sup> The letter talks of extra powers having recently been given to the director general of the Department of Education and Training (DET) which could make reference to government announcements in July 1986 that all students would have to re-register at schools and be issued with identification, apparently a tactic to exclude older student leaders. See Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999), p.175. The letter also seems to suggest that students were currently attending schools which would place it around 1986/7 when parents groups had persuaded many students to end indefinite boycotts. Having said this, the letter could be from anytime after the death of Emma Sathekga in 1984.

<sup>254</sup> Letter from Modderbee Prison, Wits Historical Papers, AG2523, Box B2.1.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

commemorating June 16<sup>th</sup>. The process that this letter suggests of the symbolic expansion of June 16<sup>th</sup> to symbolise youth sacrifice in the struggle in general would continue after 1986 during the construction of ANC hegemony.

1986 saw a widespread and explicit politicising of the anniversary as a potential battleground for ideological contestation *within* the struggle. The tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising was linked by the UDF and its affiliates to celebrations of the signing of the Freedom Charter on June 26<sup>th</sup>. This clearly made joint celebrations with the National Forum organisations that rejected the Freedom Charter a political impossibility. That year several large trade unions announced a 'stay-away' saying that they regarded June 16<sup>th</sup> as a public holiday and expected their workers to be paid.<sup>256</sup> The Regina Mundi service was overshadowed by the UDF's organisation of a rally at Orlando Stadium on June 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>257</sup> The *Sowetan* also reported that in Durban both the UDF and the Inkatha Youth Brigade had applied to hold a rally at Currie's Fountain, also a sports ground.<sup>258</sup> The move from churches to stadiums in 1986 was undoubtedly partly a matter of crowd capacity but arguably also a sign of the reinvigoration of internal political opposition to apartheid and an accompanying shift to the view of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day for potentially massive and overt political mobilisation. The Government certainly saw it this way. On June 5<sup>th</sup> it was reported that the Minister of Law and Order had banned all gatherings in South Africa from June 4<sup>th</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>, under Section 46 (3) of the Internal Security Act of 1982.<sup>259</sup> The joint purpose of the banning order was clear from the government gazette, issued on Wednesday June 4<sup>th</sup>. A gathering was banned,

If such a gathering is a gathering organised or convened or held or otherwise brought about to commemorate any incident of public disturbance, disorder, riot or public violence which prevailed or occurred on June 16 1976, or at any other time thereafter, at Soweto in the magisterial district of Johannesburg or at any other place in the Republic or (b) the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the so-called Congress of the people at Kliptown in the said district on June 26 1955, except any such gathering expressly authorised by me, or subject to the

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<sup>256</sup> *Sowetan*, June 4<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>257</sup> *Sowetan*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>258</sup> *Sowetan*, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>259</sup> *Sowetan*, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1986.

provisions of Section 46 of the said act by the magistrate of the district in which the gathering is to be held.<sup>260</sup>

On June 12<sup>th</sup> 1986 a nationwide State of Emergency was declared that involved ever tighter restrictions on the operations of journalists.<sup>261</sup> Consequently, information from newspapers on what happened at commemorations of the tenth anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> is sketchy at best. However, what is clear is that the new emergency brought some mainstream and alternative newspapers alike into a more direct conflict with the government.

The *Sowetan*'s headline on June 17<sup>th</sup> 1986 read: 'ALL QUIET ON JUNE 16. And if anything DID happen we are not allowed to tell you'.<sup>262</sup> Under the emergency regulations reporting of security forces actions was forbidden and the only information that could be reported on 'unrest areas' was that supplied by the government Bureau of Information. Coverage of the workers' stay-away was not restricted, however, and the numbers involved were reported as high in most parts of the country. Estimates put the stay-away as 95- 100% effective in the Greater Johannesburg area, at 80% in the Cape Peninsula, 100% effective amongst black workers in the Eastern Cape.<sup>263</sup> Some newspapers pushed against government restrictions by leaving blank columns prominently on their front pages in the first few days after June 16<sup>th</sup>. On June 18<sup>th</sup> the *Sowetan*'s front page editorial read, 'All that we and the other media have to contribute at this time when the country is facing its worst ever crisis has been effectively banned. We could have offered our readers a comment on the trivial, but that would have been an insult to them and to us'.<sup>264</sup> The *Weekly Mail*'s headline on June 20<sup>th</sup> was 'Our lawyers tell us we can say almost nothing critical about the Emergency. But we'll try'.<sup>265</sup> They claimed that a meeting held in a locked church in Diepkloof by the Soweto Youth Congress and Soweto Students Congress was the 'only explicitly political occasion' in Soweto on June 16<sup>th</sup> itself.<sup>266</sup> Page 14 of the *Weekly Mail* was almost

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<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>262</sup> *Sowetan*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> *Sowetan*, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>265</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>266</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1986.

entirely blank except for a headline 'The day that fell off the calendar'.<sup>267</sup> June 16<sup>th</sup> 1986 was further politicised outside the framework of a day of mourning by these government attempts to silence commemorative practices. In 1986 it was the newspapers themselves that could be found using the moral authority of June 16<sup>th</sup> when they used their enforced silence on the anniversary to make explicit their opposition to government controls on their content. By 1986 the moral authority surrounding June 16<sup>th</sup> was not restricted to students as it had been ten years earlier.

On June 18<sup>th</sup> 1986, Sam Mabe, the *Sowetan*'s political reporter wrote a piece entitled 'June 16<sup>th</sup> a public holiday?' In it he looked back over the previous ten years since 1976 and concluded 'whatever the reasons people stayed away this year's June 16 was acknowledged, wittingly or unwittingly as different from ordinary working days. It was not the same as the other nine and is not likely to be the same in the future. Its extraordinary quietness added to its significance'.<sup>268</sup> He likened the day to 'the ANC's passive resistance of the late '40s and early '50s' in its spirit.<sup>269</sup> He thus aligned June 16<sup>th</sup> with the ANC-led strand of the liberation struggle and a particular narrative of the history of the struggle. On June 13<sup>th</sup> the *Weekly Mail* carried a full-page advertisement issued by the UDF, COSATU and the National Education Crisis Committee appealing to 'all peace loving South Africans' to observe June 16<sup>th</sup> as a holiday.<sup>270</sup> The detail of the advert made clear this was an appeal to white South Africans. It asked businessmen to give employees the day-off, parents to explain to their children the significance of the day and employers of domestic workers to give them leave. In 1986 the *Weekly Mail* also carried a number of in-depth articles on the nature of youth politics by Shaun Johnson, which highlight for us a further set of questions. Beyond *what* the newspapers reported there is also the question of *how* the actions of young political actors over the period were presented. Significantly this was a highly gendered story that reveals more of the social dynamics of the evolving commemorative practices already discussed.

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<sup>267</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>268</sup> Sam Mabe, 'June 16 a public holiday?', *Sowetan*, June 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1986.

## Gendered legitimacies

The notion of a day of mourning at times became highly gendered. In these first ten years it emerged in two ways: through a focus upon mothers, in particular Hector Pieterse's mother, but also on young women as the victims of police shootings.<sup>271</sup> In 1982 *The Sowetan* published an article entitled, 'A day that took its toll on women. They gave their husbands and their children to June 16'. The article lamented,

Six years ago to the day black mothers were left without words. They were speechless, yes because they felt the winds of change. And they were out of control of the situation...School children took their grievances up on their own accord and forgot to cling to mummy's apron. School children took their own decisions and they marched forward chanting songs many ordinary women had never heard before. They sang of courage, inspiration but also condolences for any casualties that might occur. And casualties there were. This day has gone down into the books that make history...Ever since that day it became clear from the widows and mothers, who mourned the loss of their loved ones, that they would never forget the cause of the death of their husbands and children.<sup>272</sup>

Yet, the mother-centred narrative did not appear in the first ten years of commemoration as often as it was to in the 1990s at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. In the early 1980s what appeared more commonly, especially in the pages of the *Sowetan*, were the voices of young women invested with a moral authority of victimhood on June 16<sup>th</sup>. They appeared alongside the silent figure of Hector Pieterse. On June 16<sup>th</sup> 1981 stories appeared about Poppy Buthelezi, a young woman who was shot on June 1976 and thereafter confined to a wheelchair and Phindile Mavuso who lost her leg during the uprisings. Poppy Buthelezi was quoted as saying, 'I don't know why I was shot. I marched only up to Mofolo that morning and realising the police were already shooting children at Orlando West I went back home but I still became a victim. This is why I regard June 16 as a special day for I believe I was picked out by God as

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<sup>271</sup> However, mother and daughter are not always distinct subjects. Gaitskell and Unterhalter have argued that in a poetry collection by ANC women on the Soweto uprisings that was published in 1983 two distinct images of motherhood can be found. In the first, the suffering of mothers 'goads her daughter to join the liberation struggle' and in the second, the mother 'in her suffering, nurtures the revolution'. They suggest that in this poetry, 'the mother is an inspiration to the daughter, but it is the daughter who is the protector of the mother and in that guise and in her decision to join the struggle becomes the mother to future unborn generations'. Deborah Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter, "Mothers of the Nation: a Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress," in *Woman - Nation - State*, ed. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp.70-71.

<sup>272</sup> *Sowetan*, June 16th 1982.



one of those who was set aside for death or injury that day'.<sup>273</sup> Phindile Mavuso told a *Sowetan* reporter of her injuries in 1976, 'Yes, I was just an innocent little girl but I knew what the riots and protests were all about. I knew police were shooting and I knew someone was going to die; someone was going to be crippled. I knew it. But I also knew that was all for a just cause'.<sup>274</sup> The story ended 'she smiles and all her beauty shows as she recalls the incidents that cost her a leg'. The symbolism surrounding Phindile Mavuso and Poppy Buthelezi emphasised their innocent femininity.<sup>275</sup>

These two young women were to reappear many times in the following years, more and more explicitly invested with a moral authority of sacrifice made on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976. For example, on June 17<sup>th</sup> 1983 Poppy Buthelezi, Phindile Mavuso and a third young woman Mavis Ngubane were again featured in a story in the *Sowetan*. Phindile Mavuso was quoted, 'One look at myself reminds me that we haven't reached our goal yet. All others who were seriously maimed and relatives of those who died at the hands of the oppressor, should not wallow in self pity, but always remember that the black man has to be free and that we are not very far from attaining our goal'.<sup>276</sup> These young women were invested with a particular moral authority based upon their female innocence, purity of motive and strength in the face of sacrifice.<sup>277</sup> This was also a religious discourse linked to the wider June 16<sup>th</sup> commemorative practices and the dynamics of the township uprisings of the mid-1980s where it was well documented that funerals and church services became politicised occasions.<sup>278</sup> This discourse seems to have attached itself to these young women especially in the pages of the *Sowetan*. There is some evidence however that this particular phenomenon was not restricted to

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<sup>273</sup> *Sowetan*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1981.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> *Sowetan*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1983.

<sup>277</sup> Similar sentiments can be found in Harold Scheub's dedication to his 1996 book on storytelling in South Africa. He recalls meeting a young girl called Thembeke, a week before the Soweto uprising and then watching her participate in the June 16th march. 'How could such a young and fragile person make such awesome decisions at such a time in her life? In this dreadful place that race hatred had created, this Soweto, home of three million Africans living in squalor and despair, this fragile tendril rose and, for a splendid moment, made the world shine'. Harold Scheub, *The Tongue Is Fire: South African Storytellers and Apartheid* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

<sup>278</sup> In his autobiography Mark Mathabane recalled 'those who fled and became freedom fighters the government called terrorist; in the churches they were praised as heroes'. Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy: Growing Out of Apartheid* (London: Bodley Head, 1987), p.289.

newspaper stories. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that the Lenasia memorial service in 1983 was addressed by Poppy Buthelezi, quoted as saying the audience should 'not feel pity for her as her injuries were a symbol of the struggle'.<sup>279</sup>

The heroism accorded to these young women in the early 1980s disappeared along with a marked decline in the moral authority of youths generally as political actors. This decline can be traced through newspaper reports over the course of the 1980s, and was connected with the apparently increasingly violent behaviour of young people in urban townships under the states of emergency.<sup>280</sup> These discourses were focused primarily on the behaviour of young black men. In the mid-1980s newspapers began to carry reports of violent attacks carried out by groups of young people, very often identified as 'students', on other township residents who were described as having wronged the students in some way or another. On June 12<sup>th</sup> 1985 the *Sowetan's* editorial addressed this issue after a reported attack on a '125 year old pensioner' whose home had been burnt down by 'students' in a 'revenge attack' on her grandson. The *Sowetan* commented,

It would seem Soweto school children are engaged in a battle more with the system and the adult world than the people they attack. There is no doubt that their depressed social conditions, the effect of Bantu Education, and the oppression that they also feel as blacks, has caused them serious problems they cannot articulate. It is because of the education and other social issues that the black child of today is turning rebelliously aggressive...Now the most sensitive and perhaps the most delicate part of the equation is the role played by the police. It seems to us that the might of the police becomes helpless when children or anybody else is engaged in such anti-social, even criminal behaviour.<sup>281</sup>

This kind of 'sociologising' of the actions of young people became very common in the liberal press during this period, but always left the reader in little doubt that 'students' or 'youth' had become largely morally bankrupt political actors. On June 13<sup>th</sup> 1985, the

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<sup>279</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1983.

<sup>280</sup> Seekings terms such depictions an 'apocalyptic stereotype' with links to historical discourses surrounding rapid twentieth century urbanisation. Jeremy Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), pp.2-5.

<sup>281</sup> *Sowetan*, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1985.

*Sowetan* carried a special report on 'the chilling statistics of pupil violence'.<sup>282</sup> The reporter dated the phenomenon of student attacks to the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1983, 'when a group of high school boys left their classroom to hunt the alleged killer of three colleagues who died in a shebeen the weekend before'.<sup>283</sup> This article analysed the attacks in strongly gendered and social terms. It is worth quoting the explanation at length:

The circumstances surrounding these attacks are now common knowledge. A pupil (boy or girl) goes to a shebeen on a Friday or Saturday night. He gets into an argument, or the girl is approached by another patron at the shebeen. The usual happens. The boy gets involved in a drunken quarrel with another youth. In the process he is stabbed to death, or injured. The girl with her fresh looks attracts some half-drunk men. The inevitable happens. It also happens that a pupil goes to the shebeen with his girlfriend- who is a pupil- to 'groove'. A pass is made at the girl and a scuffle follows. Another death or stabbing. At school on Monday morning the killing is announced. The cause of the killing is not given or considered by the now emotional pupil fraternity. The law of the jungle takes over, alas at an institute of learning. It is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. More ominously, a life for a life. And the pupil horde goes out on a mission of death and destruction.<sup>284</sup>

What is especially interesting about the descriptions of such behaviour is that they are invariably linked in some way to June 16<sup>th</sup> as the starting point of student moral authority gone too far, or out of control. In this case the article quotes a clinical psychologist as saying, 'Parents have- since the outbreak of violence in 1976- neglected their God-given right of disciplining their children...It appears as if the children are now in full control at home, in the community and at school'.<sup>285</sup> The article reinforces this idea with its repetition of 'the usual happens' or 'the inevitable happens'. The writer believed that when school pupils were 'out of place' in the shebeens, the consequences were predictable. Such sentiments crept into the coverage of June 16<sup>th</sup> commemorations.

For example, in 1987 Aggrey Klaaste saw direct connections between June 16<sup>th</sup> and the actions of youths in the 1980s. So he argued, 'the seeds of the student revolt expressed so colourfully by the lanky, handsome and shy [Tsietsi] Mashinini have given

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<sup>282</sup> *Sowetan*, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1985.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

rise to some of the most monstrous forms of anger and dissent in young black South Africans'.<sup>286</sup> He stated categorically, 'the class boycotts of the '70s should have warned us that we were nursing the type of ruthless and often ugly monster we would not be able to understand 10 years later'.<sup>287</sup> He concluded, 'If we should turn our minds back tomorrow as we remember June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976, then we will perhaps be able to understand the total commitment, the total unconcern for life and limb showed by the class of 1980'.<sup>288</sup> June 16<sup>th</sup> thus became in discussions on youth violence a watershed, or turning point that had catapulted young South Africans into a position of authority that was perceived as dangerous for them and black society. By 1986 such concerns were of a high priority for the internal leadership of liberation organisations. As Seekings notes the strategic framework of people's power elaborated by the UDF leadership in 1986, which was 'central to the nascent hegemony of the UDF', was concerned with 'extending the social base of resistance beyond the youth and indeed subordinating the militancy of the youth to more cautious sections of the community'.<sup>289</sup> These priorities were reflected in the changing commemorative practices over the next ten years.

### **III. June 16<sup>th</sup> as the symbol of youth in the wider struggle 1987-1996**

The period 1986 to 1997 saw the dismantling of the apartheid state, the negotiation of a new constitution and South Africa's first democratic elections based upon a universal franchise. It was also the most violent period in South Africa's twentieth century history. 1990 marked a shift in the boundaries of the public political sphere. With apartheid legislation being repealed and the unbanning of opposition organisations, it was possible to report more fully on June 16<sup>th</sup> commemorative practices as the risk of state-led reprisals diminished. 1990 did not mark a total or sudden shift in the nature of public historical discourses on June 16<sup>th</sup> but by 1996 it was clear that the moral authority of June 16<sup>th</sup> once pitched against the apartheid state was now part of the legitimating power of the post-apartheid government. This did not mean it was no longer contested. In fact

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<sup>286</sup> Aggrey Klaaste, 'On the Line', *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1987.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> Seekings, *The UDF*, p.193.

the shifting priorities of the ANC as it led a government of national unity after 1994 saw changes in the way it sought to commemorate June 16<sup>th</sup>. These brought the government under increasing criticism from the PAC, AZAPO and civil society groups that harked back to standards of 'respect' and 'dignity' once shown to June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day of mourning. At this time, a new bitter discourse of victimhood was attached to survivors of June 16<sup>th</sup>. Victimhood and the place of June 16<sup>th</sup> in the national story were retold in the new national space of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings during 1997, 21 years after the initial uprisings.

In 1986 Shaun Johnson had published several articles in the *Weekly Mail* discussing youth as a distinct constituency within the broader struggle. His first set of articles on the tenth anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> carried an interview with the one-time president of the SSRC and by 1986 a member of the Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO) and the UDF, Dan Montsisi.<sup>290</sup> Over the next ten years Dan Montsisi was to remain one of the most visible carriers of memories from within June 16<sup>th</sup>. Johnson described him as 'a child of Soweto'.<sup>291</sup> The interview focused upon his life after June 16<sup>th</sup> including his imprisonment on Robben Island where he described himself as growing in political knowledge and understanding. In 1986 the fault-lines between rival traditions were already clear and Johnson reported that,

Montsisi regards it as 'unfortunate' that some activists who emerged in the 1976 era came to regard the ideology of Black Consciousness 'as the exclusive possession of a particular political faction, and independent of the heritage of the progressive movement, when in essence it was refracting the conditions in the country at a particular time'.<sup>292</sup>

This particular interview revealed the deliberate attempt being made by members of the UDF to position June 16<sup>th</sup> as one particular moment in South Africa's history and to subordinate youth actions within the broader struggle.

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<sup>290</sup> Shaun Johnson, 'Looking back on that fateful day in June', *Weekly Mail*, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

## Struggles within the struggle

Between 1987 and 1993 calls for June 16<sup>th</sup> to be recognised as a public holiday continued. However, this campaign was now solidly a matter for the trade unions. By 1987 many trade unions had individual agreements with employers either recognising the day as a public holiday or reaching some other compromise.<sup>293</sup> In 1989 an article in the *Sowetan* reported an Institute for Industrial Relations spokesman as claiming that 161 employers recognised June 16<sup>th</sup> as a paid holiday for their workers.<sup>294</sup> Employers in the metal working industry, represented by Steel and Engineering Industries of South Africa (SEIFSA), had worked out a deal with unions whereby employees would vote whether to 'swap' Founders Day for June 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>295</sup> This arrangement illustrated alternative traditions of Afrikaner and African nationalism as in a kind of direct symbolic competition. The article ended with a reminder of the racial divisions within South Africa's working classes: 'The right-wing Confederation of Metal and Building Worker's Union, which represents mostly skilled white employees, and the White Workers' Union have disassociated themselves from June 16<sup>th</sup>, saying they did not identify with the commemoration'.<sup>296</sup> Each year the majority of the black workforce in Johannesburg, Pretoria, the Cape Peninsula, Port Elizabeth and Durban were reported as staying away.

1989 was significant as the year in which contestation between different traditions of anti-apartheid activism intensified at the Regina Mundi commemoration service. Hector Pieterse's grave also came under a new focus following a mysterious attack on the site. The *Sowetan* reported two incidents on June 16<sup>th</sup>. The first was that Hector Pieterse's grave was desecrated, apparently on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. The tombstone that had been erected in 1981 by AZANYU was found in pieces; the paper reported that it was 'believed to be work perpetrated by forces opposed to the liberation struggle'.<sup>297</sup> A spokesman for AZANYU was quoted as saying that 'the desperation of this act leaves [AZANYU] in no doubt as to the identity of the culprits. Hector's grave

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<sup>293</sup> *Sowetan*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1987.

<sup>294</sup> *Sowetan*, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1989.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> *Sowetan*, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1989.

is a lasting reminder of our cause and we will spare no effort in ensuring that the cause that Hector died for is not betrayed'.<sup>298</sup> However, it was never discovered who had actually damaged the grave. This seems an extraordinary event considering the importance that was later to be placed on Hector Pieterse with a 2001 memorial and 2002 museum, but at the time the newspapers only gave the incident fairly muted coverage. Why this was so it is not clear. Perhaps the gravestone was seen as an AZANYU monument rather than a symbol of wider significance, or Hector Pieterse's grave was not regarded by newspapers as anything particularly sacrosanct. Ali Khangela Hlongwane suggests that 'it may have been [the gravestone's] broader collective expression of struggle that led to its vandalism by unknown people'.<sup>299</sup> No other direct challenges were ever made to June 16<sup>th</sup> commemoration sites until the far-right Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) staged a provocative march through Welkom on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1990.<sup>300</sup>

The second incident occurred at the Regina Mundi commemoration service itself. The *Sowetan* described the scene thus:

The 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1976 uprisings ended in chaos at the Regina Mundi church in Soweto on Friday when a small group of young people chanting UDF slogans prevented an AZAPO official Mr Muntu Myeza from delivering his speech. The organisers of the service which was ironically called 'unity' as its theme were forced to end the service after repeated calls for calm failed. A massive contingent of riot police and kits constables in armoured vehicles tear-gassed the crowd outside the church at the end of the service.<sup>301</sup>

The second incident emphasised not only the increasingly politicised nature of June 16<sup>th</sup>, but also the re-emergence of youth as vocal, yet somewhat marginalised political actors within the Regina Mundi service. By 1989 the 'violence' and 'unruliness' of youth as political actors was well-established newspaper fodder and an increasing concern for the leadership of the UDF and ANC as they moved toward negotiations with the National Party. The article clearly fits into this wider journalistic trope. The reporter ended the article: 'Young people then started the toyi-toyi dance and filed out of the church and

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<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," p.145.

<sup>300</sup> *Weekly Mail*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1990.

<sup>301</sup> *Sowetan*, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1989.

the celebration of National Youth Day ended in chaos. One disappointed onlooker lamented that “this shows how ideology has divided us”.<sup>302</sup> The potential for a disruptive surfacing of youth voices on June 16<sup>th</sup> did not go away and in 1993 the *Sowetan* reported how youth chanted ‘Kill the Boer, Kill the Farmer’ throughout the re-launched ANC Youth League’s rally at Orlando Stadium.<sup>303</sup> This was following public pronouncements by the ANC leadership that the slogan had been ‘banned’. Such moments of theatre dramatised for newspapers the awkward position of youth as actors in the new political dispensation of negotiations and compromise. The ANC moved increasingly to attempt to neutralise this troublesome constituency in many ways, but most tellingly, through a broadening of the meaning of June 16<sup>th</sup>.

In 1989 an article in the *Weekly Mail* expressed the reappraisal of June 16<sup>th</sup> shaped by ANC-aligned hegemony when focusing upon the divergent fates after June 16<sup>th</sup> of the first three presidents of the SSRC, Tsietsi Mashinini, Khotso Seatholo and Dan Montisisi.<sup>304</sup> Tsietsi Mashinini was described as a star that had ‘flared briefly and brightly’.<sup>305</sup> The journalist Gavin Evans commented, ‘today [he] is almost forgotten, a discredited playboy, believed to be living in exile’.<sup>306</sup> Apparently even his mother did not know where he was. Interestingly, both he and Khotso Seatholo are noted as having married or being linked with beauty queens, which does not seem to enhance their political credibility. None of the personal details of Dan Montisisi are mentioned at all, only his various roles in the struggle, five years as a SASM activist, President of the SSRC, imprisonment on Robben Island, membership of SOYCO and the UDF and finally ‘living in Soweto under a stringent restriction order’.<sup>307</sup> Whilst not officially aligned with any particular liberation organisation the *Weekly Mail* certainly espoused a narrative which placed Dan Montisisi and by association the UDF and the ANC as the true leadership to have emerged from June 16<sup>th</sup>. However, this was not a contest so easily won elsewhere.

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<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> *Sowetan*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1993.

<sup>304</sup> Gavin Evans, ‘Thirteen years on’, *Weekly Mail*, June 15th 1989.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*



## Contesting a new orthodoxy

From 1989 onwards Regina Mundi became the site for AZAPO's main commemoration service, while first SAYCO, and then the ANC, moved to various stadiums inside and then outside Soweto. This marked a parting of ways over how the various anti-apartheid traditions commemorated June 16<sup>th</sup>. The ANC and its youth affiliates continued and intensified June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day for political mobilisation and action and focussed more widely on the position of youth and children in the post-apartheid settlement. In contrast the PAC and AZAPO emphasised messages of 'solidarity', 'respect' and the Black Consciousness tradition as the 'true' message of the 1976 uprisings. These changes stemmed largely from the vastly different fortunes and position of the ANC, PAC and AZAPO in South Africa's shifting political landscape.

In 1990, following the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and other liberation organisations, SAYCO adopted a slightly different attitude towards June 16<sup>th</sup>. It was not a radical departure from the way in which the UDF had approached the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day for potential political mobilisation but in the changed circumstances they could afford to be more explicit. There was also a change in tone; SAYCO talked of 'celebrating' rather than commemorating June 16<sup>th</sup>. On Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June 1990 SAYCO took out a full page advertisement in several newspapers proclaiming its message for June 16<sup>th</sup>, which was 'ORGANISE. DISCIPLINE. ACTION. FOR POWER AND PEACE'.<sup>308</sup> The advert set out SAYCO's goals thus:

SAYCO has declared June 1990 the "MONTH OF THE YOUTH". In line with the adopted programme for this month we are urging the youth to play an active role in the organisation of June 16 rallies and in their thousands attend the rallies that are organised by SAYCO to *celebrate* this day; to ensure that the national blitz campaign of massive recruitment for the ANC from June 17-25 is a success and to creatively celebrate June 26, South African Freedom Day and popularise the Freedom Charter. (Emphasis added).<sup>309</sup>

In 1992 the ANC took such an approach even further. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) talks had reached a point of stalemate in May of 1992. In this situation the ANCYL, which had been re-launched in 1991, described June 16<sup>th</sup> quite

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<sup>308</sup> *Sowetan*, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1990.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

explicitly as ‘a launching pad for a further programme of action’.<sup>310</sup> The ANC led rallies were to be used as a forum in which to gauge public opinion on support for the ANC’s programme of action that aimed to break the deadlock in the CODESA talks. ANCYL president Peter Mokaba told the press on June 12<sup>th</sup> that people at their rallies would be asked ‘Do you agree that a democratically elected constituent assembly should be undermined by: An undemocratically elected senate of losers; pre-determined regional powers, functions and borders which are designed to perpetuate white privilege, racism and tribalism; or a 75% majority which will give the minority veto powers?’<sup>311</sup> These questions clearly did not have much to do with June 16<sup>th</sup> directly. That year, the ANC’s main rally was held at Orlando stadium and drew a reported crowd of 45 000 to hear Nelson Mandela.<sup>312</sup> Mandela also led a march on the morning of June 16<sup>th</sup> that began at Izwekzi station in Diepkloof and went to Orlando West where a memorial stone was unveiled in memory of Hector Pieterse.<sup>313</sup> The stone shield erected by the ANCYL, made of polished red granite, reproduced a stylised version of Sam Nimza’s famous photograph and included the dedication ‘To honour the youth who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom and democracy’.<sup>314</sup> Thus the memorialisation of June 16<sup>th</sup> symbolised youth within the struggle in a broader sense.

Whilst Hector Pieterse was to grow in importance at the centre of public remembrances of June 16<sup>th</sup>, the notion that the anniversary represented a much more generalised time to think about youth and also increasingly children was to become the powerful ANC- led government stance after 1994. In 1993 the OAU and Unicef declared June 16<sup>th</sup> as the ‘Day of the African Child’.<sup>315</sup> One year later the National Children’s Rights Committee (NCRC), one of the conveners of the main commemoration event, issued publicity material on June 15<sup>th</sup> that read, ‘Tomorrow the children of South Africa will be seen and they will also be heard. Listen’.<sup>316</sup> This notion of June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day for young people was one of the shifts in meaning criticised by

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<sup>310</sup> *Sowetan*, June 12th 1992.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> *Sowetan*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1992.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> Sabine Marschall, “Visualising Memories: The Hector Pieterse Memorial in Soweto,” *Visual Anthropology* 19 (2006): pp.150-1.

<sup>315</sup> *Sowetan*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1993.

<sup>316</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1994.

other liberation organisations. So the *Sowetan* reported that same day in 1994 'AZAPO national organiser Mr Fundile Mafongosi said that while the NCRC saw June 16<sup>th</sup> as a day to be celebrated by the young people, AZAPO held a different view, believing that it should be celebrated by all black people'.<sup>317</sup>

A further change in the discourses on youth surrounding June 16<sup>th</sup> was the change in the nature of victimhood associated with the day. Those, whom newspapers had once put forward as possessing the moral authority of sacrifice in the mid-1980s, now reappeared as pitiful victims who symbolised the tragedy of South Africa's youth. In 1993 a series of articles revisited amongst others Poppy Buthelezi and Phindile Mavuso. One article interviewed Poppy Buthelezi alongside five other victims of June 16<sup>th</sup>, three young men and two other young women.<sup>318</sup> The article was entitled 'Triumph of the schoolboy martyrs'.<sup>319</sup> In each case the young person's childhood ambitions were juxtaposed with their life after being injured on June 16<sup>th</sup>. Under the subheading 'Police bullets shattered dreams' Poppy Buthelezi was quoted, 'I feel very bitter when I think of June 16<sup>th</sup>'.<sup>320</sup> In another article entitled, 'June 16 scars will remain forever' Phindile Mavuso was interviewed by Joe Mdhlela. The article began,

Even though they live, they are in many ways dead, their ambitions killed in the repressive system. Their aspirations to become lawyers, doctors, engineers, scientists and indeed anything else their abilities permit, all shattered. Now they shuffle about, some with broken limbs, with very little hope of making meaningful contributions to society and the economy. At best they are just content to survive and see another day dawn.<sup>321</sup>

Phindile Mavuso was quoted, 'Why do you think these people should not be bitter. They may say they are not but what does the violence in this country tell you? It says there are people who are angry and the government retaliates by killing them'.<sup>322</sup> This kind of victimhood was a marked change from the glorious martyrdom Phindile Mavuso had previously seemed to embody; now her moral authority lay in having been left forgotten

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<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1993.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

and bitter. These articles foreshadow the narratives of victimhood that emerged in the public hearings of the TRC five years later.

However, AZAPO and the PAC's main criticisms of ANC-led June 16<sup>th</sup> commemorations still referred to an earlier discourse of heroic martyrdom when they complained that the commemorations did not convey the correct tone of 'respect' and 'solidarity'. These criticisms were compounded in 1994 by the Government of National Unity's failure to declare June 16<sup>th</sup> a public holiday. Part of AZAPO's claim to uphold the tradition of June 16<sup>th</sup> was presented through its continued use of the Regina Mundi Church to hold its main commemoration service from 1990 onwards. In 1990 Mr Khotso Seatholo addressed the AZAPO service described by their publicity secretary as 'in keeping with the spirit of June 16<sup>th</sup>'.<sup>323</sup> The spirit of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the event's significance were explained in the following way. 'The militancy and solidarity of June 16 serves as a perfect example to the revolutionary forces of our country because the thrust of the attack was directed at the racist regime rather than at the innocent oppressed and exploited peoples in the townships'.<sup>324</sup> In 1992 AZAPO aimed to remember June 16<sup>th</sup> 'very much in the tradition of Black Consciousness'.<sup>325</sup> Their publicity secretary was quoted, 'In this era when there is so much violence directed against black people, it becomes the responsibility of every black person to revive the unity we had in 1976. We call on black people to honour the legacy of Hector Pieteron, Tseitsi Mashinini and the memory of Steve Biko'.<sup>326</sup>

The PAC was much less successful at speaking through June 16<sup>th</sup>. In 1992 however they did organise a large rally at Jabulani Ampitheatre in Soweto. On June 15<sup>th</sup> they announced to the press that Hector Pieteron's mother would speak at their rally and his sister would be in attendance.<sup>327</sup> In the end the programme was cut short and Hector's mother did not appear. The *Sowetan* reported that 4000 people attended the Jabulani amphitheatre. The article ended, 'the programme was cut short because of the time. Among those who failed to appear was the mother of Hector Pieteron. She was

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<sup>323</sup> *Sowetan*, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1990.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> *Sowetan*, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1992.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1992.

said to be sick. *Sowetan* later learnt that Mrs Dorothy Pieterse was at an ANC rally at Orlando Stadium'.<sup>328</sup>

AZAPO and the PAC's criticisms of the ANC were most successful in 1994 when they were joined by COSATU and the ANCYL in expressing anger at the Government of National Unity's failure to declare June 16<sup>th</sup> a public holiday. When it emerged that a committee headed by the Employment Minister Tito Mboweni appointed to decide upon new public holidays had met for the first time on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1994, it became a strong possibility the Government of National Unity would not be 'ready' to declare June 16<sup>th</sup> a public holiday that year.<sup>329</sup> On June 15<sup>th</sup> the South African Chamber of Business and the Afrikanse Handelsinsituut said publically that June 16<sup>th</sup> was not a paid holiday.<sup>330</sup> AZAPO president Professor Itumeleng Mosala called the Government 'weak-kneed' for not declaring the holiday immediately.<sup>331</sup> In the end Minister Tito Mboweni called for workers *not* to stay away on June 16<sup>th</sup>. The ANC's Orlando Stadium rally was reported that year as 'poorly attended'.<sup>332</sup> On June 17<sup>th</sup> the *Sowetan* carried a story under the headline 'Disappointment greets June 16'.<sup>333</sup> The paper reported, in what was a daily column, the public reaction to topical issues on the *Sowetan*/Radio Metro 'Talkback' phone-in programme. On June 17<sup>th</sup> the column began, 'the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 uprising was summed up yesterday in five words: disappointment, embarrassment and sheer anger'.<sup>334</sup> Khotso Seatholo was quoted as a member of AZAPO and a former student leader.

'It's quite paradoxical that the very day through which the ANC rose to power can now be relegated to discussions instead of a definite decision being taken about it' said Seatholo. He said it was the ANC that had in the past 18 years insisted on stay-aways on that day to honour those who had laid down their lives to liberate the country.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> *Sowetan*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1992.

<sup>329</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1994.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *Sowetan*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1994.

<sup>333</sup> *Sowetan*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1994.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

In making these remarks, Seatholo chose to criticise the ANC as measured against its own record. Most criticism centred on a more diffuse notion of a tradition of commemoration that was being violated. For example, Philip Kepadisa, publicity secretary of the Azanian Student's Convention, 'In the past June 16 used to be a sacrosanct public occasion. Now June 16 is being turned into a commercial event but it is a solemn day and anything apart from that is destroying the spirit of June 16'.<sup>336</sup>

Such contestation continued on the twentieth anniversary of the 1976 uprisings in 1996. The ANC took the unexpected step of moving its main June 16<sup>th</sup> commemoration rally out of Soweto for the twentieth anniversary of the uprising, going instead to Pietersburg in the Northern Province. ANCYL general secretary Febe Potgieter explained the move was taken because youth of the Northern Province were 'feeling neglected'.<sup>337</sup> One cannot help feeling that this was also a move away from the contestations of Regina Mundi and the fractured political loyalties of Soweto. However, the ANCYL did also hold a march departing from Morris Isaacson School and laid a wreath at the Hector Pieterse memorial stone in Orlando West.<sup>338</sup> A new national memorial stone was unveiled at Avalon Cemetery (where Hector Pieterse was buried under an AZANYU tombstone) that commemorated all those who had lost their lives during the uprisings.<sup>339</sup> AZAPO continued its focus on Regina Mundi and as part of its commemoration service presented the church with a plaque that read 'a token of appreciation for being a living memory and refuge to those who took a brave stand on this day'.<sup>340</sup>

Generally, government initiatives continued with the broadening of the meaning and position of June 16<sup>th</sup>, as a 'time for youth'. The Gauteng Department of Arts and Culture ran 'activities' to commemorate June 16<sup>th</sup> from June 2<sup>nd</sup> to June 23<sup>rd</sup>, which included commemoration talks, performances of plays, concerts and marches throughout the province and over the 21 day period.<sup>341</sup> June 16<sup>th</sup> had been declared a public holiday,

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<sup>336</sup> *Sowetan*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1994.

<sup>337</sup> *Sowetan*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1996.

<sup>338</sup> *Sowetan*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1996.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> *Sowetan*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1996.

as 'National Youth Day', and the ANCYL's public pronouncements were part of an aim to broaden the meaning and appeal of the commemorations. So, its full page newspaper advert in 1996 spoke of the need for 'all youth through their various formations and as individuals to join hands and make a declaration on Youth Day to work together for the promotion of reconciliation, nation building and transformation. We call in particular, the white youth to join their patriots in taking the new responsibilities placed in youth by the new political dispensation'.<sup>342</sup>

The same arguments against the government's plans surfaced from AZAPO: 'Celebrations in the form of parties and bashes cannot be a dignified way of paying tribute to our martyrs. This conduct amounts to spitting and dancing on the graves of our heroes'.<sup>343</sup> New criticisms came from teachers unions and other figures in the sphere of education, such as the executive director of the national commission on higher education, Dr Tebogo Moja. Dr Moja was quoted in the *Sowetan* as saying, 'June 16 should be marked with meaningful and educative events because it is not a break or a holiday. It should be a day to respect the youths who took to the streets to protest against apartheid education'.<sup>344</sup> The newspaper itself added its own criticisms in an editorial declaring that the day ought not to be one for political campaigning in the form of separate rallies for separate organisations. The newspaper first attributed a special moral authority to the 1976 students and then spoke as the guardian of their legacy: 'Such a show of disunity must be discouraged as it sends the wrong signal to our youth, to whom youth day should be bequeathed in memory of the gallant forays of the Class of '76 students. Ironically the June 16<sup>th</sup> upheavals were characterised by an unprecedented show of unity amongst the youth, who displayed unexpected maturity when challenging the might of the apartheid state machinery'.<sup>345</sup>

### **A new public history**

Two months later, in July 1996, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held its special hearing on June 16<sup>th</sup> the narrative of that day underwent its most

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<sup>342</sup> *Sowetan*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1996.

<sup>343</sup> *Sowetan*, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1996.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>345</sup> *Sowetan*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1996.

significant re-shaping in the post-apartheid public sphere. The TRC and in particular the position of women and young people in its processes and the eventual official history of the apartheid era produced in its report are considered in much more detail in chapter three of this thesis. For now it is sufficient to note the TRC's nation building aims in the context of the negotiated end to apartheid and the imperatives of truth *for* reconciliation in the new South Africa. In the case of the June 16<sup>th</sup> special hearing, the testimony given to the TRC was also shaped by the context of twenty years of public commemorative practices and historical narratives surrounding the uprisings.

The June 16<sup>th</sup> special hearing held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1996, symbolically at the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto, heard anew many of the discourses that had appeared in public historical spaces over the previous twenty years. It also saw certain meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> emphasised and others' downplayed. During the hearings there also emerged several deeply personal narratives of the day. The witnesses with an obvious political affiliation were overwhelmingly those originally from the SSRC or the Committee of Ten who had then subsequently joined ANC-aligned organisations. The story heard by the TRC was a unified one. The hearings included the testimony of two 'student leaders', both male and both subsequently members of the UDF and then the ANC, Dan Montisi and Murphy Morobe. There were also other young participants, several journalists, parents who had lost children, religious leaders and community activists. A notion that the narratives being spoken during the hearing might be contested came only from existing 'past' versions of events. Contemporary controversies over the ownership of the legacy of June 16<sup>th</sup> were not raised. From the beginning the commissioners self-consciously positioned the hearings in relation to all that had previously been written and said about June 16<sup>th</sup>, including prominently the Cillie Commission. Thus the TRC opened up the possibility of contested versions of events and simultaneously staked its own claim to authenticity and truth. These truth claims rested upon notions of participation and a privileging of oral testimony, which Meg Samuelson has described as 'the ritualistic act of giving voice that has dominated



the transition moment'.<sup>346</sup> Whilst being powerful rejoinders to apartheid era historical practices, the TRC's approach was still vulnerable to criticism of new exclusions.

The Chairperson for the proceedings, Yasmin Sooka, began by locating the TRC as unique. 'For many of us Soweto '76 is a time remembered in our history. We know the evidence that had gone to previous commissions; however, what we want to do today is get the story behind Soweto, the story of the human beings that lived in Soweto'.<sup>347</sup> On the second day of the hearing Sophie Thema, who had worked as a journalist on the *Weekend World* in June 1976 and been at the student's march on June 16<sup>th</sup>, gave testimony to the TRC as she had done to the Cillie Commission. Asked about her experiences before that previous commission she responded, 'well, my experience was that questions were actually being put to me. I was not given the opportunity to express myself like I am doing now'.<sup>348</sup> Commissioner Sooka characterised the Cillie report as finding that 'it was just the SSRC making trouble and they did not think that Afrikaans was the real problem'.<sup>349</sup> Sophie Thema responded with the very metaphor John Kane-Berman had used in his 1978 account of the uprising: 'My opinion is that Afrikaans was just the last straw that broke the camel's back'.<sup>350</sup> During Sophie Thema's testimony Commissioner Sooka also gave a characterisation of the position of black journalists in the history of June 16<sup>th</sup>; 'it seems that the black journalists were a window to Soweto in a white world'.<sup>351</sup> Despite echoing Mongane Wally Serote's 'Window on the Township' column the commission did not seem to be problematising the position of black journalists in the same way as writers of the 1980s had. The appearance of several black journalists during the June 16<sup>th</sup> hearings rather confirmed their continued importance to the transmission of authentic stories of the uprisings.

The two student leaders who testified also spoke about the Cillie Commission. Dan Montsisi, when asked for his comments on the report, began, 'Well, I don't blame Cillie because he was a judge operating within a certain framework and a certain

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<sup>346</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?: Stories of the South African Transition* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), p.120.

<sup>347</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/sithole.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>348</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/thema.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

institution'.<sup>352</sup> He went on, 'Ja. I think the Commission was not fair because at that time we were in prison. I might have been in Robben Island by the time they were actually investigating. Nobody spoke to me. The leadership of the SRC for instance they were outside. They didn't come to the community structures which were set up as a result of June 16'.<sup>353</sup> Murphy Morobe in his testimony remembered, 'they used the Cillie Commission to try to find a place where to put the blame on and they pulled us out of our detention cells at John Vorster Square, they took those same statements that were extracted from us under torture and forced us to read them before that Cillie Commission'.<sup>354</sup> Later on, Commissioner Ally asked him what his response to all that had been written on June 16<sup>th</sup> was. Murphy Morobe gave a long answer that acknowledged the importance of writings about June 16<sup>th</sup> and the possibility of different versions of the same events coming from different participants but he also saw his own legitimacy derived from experience. He saw that his and Dan Montsisi's testimony before the commission 'takes you more or less to the heart of some of the main players that were planning some of the things'.<sup>355</sup> He later went on, 'many of the authors of this history often tend to be outsiders, you know. They come from America, they come from England, they are white journalists who could not come into the township during that period, but they write these books, you know. I think that the big challenge is on those of us who were involved to be able to put our resources and energies together to piece this history and actually give the right impression'.<sup>356</sup> It was thus in relation to past attempts to tell and explain June 16<sup>th</sup> that the commission and some of its witnesses located their own narratives as newly emerged.

The two male student leaders saw themselves as providing the TRC with the kind of narrative from 'within' that the Cillie Commission had never heard. Yet they also analysed the youth from without. Murphy Morobe spoke in comparative terms of other student uprisings around the world in the late twentieth century, 'also at that time there were general student uprisings. Not only, you know, in America but also in France

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<sup>352</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/montsisi.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.* In his reference to 'outside' Montsisi meant in exile.

<sup>354</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/morobe.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

and a number of areas where the war in Vietnam was generating a lot of opposition and we came up SASM then, you know, riding after that development'.<sup>357</sup> Dan Montsisi appeared to reference neo-Marxist notions about the nature of youth as political actors when he explained the violence of June 16<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath,

I understand, I mean youth will always be youth. Youth in nature, they are very vibrant, very active and probably even susceptible to temptation at times. But I think with the experience that we had as student activists starting from the early seventies right up to 1976 we thought we could be able to embark on a demonstration which was going to be peaceful.<sup>358</sup>

From this quotation it is possible to see how Montsisi and Morobe both emphasised the planning and organisation that went into June 16<sup>th</sup>. Their accounts clearly articulated what happened to them and others on the march. In contrast, the other former students who appeared before the commission were all female and all struggled to present a coherent narrative of the day. In Amelia Malope's testimony, June 16<sup>th</sup> emerged as a day of confusion and hurt. For her the march was 'noise...confusion...running around...running away'.<sup>359</sup> She 'did not know what was happening but as I was standing there I started asking around what was happening, but we were standing in a crowd, we could see some shooting and then I got to know immediately what was happening'.<sup>360</sup>

This gendered division of understanding became even more pronounced during Dan Montsisi's testimony, as he described the crowd as it lost control after the police shootings.

Now if one had to comment about the condition in which these students were, you had girls for instance who were clad in gyms dress but now those gyms were actually cut into two by the fence and they were just exposed, and some of them were actually bleeding. There is one particular girl I saw who had a gash on her head and all the time they had been trying to stop the blood that was flowing profusely and a number of them did not even have their shoes on. It was terrible. It was almost as if these people had come from a battlefield not a demonstration....

Now on our way to Morris Isaacson [School] we met a van, it was a green bakkie, one of these Municipality vans, it was driven by a white man. That is

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<sup>357</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/morobe.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>358</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/montsisi.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>359</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/molapo.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

when violence started with our group. Mostly the girls were in the forefront. I have never seen so many stones in my life raining on a car or on a target...and the student girls themselves actually struggled and fought amongst each other to get hold of the white man who was inside the car. They dragged him out. They pelted him with stones, with bottles, with their shoes as they were screaming. There was a young boy who was also looking for a way through to the white man. Finally when they made space for him he produced a knife and he stabbed a number of times in the chest of the white man...<sup>361</sup>

Dan Montsisi, as the detached male student leader, describes the crowd violence he personally witnesses as almost exclusively carried out by young women, except for the final actions of a 'young' boy. Together with the other testimony heard that day it makes for a confusing depiction of young women as the innocent victims and violent perpetrators of June 16<sup>th</sup>. Significantly, the authoritative accounts from inside the student body came from men; it is they that spoke with confidence about the build up to the march and the effects of the day on their own and the nation's life.

Alongside the stories of bereaved parents, there were also witnesses in the June 16<sup>th</sup> hearings who spoke as community leaders passing comment on and framing youth testimony. In the context of the Alexandra TRC hearings Belinda Bozzoli has argued that such testimony because of its adult emphasis on youth victimhood both 'demeaned the youth and let them off the hook' in terms of their political roles and moral responsibilities.<sup>362</sup> Yet in the case of the June 16<sup>th</sup> hearings the residue of historical meaning and symbolism surrounding young people's actions that day meant that heroic narratives were also retold alongside those of youth victimhood. Ellen Kuzwayo was asked by the commission to 'share your own experiences of that day with us'. She was also asked to discuss her 'observations of the community'.<sup>363</sup> Her testimony moved between the two and wove them together. Ellen Kuzwayo's authority to speak thus came from her position within the Soweto community, her youth work and political activism. Describing how she returned from work on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 when she heard there was

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<sup>361</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/montsisi.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>362</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.275; See also, Belinda Bozzoli, *Ritual and Transition: The Truth Commission in Alexandra Township, South Africa, 1996* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1998).

<sup>363</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/kuzwayo.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

trouble in Soweto, she told how with her friend Matilda she drove around to find out what was going on:

Suddenly on the lips of every child you met was Hector Pieteron, Hector Pieteron, Hector Pieteron. That young boy, on that day, yes he died, he was killed by the police. But overnight he became a hero...I still believe to this day, I am still angry because I feel the Nationalist Party government never did see our children as children because the colour of their skin was not the colour of the skin of their children, they were not children, they were not human beings...There was a time when I didn't have a car, I was a social worker doing my practice in Soweto and sometimes after sunset I would be going through Orlando Station to go to my home and it would be dark and if I saw a group of young men standing there I just ordered them to take me home. They would be grousing that they should be doing something else rather than take this old lady home, but they obeyed. Believe you me today I cannot do that, because I don't trust the very children who ought to protect me because of the handling of the government of South Africa of those days. They turned our children into animals.<sup>364</sup>

In a very personal testimony, Ellen Kuzwayo linked her sense of a community breakdown to the sacrifices made by young people on June 16<sup>th</sup>. Hector Pieteron became a hero 'overnight' but the children of South Africa were simultaneously stripped of their own humanity. Ellen Kuzwayo's attempts to measure the cost of June 16th for society emphasised the changing behaviour of young men towards herself, an 'old lady' or maternal figure. Kuzwayo saw the apartheid government as having violated the African family and described this through the breakdown of the relationship between older women and young men. Similar sentiments were also to be found in photographer Peter Magubane's testimony. He recalled,

Our children did not use any guns then; all they used were stones, fighting guns with stones. When you tried to talk to the policemen and you say what is it that you are doing? the answer that you get, you have asked for it. Some of these children left their homes at a tender age and went to strange countries in Africa to become refugees. Left their mothers, their fathers behind and did not have the motherly care, whilst the white people of South Africa had our mothers and they had the very children's mothers who had fled the country at a tender age, to bring up their children.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>365</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/magubane.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

Peter Magubane emphasised the loss, perhaps even theft, of 'motherly care' the apartheid system inflicted upon African children. Such a perspective was in contrast with stories from the English-language press of the 1980s that often suggested an abdication of parental responsibility could explain the waywardness of youths. In the TRC hearing young people's heroism and victimhood were thus bound tighter than ever.

In the testimony of the last witness on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, the TRC heard the most explicitly heroic meaning of June 16<sup>th</sup>. The Reverend Dale White described himself as a 'white clergyman working in Soweto from 1972 to 1992 in the parish of Jabavu'.<sup>366</sup> His testimony involved a narrative of South Africa's liberation struggle that placed June 16<sup>th</sup> at its centre. He began, 'June 16 can be memorialised as the beginning of the end of apartheid. It was on that day that the raw as yet untested energy of the youth erupted and a new spirit of uprising of the oppressed was born, flowered and seeded in the future liberation we enjoy today'.<sup>367</sup> Later in his testimony he spoke again in symbolic terms, 'who could realise that on the dusty day in Soweto the first organised confrontation between placard bearing youth and pistol shooting police was the opening salvo on the stage of modern South African liberation history'. Finally, in a heavily religious image he claimed 'the carrying of Hector Pieterse was a walking pieta of the struggle of the youth to undo the shackles of the past'.<sup>368</sup> The Reverend White thus re-inscribed in the new forum of the TRC public hearings the notion that June 16<sup>th</sup> symbolised the position of the youth in South Africa's liberation struggle in general. In the TRC this was overwhelmingly a symbolic, sacred, position of sacrifice. Reverend White evoked the internationally famous image of Hector Pieterse carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo as the ultimate symbol of the struggle of the youth.

Talking in heroic terms of the youth within the political struggle against apartheid, Reverend White also recalled a change that he noticed June 16<sup>th</sup> had wrought upon the family and by extension the community:

Even more startling was a change in the attitude towards children and young people in Church. As one parishioner explained to me, these young people have

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<sup>366</sup> <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/soweto/white.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

taken up our struggle, they are on the frontline. We have buried so many we feel they should be blessed because we do not know if they will die between now and next Sunday.<sup>369</sup>

White saw this as a 'reversal of a deep African custom that elders must be given pride of place and honoured as wise patriarchs'.<sup>370</sup> He commented that 'this reversal of generational status will later become a problem in families, but arises out of necessity as the schools became the site of the struggle'.<sup>371</sup> Whilst the TRC heard many of the familiar meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> that had emerged through the English-language press and twenty years of public commemorative practices, the loudest meaning heard was that of June 16<sup>th</sup> as embodying the symbolic victimhood of youth in the struggle. In its report the Commission acknowledged in its chapter on children and youth the particularity of these meanings when it commented,

Few chose to speak of, or to report on the heroic role of young people in the struggle against apartheid. Many saw themselves not as victims, but as soldiers or freedom fighters and for this reason, chose not to appear before the Commission at all.<sup>372</sup>

In 2002 the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum opened in Orlando West, Soweto. The Museum strove to contain within itself the multiple meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent uprisings. Its name and location placed it firmly within the commemorative practices ongoing since 1977 that this chapter has attempted to explore. The Museum's publicity leaflet describes its own location,

The Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum's Orlando West precinct includes the following important sites; the spots where both Hector Pieterse (Vilakazi Street) and Hastings Ndlovu (Khumalo Street) were shot dead by the police; Orlando West/Phenfeni Junior Secondary School where the first official class boycotts took place in May 1976; Belle Higher Primary School whose students joined the May 1976 class boycott...the Phomolong Clinic where Antoinette Sithole

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<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 4 (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998), p.249.

(Hector Pieterse's sister) and Mbuyisa Makhubo rushed to only for the on-duty doctor to confirm that young Hector Pieterse was dead.<sup>373</sup>

The iconography of Sam Nimza's famous photograph of Hector Pieterse carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo and Antoinette Sithole is reproduced throughout the museum, even on the entry ticket. However, the museum does attempt to problematise its own narratives. On a window looking out onto the fore-court of the museum, where the ANCYL's 1992 marble memorial and a second 2001 memorial to Hector Pieterse sit, a quotation from his sister Antoinette Sithole has been placed. It reads,

When my brother was killed in the June 16<sup>th</sup> student uprising, he was just a 13 year old schoolboy. But this does not justify the heroism around him as a martyr...I appreciate that my brother is named as the icon of the uprising...he was just an ordinary child without glamour. Why all the glamour around his death?<sup>374</sup>

The power of this quotation to address the weight of symbolism the museum, nearby monument and thirty years of commemorative practices have invested in Hector Pieterse is debatable. Its curator Ali Khangela Hlongwane acknowledged the position of the museum in a 2008 article as a 'further metamorphosis of commemoration' in post-1994 South Africa. Memorial sites were re-imagined as tourist destinations as part of the national imperative 'to create jobs and develop local economies using the heritage of the liberation struggle side by side with the public pressures and national and public interest in symbolic reparations and social justice'.<sup>375</sup> It has also been argued by Sabine Marschall that the 2001 Hector Pieterse memorial in front of the museum 'is not primarily addressed at those directly bereaved, but increasingly at the wider community and the public at large, who are now encouraged to pay tribute to those who died and to recognize this event as one of the stepping stones towards liberation'.<sup>376</sup> As part of this dynamic she reveals that the need for the memorial to address a national and international audience (the memorial was always intended by Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism to become a major tourist attraction) resulted in the use of a minimalist style. Thus the memorial used the same architectural language as

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<sup>373</sup> Hector Pieterse Museum, leaflet produced by City of Johannesburg, Community Development: Arts Culture and Heritage, 2008.

<sup>374</sup> *Sowetan*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>375</sup> Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," p.135.

<sup>376</sup> Marschall, "Visualising Memories: The Hector Pieterse Memorial in Soweto," p.151.



memorial art in the United States, and Holocaust memorials in Europe.<sup>377</sup> This apparently conflicted with wishes expressed by Soweto residents. According to the architect Jeremy Rose, 'local residents, represented by the ANC Youth League and the Soweto Development Forum, wanted a seven-meter bronze statue of Hector Pieterse' to be erected on the site.<sup>378</sup> On the thirtieth anniversary of June 16<sup>th</sup> in 2006 the questions of the students' legacy and appropriate practices of remembrance were not set in stone despite numerous attempts to do just that.<sup>379</sup>

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which narratives and understandings of June 16<sup>th</sup> have emerged as public or national history over the twenty years between 1976 and 1996. Discussions about these spaces were very often self-consciously historical as well as politically contentious. Various attempts have been made to fix the meaning of June 16<sup>th</sup> but understandings of that day and the Soweto uprisings have remained fluid. No one group, political or social has been able to grasp or tie-down the moral or political authority that the students won in return for their sacrifices. However, dominant narratives, recurring motifs and certain prominent figures as legitimate carriers of the historical memory of June 16<sup>th</sup> have emerged. Of crucial concern to the rest of this thesis is the recognition that the gender of the student participants has been a detail shaped and obscured by these wider processes of making the meanings of June 16<sup>th</sup>.

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<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.159-160.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p.166n.

<sup>379</sup> Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Monuments and Memory in the contested language of Black Liberation: the South African experience," p.136; See also the volume issued for the uprising's 30th anniversary: Khangela Ali Hlongwane, Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, and Mthobi Mutloatse, eds., *Soweto '76* (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2006).

### **CHAPTER THREE: Real Absence and Symbolic Presence? Young women in political organisations**

*So we, as black women activists, remained in limbo. On the one hand we could not claim a space for ourselves politically in the way that men had on campus. On the other our association with the Federation of Transvaal Women (Fedtraw) defined for us the 'legitimate' women's concerns. The problem was that a programme geared for older community women, did not cater for a constituency of young women, who were arguably not triply oppressed, or in fact mothers of youth, but youth themselves. We could not even rely on constant debate within the non-racial alliance with the National Union of South African Students (Nusas) women to develop a critical analysis of the role of young women in the struggle. In a sense we were a disempowered grouping.<sup>380</sup>*

The words of Suzi Nkomo, an activist in the South African National Student's Congress (SANSCO), convey a sense of frustrated belonging to the broad political movement of South Africa's liberation struggles. She wrote in this 1991 article that she was 'grateful' for the space she had had as a young, black woman, and university student, studying at the University of the Witwatersrand in the mid-1980s, for her own personal political development. However, it seemed to her that 'none of the more broadly based organisations in the liberation movement do encourage women's participation'.<sup>381</sup> This was a controversial accusation to make and probably one that was only possible in the changed political environment of 1991 and within a sympathetic space such as *Agenda*, an academic/activist and feminist magazine.

I have chosen to begin this chapter with Suzi Nkomo's words, not because they represent the position of all young black women within South Africa's liberation struggles but rather because they highlight the very impossibility for any political

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<sup>380</sup> Suzi Nkomo, "Organising women in SANSCO: reflections on the experience of women in organisation," *Agenda* 10 (1991): p.12.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

movement to represent all black women, or all South African youth. Political mobilisation and indeed perhaps especially nationalist political mobilisation allocates specific roles to women and men that are intertwined with local and global gender ideologies. Such gender ideologies can be constraining and/or empowering depending upon how they are performed, the resources available to people and groups of people, and the changing context of political action. As Suzi Nkomo identifies there were very few specific organisational homes for young black women within the broad range of South African political organisations. The existing historiography suggests that young black women had to negotiate their participation in anti-apartheid politics, either through an increasingly masculinised youth politics, or a 'motherist' women's politics.

The existing work on youth organisations has largely relied upon oral history interviews with former (usually male) activists. Whilst rich in many other respects these interviews and subsequent historical narratives rarely explore gender ideologies. The interplay between gender ideologies and participation is the main focus of this chapter. The analysis locates discussions of gender ideologies published by former women activists and re-examines the documentary archive left by a number of youth organisations. The chapter attempts to explore more than just ANC-aligned youth congresses which have been the major focus of most research on youth politics.<sup>382</sup> So the chapter explores discussions of Black Consciousness ideology, the important but often ignored Christian group the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), leftist coloured and Indian youth groups as well as the ANC Youth League after its re-launch in 1991. This diffuse approach has been dictated by a shallow and fragmented archive but the strength of it lies in the multiple disruptions to the existing narrative of youth politics that emerge.

A small field of academic work upon gender ideologies and the liberation struggle has to date focused upon the masculinities of the ANC. Natasha Erlank has

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<sup>382</sup> In addition to those studies discussed extensively elsewhere are Charles Carter, "We are the Progressives': Alexandra Youth Congress Activists and the Freedom Charter, 1983-85," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 1991): pp.197-220; Charles Carter, "Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 1992): pp.115-142; Kumi Naidoo, "The Politics of Youth Resistance in the 1980s: The Dilemmas of a Differentiated Durban," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 1992): pp.143-165.

argued that the early political ideology of the ANC in the period 1910 to 1950 was permeated by a 'conscious political' project of regaining denied manhood.<sup>383</sup> Erlank argues that the early politics of the ANC intersected with the private, social preoccupations of an urban African elite which was fashioning a respectable, nuclear family influenced by Christian missionary ideologies. She suggests that 'during the 1920s and 1930s...African men were using their vision of the duties and rights of men to structure how and on what terms they engaged in political activity'.<sup>384</sup> The denial of male adulthood to African men in the 1910 Union of South Africa through a restrictive voting franchise was 'one of the most important areas where concern for denied masculinity was articulated'.<sup>385</sup> By the 1940s 'views of masculinity were increasingly linked to traditional ethics and socialism as expounded by the ANC Youth League'.<sup>386</sup>

Elaine Unterhalter has argued that 'struggle autobiographies' by male ANC leaders prominent after the 1940s are permeated by a notion of 'heroic masculinity', where men were the main performers of heroic deeds in the liberation struggle. Raymond Suttner has countered that outside of these autobiographies there were various models of masculinity within the ANC and that there was also a tradition of what he terms '(s)heroic projects' in the ANC-led underground.<sup>387</sup> He cites the example of Ray Alexander who 'joined the communist underground while her husband Jack Simons refused'.<sup>388</sup> He also argues that there were women as well as men in the MK, in some cases with men under their command, such as Jackie Molefe, Lindiwe Zulu, Thandi Modise, Marion Sparg, Dipuo Mvelase and Thenjiwe Mtintso.<sup>389</sup> Discussing time spent in MK training camps, women have drawn varying pictures of gender relations and ideologies. Sometimes the same women have given very different interviews, as in the case of Thandi Modise, whose changing accounts of life in an ANC camp are discussed in chapter five of this thesis. Suttner himself raises the issue that from the onset of ANC

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<sup>383</sup> Natasha Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912-1950," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 3 (2003): pp.653-655.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p.659.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p.661.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p.663.

<sup>387</sup> Raymond Suttner, "Women in the ANC-led underground," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), p.238.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239.

illegality and the move into exile, the ANC or the underground in South Africa became increasingly difficult to define. He argues that internally within South Africa 'ANC membership was as much a cultural as a political phenomenon'.<sup>390</sup>

In light of the widely acknowledged 'propaganda' element to MK activities, Jacklyn Cock's observations that, 'men constitute the majority of MK combatants who have been tried and convicted in South African Courts'<sup>391</sup> and 'no woman combatants are mentioned in the NEC's statement delivered by Tambo on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MK' become very relevant to considering the models of masculinity MK suggested to internal organisations.<sup>392</sup> However, Cock also argued in 1991 that 'at the same time the image of the female fighter – the MK guerrilla – has become a popular mass image of the strong, liberated woman'.<sup>393</sup> A 1994 letter to *Agenda* suggests that after the unbanning of the ANC women MK members were indeed important symbolic political actors. In her letter, Noliswe Mnyaka from King William's Town described the funeral of a Communist party educator Skenjana Roji, otherwise known as 'Isaac Makana', who had been involved in the Black Consciousness community clinic set up in Zinyoka village:

Thenjiwe Mthintso, a long standing companion of the late Roji, talked at the funeral. You see, I am telling you this because traditionally in our Xhosa custom – especially in the villages as conservative as Zinyoka – a woman can never dare to stand up and address a gathering and worst of all a funeral! It becomes even worse when the woman is the chief mourner...She said she was not going to leave any stone unturned and people would have to bear with her because she was an empowered and strong woman...She even urged the teenagers to finish matric and join a people's army if they want to. But not to think that an army is for males only and for illiterates who have run away from school. Thenji is a strong woman. I wish you can interview her. She is a communist, a guerrilla, a member of the National Executive and a woman!<sup>394</sup>

The remainder of this chapter discusses the ideologies of femininity and masculinity offered by internally based youth and women's organisations for young men

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<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, p.234.

<sup>391</sup> Jacklyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford U.P, 1991), p.161.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>394</sup> Noliswe Mnyaka, "Letter to Agenda", *Agenda*, 20, (1994), pp.4-5.

and women through the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. The analysis is split into three sections; each one dealing with a decade and three shifting models of youth participation. The first deals with Black Consciousness influenced community organisations, the second with the youth congresses of the 1980s and the third with the ANC Youth League after 1990. The versions of femininity available are considered alongside issues of actual participation. It is clear young women's participation was shaped by gender ideologies but that this was by no means simply a story of marginalisation.

In the 1970s it seems Black Consciousness as an organising political ideology made little attempt to address young women as a political constituency although it did offer up a model of positive black femininity. In the mid-1970s the Young Women's Christian Association began to become involved in the political arena and despite a Christian, conservative social ethos provided a unique space through which young black women entered politics. In the 1980s, the leadership of some youth congresses, motivated by socialist ideologies and notions of protection, began to address young women as beneficiaries of the youth movement and sometimes potential activists. The politics of confrontation can be seen to have both reinforced and disrupted normative gender roles. The rapidly shifting political terrain of the early 1990s 'transition period' opened up space for young women themselves to address issues of their participation and exclusion. The argument is that issues of young women's absence from political organisations are intertwined with their symbolic presence in the rhetoric and self-image of those same organisations. In other words, normative discourses on young women sustained the political subjectivities of male youth and older women.

### **I. 1970s: Black Consciousness, the YWCA and a womanhood of tested steel.**

It seems that in the 1970s political ideals of masculinity and femininity were tied overwhelmingly to ideas of racial pride that had an ambiguous relationship with discourses of modernity and changes in gender roles and relationships. Internal political

organisations at the time were largely influenced by Black Consciousness ideology. One strand of organisations drawn into political opposition through Black Consciousness were black Christian women's groups, such as the Young Women's Christian Association. The YWCA upheld ideals of femininity for young women that were connected with its missionary roots, but also provided a space for female political and community leadership. A number of women who were activists during the 1970s have described the combination of the YWCA and Black Consciousness as influential in young women's political participation.

In a 1991 book on the legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness, Mamphela Ramphele wrote a chapter on the gender dynamics of the movement, from what she described as a 'personal' perspective.<sup>395</sup> She argues bluntly that in Black Consciousness politics 'gender as a political issue was not raised at all' but that 'in general the BC Movement had a significantly positive impact on black women in South Africa'.<sup>396</sup> This was because of the new version of black femininity that the movement legitimated,

For the first time many black women could fall in love with their dark complexions, kinky hair, bulging hips and particular dress style. They found new pride in themselves as they were. They were no longer 'non-whites', but blacks with an authentic self, appreciated on their own terms. The skin-lightening creams, hot-oil combs, wigs and other trappings of the earlier period lost their grip on many women.<sup>397</sup>

However, deeper participation in the practice of politics within the South African Students Organisation (SASO) involved Mamphela Ramphele becoming 'one of the boys' and flouting more widely held ideas of the appropriate behavior of young women. She argued that 'late nights, alcohol consumption and smoking became part of life. An interesting aspect of this lifestyle was that the men one socialized with took a dim view of women being seen doing the same things as them publically, particularly smoking'.<sup>398</sup> She described one incident in which Vuyelwa Mashalaba, who was both a member of

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<sup>395</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View," in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, ed. Barney Pityana et al. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1991), p.214.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p.217.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218.

the SASO national executive committee and a young woman, was sent to Fort Hare University to address the student body prior to the launch of a local SASO branch there:

[Vuyelwa Mashalaba's] public smoking during the meeting left the students horrified! How could they be associated with an organisation that has such women in leadership positions? It took some skilful smoothing of ruffled feathers by [Barney] Pityana to get the launch back on track.

One has thus to judge BC male activists as products of their environment. They had to be sensitive to the feelings of people on a wide range of issues, including sexism, if they were to influence public opinion.<sup>399</sup>

The suggestion from Ramphele here seems to be that whilst SASO was a space within which different kinds of behavior were possible for certain young women, this dangerously modern masculine-femininity could actually damage the organisation's wider appeal. The exclusivity of this position within SASO was something Ramphele also remembered; she described herself as 'matter out of space' a characterisation that had been used previously in relation to women MPs in the House of Commons.<sup>400</sup> She admits that she and her female friends within SASO, Nomsisi Kraai and Deborah Matshoba, 'looked down upon women who played traditional roles within activist ranks as well as more widely within the student world'.<sup>401</sup> She argues that, 'it should be noted that these challenges to male privilege did not represent a systematic departure from traditional gender relationships, but only served to undermine this tradition for the benefit of those who were prepared to take the risks in challenging sexism at a personal level.'<sup>402</sup>

As chapter two of this thesis has shown, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 and commemoration practices during the late 1970s and early 1980s contained ideals of heroic young women's sacrifice in the struggle. Sibongile Mkhabela was perhaps the most prominent young female activist of the late 1970s because of her place alongside ten other male activists in the 1978-79 sedition trial of the SSRC leadership. Mkhabela suggests in her 2001 autobiography *Open Earth, Black Roses*, a feeling of being in an unusual place in

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p.219.

<sup>400</sup> S. Rodger quoted in *Ibid.*, p.220.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*



the day-to-day world of politics. Sibongile Mkhabela recalls that at Naledi High in 1976 she was initially the only girl in her class; 'I realised that my subject selection, which combined history, business, economics had landed me in a man's world'.<sup>403</sup> The importance of breaking out of a very real gendered spatial confinement is also apparent in the way Mkhabela remembers persuading other girls to join her class by commenting on their choice of biology and domestic science; 'this is a subject intended to keep black women in white women's kitchens and you are not about to let them do this to you'.<sup>404</sup> Throughout the autobiography the distinctiveness of her position as a young woman is emphasised. She remembers her teacher called her 'the rose amongst the vegetables'.<sup>405</sup> When describing herself on trial for sedition in 1978-9 she refers to herself as 'the black rose, who stood among men'.<sup>406</sup>

Sibongile Mkhabela claims that her male comrades in the South African Students Movement (SASM), and the SSRC 'felt quite unsure about how to work with me. I was not one of the girls, for none of the boys had a claim to bringing me into the struggle. I made an individual choice to be involved.'<sup>407</sup> Interestingly, she felt that not always being part of the male camaraderie actually made her freer; 'if I was compared with boys, I probably had more chances to make my own choices. I did not have to be in all their meetings (of course the boys would often feel that to miss a meeting would compromise them).'<sup>408</sup> She describes her political activism as inspired by her immediate surroundings and her mother's independence and strength, which, after her mother's death, she found 'reincarnated' in the 'strong female leadership' of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).<sup>409</sup>

The YWCA has a fascinating history in South Africa which can be read as a narrative of the ways in which race and racial politics intersected with global Christian missionary and colonial modernising projects over the twentieth century. It is

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<sup>403</sup> Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Press, 2001), p.33.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

particularly interesting for this chapter since whilst being a women's organisation it was aimed more specifically at fulfilling the needs of *young* women. In 1994 a young woman ANCYL activist argued 'in comparison with the plethora of youth organisations catering to other sectors (for instance, student, political and religious youth clubs) there are very few young women's organisations (the YWCA, Girl Guides and Jong Dames are some exceptions)'.<sup>410</sup> The YWCA in South Africa was founded in Cape Town in 1886.<sup>411</sup> In the early part of the century it remained an organisation for white women, although in 1914 there were twenty six branches for black women and it did open facilities for the so-called coloured community in District Six in 1918-19.<sup>412</sup> It was far from the only Christian organisation interested in young women. Young women of all races were, in the early twentieth century, considered to be in need of moral guidance and protection in the context of urbanisation and new employment opportunities. Deborah Gaitskell has shown how Christian missionary concerns over pre-marital pregnancy amongst African Christian girls in the years 1911-12 saw the 'creation of special associations for girls under the protective aegis of older women's organisations' such as the *isililo* and *manyano* uniformed prayer groups.<sup>413</sup> At the same time 'all-African peer groups with members of both sexes and adult-led single sex youth groups' also appeared.<sup>414</sup> One such group, the Purity League, first launched in 1919 with the aim of instituting respectable behavior during 'courtship, betrothal and marriage' later morphed under the leadership of Sibusiswe Violet Makanya in the 1930s into the Bantu Youth League which 'tried to interest the young people in Natal in programmes to uplift the community'.<sup>415</sup> In 1925 an African adaptation of the Girl Guides called the Wayfarers was launched and it was hoped that 'the movement's health and social teaching would, for Christian girls, replace the initiation schools'.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Febe Potgieter, "A Voice for Young Women," *Agenda* 20 (1994): p.32.

<sup>411</sup> Gregor Cuthbertson and David Whitelaw, *God and Youth and Women: The YWCA of Southern Africa, 1886-1986* (Johannesburg: YWCA of Southern Africa, 1986), p.8.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23-25.

<sup>413</sup> Deborah Gaitskell, "'Wailing for Purity': prayer unions, African mothers and adolescent daughters 1912-1940," in *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930*, ed. Shula Marks and R. J. A. R Rathbone (Harlow: Longman, 1982), p.352.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p.345.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p.346.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p.346.

In 1923 the YWCA admitted that 'its mission to black women in the towns remained "nearly all in the future"'.<sup>417</sup> In July of 1931 at the national conference in East London the YWCA in South Africa split into two organisations whose paths were to diverge significantly in the latter half of the century. The split occurred over the world-wide association's adoption of a new inter-confessional constitution that, according to the Durban and Port Elizabeth branches, 'would enable the YWCA to meet the need of any girl irrespective of creed'.<sup>418</sup> The Johannesburg and Cape Town branches argued that they feared losing control over leadership of the organisation and withdrew from the world association. The Young Women's Christian Association of Southern Africa continued to provide urban hostel accommodation for young white women and so-called coloured women in Cape Town, remaining a racially segregated organisation. The World-affiliated YWCA merged with the Zenzele clubs (see below) in October 1951 and its leadership became in the 1970s increasingly involved in liberation struggle politics.<sup>419</sup> Unfortunately, the World-affiliated YWCA has, unlike the YWCA of Southern Africa, not left behind an archive. This is no doubt due to their divergent paths after 1931.

The World-affiliated YWCA was in the 1970s involved in the local-level spread of Black Consciousness ideas through its youth and leadership training programmes as well as the community activities and women's groups it organised. The Zenzele clubs, which had been founded by Madie Hall Xuma (wife of the ANC leader Dr A.B. Xuma) in the 1940's, had promoted a 'powerful combination of Victorian womanhood, Christian devotion and "American Negro" modernity'.<sup>420</sup> The affiliation with the World-YWCA added ideas of social responsibility to this mix and the organisation spread quickly in the early 1950s.<sup>421</sup> A *Drum* article in 1963 about the imminent return to

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<sup>417</sup> Cuthbertson and Whitelaw, *God and Youth and Women: The YWCA of Southern Africa, 1886-1986*, p.31.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38. In the records of the YWCA of Southern Africa, from which this account is taken, creed and race are intertwined. The organisation often recorded the refusal of a particular young women's request for residence or membership on the grounds that they were Muslim or Hindu and thus could not be catered for in a Christian hostel. There was a certain coyness in the records in referring to race at all. UNISA, Manuscript Collection: YWCA of Southern Africa.

<sup>419</sup> Iris Berger, "An African American 'Mother of the Nation': Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940-1963," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): p.562.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, p.549.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p.564.

America of Madie Hall Xuma, who had remained a leadership figure for the World-YWCA, outlined the womanhood linked to the organisation: '[Xuma was] "Mummy" to the new type of woman we are seeing in our townships now; "Mummy" to the smart social workers and new feminine intelligentsia who will take over the leadership from her'.<sup>422</sup>

Mamphela Ramphela argues that the Zenzele and YWCA, along with Parent-Teacher Associations, were one of the ways in which 'ordinary women' became involved in the Black Consciousness movement'.<sup>423</sup> Ramphela notes that at a conference in Durban in December 1975 which launched the BC-orientated Black Women's Federation as a national umbrella body for women's organisations, 'prominent mature women from established groups such as YWCA, Zenzele and church bodies were key participants'.<sup>424</sup> Sibongile Mkhabela recalled that in Soweto,

The YWCA had facilitated a positive reawakening among young people. It was exciting to listen to people such as Dr Ellen Kuzwayo, President of the YWCA, Brother Tom Manthata of the BPC and George Wauchope and others, SASO leaders...Through my links to the YWCA and other township youth clubs, I was exposed to seminars at St Angus Ecumenical Centre and the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre. My schoolbooks started to bear slogans such as 'Black man you are on your own', 'Black and proud', 'Black is beautiful'...At the YWCA we learnt how to organize, as they involved us in annual community events such as 'Everybody's birthday', which was a huge communal birthday party...such events were intended to strengthen communities and keep them organized.<sup>425</sup>

Prominent members of the YWCA in Soweto became more overtly involved in liberation politics during the events after June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 and attracted government restrictions. In March 1977 the World-YWCA, described by the *Rand Daily Mail* as 'a Christian organisation with 3000 members' called for a lifting of the 5 year banning order served upon their member Mrs Oshadi Phakathi.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> *Drum*, March 1963, pp.39-40 quoted in *Ibid.*, p.564.

<sup>423</sup> Ramphela, "The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View," p.216.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>425</sup> Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*, pp.26-27.

<sup>426</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1977.

The World-YWCA may have been involving itself in political matters but it also retained a focus upon welfare work and the provision of hostel accommodation to young women in urban areas. A June 1978 article in the *Post* detailed the involvement of two YWCA members, Mrs Makan and Mrs Hlomuka, in setting up the Soweto Women's Thrift Club. The club aimed to 'exchange skills' in sewing, knitting and other crafts. Mrs Hlomuka commented, 'when I saw what I got from dressmaking, I wondered about the other women who are not working and those girls who have left school after the disturbances, and decided to share my skills with them'.<sup>427</sup> In her autobiography Ellen Kuzwayo describes a mixture of self-help schemes, leadership training programmes and public health campaigns undertaken by the Transvaal World-affiliated YWCA when she was its General Secretary between 1964 and 1976.<sup>428</sup> She argues that 'it was during this period in the life of the black communities in South Africa, when YWCA clubs were in operation, that a foundation of community-minded commitment was laid'.<sup>429</sup> Interestingly, whilst most of the early twentieth century women's hostels set up by white Christian women's groups to provide accommodation for African 'girls' had been forced to close by the late 1950s, the World-affiliated YWCA continued to expand its provision.<sup>430</sup> In October 1987 a R4.9 million YWCA hostel was opened in Dube, Soweto. The hostel, funded by the Anglo-American-De Beers Chairman's Fund had 121 single bedrooms.<sup>431</sup> However, by the 1990s there were several newspaper stories suggesting difficulties at the hostel over issues of rent and in 1995 the YWCA decided to use the building for training, workshops and conferences instead.<sup>432</sup>

Also apparent from Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography is the way in which the YWCA, whilst led by older women, did offer space for young women to participate and develop leadership skills. *Call Me Woman* begins with a letter written to Ellen Kuzwayo

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<sup>427</sup> *Post*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1978.

<sup>428</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1985), pp.160-179.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>430</sup> The exception to this was the Helping Hand Hostel in Johannesburg which remained open until 1970. The Group Areas Act forced the eventual closure of most of the hostels that tended to be located in areas declared white, as they had initially aimed to provide accommodation for domestic workers employed in the white suburbs. Deborah Gaitskell, "Christian Compounds for Girls': Church Hostels for African Women in Johannesburg, 1907-1970," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979): p.68.

<sup>431</sup> Langa Skosana, 'Home Away From Home', *Sowetan*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1987, p.5.

<sup>432</sup> *City Press*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1991; *Sowetan*, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1995; *Citizen*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1995.

from a young woman in the Johannesburg Fort Prison in September 1978.<sup>433</sup> The young woman was Deborah Matshoba, also mentioned by Mamphela Ramphele as one of the honorary boys in SASO. Kuzwayo recalls that when she first knew her, Deborah Matshoba was an 'active and committed member' of the YWCA, who was also 'in time Chairman of the Youth Department of the YWCA'.<sup>434</sup> For Kuzwayo:

It is a letter I treasure. Here, in a few words, are the strength, caliber and outstanding personality of many black women – women who have been detained under extremely brutal and frightening conditions but who have emerged like tested steel, their character and courage somehow untouched by bitterness and deep-seated frustration.<sup>435</sup>

Kuzwayo thus celebrates through Deborah Matshoba a womanhood of 'tested steel'. The leadership of the World YWCA continued to be involved in liberation politics in the 1980s. The *Natal Witness* reported on the World YWCA's Annual General Meeting in August 1985 with the headline 'YWCA calls for abolition of apartheid'.<sup>436</sup> The article set out that the YWCA 'supports all forms of passive resistance including consumer boycotts' and aimed to 'convince the government to negotiate with all relevant black leaders in the community'.<sup>437</sup> November 10<sup>th</sup> was declared a national day of prayer, with the theme 'the truth will set us free'.<sup>438</sup> Amidst the politics of confrontation the YWCA continued to offer a version of womanhood that was politically engaged and rooted in Christian moralities.

## II. 1980s: COSAS, youth groups and 'women's participation for victory'.

Contrary to Seekings' argument that young men marginalised young women from youth politics during the 1980s through an increasingly violent politics of confrontation, there is evidence, from a broader range of youth groups than Seekings studied, that the political participation of young women was considered vital for victory in the struggle. However, this is not to argue that large numbers of young women did

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<sup>433</sup> Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*, pp.3-5.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>436</sup> *Natal Witness*, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1985.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

participate in youth politics during the period. In his broader argument Seekings may be correct. An examination of COSAS and a number of youth groups founded in coloured and Indian areas provides evidence that young women's participation was symbolically important to ideas of youth political action during the 1980s. This complicates any simple narrative of marginalisation.

The Congress of South African Students was launched in 1979, its name signalling that it was, 'the first mass organisation since the crushing of internal resistance, to embrace the Freedom Charter of 1955'.<sup>439</sup> Seekings argued that it was partly this explicit reference to the ANC congress tradition that made COSAS the target for state repression that same year. Among the members of the first executive was one young woman, Kgomotso Nkadimeng, who recalled her role in the founding of COSAS in Nokuthula Mazibuko's 2006 book *Spring Offensive*. Kgomotso Nkadimeng described becoming unknowingly involved in underground ANC structures after commenting to someone in the crowds in Soweto on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976, 'why don't we poison the white people because our mothers are domestic workers?'.<sup>440</sup> She was involved in SASM until it was banned and was then 'working for the underground' although, as she puts it, 'we thought we were just part of a political meeting'.<sup>441</sup> Nkadimeng described her involvement in transiting activists coming through the Transvaal into exile. It was through these links she became involved in setting up COSAS:

I was sent together with a lady called Mpho Masetla, we went to Botswana and fetched lots and lots of money, and we were given instructions to form an organisation – COSAS. We left with Mpho and believe you me from Gaborone to Soweto, we hitch hiked, and we were in nine different cars. It was quite an experience for me, but I was brave enough to go through it with a friend, a comrade, Mpho.<sup>442</sup>

In retrospect Nkadimeng deemed the decision to call the new organisation COSAS, 'naïve'. She was arrested along with the whole first executive on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1979. Before her arrest she said that her family was unaware of her involvement in

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<sup>439</sup> Shaun Johnson, ed., *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.106.

<sup>440</sup> Kgomotso Nkadimeng in Nokuthula Mazibuko, *Spring Offensive* (Limpopo, South Africa: Timbila Pub, 2006), p.14.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

politics and that 'until then, they had concluded that I must really like boys, because the people who came to visit me all the time were young men!'<sup>443</sup> Kgomoitso Nkadimeng was detained for five and half months under Section Six of the Terrorism Act. During her detention, 'I was literally told that I was a bitch, I've actually joined the struggle to service these men sexually, nothing else. There's no woman or girl of my age who can be involved in politics'.<sup>444</sup> Nkadimeng commented later in the interview with Mazibuko:

Very few girls were involved, you were criticized from all angles including from other girls. Of course within the cells themselves you were constantly undermined by your male comrades. But of course if one understands the social influences one can't really say one was undermined, we were all under the same influences, they all thought women were lower, women are weaker, therefore they need to be protected. Therefore I wouldn't really want to label them as oppressive as such; we were all influenced by the same environment.<sup>445</sup>

Nkadimeng left the country after her release from detention but remained active in the ANC in exile.<sup>446</sup> She seems to have found in her involvement in the 'underground' a female camaraderie with Mpho Masetla. Her position, like that of Mamphela Ramphele and Sibongile Mkhabela, appears a somewhat lonely one; she remembers being 'criticised from all angles'. Her involvement in COSAS does not seem to have been school-based at all, or at least school appears not to have been significant enough for her to mention. This would change for later activists when COSAS restricted its membership to high school students in 1983.<sup>447</sup>

According to Seekings, with 'twenty-odd of its senior activists detained' and 'weak support outside the Transvaal, [COSAS] proved out of touch with the student protests which spread around the country in early 1980'.<sup>448</sup> However, Johnson claims that COSAS was involved in 'aggressively promoting' a nationwide 'Free Mandela' campaign in 1980 which 'contributed to the saturation of some townships with the

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<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>447</sup> Ineke Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.20.

<sup>448</sup> Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), p.36.



iconography of the ANC'.<sup>449</sup> He also states that by 1981 COSAS 'overshadowed other youth groups' and 'allowed for pivotal student involvement in initiatives like the Anti-Republic Day protests, consumer boycotts, rent strikes, and solidarity action with trade unions'.<sup>450</sup> COSAS was to become an increasingly large, vocal, and radical affiliate of the UDF from 1983 onwards. Early on during the township unrest of 1984, Seekings notes that the COSAS leadership was committed to the escalation of protest and 'generally denounced meetings with state officials and called for continued [school] boycotts'.<sup>451</sup> Boycotts had begun in 1984, initially because of very poor results in the 1983 matriculation examination, leading to suspicions that the Department of Education and Training was trying to limit the number of high school graduates.<sup>452</sup> These suspicions appeared to be confirmed when students at a school in Atteridgeville, Pretoria discovered a stack of unmarked exam scripts belonging to matric students who had already received their results.<sup>453</sup> In 1984 COSAS campaigned upon the matric issue as well as an end to the sexual harassment of female pupils, scrapping age limits enforced in schools, an end to corporal punishment, and the right to establish Student Representative Councils.<sup>454</sup> An undated press release from COSAS, that appears to be from 1984-5, makes some of these demands more specifically:

In our schools there is no genuine students' representation; students find themselves being policemen over other students...

Female school students at Dethabo High School (Naledi, Soweto) are still suffering under harassment by teachers in order for them to pass at the end of the year. They need to pay R78 instead of R68 (For school fees, books and other necessary fees)...

A number of schools in Soweto during the period of the 30<sup>th</sup> March must go to Magaliesburg for indoctrination by the SADF.<sup>455</sup>

The situation described here was not just one in which girls were forced into relationships with their teachers to obtain grades but they were also being charged

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<sup>449</sup> Johnson, *South Africa*, p.106.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>451</sup> Seekings, *The UDF*, p.134.

<sup>452</sup> Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle ; Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999), p.170.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> 'Press statement on repression to students' movement', undated, SAHA: AC2457: N3.2 COSAS.

higher school fees. Another undated COSAS document entitled 'Women's Participation for Victory' sets out the leadership's stance upon mobilising female school students. It begins, 'in our last Congress a resolution was taken to ensure an all-sided attempt to draw our women fold into our organisation'.<sup>456</sup> It highlighted the position of young women within the family; 'female students are drawn into domestic work at an early age'.<sup>457</sup> Consequently their 'performance in school work is pathetic' and,

What they become interested in, in their school life is nothing else but events in our schools, your 'Miss Orlando High' and 'Miss Freshette' etc. It is in this situation which forces students to strike a 'deal' with your wielding teachers. A love affair notes that you will sometimes be exempted from punishment. This is why in our schools we have sugar daddies and sweet sixties!!!...It is therefore our task to organise our women students into COSAS, to mobilise them against the problems they experience. We must educate them about the nature of our society.<sup>458</sup>

Later the author comments, 'surely we must not be satisfied with the fact that no female students have been in COSAS NEC since COSAS's launching'.<sup>459</sup> The leaflet has a slightly patronising tone which places female students in a position of weakness from which the rest of their behaviour can be understood. Young women are presented as in thrall to beauty contests and using their gender and sexuality to do well at school. The solution is to 'educate' young women about their weakness. The suggestion is that COSAS young women would not have the same competitive and predatory femininity.

The mention of beauty contests here is also interesting. Beauty contests were ubiquitous in the print media of the time especially that aimed at a 'township' audience.<sup>460</sup> As well as making for diverting pictures, these beauty contests were presented through newspapers and magazines as serious propositions for young women looking for 'success'. For example, the article below which was titled 'business before pleasure' and appeared in the *Rand Daily Mail* in February of 1977:

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<sup>456</sup> 'Women's Participation for Victory', undated, SAHA: AC2457: N3.2 COSAS.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> According to Van Kessel, a 'feasibility survey' conducted in 1991 to explore the possibility of continuing production of the community newspaper Grassroots, 'found that people were interested in reading a local paper, but it should feature a picture of the spring queen (a beauty queen discussed below) rather than Nelson Mandela'. Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, p.280.

Ga Rankuwa actress Margaret Lebelo, is a girl who believes in business before pleasure. Secretary of the Pretoria Arts Music and Drama Association (PAMDA). Aged 23. She was educated at Ga Rankuwa primary school and was not much in sport. She excelled at acting in school plays. She won a school beauty contest and she was "Miss Top 1974". Last year she joined a local modelling school under beauty queen Miss Rosetta Motsepe. The school did not last long and now she has joined forces with PADMA. "Marriage can wait for awhile. I first want to make use of my talent and afterwards look to marriage".<sup>461</sup>

This was a model of femininity and success that was highly visible in townships and, as the COSAS leaflet made clear, in schools too. It seems that the very spaces which were the site of political mobilisation were very often also used for staging such contests. Also in February 1977, successive articles in the *Rand Daily Mail* suggest that DH Williams Hall in Katlehang, Germiston was used to stage a beauty contest amongst residents of a local female hostel and days later the launch of the Katlehang Students Representative Council.<sup>462</sup> In an event which showed the blurring of politics and beauty contests the same hall was host to the 'first-ever Transkei Independence Party (Transvaal region) beauty contest' in May of that same year.<sup>463</sup>

A study of the Spring Queen Festival in Cape Town, in which workers from clothing factories took part in an industry-wide beauty pageant, has suggested that factory managers saw the contest as a way of diverting and placating increasingly difficult staff. Johnson argues that by 1980 a 'family atmosphere' that had existed in the factories between management and workers broke down.<sup>464</sup> The Clothing Workers' Union was becoming more militant and successful as the factories got larger and wages stagnated. Added to this mixture was the 'gradual recruitment of the "struggle generation" school-leavers: "They were rude! ...no respect for anyone...These girls *mos* thought they knew everything".<sup>465</sup> In the words of Vivian Bickford-Smith et al. the contest offered the chance for 'these "proletarian Cinderellas" [to] aspire to become feminine royalty, feted by management and colleagues alike, and win prizes of

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<sup>461</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1977.

<sup>462</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1977; *Rand Daily Mail*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1977.

<sup>463</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1977.

<sup>464</sup> P.Johnson, Talking the talk and walking the walk: The Spring Queen festival and the eroding family cult in the Western Cape garment industry, unpublished paper, UCT Centre for African Studies, 1993.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

modelling contracts or holiday trips to Sun City'.<sup>466</sup> It does seem that there was a certain antagonism between political youth organisations and this version of femininity – tied as the beauty queen in South Africa was into a white world of lavish capitalist consumption.<sup>467</sup> In July 1977 the *Rand Daily Mail* reported an incident involving 'Bubbles', a controversial beauty queen in Soweto:

Three beauty queens on their way to a contest at the Diepkloof Hotel had a narrow escape when youths began stoning their cars along a funeral route yesterday. Bubbles Mpondo who was involved in a much publicised romance with white muscleman Jannie Beetge, and two of her friends were involved. According to Miss Mpondo they were travelling from Orlando East to the contest at Diepkloof Hall about 2pm. Bubbles told me: "We saw a group of students on the road from Orlando to Deipkloof stopping cars. These students stopped our car and tried to open the doors which were locked. Miss Dikeledi Monareng one of the people in the car behind bubbles' vehicle said 'I heard a shout from the students who stopped Bubbles' "here's the sell-out to the black community"" When youths started hurling stones at the beauty queens car it took off at high speed. The car was not damaged...Meanwhile at the hall where Bubbles was competing, the crowd was hostile to her. There were jeers and boos. She was not placed in the competition which was won by Miss Nomsawazi Nhlengethwa.

This article suggests the manner in which control over young black women's relationships was part of a moral economy of struggle that emerged in townships in the uprisings of 1976-7 and the 1980s. The COSAS leaflet that dismissed beauty contests also seemed to be aimed at male members, offering explanations for young women's attitudes to school and teachers. This was the context in which the issue of sexual harassment of female students was taken up by COSAS. Niehaus suggests that in Impalahoek young men were sometimes jealous of teacher and school-girl relationships and his informants argued that 'the girls actually preferred teachers as lovers because teachers had more money'.<sup>468</sup> Seekings claims that the issue of sexual harassment was taken up by COSAS 'as much because male students resented teacher's poaching their

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<sup>466</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth Van Heyningen, and Nigel Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (Claremont, South Africa: D. Philip, 1999), p.207.

<sup>467</sup> For more on Beauty Queens and the politics of beauty contests see Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje, *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests and Power*, (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>468</sup> Isak Niehaus, "Towards a Dubious Liberation: Masculinity, Sexuality and Power in South African Lowveld Schools, 1953-1999," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 3 (September 2000): p.395.

potential girlfriends as out of any concern for the female students themselves'.<sup>469</sup> Van Kessel too asserts that whilst 'this could indicate a manifestation of student solidarity, more often than not the boys were voicing resentment against their teachers, who were snatching the girls away from them'.<sup>470</sup>

The 'Women's Participation for Victory' leaflet has a different, brotherly and protectionist attitude behind it. This appears to have something in common with the early twentieth century concerns of church and political women's groups over young women's sexual conduct that Deborah Gaitskell and Cherryl Walker have discussed.<sup>471</sup> Ari Sitas's study of comrade movements in Natal between 1985 and 1991 suggests that there had emerged at this time 'a new community of social solidarity'.<sup>472</sup> Sitas argued that the comrades espoused 'a new brotherhood of combatants' and a 'sisterhood' that was 'outside the constraints of the homestead' and involved 'caring, nursing, risking and feeling'.<sup>473</sup> In an interview with *New Era* COSAS leaders spoke of their attempts to mobilise young women, by taking up the issue of sexual harassment. Ephraim Mogale commented,

Women, we know their problems, traditionally, economically and all these things, they are oppressed. So they will always be a minority in national organisations. But we are at the same time proud of their achievements. We are proud that the first national executive of COSAS included two women that is, Khumutso Mogase and Mpho Masetla, who were very consistent, even now they are still fighting. From the start we took a resolution on the protection of women, not only against teachers, but against anyone who was harassing them, beating them etc. So they had defence in our organisation. Then they were very happy, they had a home, they were living free, and they could even argue a point with a male because now they had protection.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Jeremy Seekings, "Gender ideology and township politics in the 1980s," *Agenda* 10 (1991): p.80.

<sup>470</sup> Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, p.297.

<sup>471</sup> Gaitskell discusses African Christian mothers' attempts in the early twentieth century to 'guard their daughter's virginity' Gaitskell, "'Wailing for Purity': prayer unions, African mothers and adolescent daughters 1912-1940," p.339; In the 1950s members of the Federation of South African Women discussed including a call for birth control clinics in their list of demands submitted for incorporation into the Freedom Charter. Walker notes that some approved of the suggestion on the grounds that 'All the children that we have today are children from school children and...from our daughters'. Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), p.183.

<sup>472</sup> Ari Sitas, "The Making of the 'Comrades' Movement in Natal, 1985-91," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 1992): p.636.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>474</sup> Ephraim Mogale interview with Tony Karon, *New Era*, SAHA: AC2457: N3.2 COSAS.

Mogale here seems to reinforce an idea of 'protection' that lay behind the COSAS leadership's attitude to its young women members. The call for a safe space for participation was a common suggestion from female members of national liberation organisations during the 1980s. Janet Cherry noted that in Port Elizabeth,

One activist recalled her experience being a student at Izwezi Lomso High School – how women students were afraid to join COSAS, and how they set up a separate women's section of COSAS to encourage women students to join. When the schools boycott started [in 1984], these women were at the forefront of enforcing the boycott.<sup>475</sup>

That the issue of sexual harassment may have been successful in mobilising some young women to join COSAS is suggested by Charles Carter's study of the Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO). The one female activist he interviewed that he refers to as 'DP' mentions that 'her political involvement began with her participation in COSAS campaigns at Minerva High School against the sexual harassment of female students by staff' as well as other issues including the 'locking of school gates, poor teaching aids, calls for an end to school fees and the wearing of uniforms, and the replacement of prefects with an SRC'.<sup>476</sup> Van Kessel suggests too that COSAS provided a way for some young women to become involved in civic politics in Kagiso Township. She cites the career of Nomvula Mkhize, who was involved in COSAS when at high school and then 'after completing matric became an active trade unionist and civic activist with a strong interest in women's issues'.<sup>477</sup> We can only suggest from this that COSAS did indeed become an organisational home for some young women, amid ideas held at a leadership level of simultaneously mobilising and protecting those young women. It must be remembered though that COSAS had an uneven geographical reach; its leadership recognised in the *New Era* interview that it was not strong in Natal, the Eastern Cape or rural areas.<sup>478</sup> Also, in the Western Cape other organisations were

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<sup>475</sup> Janet Cherry, "We were not afraid": The role of women in the 1980s township uprising in the Eastern Cape," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), p.285.

<sup>476</sup> Carter, "We are the Progressives," p.213.

<sup>477</sup> Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, p.169.

<sup>478</sup> Interview with Tony Karon, *New Era*.

stronger, such as the Inter-Schools Coordinating Committee that represented 25 schools in Cape Town and the surrounding area in early August 1985.<sup>479</sup>

There is a question, in light of Seekings' argument, as to whether and how exactly female involvement in COSAS altered as the politics of confrontation escalated under successive states of emergency. Carter uses DP's overlapping involvement in COSAS, Alexandra Student's Congress (ASCO) and AYCO as evidence of what he calls an 'organisational merging' that became more pronounced amid the conditions of township rebellion in Alexandra in the first half of 1986. It seems then that her involvement in politics, at least in terms of the organisations she participated in, actually expanded amid confrontation. COSAS became a banned organisation on August 29<sup>th</sup> 1985 under Section 4(1) of the Internal Security Act. Prior to its banning COSAS had been targeted heavily by the South African security services under the State of Emergency, first declared on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1985. In September the Detainee Parent's Support Committee noted that one out of every five detainees was a member of COSAS.<sup>480</sup> As chapter four of this thesis demonstrates, Detainee Parents' Support Committee advice offices recorded testimony from a significant number of young women detained as COSAS members in 1984-5. Their testimonies frame their detention as a moment of direct conflict with the apartheid state through which they emphasise both an activist identity and notions of female domestic respectability. What their testimonies do not reveal is whether detention had any affect on their subsequent involvement in political organisations.

Whilst there is only a small documentary archive for the youth organisations that proliferated across the country in the mid-1980s that which does exist makes for interesting reading in comparison with the oral histories so far conducted. Especially since some documents survive from youth organisations as yet neglected by oral histories – those aligned with the National Forum and Indian and so-called coloured youth groups. Most interesting and the most common archival survivors are the magazines produced by many such youth organisations. These magazines typically

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<sup>479</sup> DESCOM DPSC, *Democratic Movement Under Attack*, (1985), p.28.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

include news on local events and campaigns, articles aimed at educating readers about youth demands and campaigns, and organisational debates. One such magazine, *Arise! Vukani!*, was produced by Action Youth, which described itself as an initiative of working, unemployed and student youth residing in Soweto, Lenasia, Eldorado Park, Riverlea, Bosmount and Fordsburg. Action Youth were aligned with the National Forum. They cited their principles as anti-racism, anti-imperialism, anti-ethnicity, anti-collaboration and anti-sexism. A number of volumes of *Arise! Vukani!* that were issued between September 1984 and September 1989 survive in the South African History Archive and on the Digital Innovation South Africa website.

What is most striking about *Arise! Vukani!* is the journal's strong rhetorical commitment to addressing women's issues. A series of articles on 'Women's Oppression' appeared during 1985. One at least appears to have been written by a woman, or at least from the perspective of a young woman:

In fact the liberation of women is a fundamental necessity of the revolution and not an issue that should be pushed to the sidelines because of the mistaken belief that it will deflect from the main purpose of national liberation or radical social transformation...A commitment is needed from both men and women to rectify the position of women in society at a grassroots level – in the realm of private lives first, then of society in general...As an organising idea women's liberation has to be seen as a revolution within a revolution...whether we decide to organise ourselves separately or not we should incorporate into our actions and organisational planning ways and means to end the subjugation of women. Fighting oppression should extend to all levels of our lives, be it personal or political. We have to learn to express a sense of self-confidence in our abilities as essential political experiences of the oppressed and doubly exploited.<sup>481</sup>

*Arise! Vukani!* seemed to have room for the expression of a strong commitment to addressing women's oppression, what it did not do was set out any specific ideas about young women. Within South Africa's liberation struggle, the commitment to addressing women's oppression was an idea emanating largely from the South African Communist Party. Whilst internal discussions on women's place in the struggle had been going on since the mid-1980s, the ANC did not mark its own unequivocal commitment to such ideas until the May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1990 document on 'the emancipation of women in South

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<sup>481</sup> *Arise! Vukani!* Vol.1, No.5, September/October 1985.



Africa'.<sup>482</sup> Material published during the period 1984-1989 by the South African Communist Party had similar emphases and limits to that in *Arise! Vukani!* For example, a 1985 article in the journal *Umsebenzi*, set out the ideas of a revolution within a revolution and the triple oppression of African women.<sup>483</sup> In 1987 an article, this time published in *The African Communist*, maintained that 'the majority of African women feel their oppression as mothers, citizens and workers'.<sup>484</sup> Both display an open hostility to any separation of women's struggles from the national liberation struggle. *Umsebenzi* described 'any attempt to deal with the emancipation of women as a thing in itself, separated from the over-all struggle' as 'self defeating'.<sup>485</sup> Phasha Mwandla in *The African Communist* was even more explicit: 'unlike the feminists, the oppressed and exploited African women are not concerned about the superiority of one sex over another'.<sup>486</sup>

However, in a number of ways *Arise! Vukani!* made explicit attempts to identify with and represent young women. For example, as in the graphic image below and the poem published 'for Susan van Wyk, a twenty-one year old factory worker killed by a shotgun blast fired by a soldier in Kasselsvledi Road, Bellville, Cape Town in August 1985'.<sup>487</sup> This poem made a heroine of the ordinary young woman worker, 'Her laughter flashed in the sweaty workshop, Her steps going to work, sounded at my side each day, I have seen her heart flame with fire and energy'.<sup>488</sup> It also included her death in the liberation struggle; 'you have dared to ruffle, my sister's hair, you will pay'.<sup>489</sup> In 1989 *Arise! Vukani!* addressed the issue of rape from an explicitly female perspective with an article titled 'Speak out against rape'.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority, Women in Africa and the Diaspora* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p.112.

<sup>483</sup> *Umsebenzi*, No.2 (1985).

<sup>484</sup> Phasha Mwandla, 'The Triple Oppression of African Women in South Africa', *The African Communist*, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, No.111 (1987), p.101.

<sup>485</sup> *Umsebenzi*, No.2 (1985).

<sup>486</sup> P. Mwandla, 'The Triple Oppression', *The African Communist*, p.102.

<sup>487</sup> *Arise! Vukani!* Vol. 1, No.5, September/October 1985.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> *Arise! Vukani!* Vol.2, No.5, March/April 1989.



From *Arise! Vukani!* Vol.1, No.5,

September/October 1985.

The membership of Action Youth and readership of *Arise! Vukani!* are unknown, all that is clear is the self-conscious attempt to address, mobilise, and represent young women. Action Youth do not seem to have been alone in such endeavours. The South African History Archive also contains an issue of *Youth News* produced by the Mitchell's Plain Youth Movement. Mitchell's Plain was a coloured area in the Cape and members included young women such as Lynne Brown, who later became a member of UWO.<sup>491</sup> This magazine included an article titled 'Miriam's Story'. It begins, 'this is the story of Miriam, who works at Bonwit, a clothing factory. She is one of six children who grew the very hard way'.<sup>492</sup> The story continues: following the death of her father, as the eldest daughter, Miriam had to leave school and start working at the age of 15. She was a cleaner at the Bonwit factory, earning R14.00 a week,

<sup>491</sup> She later described her difficulties as a young woman within UWO to Gertrude Fester. See discussion in chapter one and Gertrude M.N. Fester, "Women and citizenship struggles: A case of the Western Cape, South Africa 1980-2004" (PhD, Gender Institute L.S.E., 2007), p.272.

<sup>492</sup> 'Miriam's Story', *Youth News* Vol.1. No.1.

Miriam, earning that meagre wage, felt obliged to fit in with the usual trends of young girls. That includes going to discos, checking out the fashions and going on dates with young men. This she felt compelled to do in order to be accepted by society...And then, one day Miriam met a young girl who told her that without these glamorous things (which she could barely afford) she would still be a woman.<sup>493</sup>

She told Miriam that her situation was not her fault, that education ought to be free and compulsory, and that she should be able to get a better paid job. It turned out that this young woman was from the local youth congress and she invited Miriam along to the next youth meeting. The story ended:

Miriam went home and thought about what the young girl had said very carefully. She told her mother about their conversation and her mother, who was very concerned about her late nights at the discos, encouraged Miriam to join the youth because then she would know that Miriam was doing something useful and would learn a lot in the process.<sup>494</sup>

The story is fascinating in the way that sets up an opposition between a westernised youth culture of discos, fashion and dates and participation in the youth congress. It presents involvement in youth politics as offering an alternative, respectable, young womanhood. It appears to be aimed as much at existing youth members, to encourage recruitment, and anxious mothers worried about their daughters, as it is at potential 'Miriams'. Gertrude Fester noted in her study of the UWO that black and coloured women often mentioned their children as a motivating factor behind their participation in politics. A number of members of the UWO's Surrey Estate branch discussed their motivations with reference to an ideal of womanhood: 'Speaker 1: For me, I consciously wanted to raise my daughter to be this assertive person. Speaker 2: You have this utopia of how a woman should be'.<sup>495</sup>

There is a similar opposition to 'westernised' youth culture to be found in the publications of the Lenasia Youth League (LYL) formed in June of 1982.<sup>496</sup> Lenasia was an Indian township that lay to the South of Johannesburg and Soweto. In the first

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<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>495</sup> Fester, "Women and citizenship struggles: A case of the Western Cape, South Africa 1980-2004," pp.103-4.

<sup>496</sup> *Lenasia Times*, July 1982.

issue of *Contact* in July 1982 was an article titled 'Role of Youth'. In it the author comments,

the intention of this article is not to attack the attitude of youth but to show that the things we consider to be the 'in thing' are merely diseases of western societies...we are not suggesting that we give up dancing and disco music because it is pleasant at times, but that we do not become over involved in this way of life so that we do not become blind to the realities around us.<sup>497</sup>

The publications of the LYL show a sophisticated interaction with global discourses on youth. One article in *Contact* compared the United Nations Youth Charter with the apartheid government's new constitution in 1983.<sup>498</sup> There were articles that mentioned the role of youth in American Anti-Vietnam War protests, in Europe and in the Iranian Revolution, all of which informed the LYL's self-image.<sup>499</sup> There is, as with the Mitchell's Plain Youth Movement, a strong sense of moral righteousness in the call to join the youth. In the LYL publications this has a more explicit class element to it.

The third issue of *Contact* described 'a day in the life of Anita', a standard 8 school-girl from Thomasville. It was revealed Anita had written to *Contact* after reading their article on corporal punishment, to complain that she often suffered punishment at school over things she could not help. *Contact* described her living conditions and burdens of house work which explained her poor performance at school,

It is hoped that by *Contact* investigating the problem of Anita, teachers as well as pupils would become aware of the problems which Anita and other kids from her area faces. The appalling conditions, overcrowding, lack of proper sanitation facilities, non-existence of privacy etc all have an individual effect on their school work.<sup>500</sup>

The crusading element of 'a day in the life of Anita' is reminiscent of 'Miriam's Story', the only difference here is that Anita was educated by the article in *Contact*, but she is not recruited into LYL in order that she may also help herself. The particular racialised class and gender dynamics of a predominantly Indian youth movement are also apparent

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<sup>497</sup> *Contact*, Issue 1, 1982.

<sup>498</sup> *Contact*, Issue 8, 1983.

<sup>499</sup> *Contact*, Issue 2, 1982.

<sup>500</sup> *Contact*, Issue 3, 1982.

in an article in the same issue of *Contact* titled 'our people cannot be free while our women are still in chains':

We as young women have to become active, we have to be in keeping with women in communities where the oppression suffered is greater and more direct. We cannot isolate ourselves from their struggle and remain oblivious to the suffering which riddles the society we live in. We do not live in a vacuum and therefore cannot remain blind to the effects that Apartheid has on the people of this country. Young women in Lenasia have to break out of their cocoons – see the reality and participate.<sup>501</sup>

In 1984 the LYL described one of its important activities as the setting up of a Netball Association to encourage women's participation in sport.<sup>502</sup> Two years later, in *The Young Leader*, similar arguments were made in another article on the role of youth. At this time however, there was a stronger emphasis on young men's experiences, which does perhaps mark a shift in perceived readership:

Unlike the township youth we have not confronted and rejected Apartheid values. Instead, we have been so far removed from the realities of the country that most of us don't even care about the needs of the less privileged. A selfish attitude is clearly visible amongst the youth in Indian areas. Indian youth are far more interested in "hanging out with the guys". This supposedly gives them a sense of group identity, "protection" and a sense of being the "man ou around".<sup>503</sup>

Interestingly this article suggests physical protection as something young men were also seeking. None of this is to suggest that Action Youth, the Mitchell's Plain Youth Movement or the Lenasia Youth League mobilised large numbers of young women, it is impossible to know without more detailed research into these particular youth groups and their local contexts. However, what is suggested is irrespective of a real absence or presence, young women were symbolically vital to the publicly expressed ideologies of these youth groups and bigger organisations like COSAS.

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<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>502</sup> *The Young Leader*, Vol. 1, No.2, 1984.

<sup>503</sup> *The Young Leader*, Vol.2, No.1, 1988.

### III. 1990s: the re-launch of the ANCYL, *Agenda*, and 'a voice for young women'.

1990 saw, in February, the unbanning of the liberation organisations and, in May, the ANC's statement on the emancipation of women in South Africa. Together, these two public statements marked a new climate for voicing the political concerns of young women. In a number of spaces, especially *Horizon* the magazine of the re-launched ANCYL and *Agenda*, the position of young women within the national liberation struggle was articulated explicitly, for the first time by young women. This involved criticisms of the masculinity of liberation organisations. Also in the 1990s, due to the un-banning of the liberation organisations there emerged some evidence relating to the Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO) and the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) that state repression, one aspect of the politics of confrontation, may have in fact widened the participation of some young women already politically involved. It seems that young women were, at the height of the states of emergency, sometimes the only organisers left following police detentions. The executive report of the Soweto Youth Congress to the Annual Congress of SOYCO held on 27-29 July 1990 commented that the last such congress had been held in July 1986. The report set out briefly what had happened in the intervening years of emergency. After listing the last elected executive committee the author commented that some of the names might be unknown to those present and explained why.

We had comrade Tseko Modutoane who was elected as the secretary of the organisation but later resigned. This comrade's behaviour was unpleasant and could not listen to the executive committee when it tried to reprimand him. Secondly he was inconsistent in executive meetings. Comrade Jabulile [Women's organiser] could not cope with the work of the organisation and decided to abstain from meetings; she later announced her resignation to the executive committee. Other comrades like Comrade Patience, Fani, Bheki were written letters by the executive committee informing them that they have been expelled from the executive committee because of their inconsistency in the executive committee without reasons. Secondly, negligence of their duties in the organisation as pronounced in the last congress.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> 'Executive report of the Soweto Youth Congress to the Annual Congress of SOYCO held on 27-29 July 1990', SAHA: AL2457: J8 SOYCO.

It should be noted, that some, but by no means all of those executive members who had resigned or been expelled were young women. Later the report detailed the effects of continued arrests on the functioning of the remaining executive. In this context, 'Comrade Agatha' took over the job of secretary to the organisation and the job of women's organiser. In 1987 when almost the whole executive was arrested, Comrade Agatha and Comrade Fani were the only executive members not detained. New executive members were 'co-opted' from the branches but the author of the report comments that 'during the period late 1987 to early 1989 the organisation suffered because people were now scared of detention, some went into hiding forever, some did not want to take up additional organisational responsibilities and this jeopardised the entire organisation'.<sup>505</sup> No gendered distinction is made here.

A similar story can be found in the records of the South African Youth Congress. From its inception in March 1987 SAYCO committed itself to 'ensuring that women participated fully in the activities of the youth movement'.<sup>506</sup> Its constitution envisaged a specific role for young women within its organisation. It specified there would be a 'Women's Department', its duties were listed,

Shall appoint an administrator understudy. To encourage the participation of young women in the organisations activities. To organise young women around issues affecting them directly. To run workshops on the role of women in the struggle and experiences of other countries.<sup>507</sup>

In SAYCO's monthly publication, *Youth Focus* in 1989 an article on 'Organising Women' described how the Women's Departments of different branches had begun to come together and discuss 'women's issues' in a consultative meeting.

A few months after the historic women's consultative meeting nearly the entire leadership of SAYCO was rounded up in different areas and times. It was around September 1988 when the police surprised the Central Executive Committee meeting of SAYCO at the Glyn Thomas house...After the detention of many CEC comrades Dipuo was left alone as the only member of the national executive committee. "I had gone to prepare food for my baby and change her

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<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> Johnson, *South Africa*, p.138.

<sup>507</sup> SAYCO Constitution, SAHA: AL2457: J7 SAYCO.

nappy when the police arrived. They arrested Rapu Molekane and beat him in an attempt to force him reveal my whereabouts, as they were convinced of my presence in that meeting. The general secretary did not reveal anything to them about my whereabouts. He only told them that I took my child Tuni to the hospital as she fell ill during the meeting...we had to temporarily suspend the task of organising women and do all in our meagre power to consolidate the remaining structures of the youth".<sup>508</sup>

Here again the gender dynamics of the politics of confrontation are much more complex than any simple marginalisation. This article also suggests that the national liberation struggle and the women's struggle were at odds, or at least not totally compatible with each other; Dipuo had to abandon the one in favour of furthering the other.

Whether the official unbanning of the liberation organisations in 1990 resulted in another shift in the gender dynamics of youth movements is something that can be explored further through the more extensive records of the re-launched ANC Youth League. The launching manifesto of the ANCYL included a specific call to young women amid others to 'the young workers, unemployed youth, rural youth, young traditional leaders, students, young intellectuals and professionals, white youth, fellow youth in the army and police, youth active in the various religions, young sportspersons and cultural workers'.<sup>509</sup> The call to young women read: 'to the young women of South Africa we say: Let us take our rightful place in the struggle and fight against all forms of sexual discrimination and exploitation. Let us strengthen the process of building strong, democratic women's organisations'.<sup>510</sup> Overall, the manifesto was an uncomfortable mixture of the militant rhetoric of the 1980s with the new politics of the negotiated settlement and democratic inclusiveness. This resulted in phrases such as: 'Let us display our militant commitment to a peaceful future in a disciplined manner'.<sup>511</sup>

At the time of the re-launch internal documents and reports show a concern at a lack of involvement of young women but little idea of how to remedy such a situation. For example, a report on a visit to the Border region on 13-14<sup>th</sup> April 1991 reported

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<sup>508</sup> *Youth Focus*, Vol. 1, No.1 July 1989.

<sup>509</sup> 'ANCYL Launching Manifesto', SAHA: AL2457: J3 ANCYL.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*



three main observations back to the Provisional National Youth Committee, which made clear some of the problems facing the new organisation.

A) At both the Regional General Council and the branch meeting the question of crime and drinking by youth was raised very sharply. We therefore need to give flesh to and implement our resolution on crime prevention.

B) The question of the autonomy of the Youth League needs to be discussed at regional level...some things don't seem to be very clear.

C) In both events the question of the participation of young women was discussed but no clear suggestions on the way forward were made.<sup>512</sup>

It was concluded at the ANCYL Inaugural Conference that 'the overall women's participation in our grassroots structures and in the organisation as a whole leaves much to be desired'. The suggestion decided upon was that this 'must stem from the fact that we have up to now not adequately addressed the issues that face them at grassroots level e.g. teenage pregnancy, rape'. A programme of affirmative action was also endorsed.

In the early 1990s the ANCYL's magazine *Horizon* became an interesting space in which issues of gender discrimination were raised and questions of organisational solutions debated. In May/June of 1991 *Horizon* included an article titled 'Isolating Sexism':

The ANC Youth League is strongly committed to fighting sexism. It is committed to affirmative action to ensure that women are able to take their rightful place as equals in the organisation. But we still have a long way to go. Only five of the Provisional National Youth Secretariat's 30 members are women. At the recent launch of the PWV region of the Youth League, only 14 delegates out of 197 were women. Only one woman was elected onto the 15 person executive....Five women from the ANCYL Johannesburg branch who have previously been involved in women's and youth organisations in the Eastern Transvaal, Western Cape, PWV and Natal speak about the problems young women face in the organisation and how to overcome these problems.<sup>513</sup>

The comments made by the five young women, only identified by their first names as Mpho, Ayesha, Zandi, Hazel and Fikile were frank and damning. For example: 'Ayesha: Some men think that because we say we are fighting sexism, sexist practices don't exist

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<sup>512</sup> 'Visit to Border Region', 13-14<sup>th</sup> April 1991, SAHA: 2451: ANC Youth League Collection.

<sup>513</sup> *Horizon*, May/June 1991.

in the organisation'; 'Zandi: What makes me angry is when guys say that women must be liberated, but they don't even bring their girlfriends to meetings. Sometimes they even have other girlfriends in the meetings!'; 'Hazel: And men say "you don't discuss anything important in your meetings. All you do is gossip and drink tea."'; 'Fikile: They think that they must push women to take leadership positions...They don't realise it's because women don't have the necessary skills or confidence'; 'Mpho: It's always the women who do the cleaning and catering.'<sup>514</sup> It is also clear from their comments that these were not just issues that they faced in the past. Hazel told one anecdote that made clear some attitudes had hardened following the unbanning:

The other day I was talking to a male comrade. I told him that if my husband "jolloed", I would "jol" too. The comrade's reply was, "Mm, it's because the new South Africa is coming that women are saying such things".<sup>515</sup>

The potential solutions suggested by these five young women included, drawing more women into involvement, political education and training, a code of conduct committee to enforce an end to harassment, open criticism, and crèche facilities. Mpho argued that 'we need to make everyone feel that, first and foremost they are members of the Youth League'.<sup>516</sup>

The one question that continued to be debated in subsequent issues of *Horizon* was that of separate organisations for women. In July/August of 1991 the ANCYL's Western Cape Secretary for Women's Affairs Brenda Leonard argued that 'women's structures can work'.<sup>517</sup> She argued that women's sub-committee's within the ANCYL were necessary for 'who will address women's issues if not women themselves? There would not be a need for separate women's committees if there existed a gender-sensitive consciousness in the organisation itself'.<sup>518</sup> She claimed that the women's subcommittee in the Western Cape had 'functioned quite well', building women's confidence, and

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<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>517</sup> Brenda Leonard, 'Women's structures can work', *Horizon*, July/Aug 1991, p.34.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*

raising men's consciousness so that they were 'hesitant' about sexually harassing female comrades.<sup>519</sup>

Perhaps the most radical intervention in these debates was made by Nomfanelo Kota as Secretary for Gender Affairs in the Eastern Cape who aimed to provoke debate on the 'gender question' before the ANC Policy Conference in 1992. She argued that 'the liberation movement has used the family as a mobilising tool, this has led to a failure in proper analysis and theorising around this concept' and that transformation would never take place inside the ANC without wider societal changes.<sup>520</sup> How far the space provided by *Horizon* marked any shifts in the day-to-day workings of the ANCYL it is of course difficult to say. A programme of action issued by the Secretary for Women's Affairs in 1991 made clear there were ingrained attitudes to counter and that as far as the organisation was concerned the burden of change lay with women themselves. The programme suggested that at the local level, 'the programme of the Youth League for women should be such that it does not leave any one woman to idle and thus engage in activities that have been coined tendencies of women e.g. gossip, jealousy and cliques.'<sup>521</sup>

*Agenda*, a feminist academic/activist journal, was in the early 1990s another space within which young women's voices and experiences of participation within youth organisations emerged. The article by Suzi Nkomo, quoted at the very start of this chapter, is an example of the cautious but critical tone of these interventions. Suzi Nkomo's experiences as a SANSCO activist were similar to those of the ANCYL young women interviewed in *Horizon*. She highlighted the same disjuncture between rhetoric and practice, saying of her fellow comrades, 'They remained very sexist in the comments they made about women during our trips. They were very good in reproducing the organisation's rhetoric about a future non-racial society that both men and women had to build.'<sup>522</sup> Her comments went further though, questioning the logic of

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<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> Nomfanelo Kota, 'Provoking debate on the gender question', *Horizon*, No.2, 1992, pp.32-33.

<sup>521</sup> Secretary for Women's Affairs, 'Programme of Action', 1991, SAHA: AL2451: ANC Youth League Collection.

<sup>522</sup> Nkomo, "Organising women in SANSCO: reflections on the experience of women in organisation," p.15.

women's movements within the broader liberation movement and the possibility of addressing 'the question of gender oppression' within those movements.<sup>523</sup> She also makes some interesting observations regarding women's political participation in the multi-racial space of the University of the Witwatersrand campus. She describes a 'strong schism' between the Black Students' Society women's groups and the NUSAS women's grouping, which rehearsed the racialised debate in South Africa over women's issues in an oppressive country and the applicability of a white middle class feminism seen to be preoccupied with 'sexual gratification in a capitalist society'.<sup>524</sup> Nkomo goes on,

Added to this was the general complaint from black students that they found the attempt by white activists to identify with the working class by dressing as shoddily as possible rather annoying. White women activists often accused black women activists of being prima donnas or in fact of being too 'glamorous'.<sup>525</sup>

Nkomo's comments suggest that a part of this conflict was about competing visions of womanhood, bound up and articulated in the South African context with issues of race and class.

That there were still difficulties in making arguments about women's positions within liberation organisations, even though the unbanning had provided some new space, was apparent in a 1994 article written by Febe Potgieter, at that time a member of the National Executive of the ANCYL and the National Youth Development Coordinating Committee (NYDCC). The article which also appeared in *Agenda* made clear that Febe Potgieter was writing 'in a personal capacity'.<sup>526</sup> This is reminiscent of Mamphela Ramphele's 1991 insistence that she was producing a 'personal view' of the gender dynamics of BC organisations. The need to legitimise and limit such criticisms to the 'personal' is perhaps a sign of the potential dangers of making such criticisms, for both the women themselves and their organisations. Potgieter's article came in the context of plans to launch a young women's network within the NYDCC, which was,

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<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> Potgieter, "A Voice for Young Women," p.30.

Born out of a realization by women in the NYDCC that we need to organise to ensure that our issues are included in the agenda of the NYDCC. We also discovered that most youth organisations do very little to organise young women nor do they incorporate gender into their programmes. Our experience in the women's movement has been one of discrimination against young women on the basis of age, with the strong emphasis on organizing women primarily as mothers.<sup>527</sup>

Potgieter gives an overview of young women within youth organisations, commenting from the outset that 'it is ironic that the picture of Hector Peterson, which symbolizes youth in South Africa, prominently features a young woman' since organised youth have been dominated by black, urban young men.<sup>528</sup> She argues that her own experience as national women's organiser for AZASO in 1987 was that women throughout the country experienced the same problems within AZASO, including: 'a lack of commitment by women to attend meetings, subcommittees that did not increase participation and internal divisions as a result of a lack of programme and issues'.<sup>529</sup> This was despite pressing issues facing women students, which she identified as 'the expulsion of female students from teacher's colleges and sexual harassment and rape on campuses'.<sup>530</sup> Potgieter detailed how, in her experience, sexual harassment had been dealt with by youth organisations,

It is an open secret that sexual harassment does happen in youth organisations and without exception it is seen as a divisive issue. When (after reports of sexual harassment at our Congress) the SAYCO Women's Desk produced a paper to be presented to the NEC in 1990, there was an outrage from male NEC members. The paper was never discussed in any structure, nor was it even circulated. The ANCYL NEC debated, for hours, a clause in our leadership code which makes sexual harassment an offence. The main objection was that it would lead to men being falsely accused of sexual harassment and should therefore be qualified. During the debate there was little consideration for the women who, as the victims, have very little recourse, nor was there an argument for any of the other clauses to be qualified.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

It is in light of these comments, that the significance of the limited space that had opened up for these arguments to be heard publically is apparent. There was in the 1990s limited room for young women to articulate their lack of space in liberation struggle organisations. At times, as in Potgieter's article, these arguments were made in the language of the liberation struggle: 'As a generation we participated in throwing off the yoke of apartheid; as a generation we should play our role in removing the yoke of patriarchy whose origins go back way beyond the 300 years of colonialism'.<sup>532</sup> The issue of young women's absence or marginalization continued to frame the new spaces opened up for their speech.

There is an interesting moment in Sibusiswe Nombuso Dlamini's study of youth cultures in Durban townships, which was based on research conducted in the same transition period between 1990 and 1994 that highlights how such space was only sometimes available for young women. Part of Dlamini's study involved participant observation of a group of friends in Umlazi Township who described themselves as *tsatsatsa* or *Matsatsatsa*; a 'made-up' name that was chosen because it 'sounded cool'.<sup>533</sup> Tsatsatsa had all been involved in the UDF, some of them in leadership positions, and when UDF/Inkatha violence erupted after 1985 had had their lives severely disrupted. When Dlamini met them in 1990 they were members or supporters of the ANC, a position that was very difficult and dangerous to maintain in Umlazi Township that was administrated and policed by the Inkatha controlled Kwazulu-Natal Bantustan.<sup>534</sup> The incident revolved around a conflict provoked when Vukani, a somewhat marginal member of the group because of his known position as a former member of MK, criticised the way that the tsatsatsa dressed. Vukani had commented that the matsatsatsa 'liked to look rich and therefore better than ordinary people', which was problematic since 'if people who claim to be fighting for equality [like you matsatsatsa] still think in terms of looking better than others, then nothing will ever change'.<sup>535</sup> The criticisms provoked further discussion amongst other tsatsatsa members,

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<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>533</sup> S. Nombuso Dlamini, *Youth and identity politics in South Africa, 1990-1994* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p.97.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

a young woman Thulile and two young men Sizwe and Lunga. Dlamini related the discussion:

In general Thulile agreed with Vukani, and spoke about other practices that went against the ideologies that tsatsatsa stood for. For example, she mentioned that Sizwe and Lunga continuously dictated to her what she should look like, and yet they spoke about gender equity. Lunga at this juncture became defensive and reminded Thulile of the things he had done that indicated he was for women's lib. He recounted some things which included how they (tsatsatsa men) never asked her to cook for the group if the gathering took place in her home but instead cooked together with her, how he had approached Zandile for a job whilst his boss had asked for him to look for a boy, and so on.<sup>536</sup>

The incident showed the sensitivity of issues of gender discrimination and as Dlamini comments 'such conversations could only have occurred in an informal setting, and in the presence of people who shared the same views'.<sup>537</sup> Also, it was only in the context of Vukani's criticism that Thulile raised her own issues.

Taking note of recent studies of the masculinities of the ANC, the approach here has been to examine the issue of young women's political participation alongside youth organisations' publically articulated constructions of masculinity and femininity. It is argued that gender ideologies do not simply restrict the behaviors of young men and women i.e. ideas about political violence as a male activity do not simply stop young women from being involved. This is not to negate the gendered nature of violence that emerged in parts of South Africa, especially after 1990. Constructions of masculinity and femininity have been re-inscribed, created and contested within youth organisations, from the public smoking of Mamphela Ramphele to the criticisms of Febe Potgieter. This chapter has not been able to draw a comprehensive portrait of the femininities of internal youth political organisations, but it has suggested the symbolic importance of young women to youth organisations' discourses of moral authority. To be seen to represent the interests of young women was very important, yet the absence of actual young women to articulate those interests was only sporadically considered an issue. Rather, young women were to be spoken for, saved from themselves and protected. The

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<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

following chapter argues that the masculinisation of youth organisations was also shaped through interaction with both the apartheid and post-apartheid state.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: Criminality, victimhood and youth politicisation.**

*The question is not, what is it I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I speak at all?*<sup>538</sup>

*The Commission's rubric of harm focused on the individual and the sayable.*<sup>539</sup>

*So there are actually two stories: the story and the under-story, the matrix, the propelling force determining what is left out, what is used, how it is used.*<sup>540</sup>

This chapter examines youth politicisation as it was recorded through the legal entanglements of the anti-apartheid struggle. The focus is primarily upon the interplay between two prominent discourses that framed understandings of youth politicisation throughout the late twentieth century in South Africa. These are discourses of criminality and victimhood. The chapter looks at three 'moments' in chronological order that allow us to explore the shifting interaction between ideas of criminality and victimhood as youth politicisation is discussed, represented and recorded. The historical moments chosen come one from each decade that this study considers. The first moment is the trial of eleven young Soweto activists for sedition in 1978 -1979, traced through the trial proceedings. The second examines the states of emergency from 1985 through the records of the Detainee Parents' Support Committee and their campaigns against state repression. The third explores the special youth hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997, through the hearing transcripts. They are all moments at which youth is both performed by young people themselves and discussed by state and civil society representatives in an interaction shaped by changing power relationships. In the case of the sedition trial the relationship between the state and the young witnesses held in detention was clearly a coercive one. The same could not be said of the relationship between the statement takers of the DPSC or the TRC and young

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<sup>538</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.133.

<sup>539</sup> Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto, 2002), p.162.

<sup>540</sup> Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998), p.85.

witnesses but here the dynamics, firstly of ongoing township struggle, and secondly powerful ideologies of reconciliation and nation-building structured the 'field of the sayable'.<sup>541</sup>

At no point is it argued that the discourses of youth that emerge give us anything other than understandings shaped within those very particular historical moments. The approach taken here is one summed up by Shahid Amin in his work upon judicial discourses in colonial India:

It is, I feel, quite important for any historian of the subaltern classes to investigate the discursive practices within which statements by the police, administrators, judges, and by the accused themselves, are produced. This is required not in order to discern bias, rectify it and thereby arrive at an untainted, *proper* narrative of things past, unsullied by the context within such a narrative was produced: that would be a pointless positivist venture. It is necessitated by the fact that most statements about the dominated are produced within well-defined fields of power.<sup>542</sup>

The moments and these understandings are important because of the ways in which they powerfully shape and interpret youth politicisation as it is recorded. The three moments allow us to explore the ways in which the meanings of youth have been shaped through judicial and legal practices.

As Richard A. Wilson has suggested in his work upon the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, sources produced through the legal system and human rights organisations have certain limitations. He argues that 'the instrumental rationality of law and rights systematically transforms the life-world, rather than being a sensitive device for listening to subjectivity on its own terms'.<sup>543</sup> What the moments do reveal are the ways in which ideas about youth, and in particular the gendered nature of youth politicisation, have emerged through discussions of criminality and victimhood. The importance of young women in the production of a masculine youth politics complicates

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<sup>541</sup> Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State*, Cambridge studies in law and society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.105.

<sup>542</sup> Shahid Amin, "Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura," in *Subaltern Studies V*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.167.

<sup>543</sup> R. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, p.225.

our understanding of that masculinity and highlights the importance of power structures shaping the sayable.

The chapter explores detention and/or imprisonment as a real and imagined space for the emergence of gendered narratives, at the intersection of ideas of criminality and victimhood. As Paul Gready has argued, ideas of detention have particular resonance within South African history since 'central to apartheid's design were layered spaces of confinement and exclusion: lives were lived within an evolving crosshatch of mutually re-enforcing insides and outsides, behind bars and borders.'<sup>544</sup> Gready suggests that the prison cell was like the courtroom, the torture chamber, and exile 'at the interface between the state and its subjects/opponents, during moments and encounters when both were seeking to inscribe and were contesting lives'.<sup>545</sup> All of the sources considered in this chapter were produced at this interface and allow us to consider how this 'violent collaboration' gendered public narratives of youth politicisation.<sup>546</sup>

### **I. 'These are schoolchildren not the African National Congress': the Soweto Student's Representative Council sedition trial.**

Between 25<sup>th</sup> September 1978 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 1979 eleven young South Africans were tried for sedition in the Transvaal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court. The accused were, Wilson Welile 'Chief' Twala aged 18 in 1978, Daniel Sechaba Sediane Montsisi aged 23, Seth Sandile Mazibuko aged 19, Murphy Mafidon Morobe aged 22, Jeferson Khotso Wansi Lenganu aged 21, Susan Sibongile Mthembu aged 22, Ernest Edwin Thabo Ndabena aged 21, Kennedy Kgotsietsile Mogama aged 19, Reginald Tejobo Mngomezulu aged 21, Michael Sello Khiba aged 20, and George Nkosinati Yami Twala aged 23. The outline of the State's case against the eleven was as follows. The South African Student's Movement (SASM) was, according to the state, an

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<sup>544</sup> Paul Gready, *Writing as Resistance: Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile, and Homecoming from Apartheid South Africa* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2003), p.1.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

organisation with the ultimate object of 'contributing to the liberation of blacks in the Republic of South Africa'.<sup>547</sup> It was alleged that, at a conference in May 1976 in Roodepoort, SASM had adopted a policy of rejecting the system of education in South Africa and specifically the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. As part of its policy to support students 'who identified themselves with the rejection of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction' SASM called a general meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1976 in Soweto.<sup>548</sup> At this meeting a regional branch and an 'Action Committee' were elected. According to the State this Action Committee then organised the march on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976, which was a seditious gathering. This Action Committee changed its name to the 'Soweto Student's Representative Council (SSRC) sometime in July or August. The SSRC was responsible for a series of subsequent gatherings (that stretched from June 1976 to October of 1977) that were also seditious.<sup>549</sup> In addition, the State placed before the court various pamphlets the SSRC was said to have published over that time as evidence against the eleven accused.<sup>550</sup> The charges brought by the State alleged that the eleven accused as 'office bearers and or officers and or members and or supporters of SASM and or the "Action Committee" and or the SSRC' had committed sedition as well as conspiracy to sedition, incitement to sedition and a secondary charge of 'participation in terroristic activities'.<sup>551</sup>

The case is significant here for a number of reasons. Since it focused upon the SSRC as a stand alone organisation the trial involved public debates over the nature and significance of youth political action and as one of the defendants was a young woman the gendering of these debates was particularly interesting. The proceedings of the trial show the historian how the concepts of youth and young womanhood were invoked in these particular circumstances and by whom. The appearance of a significant number of young women as witnesses for the prosecution and the dynamics of the courtroom also show us the way in which gender roles and ideologies inflected the narratives of youth politics that emerged from the trial. The appearance of young women also marks this

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<sup>547</sup> Supreme Court of South Africa (Transvaal Provincial Division), *State vs. W.W.C. Twala and Ten Others*, case K/P 282/78; WHP: AD1450: Box 4: The Indictment, p.3.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Schedule F', pp.25-32.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Schedule B', pp.17-18.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

trial out as an unusual public space in which their voices were heard, although obviously only in very constricted ways. The apartheid state's attempt to criminalise student protest was countered by the defence advocate's portrayal of the eleven accused as victims of an over-zealous and unjust regime searching for scapegoats.

Michael Lobban has argued in his examination of political trials during the 1970s (what he refers to as the 'Black Consciousness Era') that the SSRC sedition trial marked a change in the South African State's legal assault on Black Consciousness.<sup>552</sup> He argues that the decision to regard the eleven as seditionists and not revolutionaries was an 'attempt to dilute the political mixture' that the trial presented both domestically and abroad.<sup>553</sup> In a number of earlier political trials the State had failed to link the SSRC *as an organisation* to specific acts of violence or to a conspiracy with the ANC, as it had hoped to and perhaps believed was the case.<sup>554</sup> By 1978 the Cillie Commission had been running for two years and the events of June 16<sup>th</sup> and subsequent riots had been discussed extensively inside and outside South Africa. Lobban argues the State was up against 'so much of white opinion [which] saw the riots as the result of legitimate grievances' and would not accept that the work of 'agitators' could explain the scale or size of the unrest.<sup>555</sup> According to Lobban, 'the trial was an exercise in retrospective self-justification by the State; and that it sought to establish plainly the boundaries of illegitimate protest'.<sup>556</sup> The State thus moved away from attempting to prove grand conspiracy theories and instead argued that by challenging Bantu Education the SSRC was actually assailing the authority of the State.

Since Bantu Education was administered by the Department of Bantu Education, a part of the State, attacking the former was construed as an attack on the latter. As Lobban points out, the logic of this was to make almost any black protest against the government seditious but the prosecution selectively emphasised the 'ensuing violence'

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<sup>552</sup> Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p.221.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, p.225.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, p.226.

as the mark of seditious intent.<sup>557</sup> Playing upon public perceptions about legitimate grievances the prosecution argued that the Action Committee was 'irresponsible in calling the march' on June 16<sup>th</sup> considering the background of anger and tension that existed in Soweto.<sup>558</sup> It was alleged that since, the Action Committee knew the march would bring about conflict with the police; they were aiming to assail the authority of the State. The result of this choice of arguments and battleground was that both prosecution and defence spent a lot of time debating the nature of youth political action and the position of the June 16<sup>th</sup> march and uprisings in wider understandings of liberation politics. It was the State which actually put forward what might be recognised now as the more orthodox nationalist version- that the students acted with political intent but were limited by their youthful nature. The defence found itself in an awkward position, trying to play-down the students' political ambitions and trying to emphasise the social aspects of youth political actions and a more innocent and naive youthfulness.

Both prosecution and defence had particular constructions of youth, often overlapping, which they wished to emphasize to condemn or absolve the eleven accused. These constructions were sometimes explicit and were drawn out of evidence given by witnesses but were also implicit in certain arguments and courtroom practices. Throughout the proceedings defence advocate Wentzel chose at certain moments to emphasize the young age of his clients, drawing upon a discourse of youth as innocent and vulnerable. Early in proceedings the prosecution asked that certain witnesses they regarded as accomplices be allowed to give evidence in camera. Defence advocate Wentzel reacted with indignation at the suggestion that those witnesses were potentially in danger:

With respect, it doesn't follow M'lord. More than that, we have no evidence of persons... M'Lord, I am representing school boys and school girls. This is not the African National Congress, or some body which is in hostile antagonism with the Republic of South Africa. These are school children.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, p.232.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230.

<sup>559</sup> Supreme Court of South Africa (Transvaal Provincial Division), *State vs. W.W.C. Twala and Ten Others*, case K/P 282/78; WHP: AD1450: Box 5: Record of Proceedings, p.603.

However, the court accepted the prosecution's arguments. In other instances too, this strategy did not prove all that successful within the courtroom. Once, the Judge himself intervened to disagree with Wentzel's use of 'child' when describing a defendant. Wentzel was cross-examining Walter McPherson of the South African Police, who was in charge of detainees at John Vorster Square, and was asking him how long Sibongile Mthembu had been in solitary confinement for:

Adv. W: What about this child here, accused No.6, how long was she there in those conditions?

BY THE COURT: I don't know whether accused No.6 can still be described as a child, she is well over twenty.

Adv. W (cont): This young girl, No.6 accused? ---- I don't know exactly how long she was there but it was some months.<sup>560</sup>

During this cross-examination Wentzel took on the State's accusation of 'terroristic activity' that was linked to a number of letters Sibongile had written to her family and smuggled out of detention. In the court Wentzel emphasised Sibongile's vulnerability after months in solitary confinement, and the Christian content of her letters. Wentzel's defence was in this instance highly gendered but Sibongile's youth was just as important. Throughout the trial Wentzel implied that the State's treatment of the eleven accused, was like the police's treatment of the marchers on June 16<sup>th</sup>, heavy-handed and disproportionate.

Wentzel was keen to confuse the State's portrayal of the eleven accused and the SSRC as dangerous and driven political actors. This he did through the cross-examination of young witnesses, regarded as accomplices by the State. The evidence of a number of witnesses revolved around a particular house, belonging to the Ngubeni family and its 4 daughters, two of whom testified in the trial. The nature of student meetings within this house became an important battleground in the cases of both prosecution and defence. The representation of this particular domestic space within courtroom testimony also structured the relationship between the young women witnesses and their male counterparts. The Ngubeni house appeared within the courtroom testimony as having been presided over by the mother of the family Maria

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<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1522.

Ngubeni, with four sisters, two brothers and a cousin living there.<sup>561</sup> One of the sisters, Elizabeth Ngubeni, described how her cousin, Herbert Mabuza, had asked, first if two girls named as Baby and Joyce could stay at the house, and had then invited a number of the accused to also stay there.<sup>562</sup>

Elizabeth Ngubeni was asked by the prosecution to describe the subsequent meetings that happened in the house, 'What did they used to do when they came to your house? --- If I was at home I would give them supper. Yes? --- They would close the door and hold a meeting then'.<sup>563</sup> Later the prosecution asked again, 'Could your sisters, or your brothers, or your mother attend these meetings? --- No, except Herbert'.<sup>564</sup> The young female witnesses were thus placed outside the main SSRC grouping. Defence advocate Wentzel asked the second of the Ngubeni sisters, Cecelia, about the frequent visits of some of the accused to her house:

I have also heard the evidence in this court of your sister who has testified already and one listens to the two of you it would seem that there was a lot of coming and going into your house, is that right? ---Yes.

We can judge from all the evidence there was your family with the various daughters and you must have had lots of friends? --- Yes.

And we have your cousin Herbert Mabuza? ---Yes.

I believe that your sister is a very good cook? --- Yes.

That in itself makes the house a popular one, doesn't it? --- Yes.<sup>565</sup>

In this way Wentzel suggested that these meetings were social gatherings. This was a suggestion that explained the young women's confinement to the kitchen of their home as understandable, perhaps even normal. However, it was later during the cross-examination of another accomplice Nelson Thamondqa Ndwendwa that Wentzel really emphasized the masculinity of the SSRC as a social grouping. During his evidence led by the prosecution Nelson had described activities at the Ngubeni house thus:

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<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, p.692.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, p.693.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, p.694.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, p.695.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, p.705.



We'd come in, sit down and listen to music, I'd complain of hunger, bread would accompany my tea and so on, and I would then hold a conversation with the people I found there, I would talk generally, also amongst other things about girls. I would then, in passing in our conversation, speak to an individual there about matters which we had discussed during our meetings at the SSRC and try to find out from this person how he viewed things.<sup>566</sup>

Wentzel picked up on this description for his own purposes:

For example at this house in Diepkloof, you would discuss politics, girls, soccer, and literature? --- That is so.

In other words, to put it very shortly, you were like any group of young folk gathered together? --- That is so.

And you disputed amongst yourselves, some of you had this opinion about soccer, some had that opinion, some had this opinion about politics, others had that opinion? That is so.

I suppose you even differed about the girls? --- That is so.

I want to just get away from the idea that we're dealing with a kind of command post at the house in Diepkloof, *that wasn't a house full of a lot of long faced, serious young men talking SSRC, from morning till night was it?* --- That is so.<sup>567</sup>  
[Emphasis added]

The implications of Nelson's evidence were drawn out by Advocate Wentzel to try to undermine the State's concentration upon the defendants' subversive political identity to the exclusion of all else. The portrayal of the SSRC as a masculine grouping had been central to both cases.

This line of argument caused problems for the defence when they came up against their own witnesses' extolling of the importance of the youths' political actions. Bishop Manas Buthelezi of the Black Parent's Association was a prominent witness for the defence. Under cross examination the prosecution chose to confront him with his own words in various newspaper articles, in which he had praised the actions of the students and heralded June 16<sup>th</sup> as a momentous event. Advocate for the prosecution Van Lieres put forward the notion of a new generation taking leadership of the liberation

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<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, p.993.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, p.994.

struggle. He thus implied, even without any grand conspiracy theories of links with the ANC, that the SSRC should be thought of in the same way.

Adv. V. Lieres: Now one gets the impression Bishop, if one looks historically at the position that in the 1970s apparently the youth has sort of taken over the role of the older people in connection with the liberation of the Black people in putting forward grievances and so forth, would you agree with that?---

Bishop Buthelezi: Not 'taken over', I took them as having; they tried to do their own thing in the student's pattern.<sup>568</sup>

Buthelezi's argument was to try to contain the importance of this new politics by the description 'student's pattern'. Advocate Van Lieres later read out a section of an article that had appeared in the Sunday Express on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1976. Buthelezi was quoted as saying:

Black politics was experiencing a birth in the flow of fresh political ideas. In the 50s and 60s, the dominant figures on the political scene were such figures as Chief Luthuli and Dr Moroka. Accused in political trials of those days were usually, "the old people", but the big new factor in the '70s is that you have the politics of the youth, Dr. Buthelezi explained, it started with SASM, the BPC and now it is the whole student body. It appears as if the grievances which were expressed in the past by the grown ups, were just not being listened to. You must therefore, see the role of the students in relation to unsuccessful attempts in the past to bring about change'.<sup>569</sup>

It was very difficult for Buthelezi to maintain plausibly that he referred only to youth political leadership on the issue of Bantu Education and Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The prosecution cleverly played upon ideas of trials and detention as a marker of political opposition to apartheid. Buthelezi had commented that 'accused in political trials' of the past had been 'the old people'. The implication that was hard to avoid was that the students, by virtue of being on trial fitted into the roll call of ANC leaders Chief Luthuli and Dr Moroka.

Detention also had a second, perhaps more important meaning during the trial. The courtroom was a social space and the hearing granted to witnesses was structured significantly by gender ideologies, but also crucially race, age and class. Most of the

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<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2461.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.2461-2.

young witnesses who appeared were under additional, more immediate pressures. The majority arrived to testify directly from detention, where they may have been held for several months. Testifying as accomplices they were at risk of being re-detained after their testimony if they did not satisfy the court that they had given 'full and frank answers'. Most also gave evidence in camera, making the courtroom an even stranger environment. Whilst detention was not usually mentioned during witness testimony it was perhaps the most important factor shaping the 'sayable'. It is little wonder that many of them gave their testimony visibly afraid. The following exchanges come from the testimony of Anastasia Zulu, led by Advocate Von Lieres:

Adv. V. Lieres: Just a bit slower please, just a bit slower.

By the Court: I know she is a bit nervous, but she must speak slowly and distinctly. She needn't be afraid.

Adv. V. Lieres: (cont,) Even Seth is laughing at you.

A Zulu: The students at our school chose me, myself and Mlambo...<sup>570</sup>

This exchange also reveals a little of the dynamics of many of the testimonies from young people, who were testifying in front of their friends. Seth, whom Advocate Von Lieres refers to, was Seth Mazibuko, one of the defendants. Some coped better than others with the multitude of pressures upon them. Anastasia Zulu was one of six young women called by the prosecution to give evidence. Five young men testified. In contrast the Cillie Commission heard the evidence of only two young women, out of its 563 witnesses. It is argued below that the prosecution's use of young women witnesses may have been a conscious strategy. It certainly shaped the picture of youth politics that emerged as the serious activity of dangerous young men.

When they spoke, the young women witnesses were heard in a highly gendered way. This was most clearly illustrated by the testimony of Masobatha Mary Loate who had just turned 18 in 1978. During his cross-examination of the witness Advocate Wentzel tried to highlight the impact that being held in detention had had on Loate. She told him she had lost 20lbs in weight during her time in detention. At the end of her

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<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1699.

testimony the Judge commented, 'Tell her that she may stand down. She is going to be released now. She must watch her weight. I think she should not add another 20 lbs again'.<sup>571</sup>

The young women who testified appeared in a number of instances to be in liminal positions with regards to the activities of the SSRC that they described for the prosecution. This could be seen in the testimony of the Ngubeni sisters discussed earlier and again during the testimony of Masobatha Loate. Under cross-examination Wentzel revealed that Loate was the object of a falling out between one of the defendants and Herbert Mabuza, another SSRC member (and cousin of the Ngubeni sisters).

Adv. Wentzel: Now I'd like you to look at the 8<sup>th</sup> accused. Accused no 8 Kgotsietsile Mogami? I don't want to say more than I have to about very personal matters. I see from the smile on your face you know what I am about to say? He was your particular boyfriend was he not? --- He is my ex-boyfriend.

And at one time he was very much your boyfriend is that right? I won't put anything personal? --- Yes.

Do you know a young man called Herbert Mabuza? --- Yes.

Am I right in saying that his nickname was "Chance Taker"? --- I can't say.

You can't say? What chances was Herbert always taking? --- Divorcing girlfriends of his friends, making love to...

By the court: Making love to his friend's girlfriends? Was he a ladies man? --- Yes.

Adv. W: And in fact Herbert Mabuza was rather interested in you, he found you a very attractive young lady? --- He was having a soft spot for me.

The eighth accused wasn't very pleased about this was he? --- Yes, he didn't like it.

It led to trouble between him and Herbert did it not? --- Yes.<sup>572</sup>

Wentzel did not pursue this line of questioning any further, but the implications of this exchange placed Masobatha Loate in a very particular role with regards to the SSRC

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<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1096.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1093.

social grouping. She was one of the 'girls' discussed and disagreed over. It followed that the SSRC was a group of young friends rather than serious or dangerous political actors.<sup>573</sup>

In a number of other instances the issue was raised that various young women, including the accused Sibongile Mthembu, found it difficult to attend SSRC meetings regularly.<sup>574</sup> So, in his testimony, Issie Gxluwe, who also attended Naledi high school, explained why his school had four representatives in the SSRC instead of two.

Adv. Vo. Lieres: But all four of them served on the SSRC that is if I understand you correctly?

---Susan Mthembu sometimes didn't attend. Sometimes she didn't attend, most of the time she did not'.<sup>575</sup>

Ayanda Cokile gave evidence later in the trial and again suggested a liminal position for young women within the organisation:

What was your attitude to being elected as a member of the – to represent your school on the SSRC? --- I asked the chairman himself when he came to our school...

Is that Mr. Sono you asked? --- Yes.

What did you ask him? --- I asked him that as being in the SSRC some people like myself were having domestic problems, so that I won't be able to attend these meetings regularly. So he said that as long as I am representing the school and I am well informed about what the meetings which were held when I wasn't there and gave the reports back to the students as to what was said at the meetings that was ok.

Your- perhaps just briefly, your domestic problems, did you have to do the household at home? --- Yes.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> It is worth mentioning Shahid Amin's work on judicial discourses in colonial India again. In discussing the testimony of an 'approver' or accomplice turned witness, Amin comments, 'the prosecution treats the Approver's testimony as a sealed text which derives its meaning from its constitution and not from any context...the defence attempts to 'socialize' the event, implicate it- and hence the Approver's testimony- into the reality of its milieu'. Amin, "Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura," p.187..

<sup>574</sup> Interestingly, Sibongile Mkhabela, nee Mthembu, mentions in her autobiography that she would sometimes miss political meetings. She saw this as insignificant in contrast to her male comrades who she says felt they had to attend. Her autobiography is discussed fully in chapter five. Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Press, 2001), p.40.

<sup>575</sup> *State Vs. W.W.C. Twala and Ten Others*, Record of Proceedings, p.676.

Here, the SSRC leadership in the person of Chairman Trofomo Sono appeared understanding towards Ayanda Cokile's predicament, but it is interesting that this was the issue she raised when asked how she felt about being a representative on the SSRC. It is an open question whether such suggestions aided the prosecution in its arguments that the SSRC was a serious, dangerous political organisation which required committed membership. Another particularly articulate witness, Sarah Makepe, suggested that membership of the SSRC was for her a social choice as much as anything else. After being elected by her school to the SSRC she resigned the following day. 'Why did you resign the very next day? --- I had to decide whether I was representing my students on the SSRC or whether I should go back to my old procedure that is being an actress'.<sup>577</sup> What all of these details do is suggest a liminal position for young women in SSRC politics, which appears to be what makes them so useful to the prosecution. Whilst they do not know the full story, they give a sense of the organising capabilities of the students and let the imagination of the Judge fill in the gaps. Wentzel's ultimately unsuccessful strategy was to try to show these exclusions as the result of the SSRC as a youthful social grouping rather than secretive political masterminds.

As discussed earlier, this was also Wentzel's line of defence when dealing with the specific charges that were laid against Sibongile Mthembu in relation to the letters she smuggled out of prison. Whilst the prosecution focused upon some of her political comments as incitement to terroristic activities, Wentzel tried to show the letters as an attempt to reach out to loved ones from her lonely, frightening detention. Whatever her motivations, in the first letter read out to court that Sibongile Mthembu had written to her boyfriend she discusses her position as a young woman finding herself in prison:

Women might speak about Women's Lib; to me it will only apply in the social and commercial spheres, love wise, to hell with it. I have had my liberty and it was nothing less than a disaster. If you had a strong hand over me surely I wouldn't be here today.<sup>578</sup>

Whilst not in any way explicit, Sibongile Mthembu suggests that up until her arrest her behaviour might be seen by some as 'freer' than normal. It is really the last phrase here,

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<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1241-2.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*, p.735.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1525.

'if you had a strong hand over me surely I wouldn't be here today' which seems to allude to a certain safety in being under male control. The letter can be seen as part of a broader tendency for young women to recognize themselves as liminal and describe their position within youth politics as tenuous and difficult because of gender roles and expectations *within the trial itself*.

Defence Advocate Wentzel obviously thought that reading the letters in full to the judge would arouse sympathy for Sibongile Mthembu because of their emotive content. He was however unsuccessful in getting the prison official McPherson to express any sympathy:

I ask you again, can you understand the unhappy desperation of somebody in solitary confinement, can you? --- I can.

From your experience you can? --- I haven't been in solitary confinement myself.

No, you have been the jailer.

By the court: That is rather a fair [sic] comment to make, Mr. Wentzel, really. Please don't get carried away, it may not serve the interests of your client. Surely you will have a very sympathetic ear when you address the court. I don't have to stress that.<sup>579</sup>

The question seems to arise at this juncture of how these details within testimony can be used by the historian, and, what their real significance and meaning is. It is argued here that these proceedings and testimonies must be read as the *public* performance of gender roles in a space marked by continual reminders of a gender and racial hierarchy. The white, adult, male Judge and Advocates controlled and shaped the space and testimony and how it was heard within the courtroom. This is not to suggest total or absolute control; witnesses could at times choose their own direction. For example, one young witness Tsitsi Raymond Ramapepe interrupted proceedings to tell the Judge that he had been beaten and threatened in detention and offered protection if he would testify against the students.<sup>580</sup> This was however a very brave choice. The details about the gender dynamics of the SSRC's politics extracted here should not be

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<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1532- 1533.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1225-1235.

understood as details which emerged despite the pressures witnesses were under but rather as details that emerge only *within this very particular context*. Sibongile Mkhabela, nee Mthembu, recalled the attitude of Prosecutor Von Lierens during the trial in her 2001 autobiography,

He had especially focused on the only young woman, the black rose, who stood among men. He, an Afrikaner male of the time could not understand how a black female could be determined to defy the white man's law: after all, black women belonged in the kitchen.<sup>581</sup>

This suggestion can be seen to have played out not only in the treatment of Sibongile Mthembu but also in the racialised gender hierarchies invoked by the Judge and the ways in which testimony from young women was heard. The gender relations of youth politics, as it was in the apartheid courtroom, were structured through representations of the domestic space of the Ngubeni household. The Ngubeni sisters were placed explicitly in the kitchen, whilst politics went on behind closed doors. The space of the courtroom and the threat of continued detention were powerful factors shaping testimony. As Amin puts it, 'the speech of the approver [or accomplice witness] is thus fabricated by the power of the state'.<sup>582</sup> The central arguments over the character of the SSRC, as either political masterminds or ordinary young people, constructed youth politics as masculine, crucially, through the testimony of young women.

## **II. 'Freedom is indivisible. Silence betokens consent': the daybooks of the Detainee Parents' Support Committee**

The daybooks of the Detainee Parents' Support Committee contain testimony from people affected by the successive states of emergency in the mid-1980s. They are different from the trial and TRC testimonies in many ways but perhaps most importantly here in that they were not direct, public performances. The DPSC daybook testimonies were recorded on an individual basis and whilst the DPSC at times used such testimony

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<sup>581</sup> Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*, 83..

<sup>582</sup> S. Amin, "Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura," p.186.



in the public realm, at the moment of telling, there was no audience.<sup>583</sup> The act of giving testimony to a DPSC advice office and what it was possible to say in that space is something we can only suggest from the surviving daybook records and what they do and do not contain. In contrast to the testimonies of the SSRC sedition trial, in the DPSC daybooks we hear the un-coerced voices of young activists. Comparing the DPSC daybook testimonies with those heard by the TRC gives us a sense of the uniqueness of each testimonial space and also points us to the continuities of testifying to 'human rights abuses' under and after the apartheid state. The following analysis aims to trace the continuities and changes in young people's portrayals of activism around the shifting and intertwined discourses of youth criminality and victimhood.

The Detainee Parents' Support Committee was founded in September 1981 by the relatives of a number of activists detained in a large, countrywide swoop by the Security Police. The State at this time targeted some of the newly resurgent ANC-aligned activists as well as trade unionists, like Emma Mashinini and a number of white students, including Keith Coleman. Keith's parents Dr Max and Audrey Coleman and Emma Mashinini's husband Tom were among the founding members of the first Detainee Parents' Support Committee. By January 1982 over a hundred activists were detained.<sup>584</sup> An official history of the DPSC written around 1987 described its evolution from 'a sitting room gathering of relatives of detainees to a widely publicised organisation and pressure group'.<sup>585</sup>

A number of dates are important to note in this evolution. In 1983 the DPSC affiliated to the newly formed United Democratic Front. Its position within the UDF was especially important during the township uprisings of 1984 and 1985. Seekings argues in his history of the UDF that as part of a cautious approach to the uprisings the Front's leadership 'took up issues such as state repression and the schooling crisis which could be used to embarrass the state and draw more constituencies into organised political

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<sup>583</sup> Whilst the witnesses giving evidence in the SSRC sedition trial often testified in camera, there was still an important audience in the courtroom of judge, the advocates and the eleven accused. The TRC hearings were of course conducted in front of multiple audiences: local, national and international.

<sup>584</sup> Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), p.38.

<sup>585</sup> 'History of the DPSC', (1987), WHP, AG2523, Box A1.

activity'.<sup>586</sup> This was done through the work of affiliates like the DPSC who monitored detention. Two weeks before the state of emergency was declared in 1985 the DPSC opened an advice office in Johannesburg at Khotso House, where the South African Council of Churches was also based. During this state of emergency Seekings argues that whilst the UDF was hard hit by state repression 'service organisations such as the DPSC and the Community Education and Information Project served to monitor state repression, facilitate co-ordination and help to build organisation'.<sup>587</sup> By 1987 the DPSC operated advice offices in 'all major centres and several small towns'.<sup>588</sup> It was named a banned organisation by the state in February 1988 but continued to operate until 1990 when the office in Khotso House was finally closed.<sup>589</sup> The DPSC actually had two organisational components: the Detainee Parents' Support Committees which were made up of parents, friends and relatives of detainees and thus had an ever changing membership; and the Descoms which had a much wider membership and carried out the organisation's education campaigns, provided support to DPSC branches, and undertook 'information gathering' and 'crisis and emergency work'.<sup>590</sup>

The DPSC had to work closely with other organisations whose membership was being targeted by the state for detentions if they wanted to provide support to detainees and 'gather information' from them about the state's repressive tactics. As Audrey Coleman explained in 2007, 'the different organisations within the townships seconded people to our office because of the sensitivity of the information we were receiving. So they wanted to know that reliable people were getting the information as we debriefed detainees'.<sup>591</sup> A 1988 internal document grappling with the logistics of operating 'underground' through other existing organisations commented upon the importance of this kind of accountability. The document states:

Accountability is much looser in town where non-politicised groups are still being drawn in but is firmer in the townships. It was stated that this is the reason

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<sup>586</sup> Seekings, *The UDF*, p.124.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162..

<sup>588</sup> 'History of the DPSC', (1987), WHP, AG2523, Box A1.

<sup>589</sup> Interview with Max and Audrey Coleman, (10<sup>th</sup> April 2007), in *Between Life and Death: Stories from John Vorster Square* (Johannesburg: Doxa Natural Knowledge, 2007).

<sup>590</sup> 'Detainee Support Committees', WHP, AG2523, Box A1.

<sup>591</sup> Interview with Max and Audrey Coleman in *Between Life and Death*.

for the collapse of the Durban structure because the committee did not consult with the affected organisations or with the D [PSC] at a national level before making their decisions.<sup>592</sup>

The DPSC's position, and with that its ability to assist detainees and access information, depended upon it being trusted. In the increasingly fraught political landscape of the late 1980s trust gained through, for example the organisation's affiliation with the UDF would have had far from a universal purchase. Even amongst UDF affiliates there could be considerable tensions. Seekings suggests a very strained relationship between COSAS and the UDF, which certainly puts the DPSC's collection of a large number of testimonies from COSAS members in an interesting light.<sup>593</sup> Coupled with this, under the emergency, as the DPSC itself became a target for state repression, members of other organisations were often needed to step in and help run the advice offices. Audrey Coleman remembers relying upon friends from the Black Sash to help her keep Khotso House running in 1985 when the first state of emergency sent other activists underground.<sup>594</sup>

Working closely with other organisations was a necessity but could be problematic. In 1988 the DPSC discussed the problems presented by working closely with the Dependants Conference (DC), an organisation linked with the International Defence and Aid Fund that provided welfare payments to detainees' families. The Cape Town DPSC commented that the DC would withhold support if the detainee was unemployed. The Port Elizabeth DPSC complained that 'one of the DC fieldworkers has an unfortunate manner. People feel he shows a lack of respect and makes no effort to relate to people'. In the Northern Cape 'ideological differences with DC workers often means support is not given'. In Pietermaritzburg the DC worker doubled up for the DPSC which was problematic since 'DC wants to help Inkatha which is regarded as unacceptable'.<sup>595</sup> Ineke Van Kessel comments on the make up of the UDF in the Northern Transvaal region, suggesting that there 'a fairly limited number of activists

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<sup>592</sup> Minutes of internal meeting, (1988), WHP, AG2523, Box A1, p.4.

<sup>593</sup> Seekings, *The UDF*, p.134.

<sup>594</sup> Interview with Max and Audrey Coleman in *Between Life and Death*.

<sup>595</sup> Minutes of internal meeting, (1988), WHP, AG2523, Box A1, p.5-7.

were able to form the core of a range of organisations'.<sup>596</sup> Blurred organisational boundaries and an increasing polarisation of anti-apartheid political groups would undoubtedly have affected the testimony that the DPSC received and recorded in its advice office daybooks. This is not to criticise the DPSC for not maintaining an objective or neutral stance in recording 'human rights abuses' but rather to argue that it was the DPSC's embedded character that enabled them to collect such testimony even as it shaped its range and focus.

What the DPSC daybooks give the historian are glimpses of people's lives at moments of crisis. In each case the testimony recorded was prompted by an intrusion into a friend, a relative or the testifier's own life. There is a terrible immediacy to the testimonies even read at a physical and temporal distance. However, each testimony was mediated by a statement-taker working in the DPSC advice offices. Judging from the surviving daybooks it is clear that different statement-takers and witnesses had different approaches. The DPSC guidelines to statement-takers make clear the organisation's interest in dates, times, places, names which would make up a factual statement of what had happened to each person. Nevertheless these guidelines clearly did not constrain some individuals from making fuller and more personal statements. Occasionally it appears that individuals wrote their own testimony directly into the daybooks. The role of the statement-taker is often obscured by the use of the first person. The DPSC did not have a policy on this except that statement-takers should be consistent. In a March 1987 document it was suggested that 'when taking down the statement we should try to be consistent. Either we should use "I" all the time, or "He/She". That way it will not be confusing to read'.<sup>597</sup> The guidelines can read as somewhat blunt and unsophisticated but were clearly meant to be interpreted by statement-takers.

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<sup>596</sup> Van Kessel notes that of the three prominent UDF organizers in the Northern Transvaal, 'Louis Mnguni was chair of the Mankweng Civic, of which Joyce Madudafhasi was the secretary and Peter Mokoba the publicity secretary. All three were also active in the DESCOM. Mabudafhasi was involved in the National Education Crisis Committee as well as in the Human Rights Commission. Her son Raymond was chair of the Mankweng Youth Congress'. Ineke Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.95.

<sup>597</sup> 'Detainee Interview Checklist of Statement Taking', (March 1987), WHP, AG2523, Box M1.12.1.6.

The DPSC's approach to issues of gender, going by the evidence of the guidelines, fits into this general character of a straightforward factual approach to the act of testimony. An undated 'Outline of Interview Schedule' included a section 'if the detainee is a woman ask the following questions: Were your periods regular? Did you experience any gynaecological problem? How did your being a woman detainee affect your experience?'<sup>598</sup> However, the DPSC was clearly not deaf to growing concerns being voiced in the late 1980s by ANC women and UDF affiliates that women's political contributions be taken seriously. In a publication entitled *a woman's place is in the struggle, not behind bars* the DPSC stated that 'the detention of women throughout this period of state onslaught is an indication of their participation and effectiveness in mobilising resistance'.<sup>599</sup> The idea that detention was a measure of participation or a political rite of passage is an idea that existed alongside the campaign to end the practice. It echoed the ideas used by the prosecution in the SSRC trial, that detention was a badge of honour and a sign of committed opposition to apartheid.

For the DPSC the purpose of taking statements was to monitor and then publicise state practices of repression; who was being targeted, when and how? It was also, in the case of statements from ex-detainees, to gather evidence of torture. The consequences of testifying to the DPSC are difficult to gauge. A report published by the American based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights suggested that 'some who have spoken to the DPSC' had subsequently been visited by the army again.<sup>600</sup> In her testimony to the Johannesburg TRC youth hearing, Audrey Coleman related the experience of a young man Sithole Edblumo, who appeared in a film made by the DPSC called *Children under Apartheid* and who was then interrogated by the Security Police and found dead four days after his release. Audrey Coleman suggested a direct link, 'I know because I was in the office myself when he came back from having been interrogated, that that was the reason for the questioning, the *Children under*

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<sup>598</sup> 'Outline of Interview Schedule', WHP, AG2523, Box M1.12.1.1.

<sup>599</sup> *A Woman's Place is in the Struggle, Not Behind Bars*, DPSC publication, WHP, AG2523, Box M.1.5, p.36.

<sup>600</sup> Helena Cook and Diane Orentlicher, *The war against children South Africa's youngest victims* (New York, N.Y.: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986), p.52.

*Apartheid*'.<sup>601</sup> This was clearly a high profile instance of someone giving testimony but reveals the potential risks.

From 25<sup>th</sup> January 1982 the Johannesburg-based *Star* newspaper allowed the DPSC to publish its findings in a column called 'Our View'. In its publications and campaign material the DPSC used extracts from daybook testimony as evidence for its claims. Often testimony was retold anonymously. Audrey Coleman recalled a strategy of focusing upon recurring practices rather than extreme cases: 'we gave the common garden tortures, which were really bad, but weren't as way out as some. So we never exaggerated anything'.<sup>602</sup> Nevertheless, the government often accused the DPSC of making exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims. In a high profile spat in August 1987 the Minister of Law and Order Adrian Vlok accused the DPSC of 'wilful lies and exaggerated distortions' in accusations of the torture of child detainees published in a World Council of Churches newsletter, that had been 'circulated widely' outside South Africa.<sup>603</sup> Vlok argued, rather incredibly, that for the young detainees, fear was the motivating factor behind the allegations and that in a least one case 'the girl only began making these allegation after extensive consultation with political activists after her release'.<sup>604</sup> The DPSC response was unequivocal 'we do not manufacture the facts, we simply record them'.<sup>605</sup> Interestingly for us the state's argument in this instance returned to the idea that testimony from young people could not be trusted and was open to manipulation. In government attacks on the DPSC its association with young detainees was used to try and discredit the organisation. For example, in October of 1987 following the 'Kruger Day race riots' Vlok, whilst blaming drunken youths for the outbreak of violence took a side-swipe at the DPSC: 'those people who continually plead the innocence of so-called youths, such as the DPSC, must take note of the ghastly events of the past weekend'.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> [www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/coleman.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/coleman.htm) (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>602</sup> Interview with Max and Audrey Coleman in *Between Life and Death*.

<sup>603</sup> *Citizen*, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1987.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>605</sup> 'Response to the statement by the Minister of Law and Order', DPSC Press Statement, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1987, WHP, AG2523, Box F1.4.1.

<sup>606</sup> Jo-Ann Bekker, 'Pointing fingers aplenty. But the facts don't match up', 16<sup>th</sup> October 1987. Newspaper cutting in SALDRU clippings collection: [www.aluka.org](http://www.aluka.org)

The state appears in daybook testimonies through the figure of the South African Policeman. The police presence is not always the straightforward intrusion that the DPSC highlighted through its publicity material. There are examples of the often insidious police presence alongside the spectacular and sudden intrusions of arrest, injury or death. On 11th July 1985 it was reported anonymously to the DPSC advice office that in Natalspruit a young, pregnant woman was knocked over and killed by a police armoured vehicle when she was on her way to work on the morning of July 5th. The witness commented tellingly, 'as we know, the police are patrolling the townships'.<sup>607</sup> One Alexandra resident, 18 year old Jane Komape described her fear vividly in 1986,

We cannot sleep at night. They search the township with search lights. The police come and ask who the yard rep is. I think they want the yard rep so that they can shoot them. I fear that the police are looking for me because they saw me and took photographs of me holding the ANC flag at the mass funeral of the 17.<sup>608</sup>

The fear of association that the apartheid state clearly wished to cultivate through successive states of emergency was achieved powerfully through rumour and confusion as well as the physical presence and actions of the police and army. The DPSC daybooks also reveal fleeting and indirect evidence of the effect of the emergency on white society in South Africa. A woman, whose age was not recorded, Angelina Miliwana, described on release her experience of detention from June 16<sup>th</sup> until August 1<sup>st</sup> 1986. She was accused of being a comrade and being involved in necklacing along with 14 other people and held in Kameldrift Police Station. It was when she was held there that she described how on three separate occasions 'off duty policemen would come with their small sons in the night and would shout at them to wake up and stand up – so that they could show the detainees to their sons'.<sup>609</sup> We might suggest this extraordinary incident appears to be an enactment on a familial level of the spectacle of the emergency for white society as both a show of power and a disciplining mechanism

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<sup>607</sup> Statement on death of Pearl Nyembe, DPSC Daybook 19/01/85 – 19/07/86, WHP, AG2523, Box G1, p.28.

<sup>608</sup> Jane Komape, DPSC daybook Alexandra 24/04/86- 04/05/86, WHP, AG2523, Box G1, p.17.

<sup>609</sup> Angelina Miliwana, DPSC Daybook 2A 20/06/86- 16/07/86, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4, p.87.

to ensure continued support. It was also clearly a humiliating episode for Angelina Miliwana.

There are also testimonies in the DPSC daybooks that reveal the interconnectedness of police and society. In May 1987 twenty students at Thomas Mofolo School in Soweto, who were also members of Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO), were detained by special branch detectives in uniform. The DPSC daybook recorded a short statement from each student on their release. The interrogation of one of the two young women amongst the twenty, Stella Thandi Kubheka, a 21 year old, was recorded thus: 'Stella was interrogated. She was asked what she intended to do after passing standard ten. Stella said she wants to be a traffic cop. The policeman said he would take her file and make sure she was not accepted'.<sup>610</sup> What we don't know is whether Stella Kubheka was serious when she told the police she wished to become a traffic cop, but what this testimony does show is the apparently mutually exclusive identities of youth activist and state employee as potentially combined. The DPSC daybooks also reveal policemen as inextricably linked with the society they were expected to police from without. On the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1986 Thompson Ramanala reported the detention of three women on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1986. The daybook reads thus:

According to Thompson Ramanala the three ostracised a woman friend of theirs who became friendly with a policeman. This was resented by the woman and she motivated the policeman to take action against them. He is reported to have said to the families when arresting the three women that the three women intended to "necklace" the woman friend. \*He is thought to be one of the arresting police.<sup>611</sup>

It was also recorded that 'none are activists'.<sup>612</sup> Here, an important difference with the public testimonies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is apparent. Wilson has argued that during the TRC's public hearings a 'liberation-redemption narrative was applied to witnesses in a uniform manner, whether it was obviously relevant and appropriate or not. Occasionally, it was employed by Commissioners even if the victim rejected a political role and was unwilling to locate their own suffering in a wider

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<sup>610</sup> Stella Thandi Kubheka, DPSC Daybook number 8 March 1987 – January 1988, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4, p.43-44.

<sup>611</sup> Thompson Ramanala, DPSC daybook July 1986 – September 1986, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4, p.92.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*



liberation context'.<sup>613</sup> Instead, in the DPSC daybooks we find such stories recorded without reference to any overarching liberation or national narrative. Thompson Ramanala's testimony portrays forms of political struggle, such as 'necklacing' and detention, as interwoven with personal feuds. Neither is quite reducible to the other. It also reveals the way that personal relationships could cut across distinctions between state and society, and even direct their interaction.

The daybooks contain confusion, rumours and uncertainty, and it is clear that some people saw the advice offices as somewhere to get answers and reassurance. So, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1986 Rachael Letlape came to report that she had been woken on the night of Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> of April to the sound of shooting, the daybook records 'I felt the house shaking around me'. She waited until morning before emerging from her house to find,

People standing on street corners discussing what had happened. They said there was shooting at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where children were killed. I saw soldiers in brown uniforms walking around and in brown trucks. They were also stopping in 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and doing body searches. They searched me as well. They let me go on my way. Both before and after 27<sup>th</sup> April tear gas canisters were exploding in the streets and the gas was coming right through into the house.<sup>614</sup>

In the case of this incident, more information does come to light later in the daybook as two next-door- neighbours come forward, and then finally two of the 'children' who had been detained that night give accounts of their arrest. It seems nobody was killed that night though shots were fired. Most often however, the daybooks reveal nothing but the beginnings of individual stories. With the daybook testimonies it is impossible to find the resolutions of these stories, if indeed there was one for most of these people. Here, we come up against some of the limitations of the daybooks for the historian. As Fiona C. Ross has noted of human rights reportage in general, 'the categories used to understand violence, the transformation of experience to data, and the collation of these has the effect of homogenising complex social relations'.<sup>615</sup> In light of this, we should consider carefully what the DPSC records do and do not reveal about detention.

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<sup>613</sup> Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, p.117.

<sup>614</sup> Rachael Letlape, DPSC Daybook Alexandra 04/03/86 – 03/05/86, WHP, AG2523, Box G1, p.68.

<sup>615</sup> F. Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p.5.

Amid the confusion that the emergencies provoked the meaning of detention appears to have undergone some subtle changes. In a report on 'repression trends in the Transvaal area between June and September 1986' the DPSC noted that 'what has emerged is a vast increase in the numbers of people held, especially rank and file membership, as well as an increase in the time period for which people are being held'.<sup>616</sup> Within this the DPSC commented further that 'with children it has become clear that anyone under the age of 18 is a "threat to public safety" and therefore a legitimate target for arrest, assault or other violence'.<sup>617</sup> Also noted was an increase in forced confessions;

This is of course is not a new detention practice. What is remarkable is that many of the detainees so assaulted are picked randomly off the streets, often because they are young and male. There is thus the assumption that people in a particular age range can be credibly presented as having committed a particular act against the state.<sup>618</sup>

The report goes on to make the argument that 'information coming into the DPSC office suggests' that following a concerted attack within township communities on those seen as 'collaborators' in 1984-5 the state was 'using the [1986] state of emergency in an attempt to reconstruct its informer network'.<sup>619</sup> The report highlights testimony suggesting police attempts to coerce 'less experienced and less politicised detainees' into becoming informers.<sup>620</sup> Finally the report comments that,

The attempt to coerce people to inform isn't only designed to get information about the democratic movement and activities in the townships. It is also designed to create divisions by sowing suspicion that detainees have agreed to inform. The state wants people to believe that there is a vast network of informers. In this way it hopes to undermine the people's confidence in their ability to build strong organisation or wage effective struggle.<sup>621</sup>

Detention thus appeared to be potentially incriminating in another sense; within the moral economy of resistance and collaboration developed in certain townships. The

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<sup>616</sup> Repression Trends in the Transvaal Area between June and September 1986, WHP AG2523, Box F.1.2.1-20, p.3.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

DPSC's conclusions were based upon the daybook testimonies they received and did not reveal much more than these suggestions. However, what is apparent from the daybooks is that the growing numbers of 'less experienced and less politicised detainees' gave testimony that told different stories from self-identified activists. Testimonies from two young women both held in Diepkloof prison between late 1986 and early 1987 show the ways in which politicisation could shape the meaning of detention for detainees. The following testimonies also allow us to consider the extent to which the recording of experiences of detention in the DPSC daybooks provided unique textual spaces in which a broader range of experiences about the politicisation of young women was sayable. Paul Gready has argued that 'imprisonment creatively liberated white prisoners by grounding their writings in sacrifice, solidarity and a hitherto lacking authority, sanctioning their voice'.<sup>622</sup> The argument here, without wanting to obscure the violence of the state, is that detention as it was recorded by the DPSC daybooks could hold a similar importance for young women activists.

In February of 1987, 21 year old Penelope Mockett, from Kagiso, gave a statement about her detention to the DPSC on her release. She was picked up on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1986, when she was 5 months pregnant. She told the DPSC that she was accused of being a comrade and was asked about meetings and consumer boycotts, but that 'I didn't attend any meetings and I'm not a comrade'.<sup>623</sup> She recalled that she had complained about being detained when she was pregnant and was told simply, 'you are not the only one'.<sup>624</sup> She was detained in Diepkloof prison in a cell with 26 other women. In her testimony to the DPSC she described a particular incident that took place in January 1987: 'during January my cell mates demanded my release, and they refused to go back to the cells and the prison warders sprayed teargas into our cells'. She said she fell ill as a result of the teargas. On the 8<sup>th</sup> February she began to suffer labour pains but was only taken to a hospital the following afternoon. After giving birth on the 9<sup>th</sup> she was returned to Diepkloof on the 10<sup>th</sup>. She was released on 14<sup>th</sup> February with a restriction letter, which according to her said 'I mustn't participate in any strike, school boycott or

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<sup>622</sup> P. Gready, *Writing as Resistance*, p.274.

<sup>623</sup> Penelope Mockett, DPSC daybook number 7 February 1987 – March 1987, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4,

p.7  
<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*

consumer boycott. And they said to me if anything can happen in Kagiso they will come and fetch me'.<sup>625</sup> Like most detainees at this time she wasn't charged with anything. Penelope Mosette told the DPSC a story of personal suffering in detention. Her story centred on her pregnancy and the inappropriateness of her detention due to her condition. She described support from fellow women detainees over her condition and a serious incident of breach of the control of prison staff that resulted in the use of teargas in the cells. Penelope Mosette was clearly familiar with the broad political landscape of 'comrades' and 'boycotts' but never explained her detention in terms of her own political involvement.

A month later in March of 1987 the DPSC took testimony from Reginah Zwane, a 19 year old from Tembisa, who had been detained for a period of seven months from 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1986 until 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1987. Her daybook statement records that initially Reginah Zwane was taken to Rabasotho Police Station for questioning. She was asked about school boycotts. She told the DPSC that she was a member of her school's SRC. Asked by the police why her SRC were 'propagating boycotts' she replied:

I said the students decided that as long as other students were in detention there won't be schools in the townships. They then said I must give them the name of one student and I made it very clear to them that all the students took this decision so it was difficult for me to pinpoint people. Then they said I will stay in Diepkloof prison because I don't want to tell them the truth.

After two months Reginah Zwane along with a fellow detainee she names as Debra asked to be transferred to a prison closer to home. Her statement went on, 'we then had a placard demonstration inside the prison in January. We were then tear gassed as we were refusing to go to the cells'. In February she embarked on a hunger strike because, 'we wanted to be either charged or released'. In describing more general conditions she told the DPSC, 'the miele rice sometimes was rotten. When we complained they said worms do not have bones'.<sup>626</sup> The same incident that Penelope Mosette described at Deipkloof prison in January in which female prisoners were tear-gassed for refusing to return to their cells appeared in Reginah Zwane's testimony in a very different narrative. Reginah Zwane presented the demonstration as more organised, she mentioned placards,

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<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>626</sup> Reginah Zwane, DPSC daybook 8, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4, pp.1-2.

and as having broader aims - for all prisoners to be charged or released. The incident appeared in a statement of continuous complaint and protest in conflict with the state. Reginah Zwane articulately portrayed herself to the DPSC as one of the student leaders. Putting aside the issue of whether this was an accurate record of her interrogation and detention, this was how she chose to present herself. Unlike Penelope Mosette, Reginah Zwane's narrative was always carried along by her own actions, not that of the prison authorities or fellow prisoners.

The DPSC daybooks are unusual in recording the voluntarily given, personal stories, of young people detained by the apartheid state. Unlike the testimonies heard in political trials these statements were not coerced. Whilst the young people giving statements to the DPSC were undoubtedly in a pressured environment, and looking for support their statements were not shaped by a coercive power relationship between themselves and the DPSC. However, there may nevertheless have been socially hierarchical relations between witnesses and DPSC members. Nor were the DPSC daybook testimonies like those heard by the TRC. They were more immediate, more focused and it seems young detainees treated the act of giving testimony as both a continuation of their conflict with the apartheid state and a place to gain support for their suffering. The DPSC daybooks were unusual because they recorded personal statements from young women activists who did not appear to conceive of themselves as marginalised or often as gendered. Reginah Zwane's statement was typical of the testimony given by young women who claimed membership of a political group, which for the vast majority was COSAS or their school's SRC.<sup>627</sup> These statements read as litanies of complaint and action. Maureen Ndlouv was a fifteen year old detained between July and November of 1985 who stated, 'when I used to complain they didn't take that to consideration. When I started to act they used to say we are misbehaving...warders were saying nasty things. When I complain they used to say I am a stone thrower'.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> Maureen Ndlouv, DPSC daybook 04/11/85- 04/05/86, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4, pp.3-4.

If we are treating detention as a measure of participation the DPSC daybooks appear to confirm that there was a concentration of young women's political action within schools. However, we must take into consideration the state's priorities at this time and its particular targeting of COSAS. COSAS was apparently a priority target from the declaration of the first state of emergency in 1985. A DPSC report on 'the democratic movement under attack' noted that 'two months into the emergency...one out of every five detainees was a member of COSAS'.<sup>629</sup> On August 28<sup>th</sup> 1985 COSAS was banned but this did not mark the end of the campaign against it. The government attitude was summed up by the Divisional Commissioner of the Soweto Police, quoted in the *Weekly Mail*, 'trouble will escalate in schools unless members of COSAS are all rounded up by security forces'.<sup>630</sup> The Johannesburg DPSC recorded that between August 1988 and April 1989 a 19 year old young woman, an executive member of the Soweto Students Congress, was detained and tortured.<sup>631</sup> She said the police 'told [her] she was a member of SOSCO which was a disguise for COSAS'.<sup>632</sup>

There were times however, when testimony and DPSC publicity material appears to have been significantly shaped by understandings of gendered political participation. Interestingly in the DPSC daybooks several young women activists begin the story of their arrest with themselves at home. Oupa Mahomane, an 18 year old from Vereeniging, began her statement to the DPSC in 1986, 'On 18<sup>th</sup> November I was at home scrubbing the walls...' when the police arrived to question her about possessing a hand grenade.<sup>633</sup> Christina Mofolo, a 15 year old member of the Vaal Student Congress or VASCO, similarly described how, when the police arrived for her, 'I was sitting outside the house after I have finished cleaning, just basking in the sun...'<sup>634</sup> In these statements from young women their roles in the home frame their political conflict with

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<sup>629</sup> 'Democratic Movement Under Attack, July- September 1985', DPSC report, WHP, AG2523, Box F1.2.1-20, p.25.

<sup>630</sup> *Weekly Mail*, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1985.

<sup>631</sup> The statement included a request for anonymity. DPSC daybook miscellaneous, WHP, AG2523, Box G4.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>633</sup> Oupa Rarrapa Mahomane, DPSC Daybook, No.4, August 1986-November 1986, WHP, AG 2523, Box G4-G8, pp.95-97.

<sup>634</sup> Christina Mofolo, DPSC Daybook, No.5 September 1986- December 1986, WHP, AG 2523, Box G4-G8, pp.88-90.

the state, but they do not exclude them. This gives us a depiction of young women's position in 'the home' and 'the struggle' as apparently compatible. It is not clear whether Oupa Mahomane or Christina Mofolo were perhaps making claims to respectability or normality in some way by framing the stories of their arrest with their domestic roles. However, their statements are reminiscent of the combination of Christian domestic respectability and political activism practised by organisations like the World-YWCA during the 1980s. Nthabiseng Motsemme has argued that women's tendency to locate themselves in the home in testimonies given to the TRC, 'should not be taken to mean that women belong naturally to the domestic. Rather it draws to our attention the ways women may use domesticity to map out the insertion of extreme violence in their daily lives'.<sup>635</sup>

A notion of young women's domestic respectability countering the implications of detention by the apartheid state is something that can also be found in DPSC publicity material. The DPSC publication *A woman's place is in the struggle not behind bars* contained a 'letter from Pollsmoor Prison' written by nineteen year old Venetia de Klerk, one of the 'Wynberg Seven' given a one year prison sentence on the charge of public violence in June 1987. Venetia de Klerk's letter was full of recollections of her happy home life in which her domestic and feminine achievements were juxtaposed with her position in an apartheid prison. The letter began,

Sitting here in the sewing room beside the window, the direct sunshine slowly warms up my whole body for I began feeling cold all over when I started sewing seams and replacing lost buttons. Every stitch I sew reminds me of home...I can still remember my sixteenth birthday. Daddy was so proud of me – his "little baby girl" he used to call me. Now, three years later, I find myself here in Pollsmoor Prison.<sup>636</sup>

She went on to remember a dress her mother made her when she was a child and winning a Junior Ballroom competition. She commented, 'I wonder what has happened to that little partner who danced so light-footed with me? I suppose he won't believe it if

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<sup>635</sup> Nthabiseng Motsemme, "The Mute Always Speak: On Women's Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Current Sociology* 52, no. 5 (2004): p.924.

<sup>636</sup> *A Woman's Place is in the Struggle*, p.33.

he could see what has happened to me now'.<sup>637</sup> Venetia de Klerk did not portray her imprisonment as the result of extraordinary activism; she said 'at that time there was unrest in all our schools. Everyone was caught up in the situation'.<sup>638</sup> Her arrest at a meeting had broken 'daddy's rules that none of us were to go about after school'. However, her family supported her through her trial. She recalled that at a public meeting after her sentencing, 'my daddy told a huge audience that he would stand by us and gives us all his support. After his speech I felt like throwing my arms around him for I never knew he would have the courage'.<sup>639</sup> She maintained her respectability in the face of her imprisonment, on the morning she began her sentence, 'I bathed and did my hair just like someone going to a party!'.<sup>640</sup> The 'Wynberg Seven' were regarded as a somewhat unusual group of detainees as they were from a middle class, coloured background. It is certainly interesting that the DPSC chose to use Venetia de Klerk's letter from prison as an example of the 'many young people presently incarcerated in South African prisons having been convicted on the charge of public violence'.<sup>641</sup> Through this young, respectable, female detainee the DPSC attempted to counter the state's portrayal of youth politicisation as criminal behaviour devoid of legitimacy.

The DPSC's prominent focus upon detention also shaped significant silences in its records of human rights abuses during the 1980s. This is not to criticise the DPSC, detention was after all what they campaigned against, but rather to suggest the particularity of the stories the DPSC daybooks contain. There is one group of statements in the Johannesburg DPSC archives that had been given to the Black Sash Detainee Aid Centre in February 1990 that highlight the potential vulnerability of politically active young women within Soweto. They contain a series of statements appear detailing a conflict between SOYCO and a gang leader called Sugar. One young woman, Darling Mhlungu, gave a statement in which she described being accosted by Sugar:

He said to me I am a bitch being used by comrades...He proposed that I must join his gang, that I agree and I must leave the comrades. He even asked me to

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<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.



remove my trousers to check if I am still fit. That I did not respond then he undressed me and said I am stinking comrades.<sup>642</sup>

This set of statements certainly lends weight to Clive Glaser's suggestion that comrades came to compete for power on the streets of Soweto with gangs which brought them into contact with a hyper-masculinised world. The emergence of this story only in 1990, after the closure of the DPSC advice office, perhaps points us to the potential silencing of certain kinds of stories by the priorities accorded statements of detention.

Indeed despite the strong presence of young women activists in the DPSC daybooks there were also persistent silences. The DPSC themselves acknowledged, in ways similar to the TRC, their problems with getting women to testify to instances of sexual assault by security officials whilst being held in detention. The DPSC prefaced one statement it did receive with the following:

Sexual assault and rape of women in detention is known to be common occurrence. It is extremely difficult to get statements from women on their release. Women are sometimes told that if they tell anyone they will be re-detained, even killed. Often, women and girls are raped in the rural areas or in townships, without being incarcerated. They are picked up by police or army in vehicles, sexually assaulted and then dumped in the Veld...it is extremely difficult to get access to this kind of information. This statement should be viewed as indicative of the extreme, but not uncommon abuse of women and children.<sup>643</sup>

The DPSC also made clear in its publicity material that it did not know about all those detained and certainly did not receive statements from them. They repeatedly describe their estimates as 'conservative'. In numerous statements from adult detainees there are descriptions of large numbers of young people and children being held in police stations and prisons. Lisa Steffel detained from August 1986 until March 1987 vividly described how at Johannesburg's female prison; 'There are at least 100 children detainees in the prison. At night they scream and cry – sometimes because they are sick, sometimes I

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<sup>642</sup> Darling Mhlungu, Black Sash Detainees Aid Centre, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4.

<sup>643</sup> Introduction to Rose Dimpa, April 1986, WHP, AG2523, Box G24.3.2.4.

think they do it deliberately to make prison officials angry, but it is also a reflection of the fact that they easily become hysterical'.<sup>644</sup>

Finally, it should also be noted again that the DPSC mostly recorded testimony from affiliates of the UDF. Testimony from AZAPO or AZANYU activists was rare, although not completely absent from its daybooks. Tellingly, when it did appear it concerned inter-organisational conflict. So, whilst certain elements of youth politicisation appear to have been sayable in the DPSC daybooks, and in particular there appears to have been space to record the activism and victimhood of young women, the daybooks still contain important silences. It is not clear whether certain young women's experiences were sayable in the DPSC daybooks because of the extension and heightening of the state's strategies of detention, criminalisation and therefore their increasing victimisation. If a contributing factor, it is clearly not a simple correlation when we consider the continuing and multiple impediments to young women's speech in the forum of the TRC.

### **III. 'What were the girls up to?' the Truth and Reconciliation Commission youth hearings.**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's human rights violation public hearings were a unique space within the processes of the Commission itself and more widely within South Africa's 'transition' period. The Commission was made up of three committees: The Human Rights Violation Committee, the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee and the Amnesty Committee. The HRV Committee took over 21,000 statements. From these statements certain witnesses were selected to retell their stories in 50 public hearings, held around the country during 1996 and early 1997. It has been argued by Wilson that because of the way the TRC was structured these public hearings were 'not conceptualized as having any input into the production of knowledge'.<sup>645</sup> The hearings were instead 'to do with legitimating and recognizing

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<sup>644</sup> Lisa Steffel, Daybook 10 April 1987 – January 1988, WHP, AG2523, Box G1-4, p.10.

<sup>645</sup> R. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, p.41.

people's experiences'.<sup>646</sup> The 'data' on which the TRC's eventual report, published in October 1998, was based came from the initial statements. Wilson shows how this process became increasingly bureaucratized during the TRC's lifespan and the original statement-takers form 'became a checklist'.<sup>647</sup> The public hearings, covered extensively by the national and international media, were then a symbolic space in which South Africans were reconciled with their traumatic pasts. As Wilson noted, 'being authentically South African comes to mean sharing the traumas of apartheid and uniting in the subsequent process of "healing the nation"'.<sup>648</sup> As an institution the TRC was neither wholly judicial nor religious but a mixture. It opened a space 'betwixt and between' the state institutions that endured the negotiated end to apartheid.<sup>649</sup> In the public hearings legal discourses on criminality and victimhood were refracted through the TRC's unique moral framework of understanding the apartheid past.

The relationship between the TRC and its public was not a static one that was established along with the Commission and its mandate. After 5 weeks of public hearings it became apparent to some of those watching and participating that whilst the majority of the witnesses who came before the commission were women they were not testifying to human rights violations they had suffered personally but were rather talking only about the suffering of male relatives or friends<sup>650</sup>. On 19<sup>th</sup> March 1996 the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand held a workshop entitled 'Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. From this workshop there emerged an official submission to the Commission on the importance of integrating a gendered approach to South Africa's past into the commissions work. The submission argued that the Commission was not doing enough to solicit women's own stories of oppression when they came to testify.<sup>651</sup> It was argued that with improved

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<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>650</sup> After five weeks the TRC had heard 204 witnesses, 6/10 were women. Whilst ¾ of their testimony and 88% of male witness testimony concerned abuses to men; only 17% of the female witnesses and 5% of the male witnesses were about abuses to women. Fiona Ross, 'Existing in secret places: Women's testimony in the first five weeks of public hearings of the TRC'. Paper presented at the Fault lines Conference, July 4-5, 1996, Cape Town, pp.1-32.

<sup>651</sup> Beth Goldblatt and Shiela Meintjes, "Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," May 1996, p.17, <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/submit/gender.htm>, (Accessed July 2009).

questioning, statement takers could uncover women's stories, and that in closed women's hearings testimonies would be given.<sup>652</sup> In all of this there was a particular concern that women's experiences of sexual violence at the hands of the state and liberation movements had not been heard. In response the Commission re-trained statement takers to ask more 'probing questions', the human rights violations protocol was modified to include the reminder to women 'tell us what happened to yourself if you were the victim of a gross human rights abuse', and in June of 1996 the Women's special hearings were instituted.<sup>653</sup> Further along in the process of the Human Rights Violation hearings the Commission came to a similar realisation as to the lack of 'youth' voices that were being heard. In this the TRC was guided by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which the South African government had signed in 1995.<sup>654</sup> In light of the CRC's instruction of 'honouring the voice of children', the TRC decided to give children and youth 'the opportunity to express their feelings and relate their experiences as part of the national process of healing'.<sup>655</sup> Four children and youth special hearings, in which space could be made to accommodate youth testimony, were held in 1997, firstly in Durban and Cape Town in May, and Johannesburg and East London in June. As Fiona Ross argues however, these measures assumed 'testimony would follow naturally' should the conditions in the hearings be right. What they did not consider was that the reasons for the silences in women's or youth's speech may have lain outside of the immediate space of the hearings.<sup>656</sup>

The youth hearings were choreographed slightly differently from the normal human rights violation hearings, in that the testimony of children under 18 was given through an intermediary who played recorded interviews to the hearings. Otherwise the

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<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>653</sup> Fiona Ross, "Linguistic bearings and testimonial practices," in *Discourse and Human Rights Violations*, ed. Christine Anthonissen and Jan Blommaert (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), p.109. Three women's hearings were held in Cape Town 8<sup>th</sup> August 1996, in Durban on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1996 and in Johannesburg 29<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

<sup>654</sup> Karin Chubb, *Between Anger and Hope: South Africa's Youth and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), p.22.

<sup>655</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 4 (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998), p.249.

<sup>656</sup> Ross, "Linguistic bearings and testimonial practices," p.110.

rituals remained the same. A candle was lit at the beginning of every hearing, opening and closing prayers were read, and witnesses were asked to take an oath before giving their testimony. Archbishop Desmond Tutu who attended two of the youth hearings, in Cape Town and East London, opened the hearings by highlighting 'how God has used young people at critical points in the histories of different people'.<sup>657</sup> He mentioned, David, Mohammed, Mary and Jesus. The youth hearings also involved musical and drama performances from local schools. The East London hearing was different in that it consisted almost entirely of student representatives from local schools giving their responses to the apartheid past and reconciliation, not individual testimonies of human rights violations.<sup>658</sup>

It has been argued that during the TRC public hearings Christian ideologies of motherhood and a tradition of 'political widowhood' were combined to produce women as 'mother-witnesses'. Meg Samuelson has suggested that, 'the role of the mother-witness was performed by women testifying to the loss of their children, which in turn produced a dominant national narrative of sacrificial redemption, while submerging the myriad of other roles that women played during the struggle'.<sup>659</sup> She acknowledges that this role could be both constraining and enabling.<sup>660</sup> The question here, is how far or in what ways the dominance of the 'mother-witness' position constrained or enabled the testimony of young women activists during the youth hearings. It was argued in the second chapter of this thesis that the special hearing on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 produced this event as the symbolic contribution of youth to the national liberation struggle. In general it has been argued that youth experiences were recounted 'second hand' at the TRC hearings – 'through the tragic stories of parents who lost their children'.<sup>661</sup> Narratives of youth as a current problem, in particular of involvement in crime, also crept in to accounts of their past behavior.<sup>662</sup> In the words of Chubb and Van Dijk, 'apart from

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<sup>657</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/polongwana.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>658</sup> The East London youth hearing is mistakenly labeled on the TRC website as having been held in Pietersburg. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/pburg.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>659</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?: Stories of the South African Transition* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), p.159.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>661</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.275.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

honouring the very significant and special role the youth have played in fighting apartheid, one of the motives for special youth hearings is surely a great and well-founded concern about the future'.<sup>663</sup> It was in this context that the Commission held the special hearings on youth with some trepidation. The Chairman at the first Durban hearing even commented during his closing remarks, 'if one is going to be absolutely honest some of us were not quite sure how valuable this hearing would actually be'.<sup>664</sup>

In the TRC youth hearings prison and detention appeared as an ambiguous honour and it was clear that the criminalisation of the apartheid era had not dissolved in the new South Africa. These difficulties highlight what Foucault has described in another context as 'the political dimension of illegality' and the specific tension between the post-apartheid state's founding myth of resistance to state domination and its need to reconfigure and legitimise that state machinery after 1994.<sup>665</sup> The judgement that the TRC passed upon youth politicisation, criminality and victimhood was one of the ways in which post-apartheid political tensions over illegalities were played-out. As one witness in the Cape Town youth hearing, a former member of the Bonteheuwel Military Wing and the MK put it, 'we knew what we did then, but we do not know where we stand now'.<sup>666</sup>

All the youth hearings included testimony from expert witnesses, often representatives of human rights organisations or psychologists and all of whom spoke of the apartheid state's strategies of criminalising political activity. A context statement, written by Professor Andy Dawes and Professor Pam Reynolds, and read out by high school students at the Cape Town youth hearing explained the high proportion of human rights violations perpetrated against young people:

The actions of the young were criminalised. Protest was outlawed under the States of Emergency that did not distinguish between the treatment of adults and children. The provisions of the Child Care Act and the Criminal Procedure Act

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<sup>663</sup> K. Chubb, *Between Anger and Hope*, p.21.

<sup>664</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/youthdbn.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>665</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.273.

<sup>666</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/williams.htm> (Accessed July 2009); Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 4:pp.278-281..

were abrogated as children were tortured, interrogated, and imprisoned very often, without access to legal counsel, and without the knowledge of their parents. Political protest was re-invented as the crime of Public Violence, giving licence to the State to act with the full force of the violent means at its disposal. Protesting children acquired criminal records which stand to this day.<sup>667</sup>

This appeared before the hearing as part of the accepted factual context for the individual testimonies that would be heard. However, this did not mean the labels of the apartheid state were always resoundingly rejected. Professor Ransom appeared at the Johannesburg youth hearing to discuss the Paediatric Association of South Africa's stance on the detention of children as it was outlined in a 1987 code of practice. The position of the association was however a cautious one,

We believed and still believe that the place of a child is in the home...but the unfortunate fact of life is that children not only in South Africa, but all over the world, become involved in patterns of behaviour which is unacceptable to society, the state is forced to act in these situations.<sup>668</sup>

The professor used the word 'delinquency' so frequently that one of the commissioners commented upon this, 'I think we need to in a sense separate the idea of delinquency from this political conflict that we are dealing with'.<sup>669</sup> That this was not an easy separation was apparent in an exchange between Audrey Coleman, testifying on behalf of the DPSC at the Johannesburg hearing and Commissioner Malan:

Mr Malan: You refer there, this is page 5, you refer in the second paragraph under that heading, to the 50 000 children under the age of 18, that were charged with various crimes. Common charges you say were public violence, arson, stoning of vehicles and occasionally attempted murder.

Ms Coleman: This is what happened to Sithole, yes.

Mr Malan: Now reading it as I've done under the heading 'criminalisation of political activity', it leaves the impression, but I hope I understood you incorrectly, that you see that as political activity? Not?

Ms Coleman: No, it was taking political activity and criminalising political activity.

Mr Malan: Would arson be a crime or would it be political...

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<sup>667</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/polongwa.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>668</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/ransom.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*

Ms Coleman: That is exactly what I'm saying to you, that you take Sithole for example who was charged with attempted murder. That child wasn't a murderer, he didn't even know this teacher, Ngweni and neither did the other fellow that was charged with him. That was the whole tool that they used to depoliticise.

Mr Malan: No, I heard you saying that. My reference really is you put that under one heading, you refer to 50 000 children being charged. You are not saying to us all 50 000 of them were charged really because of political activities and that none of them were involved in criminal activities?<sup>670</sup>

The discussion continued for some time after this. What it highlighted was that the 'political dimension of illegality' in the apartheid era presented a specific problem for the moral framework of the TRC and in particular complicated the victimhood of youth. Wilson has argued that 'the post-1994 regime [was] not able to recover from the crisis of the legal order and the increasing fragmentation (or pluralisation) of justice during the last ten years of apartheid'.<sup>671</sup> Commissioner Mary Burton recognised during the testimony of Dee Dicks, one of the Wynberg Seven, at the Cape Town hearing that,

I notice in your statement that one of the things that you hope can be done is to have your criminal record expunged from your identity and your documents and I think that is something many people have asked us, because on the one hand, they are proud of what they did, it is not a question of wanting that record to be taken away, but they do not want to be seen as having been criminals for the part that they played.<sup>672</sup>

Sandra Adonis, a BMW activist, spoke about the stigma that her husband Jacques had expressed when talking about his detention,

Then he also said to me that he was not, like, kept separately, he was kept with the criminal people that, I mean, robbery and whatever and, like, one of the lawyers came there and as he called to one of the lawyers, they ignored him. They never even gave a glance in his direction which is quite upsetting if you know these are the lawyers that is working with us all the time and you know for a fact that these people know me and now suddenly these people do not, this person does not want to recognise me just because, maybe they think I have done something that is criminal.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/coleman.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>671</sup> R. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, p.160.

<sup>672</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/dicks.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>673</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm> (Accessed July 2009).



This ambivalence extended to many former activists' reappraisal of their time in prison. Dee Dicks gave very emotional testimony, in which she revealed that,

When I was in prison I was able to, it made me strong, and I was able to cope with my situation at that time and I was also fortunate to complete my matric in prison and at the time the question was asked, what did it do to you at the time and I can honestly say that at that time we were heroes, at that time and it, I did not feel that it affected me at that time, but now it seems as if it is getting worse.<sup>674</sup>

Another of the Wynberg Seven, Julian Stubbs, echoed Dee Dicks' sentiments in his testimony to the same hearing,

Yes, as Dee says, after you come out everything is fanfare and photographs and people wanting to know how it was and that type of thing and you handle it because of that...Now looking back it was a terrible time. Actually now consciously thinking about it for this hearing, it was a terrible time.<sup>675</sup>

For many individuals testifying to the TRC the prison appeared as the site of the violation of their human rights. Whilst many still described their own strategies of survival and resistance within prison, these stories were overlaid with the victimhood of detention that the framework of human rights violations inscribed. In the youth hearings detention never appeared as a rite of passage, conversely a number of young activists described detention and participation in the struggle as having interrupted their personal growth into adulthood. Sandra Adonis commented that she had 'not really enjoyed a teenage life'.<sup>676</sup> She went on, 'it is only now that I realise that I have, like, I do not know what it is to go to a bioscope on a Saturday afternoon or even to a disco, like many young people do today or maybe that time as well'.<sup>677</sup> Riefaat Hattas also spoke at the Cape Town hearing, and gave a testimony that alluded to his own experiences as a youth activist but only explicitly described those of his friends, whom he called 'the forgotten comrades'.<sup>678</sup> The 'forgotten comrades' were those who had,

Fought for liberation, who never knew what it was to enjoy life as teenagers. They did not have time to develop their relationships or to participate in sport. Those students whose days comprised of meetings, protest marches, facing

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<sup>674</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/dicks.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>675</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/stubbs.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>676</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>678</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/hattas.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

rubber bullets and often live ammunition, but this was part of the daily struggle against an unjust enemy.<sup>679</sup>

Both Sandra Adonis and Riefaat Hattas compared their own experiences with that of an idealised 'teenage' life. This was something that the commissioners also invoked. A young witness who had lost his eyesight after being shot when playing football with his friends, was described by Commissioner Wildschut as being 'engaged in an activity that is expected of young people'.<sup>680</sup>

Riefaat Hattas described detention as a 'horrid' experience.<sup>681</sup> He commented, 'to tell you the truth, many of us ask us the price that we had to pay for freedom, whether it was worth it in the end'.<sup>682</sup> One of the recommendations from his comrades that Hattas presented to the commission was that 'President Mandela should unveil a special stone dedicated to the forgotten comrades' that should be in Parliament 'so that all people will know our struggle was not in vain'.<sup>683</sup> Sandra Adonis also vocalised her feelings that youth contributions to the struggle had not yet been recognised.<sup>684</sup> Amid tensions over youth criminality and victimhood as they were refracted through the TRC's framework of victim/perpetrator there were gendered responses from both young witnesses and Commissioners.

The youth hearings present a rather more complicated picture of gender relations with regards to the remembering of youth politicisation than the TRC's public hearings have generally been credited with. We can perhaps suggest that the timing of the hearings is significant in this respect. The TRC's human rights violation hearings were part of an ongoing bureaucratic and social process. By the time the youth hearings had been instituted the commissioners had been sensitised to criticisms that they were not 'hearing' the stories of women and young people even when they testified. The final TRC report noted that men between the ages of 13 and 24 made up the majority of victims of killings, torture, abductions and 'severe ill-treatment'. The report also noted,

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<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>680</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/mbewu.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>681</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/hattas.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>684</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

'this can be seen as a reflection of the perceived threat posed by young males to the state, but it is linked with other gendered issues about women and their willingness to testify about their own abuses'.<sup>685</sup> Overall many more young men testified to the TRC than young women; however this did not produce a straightforwardly masculine narrative of youth politicisation. A number of ruptures within the narrative of a masculine youth politics occurred during the youth hearings, especially in response to questions put by commissioners. The Johannesburg youth hearing was especially interesting in this regard. During the testimony of two different witnesses and on different days of the hearing Commissioner Joyce Seroke asked questions which drew attention to a complex picture of gender dynamics in public remembering of youth politicisation.<sup>686</sup>

The first rupture came during the testimony of Nomonde Ntabeni which returned the commission to once more considering the events of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976. Nomonde Ntabeni had been sixteen in 1976 and was shot in her stomach when she was returning from the shops. Nomonde Ntabeni was fairly reticent in giving testimony and was led through her story by questions from Commissioner Seroke. At the very end of her testimony Commissioner Seroke asked a final set of questions:

Ms Seroke: If I may ask you one brief question as at that time I take it, you were a young girl. Were young women in particular armed? The first witness [today] did indicate that at a certain point in struggling with the police who were interfering in schools, he learnt to use explosives. In your case, did young girls begin to fight back as well?

Ms Ntabeni: We would run away, we never attempted to fight the police.

Ms Seroke: Let me put my question in Zulu. I wanted to establish if the girls were also in a position of fighting back, perhaps fight back with stones or bombs like the previous witness who has told us that they would be in possession of explosives. What were the girls up to?

Ms Ntabeni: We often times used stones to fight them.

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<sup>685</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 4:p.259.

<sup>686</sup> Joyce Seroke was during the 1980s the National Secretary and subsequently Vice President of the World-affiliated YWCA.

Ms Seroke: Now on this particular day in question, did you face them head on or did you face the culprit head on, did you have a stone?

Ms Ntabeni: No, I had nothing, I had no stone and I did not even face him head on.<sup>687</sup>

Commissioner Seroke challenged Nomonde Ntabeni's somewhat passive description of her participation on June 16<sup>th</sup>. There is perhaps a hint of frustration in her persistent questioning, 'what were the girls up to?' That she felt compelled to ask this question highlights for us that the TRC was not finding this out as a matter of course. It is also apparent that her questioning potentially undermined Nomonde Ntabeni's victimhood. The details of resistance took the witness outside the moment of her human rights violation and away from a simple victimhood.

The second rupture occurred during the testimony of George Ndlozi who presented a document he had prepared on the role of Self Defence Units in Katorus on the East Rand from mid-1990 up to 1994. As Wilson notes, SDUs were first set up in the 'ungovernable' townships of the 1980s as 'anti-crime' structures, and 'proliferated' after the unbanning in 1990-91.<sup>688</sup> These SDUs 'comprised primarily ANC Youth League members' and operated in 'an extremely localised manner, each controlling perhaps only a street or two'.<sup>689</sup> According to Wilson, after 1994 in some parts of the country, notably the Vaal, in the context of 'few alternatives for economic advancement or political participation' SDUs 'have become criminals as a means of economic survival'.<sup>690</sup> George Ndlozi thus testified in a context of heightened moral ambiguity as to the role and character of SDUs. In his testimony he related the stories of a number of young members of SDUs in Katorus. According to him, 'the most striking theme of the Self Defence Units [was] friendship and comradeship'.<sup>691</sup> George Ndlozi related the story of a thirteen year old SDU, Lucky Mtumkulu, whose life was saved by his Commander, Macashu. According to Ndlozi,

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<sup>687</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/ntabeni.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>688</sup> Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, p.177.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>691</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/ndlozi.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

This wasn't the first person Macashu has saved but you will never hear him talking about those things. He doesn't talk about it but the other boys do. Asked if he was scared to go into enemy territory to rescue friends, he said if they shoot one of our boys, I will always go there, even if they are dead, I will risk it to fetch them.<sup>692</sup>

George Ndlozi presented a picture of young male comradeship, bravery and heroism that he pitched against ideas of the SDU's as 'a bunch of undisciplined comrades or the lost generation'.<sup>693</sup> Instead, he concluded that 'if it were not for them, many of us would not be sitting here today'.<sup>694</sup> Various commissioners questioned him over issues such as the age of SDU members and the appropriateness of their role in defending their community with guns. Commissioner Seroke raised another issue that altered the picture that George Ndlozi had related to the hearing:

Ms Seroke: George were there girl SDU's?

Mr Ndlozi: Yes.

Ms Seroke: And what was their role?

Mr Ndlozi: There were some of them who were, I wouldn't say brave enough because I consider all of them to be brave, there were some of them who used to say we also need to take part, I need to carry an AK47 to defend. I should not be discriminated against because I am female. And there were those who were very important, who played parts in cooking. Although it may look a bit sexist, but they decided that they better cook for people who will be going outside to actually defend the community. So they were all involved.

Ms Seroke: But there were those who also carried AK47's?

Mr Ndlozi: Definitely. Definitely there were those.

Ms Mkhize: Order please, order please.<sup>695</sup>

This exchange reveals something of the processes of gendering that could be contained within remembering youth political participation, especially in relation to the TRC's moral framework of victims and perpetrators. George Ndlozi rejected this framework, acknowledging that SDU members were victims *and* perpetrators. The masculine heroism that combined the two obscured the participation of young women that

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<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>694</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*

apparently both conformed to a gender ideology of the female as private and protected, and the male as public and protector, and challenged it by the taking up of arms themselves.

There were a number of other instances when young women activists appeared before the commission's youth hearings without any prompting. These instances seem to directly contradict suggestions of the marginalisation of young women in youth politics since young womanhood and comradeship were combined, in ways reminiscent of DPSC daybook testimonies. The most striking instance was the testimony of Sandra Adonis that has already been discussed. Sandra Adonis remembered and presented herself as a young woman and a dedicated activist throughout her testimony. She explained her involvement in her school's SRC from the age of fifteen, 'seeing how our Government was handling our people, it hurt me and I decided to get involved'.<sup>696</sup> She described how in late 1985 she found herself as the only member of SRC not detained when one of her fellow pupils, Shaun Magmoet was killed,

Being the only person left of the SRC, I, it was my duty to convey the message to the students and I felt like, you know, being fifteen and also feeling like a mother at the same time, because I was just thinking also what would it have been like if it was me?<sup>697</sup>

She described her eventual arrest by security police after some years of involvement in Bonteheuwel Interschool's Congress and the Bonteheuwel Military Wing, a self-defence unit,

Then I decided to have a bath that specific morning and not just going with the, because I thought to myself, well, Section 29 or what the hell, I do not know, for the next 14 to 15 days or maybe three or four weeks I might not be able to see my family, I might not get clean clothes. So, well, I will take a bath. Whilst I was in the bath he [Captain Van Brackel] started shouting from the outside, if you do not finish up now, I will come in there and I will fetch you and I said to him and then I realised that this door could not lock. I said to him, if you dare enter this bathroom I will certainly lay charges against you for attempted rape, because I do not have any clothes on.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*

Sandra Adonis suggested an awareness of her particular position as a woman activist in the eyes of the police, commenting later in her testimony, 'I was, like, trying to hit back at him all the time, but also in a very gentle way not have him think that this is a stubborn woman, because once you show stubbornness, they would show you no mercy'.<sup>699</sup> Her testimony had much in common with the testimonies heard at the TRC special hearings for women. Yet, it was also unique, as throughout she returned to identifying herself as a 'youth'. Her final comments were, 'I have never ever hear[d] anybody say anything in recognition to the youth of that time. In fact, this is the first time that I have seen there are some people who are interested in who we were and who we are now. Thank you'.<sup>700</sup> Sandra Adonis saw herself as having been forgotten in the new South Africa, like Reifaat Hattas who testified in the same Cape Town hearing.

Reifaat Hattas also suggested an integrated role for young women within youth politics. When he was asked to read the names of his 'forgotten comrades' he began with a young woman,

The first one is Celeste Naidoo. I have the greatest respect for her, because she was the one who trained me. She was my mentor and all things that I achieved in life was because of what she taught me and I want to tell the whole world that the principles that Celeste taught me, it is still with me and I will never forget those principles and one of those principles was that you stay loyal to your comrades. No matter where you go one day or what you become, you do not forget your roots where you come from and you serve your comrades.<sup>701</sup>

It is difficult to explain the apparent challenge these testimonies present to the dominant narratives of the TRC but we can perhaps understand them as different from most TRC testimonies in that they appear driven by a sense of having been forgotten, of being continually silenced in post-apartheid South Africa. A number of witnesses appeared on behalf of friends. Reifaat Hattas explained his spokesman role; his comrades 'did not want to come forward, because they want to forget everything that happened'.<sup>702</sup> They also appeared to reject notions of reconciliation as irrelevant to them personally.

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<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>701</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/hattas.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*

Richard A. Wilson has argued that the processes of the TRC, from the involvement of churches in statement taking to the structuring of HRV hearings worked 'in such a way that any expression of a desire for revenge by victims would seem out of place'.<sup>703</sup> He argues that 'virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation were so loudly and roundly applauded that emotions of vengeance, hatred and bitterness were rendered unacceptable, an ugly intrusion on a peaceful, healing process.'<sup>704</sup> This was not to say that expressions of revenge and bitterness did not emerge during people's testimony, and indeed the special youth hearings bear this out. Wilson suggests that for the first six months of public hearings commissioners asked each witness that appeared whether they forgave the perpetrator but they 'received so many angry and outraged responses that they made a policy decision to desist from asking such questions directly'.<sup>705</sup> However, he maintains that 'the pressure to forsake revenge always remained implicit and unwavering'.<sup>706</sup>

These particular youth testimonies were therefore unusual in more ways than one. In Cape Town Sandra Adonis commented, 'just like these very Boers who have been interrogating us and torturing us, is trying to say to us today, we are sorry, we did not mean that. We do not need their apologies. Well, I do not need them'.<sup>707</sup> Reifaat Hattas was similarly uncompromising, 'the National Party should take responsibility for destroying and ruining our lives'.<sup>708</sup> In Johannesburg Nomonde Ntabeni described wanting to retaliate after being shot. Asked if she still had 'that hatred'? She replied, 'Yes, I do, but it has subsided over time'.<sup>709</sup> At the Durban hearing the evidence of a number of young witnesses under the age of 18 was given through an intermediary. These testimonies certainly did not fit with the commission's ideals of reconciliation. One 13 year old girl ended her testimony in which she related the murder of her father by IFP supporters with the statement, 'since that day I vowed to revenge my father's

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<sup>703</sup> Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, p.120.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>706</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>707</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>708</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/hattas.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>709</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/ntabeni.htm> (Accessed July 2009).



death, and remember I am only 13 now'.<sup>710</sup> Another 15 year old girls' testimony ended, 'I still harbour hatred and fear for those that have committed these acts'.<sup>711</sup>

When the commissioners could, they confronted such sentiments. Commissioner Mkhize ended Nomonde Ntabeni's testimony with the following gentle admonishment, 'we hope that what happened to you, won't make you aspire for revenge and all the things which will be really living up to the expectation of the perpetrator, making you to be a bad person'.<sup>712</sup> Sandra Adonis was praised for making the admission she did things in the BMW that she was 'not proud of'.<sup>713</sup> However, in the instance of testimony given in camera, no such question responses were possible. When it came to the written report, the commission acknowledged and quoted many of the expressions of anger and revenge that had been heard during the youth hearings. They were included in a section on the 'psychological effects of exposure to human rights violations'.<sup>714</sup> The report stated that 'children may feel hatred, bitterness, and fear towards society and institutions that represent authority'.<sup>715</sup> The expressions of anger and revenge were thus pathologised and explained as part of youth victimhood. In contrast the conclusions of the chapter on children and youth seemed to suggest an elision of heroism and reconciliation:

The period of struggle also nurtured resilience, wisdom, leadership and tolerance. Many young people rose above the suffering they experienced. Some defiantly and bravely saw themselves as fighting for the freedom of their people – sacrificing education and opportunities for self-improvement and joining liberation armies and resistance movements.

Many of these young people have become men and women of extraordinary calibre. Despite their suffering, they have shown extraordinary generosity and tolerance and have reached out to their former oppressors in a spirit of reconciliation.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>710</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/youthdbn.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>712</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/ntabeni.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>713</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>714</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 4:p.270.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:pp.276-277.

This chapter has examined three different historical moments at which youth politicisation was discussed and recorded. In each moment it has been shown that different power relations and material conditions have shaped what was sayable for young South Africans themselves and those seeking to represent them. In each moment it is apparent that the gendering of youth politics has been instrumental both for those seeking to condemn and to absolve the actions of the young. In other words, the criminalisation and the victimhood of youth have both involved significant gendering of that category. Put crudely, the state's drive to criminalise youth politicisation involved the masculinisation of its object of control, often young women were central to the creation of this object. It was within this masculinisation that the activism of young women was seen and recorded. The politicisation of young women appears to have been more sayable when they were drawn into the state's criminalisation practices, for example during the peak period for the detention of young people from 1986-1989. The DPSC recorded the testimony of young female members of COSAS after they had been detained. In the TRC it was apparent that the end of apartheid had not reversed the previous meanings of detention. The criminalisation of youth politicisation had become bound up in the negotiated end to apartheid and was not easily resolved in the TRC's hearings. Despite a dominant gender script of the 'mother-son' victims of apartheid, different versions of youth victimhood were sayable during the public hearings. In the TRC's final report however anything that did not fit into a narrative of redemption and reconciliation was subsumed. It is suggested here that the social reality of youth politicisation was infinitely more complex than any of these sources record it as. We should remain conscious of what has emerged from the 'domain of the sayable' as rooted within that context. The final chapter explores the narratives of youth politicisation that have emerged through women's struggle autobiographies and oral histories and their possibilities and limitations.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Women's auto/biographies of the struggle, 1985-2007

*Standing up for what you believe can lead to being written out, not just out of history but out of herstory, not just by men but by women.<sup>717</sup>*

Auto/biography and history, as genres of writing and academic practices, are intertwined in particular ways in South Africa's recent past.<sup>718</sup> This chapter examines the production of women's auto/biography in South Africa through published auto/biographies, the academic practice of oral history collection and the more recent establishment of post-apartheid museum exhibitions. The chapter draws from the work of historians and literary critics who have explored the connections between auto/biography and history. Their ideas will be considered briefly here before taking a closer look at auto/biography as a means through which gendered discourses of the liberation struggle are reproduced and challenged. The chapter will consider when and how women have had access to formal methods of telling their life stories and what they have chosen to say in these instances. The chapter considers three decades, the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s as distinct periods in which different economies of knowledge operated to tie South African women into local and global historical narratives when they spoke or wrote their lives.

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<sup>717</sup> Pregs Govender, *Love and courage a story of insubordination* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2007), p.139.

<sup>718</sup> The use of 'auto/biography' is borrowed from Laura Marcus. Marcus argues that distinctions between autobiography and biography are unhelpful since recounting one's own life 'almost inevitably entails writing the life of another' and that the writing of another's life 'must surely entail the biographer's identification with his or her subject'. Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp.272-273; Rasool has added to this that 'the writing of another's life almost inevitably means that one enters into the existence of autobiographical texts, of narrations of the self on the part of the subject'. Ciraj Rasool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa" (University of the Western Cape, 2004), p.45. On a simplistic level all of the women's autobiographies considered in this chapter involve biographical sketches of other women activists - especially young women. Secondly, in a more theoretical sense I have found 'auto/biography' useful for thinking about the nature of oral histories and interviews.

The auto/biographies considered in this chapter are framed by ideas of communication between generations. Generation seemed to offer these women authors a significant means of belonging to the liberation struggle. At times generation conferred their authority to speak or write, and affected the reception of their text. Wider debates on motherism, feminism and sexism have clearly informed women's autobiographical selves.<sup>719</sup> The shifting economies of knowledge, from the imperatives of fighting the liberation struggle in exile through to the TRC's compulsion to speak, have significantly shaped notions of young women's political activism. Women's youthful activism is often lacking in legitimacy in these texts with two notable exceptions. Caesarina Kona Makhoere's prison memoir stands out as producing an authoritative narrative of a young woman activist and Sibongile Mkhabela's recent autobiography attributes great importance to her own youth activism. More often however, young women have been contained within the position of a daughter of the struggle.

Ciraj Rassool has argued for a greater awareness of the ways in which history and auto/biographical projects are intimately constructed and do not straightforwardly tell a life that was lived. For Rassool, 'it is critical to understand different forms of biographical mediation as well as the uses to which biographies have been put'.<sup>720</sup> Rassool outlines an enduring but changing relationship between auto/biographical practices, social history as an academic discipline and political struggles in South Africa. He argues that auto/biography first became a political tool of the ANC in the 1950s during the Treason Trial, with the Treason Trial Defence Fund acting as an 'important institution in the production of solidarity biography'.<sup>721</sup> Following this 'political biography went on to acquire an important position in international solidarity work and political mobilization through a variety of ANC-aligned struggle histories produced in exile in the 1960s and 1970s'.<sup>722</sup> Before 1990, due to censorship and the 'small size of the book buying market' in South Africa most struggle auto/biographies

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<sup>719</sup> For a discussion of these debates see: Cheryl Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, no. 3 (September 1995): pp.417-437.

<sup>720</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.5.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209.

were published outside the country.<sup>723</sup> Rassool identifies the publishing work of the IDAF as 'perhaps the most significant'.<sup>724</sup> Desiree Lewis has also argued that 'a key aim of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was to codify, distribute and in certain cases produce mediating and testimonial texts that could effectively transmit the stories of apartheid to readers who were physically, politically and culturally very far away from it'.<sup>725</sup> She points out that within such texts 'biography can be an especially compelling genre' and was widely used in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>726</sup> Elaine Unterhalter has identified that the struggle produced a 'flowering of a particular form of personal political narrative' with 48 examples of struggle auto/biographies published between 1948 and 1994, and a further 18 between 1994 and 1999.<sup>727</sup> Unterhalter notes that 'women's writing comprises approximately one third of the work in this genre' but that only a tiny number (9 out of her list of 68) were written by African women, numerically the largest group in South Africa's population.<sup>728</sup> An issue explored below is that most of these African women's auto/biographies were published by feminist presses, whereas for example Ruth First, a white woman activist's prison memoir was published by the mainstream press, Penguin.

Lewis has commented that 'the telling of stories of apartheid through narratives of individual lives is revealing not so much about these lives or apartheid, as it is about the codification of apartheid as spectacle and about the way this codification has stereotyped black South African subjects'.<sup>729</sup> Certainly the means of production, publication and circulation of the women's auto/biographies considered below are crucial for understanding their intended and possible meanings. Similarly, Elaine Unterhalter has argued that whilst struggle auto/biographies 'are about the importance of personal voice, it is often difficult to disentangle the particular personal perspective,

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<sup>723</sup> Elaine Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation: Heroic Masculinity in South African Autobiographical Writing of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle," *European Journal of Development Research* 12, no. 2 (December 2000): p.160.

<sup>724</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.209.

<sup>725</sup> Desiree Lewis, "Constructing Lives: Black South African Women and Biography Under Apartheid," in *Apartheid Narratives*, ed. Nahem Yousaf (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2001), p.163.

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>727</sup> Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation," p.159.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

<sup>729</sup> Lewis, "Constructing Lives: Black South African Women and Biography Under Apartheid," p.188.

from the material and discursive forms of the anti-apartheid struggle and its aftermath in which this voice is set'.<sup>730</sup> She argues that many of the struggle auto/biographies 'were published because they form part of a grand narrative with identifiable places, for example Robben Island, and key moments of the anti-apartheid struggle like the student uprising of 1976'.<sup>731</sup> It has thus been recognised that such auto/biographies were entangled with the dynamics of the liberation struggle. Ciraj Rassool has also argued that auto/biographical writings in South Africa were and are importantly interlinked with the academic practice of history.

Rassool argues that within South African academic institutions in the 1970s 'it was biographical research in the form of the collection of life stories, which lay at the heart of attempts by social historians to democratize the processes of historical construction'.<sup>732</sup> In this 'history from below' the collected life histories of ordinary people 'tended to be viewed as windows on large, collective social processes'.<sup>733</sup> (It is interesting that 'window cases' was also the way in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission explained its selection of certain individuals to give public testimony). Whilst such an approach gave a place to the life stories of ordinary people, the historian was still a necessary interpreter and author; people's life stories were understood as 'prior to history'.<sup>734</sup>

Rassool suggests that in the 1980s 'in political movements and in the academy, "people's history" emerged as an attempt to connect the search for hidden history into the struggles for "people's power" and "people's education"'.<sup>735</sup> The University of the Western Cape was particularly important as an institution which encouraged the idea of 'barefoot historians'.<sup>736</sup> Rassool is again critical of the unproblematic use of biography within such history and following Jenny Robinson he argues these resistance histories

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<sup>730</sup> Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation," p.160.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>732</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.114.

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, p.168.

<sup>736</sup> This idea was an adaptation of the 'barefoot doctors' instituted by Mao in China. The idea was that intellectuals should belong to and benefit their community and not be isolated within academia.

were always peopled with 'coherent and confrontational subjects'.<sup>737</sup> He sees in these approaches a 'compound modernism' which he describes as,

Involving an encounter between modernist historical methods – of the recovery of lost histories through constructing an incremental chronological narrative and placing new facts on record – with modernist imaginaries of political institutions and national or local leaders, or individuals understood as bearers of pre-determined group identities.<sup>738</sup>

This thesis has attempted to recognise such criticisms and look at these histories as another site for the creation and contestation of subjects like youth, woman and activist. The auto/biographies in this chapter are considered in the same way. Finally, Rassool notes a further shift in the mid-1990s when 'modes of biographic narration were incorporated into the rituals of governance, political transformation and public policy'.<sup>739</sup> For example, he sees biographic narration at the heart of the TRC, land claim processes and the acquisition of demobilization gratuities or integration into the new armed forces for former guerrilla combatants.<sup>740</sup> Also emerging in the 1990s was a discourse of 'heroic leaders', which in particular focused upon Nelson Mandela as the individual embodiment of the history of the South African nation.

The gendering of the processes that Rassool and others have outlined has also been interesting. Mary Evans has argued that there has emerged in the twentieth century what she terms a 'male form' of auto/biography that can be written by men or women.<sup>741</sup> This 'male form' she argues is chronological, with the subject first introduced to us in the context of their original family, and throughout which the 'personal' life is separated from the subject's public 'works' or 'career'.<sup>742</sup> Evans states that 'the masculine or masculinist mode of biography chooses to assume that subjects of biography are in some absolute sense in control of their lives'.<sup>743</sup> She also argues that auto/biography should be

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<sup>737</sup> Jenny Robinson, "(Dis)locating Historical Narrative: Writing, Space and Gender in South African Social History," *South African Historical Journal* 30 (May 1994): p.149.; Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.169.

<sup>738</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.191.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194.

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.250-253.

<sup>741</sup> Mary Evans, "Masculine and Feminine Biography," in *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*, ed. David Ellis (London: Pluto Press, 1993), p.109.

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.109-110.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, p.112.

understood 'less as a passive product and much more as an explicit intervention in its author's life'.<sup>744</sup> In this chapter the production and reception of auto/biographical writing and speaking is understood to be a powerful site for the reproduction and contestation of gender ideologies. In this I follow the work of Elaine Unterhalter on South African struggle auto/biographies.

Unterhalter has examined struggle auto/biographies as a means through which a particular version of 'heroic masculinity' has been produced in South Africa. She argues that in struggle auto/biographies written by men 'masculinity is linked with the work of building the nation, living in the struggle, and making a commitment to history'.<sup>745</sup> She goes on,

While heroic masculinity implies autonomy, male comradeship, and commitment, it considers femininity in certain very limited ways. Femininity may be an absent quality, in that women are seen to be like men. Or it may be an overemphasised feature, in that women are portrayed as more heroic than men, or the opposite of the 'hard' men of the struggle, symbolising the 'soft' world they leave behind. All these portrayals of women serve to highlight the commitment of men even further.<sup>746</sup>

The rest of this chapter considers the auto/biographies produced by black South African women in three decades, the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. It explores how notions of generation and age mediate women's discussions of gender, race and class. How youth and youth activism figure in these narratives becomes important in the light of the close connections outlined above between auto/biography and the production of history in South Africa.

### **I. 1980s: Motherism, the International Audience and Feminist Publishers.**

Desiree Lewis has noted that 'biographical productions that dealt specifically with black subjects' responses to apartheid burgeoned during the late seventies and early

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<sup>744</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>745</sup> Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation," p.172.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*



eighties'.<sup>747</sup> A number of black women's mediated life-stories were published in 1980, including Carol Hermer's *The Diary of Maria Tholo* and Elsa Joubert's *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena*. I use the term 'mediated life stories' because these projects were neither straightforward biography nor autobiography but blurred the voices of writer and teller in a combination of journalism and fiction. Short biographies were also being used in anti-apartheid campaigns. Published in 1985 by the Sached Trust was a book containing a number of short 'portrait' interviews with women workers and trade unionists, *Working Women: A portrait of South Africa's black women workers*. The back-cover stated that within the book 'Strong voices speak out against women's oppression. The book shows women challenging the government, the bosses, and their own husbands'.<sup>748</sup> These women's stories were thus framed by feminism even if they made no such claims themselves. Most of the auto/biographies written by black South African women and published in the 1980s were produced by feminist publishers, based in London and the United States and were most often reviewed by feminist academics. We can only wonder at the possible mediating effects on readership and readings that this had on international audiences. Aside from this it is somewhat paradoxical that it was only through the international feminist movement that formal spaces were created for these women's stories, considering the status of feminism often considered as a 'divisive' ideology within South Africa's liberation struggle for most of the 1980s.

In 1985 Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* was the first of a number of black South African women's autobiographies published by the London-based Women's Press. In 1981 a South African political exile Ros de Lanerolle had taken over as managing director of The Women's Press and for the next ten years 'presided over an important reorientation of the press' identity towards writing from the developing world'.<sup>749</sup> In this, it has been argued, The Women's Press was responding to criticisms that black women (along with working class and lesbian women) were being marginalised within global feminist politics.<sup>750</sup> As part of this project The Women's

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<sup>747</sup> Lewis, "Constructing Lives: Black South African Women and Biography Under Apartheid," p.164.

<sup>748</sup> Sached Trust, *Working Women* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1985).

<sup>749</sup> Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (London: Pluto, 2004), pp.6, 45, 71.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

Press aimed to adopt a more collaborative approach to commissioning, editing and marketing.<sup>751</sup> The editor of *Call Me Woman*, Marsaili Cameron has said of the multiple rewrites that produced the final manuscript that editing had been, in this case, a 'truly shared project'.<sup>752</sup> It was also de Lanerolle's aim to encourage new writers through its promotion of black women's writing: 'our readers are our writers and our writers are our readers!'<sup>753</sup> After *Call Me Woman*, the Women's Press went on to publish another four autobiographies written by black South African women.

Struggle autobiographies had until this point focused upon male leaders. Only one autobiography by a black South African woman, Noni Jabavu's *The Ochre People* had been previously published in 1963.<sup>754</sup> Elaine Unterhalter has argued that male struggle autobiographies have masculinised narratives of the liberation struggle. Desiree Lewis argued concurrently that *Call Me Woman* did not challenge these dominant gender ideologies of women's position within politics since:

Much of Kuzwayo's representation of women's roles in political struggles and their recourse to familial identities reveals how subjects are interpellated into domestic and gendered spaces even when their political activity appears to be emphatically communal or national. The persistence of the family and home as metaphoric sites for women's self-realisation is a mark of the inevitable entanglement of a domestic hierarchy with broader public roles and spaces for women as citizens.<sup>755</sup>

In this interpretation of *Call Me Woman* the issue of the conservatism of motherism is what feminist academics have been interested in. Lewis notes that for Ellen Kuzwayo the title of mother is a 'validating label' and a way of 'elevating' the status of women she admires.<sup>756</sup> The most obvious example of this comes in the opening pages of *Call Me Woman* with Kuzwayo's discussion of the letter she received from her imprisoned friend Deborah Matshoba. As discussed in chapter three of this thesis Ellen Kuzwayo recalls how she got to know Deborah Matshoba through the latter's membership of the

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<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>752</sup> Marsaili Cameron, "What the hell is feminist editing?", in *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielsen (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.125.

<sup>753</sup> Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*, p.76.

<sup>754</sup> Noni Jabavu, *The Ochre People. Scenes from a South African Life* (London: John Murray, 1963).

<sup>755</sup> Desiree Lewis, "Gender myths and citizenship in two autobiographies by South African women," *Agenda* 40 (1999): p.42.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

YWCA as a young woman. Kuzwayo goes on to celebrate this letter as a measure of the 'strength, calibre and outstanding personality of many black women'.<sup>757</sup> In-between is an important passage revealing Deborah Matshoba's transformation in Ellen Kuzwayo's eyes:

Debra was a member of the Young Women's Christian Association youth club when I was General Secretary of the Association from 1964 to 1976. She was an active and committed member, and in the course of time became Chairman [sic] of the Youth Department of the YWCA. In these early years, although a cheerful person and an asset to the Association in many ways, Debra did not display any special courage or strength. These qualities surfaced at the time of her detention when she was no more Debra Matshoba but Debra Mabale, married and the mother of a lovely bouncy boy aged between two and three years.<sup>758</sup>

The coincidence of motherhood and detention are accorded equal weight by Ellen Kuzwayo in Deborah Matshoba's development. What is most interesting for us here is not necessarily the conservatism or otherwise of this elevation of motherhood but the way in which the importance of motherhood mediates Kuzwayo's portrayal of a young woman's activism as nothing 'special'. The importance accorded detention is also interesting. All of the autobiographies written by black women in the 1980s included a focus upon a period of detention. It is arguable that detention provided these women with the moral and political authority to write and publishers with a market.<sup>759</sup>

In *Call Me Woman* Ellen Kuzwayo adopts a particular position as spokesperson for the youth of South Africa through the authority of her motherhood, generational status and expertise as a trained social worker. This position is reinforced through events recounted in her autobiography. In chapter two of this thesis it was seen how Kuzwayo was also given such a position in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's special hearing on the events of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976. In *Call Me Woman* she recalls being asked by Ernst Wentzel to testify on behalf of the eleven young accused in the SSRC sedition trial. Having just been released from detention herself and having had no contact with

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<sup>757</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1985), p.4.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

<sup>759</sup> See Gready for the argument that detention accorded white political activists with the authority to write. Paul Gready, *Writing as Resistance: Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile, and Homecoming from Apartheid South Africa* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2003), p.275.

the eleven accused Ellen Kuzwayo writes that she was at first confused by his request and refused to testify. However, Advocate Wentzel 'did not give up':

His last words to me were: 'I approached you because I have great fears about the outcome of the sentence. I appealed to you in the firm belief that you are the only person who would bring home to the judge the truth about the conditions and circumstances which contribute to the seemingly negative behaviour of youth in Soweto'...I turned to Advocate Wentzel saying, 'If I am the last and only person you placed your hopes on for this case, in the name of the black child, I have no choice but to plead in mitigation for their safety and my conscience. If they get life imprisonment or capital punishment after I refused to assist, I will carry a guilt feeling to my dying day'.<sup>760</sup>

In this way Ellen Kuzwayo is asked to play the position of mother and representative of the Soweto community and feels compelled to accept. She recalled the reaction of Dan Montisisi's father after her testimony as 'all he said to me was, "You are not an ordinary woman, you pleaded like a man, only a man could speak the way you did". Before I could respond or ask a question, he was kissing me and thanking me'.<sup>761</sup> The role conferred on her was that of extraordinary woman or honorary man and involved her speaking for the youth of Soweto. The eleven accused did not speak in their own defence during the trial.

Ellen Kuzwayo explicitly rejected and wrote against the apartheid state's judgement of her that was implicit in its choice to imprison her, in a chapter entitled, 'How the State Sees Me'. Kuzwayo was detained between 19<sup>th</sup> October 1977 and 13<sup>th</sup> March 1978 under Section 10 and was never given a reason for her detention, nor charged with any offence. She proudly recalls moments when she was able to embarrass her captors, for example after persistently polite and gracious behavior towards the two black security policewomen assigned to guard her hospital bed after an operation, 'they suddenly burst out saying they did not see why they had to guard over such a respectable adult person'.<sup>762</sup> Kuzwayo thus aims to undermine how it is that the 'State sees her'. When she was detained Kuzwayo was the only woman member of the Committee of Ten all of whom had been arrested but during her detention it was her age which marked

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<sup>760</sup> Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*, p.225-6.

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.

her out. Her fellow Section 10 detainees Thenjiwe Mtintso, Mathabo Pharase and Rebecca Musi were 'all young girls of my children's age'.<sup>763</sup> She also recalls the 'perpetual pain' of hearing young girls aged from 12 to 18 years detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act in the neighboring cells but finding herself 'with absolutely nothing to offer them'.<sup>764</sup> Young women thus also appear as absent victims in her account of detention. Kuzwayo opens her chapter in the then present by commenting:

As I write this chapter in 1983, I am sitting in full view of the Atlantic Ocean, at a point where I can raise my eyes and catch a glimpse of Robben Island where many of the political prisoners from the black community are still serving jail sentences, ranging from twelve years to life imprisonment. The irony of it all!<sup>765</sup>

From the outset, Kuzwayo thus frames her own detention, and that of the other women she describes, through the more famous site of Robben Island, on which only male prisoners were detained. This is a subtle reminder of the equivalence of women and men's experiences of detention; a way for Kuzwayo to assert such an equivalence in her reader's mind.

When describing her fellow detainees Kuzwayo recalls their daily lives together and their kindnesses, the autobiography in these passages emerges as a means of communication with these lost friends – brought together but then separated by participation in the liberation struggle. Ellen Kuzwayo recalls her admiration for Thenjiwe Mtintso and 'the joy and peace of mind we derived from some of her previous experiences which she shared with us'.<sup>766</sup> Mtintso had already at that time been restricted under Sections 6, 10 and 22 on previous occasions. It is also in these passages that we see *Call Me Woman* as not just an autobiographical project but a biography of women in the struggle. Thenjiwe Mtintso is described as 'a woman of small stature but strong moral fibre'. Kuzwayo confides that,

I never had the opportunity to share these deep-seated sentiments with her before we parted at the Fort. It is my ardent wish that she will get access to this book somewhere, sometime and accept these humble words of appreciation. If that is not possible, then I hope that her son, Lumumba, whom she spoke of with deep

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<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209.

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid.*, p.203.

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

longing when in detention, will come to know of his mother's contribution from this book. Keep it up Thenjiwe, wherever you are.<sup>767</sup>

In this passage Thenjiwe Mthintso's position, like Deborah Matshoba's, as a young woman activist is mediated by her motherhood.

Two other South African women's autobiographies were subsequently published by The Women's Press in the 1980s: Caesarina Kona Makhoere's *No Child's Play, in prison under apartheid* in 1988 and Emma Mashinini's *Strikes have followed me all my life* in 1989. The two were markedly different in tone and content, but both involved a significant focus upon detention. Caesarina Kona Makhoere's book concentrated solely upon her imprisonment in apartheid jail, only the first six pages relate Makhoere's life before her detention. Makhoere was only 21 when she was detained in 1976 and in this respect she is an unusual political autobiographer. Her endeavor to publish a memoir of her prison experiences was supported by the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture, whom she thanked in a brief acknowledgments page. Also thanked was the artist and anti-apartheid activist Judy Seidman, 'whose patience, hard work, generosity and direction inspired and birthed *No Child's Play*'.<sup>768</sup> Aside from these brief lines there is no mention of the act of writing in *No Child's Play* and Makhoere's prose is free from the reflections of a self-conscious, remembering author. As Dorothy Driver put it in a 1991 review 'the narrative past is not accorded its pastness'.<sup>769</sup> Driver goes on to suggest that 'For Makhoere, the past is not in question: her eyes are constantly on the present as it is being hastened towards the future. Self-questioning seems to be politically inappropriate, as does a critique of the Black Consciousness that structures her thinking'.<sup>770</sup> Driver suggests this is a marker of Makhoere's generation. Comparing her book to the self-reflexivity of Emma Mashinini she suggests that Makhoere's autobiography 'belongs to the child's generation, rather than the mother's'.<sup>771</sup> Makhoere's uncompromising, combative writing style and the fact of her arrest for

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<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211.

<sup>768</sup> Caesarina Kona Makhoere, *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid* (London: Women's Press, 1988).

<sup>769</sup> Dorothy Driver, "Imagined Selves, (Un)imagined Marginalities," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 2 (1991): p.350.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, p.353.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p.348.

planning to join the MK in 1976, means that she is seen as a member of the Soweto generation. It seems it is this that makes her a child rather than a mother, despite the fact that she had a son at the age of 16.

Makhoere's brief description of her involvement in anti-apartheid politics before her arrest is of her active participation on 'the streets' and in violent confrontation. She says of her father who was a policeman, and who eventually revealed her whereabouts to the security police,

At times he would look at me, shake his head, and say, 'I'm always expecting a white policeman to say, "Come and pick up your daughter's body."' Irrespective of that though, he never said, 'Don't do it'. He knew I was on the streets, organising and fighting, opposing the system. He knew I was in the leadership in the fight against Bantu education in particular, and the anti-apartheid struggle in general.<sup>772</sup>

There emerges from her writing a clear sense of a collective student identity. Makhoere attended the Vlakfontein Technical High School, in Mamelodi. She describes June 17<sup>th</sup> 1976: 'We felt we were part of the murdered, wounded and arrested, we were one, and they were our brothers and sisters'.<sup>773</sup> David Schalkwyk has noted a similar 'uncritical insistence on the unshakable solidarity of her prison community'.<sup>774</sup> Another reviewer has suggested that Makhoere's autobiography is an example of an 'aesthetic' of resistance.<sup>775</sup> Certainly it is overtly political. The first page of the book reproduces the 1955 Freedom Charter. Interestingly, Makhoere's representation of her imprisonment as a narrative of direct confrontations with apartheid is reminiscent of the DPSC daybook narratives discussed in chapter four of this thesis. Makhoere made it clear that she saw her imprisonment as a direct challenge: 'They had the idea that putting us in prison would solve the problem, keep us quiet; it surprised them that even in prison we said 'no' to the apartheid regime'.<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>772</sup> Makhoere, *No Child's Play*, p.1.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>774</sup> David Schalkwyk, "Chronotypes of the self in the writings of women political prisoners in South Africa," in *Apartheid Narratives*, ed. Nahem Yousaf (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2001), p.34.

<sup>775</sup> Gitahi Gititi, "Self and Society in Testimonial Literature: Caesarina Kona Makhoere's *No Child's Play*: In Prison Under Apartheid," *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 3 (1991): 42-49.

<sup>776</sup> Makhoere, *No Child's Play*, p.47.

Caesarina Kona Makhoere positions herself as an anti-apartheid activist and rarely as a young woman. However, there are moments when her womanhood is seen to enhance her or another activist's status. Again, through its portraits of her fellow prisoners *No Child's Play* acts as a biography of women in the struggle. Makhoere devotes most attention to Thandi Modise whom she met when both were detained in Pretoria Central Prison. Makhoere describes her excitement on finding out that Thandi Modise was an MK cadre, trained in Angola: 'I was excited – a trained MK cadre and a woman!' The two women were able to communicate with each other by shouting from their cells, but both were held in solitary. Caesarina Kona Makhoere, intent on seeing her new friend face to face, describes one day running away from her guards when she was taken out for exercise and standing outside Modise's cell,

I greeted her. It was good seeing this beautiful comrade, one of our heroines. We the generation of 1976, we admire the heroes and heroines of Umkhonto We Sizwe, the MK. I admired what Thandi had done, breaking away from the traditional role of the female in our society of supporting the male. Thandi Modise – a fully fledged soldier of the people.<sup>777</sup>

Makhoere presents an image of the struggle against apartheid as collective but hierarchical. Her own position is that of the 'generation of 1976'; Thandi Modise had reached the pinnacle of achievement as an MK soldier 'of the people', which was especially remarkable for a woman.

Makhoere's other portraits of her fellow prisoner's are sparse descriptions, usually detailing their age, family circumstances, address and the reason for their arrest. For example, her description of Sibongile Mthembu (the SSRC activist, Sibongile Mkhabela after her marriage):

Sibongile Bongi Mthembu was a quiet, soft-spoken person in her twenties. She was arrested in 1977 and imprisoned for two years for sedition in May 1979. She was the only woman; seven out of the 11 accused were discharged and four were sentenced to either two or four years. During 1976 she was an activist in Soweto and was one of the executive members of the SSRC. Her home was in Dlamini One, a district of Soweto.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>777</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.88-89.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, p.89.



Makhoere's aim seems to be to celebrate women activists, with a view to inspiring participation. She states, 'The pillars of the struggle have always been the women, even though we were never given the accolades we deserved. We have to do it now and leave a strong heritage for future generations. We have to carry the flag of the sisters high.'<sup>779</sup>

An idea of the autobiography as a means to communicate with future generations is particularly strong in Emma Mashinini's *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*. In a preface Emma Mashinini set out the story of how she came to write her autobiography. Early on in her political career, after setting up the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA), Mashinini's union colleagues urged her to write about her founding role. It was not until much later, after a period in detention, and when working on a film with Joyce Seroke and Betty Wolpert called *Mama I'm Crying*, that 'Betty finally persuaded me of the importance of telling my story'.<sup>780</sup> Mashinini accorded Betty Wolpert a central role in the production of the book, and its origins as oral reminiscences highlight the nature of this autobiography as a collaborative, conversational project.

During the shooting of the film, she [Ms Wolpert] interviewed me and recorded my story on every possible occasion, even on aeroplane journeys. She would then post the tapes to Ruth Vaughan, her collaborator in London, who would rapidly transcribe them so that I could immediately work on the rough draft. With time I gained confidence and got into the groove of writing chapters myself. It was Betty who took my manuscript to The Women's Press, and it was at her house in London that I completed the final draft and worked with my editor, Alison Mansbridge.<sup>781</sup>

Later on in the book, Emma Mashinini remembered that speaking about her experience of prison was very difficult for her and that the film and autobiography had enabled her to communicate with her children:

For a long time I didn't talk to my family about my prison experiences. Neither Dudu nor Molly knew about many of the things I had been through until they saw me in *Mama I'm Crying*, telling of the terrible time I could not remember

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<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>780</sup> Emma Mashinini, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography* (London: Women's Press, 1989), p.xvi.

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.*

Dudu's name. They kept saying, 'Mom, you never told us about this.' They didn't even know about my forgetting Dudu's name. This book will serve as a living memory of the evil of the apartheid regime. It is an opportunity for me to speak to my children.<sup>782</sup>

Adding another layer of self-consciousness to Mashinini's work, Dorothy Driver suggests that 'when Mashinini came out of detention, thinking, "Now, what is left of me?", she read Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* and felt inspired to write her own story.'<sup>783</sup> Driver argues that both Ellen Kuzwayo and Emma Mashinini have written 'conduct books' which 'negotiate a set of values which have changed from one generation to the next'.<sup>784</sup> This suggestion perhaps shows the achievement of Ros de Lanerolle's aim to encourage new writers through the expansion of publishing.

*Strikes Have Followed Me All my Life* is at times an intensely personal and moving account of Emma Mashinini's experiences and feelings during her detention. Mashinini represents herself as a trade unionist and is very worried by her detention, especially how it will look in the eyes of her father. She recalls getting a visit from her husband Tom after four weeks of detention:

He told me about my children and I wanted to know, 'What do they think?' and he said they were okay. And I wondered, did my father know that I had not committed any crime, and insisted, 'Tom, please sit my father down and make him understand that I have not committed any crime. I do not know why I am here.'<sup>785</sup>

Emma Mashinini was held in solitary confinement for the duration of her detention and her trade union work rarely brought her into a working relationship with other women unionists, so she did not give the kinds of biographies of women in the struggle that Ellen Kuzwayo and Caeserina Kona Makhoere did. However, a number of reviews printed on the first pages of the book are extraordinarily direct in the symbolism and significance they attach to Emma Mashinini's narrative. Under the heading 'About this

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<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>783</sup> Driver, "Imagined Selves, (Un)imagined Marginalities," p.345.

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>785</sup> Mashinini, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*, p.67.

book' the first quotation came from 'Dame R. Nita Barrow, Member of the Eminent Persons Group' and claimed 'in writing her autobiography...[Emma Mashinini] speaks for all those people who are unable to verbalise the anguish that the system of apartheid has brought to them individually and to their families'. Sheena Duncan identified as 'Former President, Black Sash' went further, writing that the book 'is about being a woman'...'Emma Mashinini speaks for women everywhere.' These introductory comments render visible the processes Rassool has identified, whereby 'individuals are viewed as units of social forms' and their individual experiences are made to stand for collective social experiences.<sup>786</sup>

There are indications within the text that Emma Mashinini observed the dynamics of changing international gender norms as they interacted with trade union politics in South Africa. Discussing the formation of COSATU, she remembers the pivotal role that CCAWUSA played in the process but describes it as a 'bitter experience'. She recalls that when she was interested in participating 'all the men were very happy to consult' with her because of the 'size and importance' of her union. She writes, 'it didn't matter then that I was a woman' but that all those elected on COSATU's national executive were men and that a man was even elected to represent CCAWUSA, of which she was General Secretary. She went on,

And most ironic of all, when they were having an important person to come and meet them, from abroad or whatever, then they would say, 'Oh Emma, please, you must meet them.' And I would say, 'Am I again just to be used as a valve, just to patch up what you have done wrong?'<sup>787</sup>

It is an interesting question, as to what extent the three autobiographies published by The Women's Press 'patched up' or neutralised internal and external debates over sexism within the liberation struggle. All three include cautious criticism of gender norms within the liberation struggle and South African society. In her 1991 review Dorothy Driver argued that 'Mashinini pulls back. Like Kuzwayo before her, she specifically refuses to 'expose dirty linen in public', a metaphor which neatly conflates

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<sup>786</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," pp.16, 167.

<sup>787</sup> Mashinini, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*, p.118.

women's domestic and social roles (women in charge of the laundry, women in charge of the secrets of male abuse).<sup>788</sup> Makhoere only notices gender norms as just another obstacle that the woman activist has had to overcome. At this time in the late 1980s it was only through the auto/biography work of Diana Russell that terms such as 'feminist' and the issues raised by the emerging women's politics were discussed explicitly for an international audience.

In her acknowledgments to *Lives of Courage*, Diana Russell highlights the importance of the book's international audience for its creation. Wondering why she was able to interview so many women from the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa she suggests, 'I know that part of the answer is that political activists there are so eager to have the real story of their struggle be known in the United States and other countries that they are willing to take the risks involved in speaking out.'<sup>789</sup> Russell thus sets up her role as a facilitator. She sets out her main aim as conveying the 'lived experience' of apartheid to a large international audience.<sup>790</sup> However, she also gives herself and the book an additional aim as 'a tribute and, as it turns out, a reminder.' For Russell, 'the reminder concerns the important contribution that women are making to the struggle and their feelings about sexism, both in the society and in the anti-apartheid movement.'<sup>791</sup> As a result, in interviews she asked questions about 'the role of women in the struggle' and 'the problems posed by sexism' directly.<sup>792</sup>

The book is clearly motivated by Russell's own feminist politics and concerns, which is not a criticism but an observation that explains the content and direction of some of the biographies. Russell writes that she 'rarely' asked black women if they were feminists during interviews, but often used the term in the short introductions she wrote for each interview and section. For example, introducing Lydia Kompe organizer in the Metal and Allied Workers Union, then the Transport and General Worker's Union and member of FEDTRAW, Russell had been told by a fellow academic that "'Lydia was

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<sup>788</sup> Driver, "Imagined Selves, (Un)imagined Marginalities," p.348.

<sup>789</sup> Diana E. H Russell, *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p.xiii.

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>791</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>792</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

the strongest black feminist I met on my trip to South Africa in 1986.” But when [Russell] asked Kompe, “Do you consider yourself a feminist?” she replied, “What’s that?”<sup>793</sup> Russell wrote of Gertrude Fester, activist in the UWCO, ‘I did not ask Fester whether she would define herself as a feminist, but she certainly appeared to be both conscious of sexism and committed to doing something to change it in a way that fits my notion of that term.’<sup>794</sup> All of this is part of the act of ‘translation’ that Russell sees herself as performing in explaining South Africa to an American audience. There is an implicit hierarchy of knowledge in Russell’s use of ‘feminist’ to describe women who reject it themselves.

However, it is interesting to consider how far Russell’s position and questions affected the content of interviews. Also, her selection of interviewees results in an unusual set of perspectives on the liberation struggle. For example, Russell interviews a young 24 year old coloured woman called Rozena Maart. Maart is interviewed as a founding member of Women against Repression (WAR), and a self-proclaimed feminist. The small size of WAR and its marginal position within anti-apartheid politics makes Rozena Maart’s an unusual voice in an international solidarity publication. She describes having been involved in protest politics whilst studying at the University of Cape Town. Rozena Maart explains the nature of student politics, in terms reminiscent of Suzi Nkomo’s 1991 article, considered in chapter three of this thesis:

The fact that all sixteen of the students on the SRC were men for two years in a row says a lot about this lack of awareness. It took me two years to decide that I wasn’t going to have anything more to do with campus politics. Instead I got involved outside of campus. But this was also frustrating, because there was no place for women there either. At meetings I’d only see the women in the interval because they’d have been in the kitchen all the time preparing for the food break.<sup>795</sup>

Maart joined Cape Town Rape Crisis in 1982 where she came to identify herself positively as a feminist. Then in April 1986 with four others Maart set up WAR, ‘to look at what we felt the shortcomings were of South African women’s organisations.’<sup>796</sup> It is

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<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, p.257.

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*, p.258.

during a discussion of WAR's activities that Maart brings up the issue of sexual harassment of school girls. It is worth quoting at length because of the different light it sheds upon the issue. As examined in chapter three, the campaigns on sexual harassment have usually been discussed in the historiography from the perspective of young male activists.

When we went to talk to the principle of this highly politicised school about the fact that sexual abuse of students by teachers is also a political issue, he responded, 'But it's not the same thing.' Then he said, 'I'm dealing with it in my own way. Do you people want to see blood?' We said, 'No we want dismissals of these teachers, and not just from this school, but from being allowed to teach in any school.' We argued, 'If one of your teachers was heard calling one of your children "kaffir" or some other racist term, what would you do?' He said, 'I'd kick him out of school.' We said, 'But why aren't you doing the same now?' He said, 'It's different.' We said, 'No it's the same thing.' But the principal saw the rape as the student's fault. He said, 'Oh, these girls look for these things. This girl wears long nails and a short skirt. She wanted it.' The principle wouldn't let the teachers tell the students about the rape. We thought that if the female students knew about it, they at least wouldn't take lifts from these teachers. So about three o'clock one morning we graffitied the slogans on the school sports stadium.<sup>797</sup>

What Rozena Maart's account emphasizes is the complicity of the school authorities and the with-holding of information from school students. This makes clear how the issue of sexual harassment was entangled with issues of power and authority within the school but also the difficulties WAR faced convincing a progressive principal of the equivalence of racism and sexism. Her solutions were based upon young women's control of their own bodies; she hopes they would choose not to accept lifts from these teachers, because the 'protection' of the Principle WAR tried to invoke was refused. An interview with Mavivi Manzini, a full time activist for the Women's Section of the ANC, who went into exile aged 20 in 1976 gives yet another perspective on the issue. Discussing the Women's Sections attempts to address rape and violence against women Manzini claims that such campaigns originated with young women:

The young women in the student movement are addressing the problem of sexual harassment in the schools by the teachers and male students. When I was in SASO, most of the women in it didn't seem to know their rights. They just

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<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, p.259.

followed their boyfriends. And the treatment they got was quite awful. But some of us insisted that we had rights and were not at the mercy of the men.<sup>798</sup>

Diana Russell's focus upon interviewing women also results in a distinctive perspective upon youth and June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976. In an interview with Connie Mofokeng, which Russell gives the title 'From Soweto to Exile', Russell feminises the narrative of the Soweto generation's fight and flight. When she was interviewed in Lusaka, Connie Mofokeng was 28 years old. She described to Russell her arrest at the age of 18 after her involvement in the SSRC.

What happened to me happened to about one hundred fifty of the other young people who had participated in the Soweto march in 1976. About thirty-eight of the one hundred fifty were girls. The numbers who were detained was much higher if people who only stayed a short time were included. If boys were carelessly dressed, that was enough for the police to detain them. With the girls, they'd pick up those who their informers said were involved.<sup>799</sup>

Russell also includes an interview with Leila Issel, the thirteen year old daughter of Shahieda (also interviewed in the book) and Jonny Issel both UDF activists. She writes that 'since children are playing such a crucial role in the South African liberation movement, I felt it important to include the voice of at least one child.'<sup>800</sup> In choosing the young daughter of activists, Russell domesticates the role of young people in the liberation struggle, rendering them understandable and sympathetic to her international audience. Leila Issel's interview is given the title 'A Child of the Struggle.' Her involvement takes place within her family. After her father was served with a banning order, Leila Issel spoke on his and her family's behalf to UDF meetings. She told Russell, 'My father helped me with my talks the first few times, and he'd tell me to be brave. I've spoken more than seven or eight times, and find it much easier now.'<sup>801</sup>

The domestication of young women in the struggle was something that could also be found in ANC official publications. For example, a 1978 article in *Sechaba*

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<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*, p.266.

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, p.309.

interviewed a 24 year old Lindiwe Sisulu, daughter of Walter and Albertina Sisulu, as a 'daughter of the struggle':

We met her somewhere in Africa, a slim wisp of determined womanhood, eyes bright with the courage of the freedom fighter, though shadowed with the pan of the ordeals she has undergone.

There are thousands like her today in the ranks of the liberation movement, many of them are still in their teens, boys and girls driven out of Soweto and the other African townships by the batons and bullets of the racist police. Their anger against apartheid, and determination to achieve national liberation, have been forged in the fire of struggle. Now many of them have weapons in their hands, and their eyes and feet turned homewards. They know the struggle will be long and difficult, but they also know they have no choice.

Lindiwe and her comrades have chosen the road of struggle. They know it is the only way home.<sup>802</sup>

In both instances, the focus upon prominent activists' daughters makes their involvement in the struggle, sympathetic, understandable and respectable; it is above all a struggle for 'home.' All of which act as a direct counter to the apartheid government's portrayal of a criminal, masculine and anarchic youth. However, the position of the daughter of the struggle could also be a problematic one. Elaine Unterhalter has suggested that 'certain types of wound and suffering by children, resonate with heroic masculinity, but others do not'.<sup>803</sup> Antony Sampson's official biography of Nelson Mandela 'indicates that [Mandela] discouraged [his daughter Zinzi] from writing an autobiography and family history'.<sup>804</sup> Also in another case, 'in 1997 Gillian Slovo was publicly reprimanded by senior cabinet ministers in the South African press for publishing her searching view of her parents' [Joe Slovo and Ruth First] heroism'.<sup>805</sup> From these suggestions it becomes apparent that the potential position and experiences of the young woman involved in the struggle could continue to be disruptive of the post-apartheid order.

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<sup>802</sup> 'The Torture of Lindiwe Sisulu', *Sechaba*, Vol. 12, Second Quarter (1978), p.29.

<sup>803</sup> Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation," p.170.

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>805</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.



## II. 1990s: Breaking Silences and Stretching Boundaries.

She is sitting behind a microphone, dressed in a beret or *kopdoek* and her Sunday best. Everybody recognises her. Truth has become Woman. Her voice, distorted behind her rough hand, has undermined Man as the source of truth. And yet. Nobody knows her.<sup>806</sup>

In the 1990s the context for the production of South African women's auto/biography changed dramatically. First, after the unbanning of the ANC and other liberation organisations the meaning of a personal history of political activism for an individual's relationship with the state was reversed. As Rassool puts it, 'some of the "voices from below" began to make the transition into becoming "voices from above."' <sup>807</sup> However, as Lewis and others have argued, gender mediated South Africans' ability to enact and receive citizenship. The early 1990s saw a flurry of women's auto/biographies, for the first time including some from South African publishers. Later, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ritualized the act of giving voice as a means to uncover the apartheid past. The auto/biographies produced through the TRC were shaped by the 'over-riding objective' of national reconciliation.<sup>808</sup> As the epigraph above reminds us, the narrative of national reconciliation was symbolically gendered and offered particular gender-bound scripts as acceptable. The TRC also inculcated a new attitude to narratives of women's oppression, suggesting that sexual abuse and in particular rape should be openly disclosed in the search for national healing. This reversed the imperatives of racial solidarity and 'not washing dirty linen in public' that had previously circulated amongst activists. Women's continued silence was regarded variously as a legitimate upholding of those imperatives, as a rejection of victimisation and a sign of pervasive and unreconstructed sexism in South African society.

Three black South African women's autobiographies were published in the first two years after the unbanning of the liberation organisations: Maggie Resha's *My Life in*

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<sup>806</sup> Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998), p.56.

<sup>807</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.108.

<sup>808</sup> Ciraj Rassool, Leslie Witz, and Gary Minkley, "Burying and Memorialising the Body of Truth: The TRC and National Heritage," in *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation*, ed. Wilmot Godfrey James and Linda Van de Vijver (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001), p.115.

*the Struggle* in 1991, Phyllis Ntantala's *A Life's Mosaic* in 1992 and Sindiwe Magona's two volumes *To My Children's Children* in 1991 and *Forced to Grow* a year later. Only Sindiwe Magona was published abroad by The Women's Press, the other two and subsequent autobiographies were published in South Africa itself. Mamphela Ramphele published her autobiography *A Life*, in South Africa in 1995, however it was later also published in the United States as *Across Boundaries*. Of these four women, three had famous husbands (or in the case of Ramphele, a famous lover).

Mamphela Ramphele's position is perhaps unique amongst the women considered in this chapter in terms of the scale of her public profile. Her various autobiographical projects have engaged with and criticised this public profile.<sup>809</sup> As Meg Samuleson notes, Ramphele's autobiography 'writes back' to two dominant depictions of her relationship to Steve Biko.<sup>810</sup> The first, is the narrative of Steve Biko's life in the Hollywood film *Cry Freedom*. This account, based upon Donald Wood's biography of Biko 'erases from its script the story of their love affair, along with Ramphele's political activism and banishment.'<sup>811</sup> The second considers her primarily as a 'stand-in for the fallen' Biko.<sup>812</sup> Ramphele quotes various newspaper articles and press releases, for example the headline of an article in 'one of the country's leading glossy magazines, *The Executive*' that followed her appointment as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town: 'The mother of Steve Biko's son becomes UCT executive'.<sup>813</sup> As Samuleson recognises, 'in part, the autobiography is written precisely to claim an identity that [Ramphele] then disavows by foregrounding her own achievements'.<sup>814</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> Along with her autobiography Mamphela Ramphele has produced a significant body of work as an academic and researcher that has at times been auto/biographical – in particular the 'Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations' published in 1991 and 'Political Widowhood in South Africa' an article published in 1996. Her contribution to *Bounds of Possibility* was examined in Chapter Three of this thesis and it was suggested there that Ramphele's subtitling of her chapter as 'a personal view' was perhaps a strategy of legitimation and containment. Ramphele drew upon her experiences as a BC activist, which were difficult to dispute and chose not to write this article from the position of an academic making a broader argument but a person acknowledging their subjectivity.

<sup>810</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?: Stories of the South African Transition* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), p.202.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>812</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, *A Life*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), p.180.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>814</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.202.

This was something Ramphele subsequently engaged with in an academic article on political widowhood.<sup>815</sup>

Ramphele argued that 'political widows' in South Africa were 'standing in for a fallen man' and therefore 'the ultimate honorary man'.<sup>816</sup> Both Maggie Resha and Phyllis Ntantala's autobiographies were marketed in this way. Maggie Resha's autobiography was described on the jacket of the South African Writer's edition as 'special' and 'unusual' since it is a story of the struggle which comes 'for the first time' from a woman.<sup>817</sup> It went on to describe her as having trained as a nurse and then 'soon thereafter she met and married Robert Resha'. Robert Resha was described as 'a key ANC leader in the Transvaal during the 1950s'. In contrast Maggie Resha was only 'involved' in the struggle. The jacket of Phyllis Ntantala's autobiography was even more explicit. It was summed up as an account of 'her life of rich experience as the wife and mother of famous men'.<sup>818</sup> Resha wrote in her preface that colleagues who encouraged her to write her husband's biography 'should not forget that I have a history of my own to tell'.<sup>819</sup> Ntantala too to a certain extent wrote against her position. She commented after the death of her husband A.C. Jordan:

Now that I was alone people began to see me for the person that I am, as a person in my own right. I was no longer the appendage of the great man A.C., the beautiful smiling doll, basking in his glory...What a pity many women are placed in this position, to live vicariously through their husbands.<sup>820</sup>

Phyllis Ntantala and Sindiwe Magona both frame their autobiographical projects as a communication across generations that are separated by a gulf of experience. Ntantala stated that 'I wanted to leave a record of my life for my children and my grandchildren and all those other friends I have met in my sojourn through life, for them to know and understand it was because of these far off roots that I am the person I

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<sup>815</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, "Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity," *Daedalus* 125, no. 1 (1996): pp.99-117.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>817</sup> Maggie Resha, *My Life in the Struggle* (London: SA Writers, 1991).

<sup>818</sup> Phyllis Ntantala, *A Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala* (Belville, South Africa: Mayibuye Centre, 1992).

<sup>819</sup> Preface to Resha, *My Life in the Struggle*.

<sup>820</sup> Ntantala, *A Life's Mosaic*, p.230.

am'.<sup>821</sup> Magona asks of her great granddaughter 'How will you know who you are if I do not or cannot tell you the story of your past?'<sup>822</sup> Margaret Daymond has noted that Magona adopts the position of a 'Xhosa Grandmother' in the preface of *To My Children's Children*, and in this invokes 'the gendered discourse that her traditional cultural role gives her' but that she does so in order to 'account for the profound changes in identity that have come to people like herself'.<sup>823</sup> In contrast Maggie Resha seems much more confident of communication between the generations, writing that 'young women of today have already taken over from the departed, for struggle is our heritage'.<sup>824</sup>

Ramphela is the only writer of the 1990s that really explores a politicized youth. Maggie Resha makes some comments about young women's participation as 'couriers' in the anti-pass campaigns of the 1950s: 'young women very effectively constituted a network which crisscrossed the country'.<sup>825</sup> Both Magona and Ntantala write extensively about themselves as young women but neither discussed themselves as political actors at this time in their lives. Ramphela's depiction of her activist self in *Bounds of Possibility* is as an 'honorary male' but this is role she chooses and through which she says she 'became assertive to the point of arrogance'.<sup>826</sup> She describes herself smoking and drinking as part of the process of becoming 'one of the boys'.<sup>827</sup> Interestingly, in *A Life* Ramphela discusses the same transgressions but emphasises instead her embrace of a modern, international youth culture:

At the University of Natal the circle of friends centered on Steve Biko coalesced into a tight-knit community as the activism intensified...I shed the wig I used to wear whenever I felt I needed to look more 'respectable' than my boyish short hair suggested...I also became more daring in my outfits, taking advantage of my figure and the fashion trends of the time, which were affordable to me even

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<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*, p.viii.

<sup>822</sup> 'Preface from a Xhosa Grandmother' in Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children's Children* (London: Women's Press, 1991).

<sup>823</sup> Margeret . J. Daymond, "Class in the Discourses of Sindiwe Magona's Autobiography and Fiction," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, no. 4 (1995): pp.561-2.

<sup>824</sup> Resha, *My Life in the Struggle*, p.50.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.

<sup>826</sup> Mamphela Ramphela, "The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View," in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, ed. Barney Pityana et al. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1991), p.219.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218.

on my shoestring budget: hot pants became my specialty. Hot pants were exceedingly short pants which fitted snugly around one's body, hovering tantalizingly around the limits of modesty...Once tested, the boundaries of conventional behavior began to fall. I started experimenting with smoking cigarettes...I slowly but surely embraced the student culture of the 1960s.<sup>828</sup>

Samuelson has noted that within *A Life* 'the boldest forays out of the feminine sphere are masked beneath a self-conscious performance of femininity'.<sup>829</sup> Here is perhaps another example of this. Most interesting for us though is the reference Ramphele makes to a global discourse of 'the student culture of the 1960s'. In this way Ramphele renders her behavior in two different contexts, a new Black Consciousness confidence and a global youthful counter culture. In contrast, the youth politics of the 1980s is made much less intelligible to the reader. Ramphele describes living in Guguletu in the 1980s as 'not easy', describing the security forces intrusions. She also writes:

Encounters with the 'comrades' were not pleasant either. One Sunday lunch-time we were sitting in the dining room and having a family meal when a young man burst into the house. He did not respond when I asked how I could help him. He simply vanished into one of the children's bedrooms. Hot on his heels were vicious looking policemen who demanded to know where he had gone...For the next hour or so – it felt like a whole day – the police searched through the property, in and around the house, and eventually settled on the only bedroom that was locked...They kicked the door in and found a frightened young man in one of the cupboards. He was arrested for allegedly throwing stones at the police...The young comrade was later to claim that I had betrayed him – a dangerous statement in the days of the 'necklace' in the township. Fortunately there had been enough witnesses for the claim to be seen for what it was.<sup>830</sup>

The 'young comrade' is undoubtedly a victim here, a 'frightened young man', but he also refuses to communicate with Ramphele, 'he did not respond', and puts her home and family and later her life in danger through his behavior. Ramphele presents herself as marginal to the direction that the UDF took in the 1980s. She comments explicitly that 'some of my friends and political peers from the 1970s often regarded me as a

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<sup>828</sup> Ramphele, *A Life*, pp.57-58.

<sup>829</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.206.

<sup>830</sup> Ramphele, *A Life*, p.160.

prophet of doom whenever I criticised the retrogressiveness of anti-apartheid politics in the 1980s'.<sup>831</sup>

Unlike earlier auto/biographies Mamphela Ramphele's *A Life* also recounts South Africa's transition. She describes herself as going through a nervous break-down in 1990 as a result of the tensions 'which flowed from my failure to draw a clearer line between the personal and the political'. Her very description of this break-down though also interweaves her personal issues with the uncertain future of the nation:

I realised that I was in the grip of a serious metaphorical post-natal depression. Had all the energy one put into the struggle been worth it? What if post-apartheid South Africa turned into a big disaster with violent conflict between the various contenders for power? I could not see myself living in such a society.<sup>832</sup>

Ramphele's choice of metaphor is undoubtedly a self-conscious one. Throughout the autobiography she focuses on the 'unsettling physicality of motherhood' and in particular the act of giving birth.<sup>833</sup> As Desiree Lewis has noted Ramphele 'demystifies the romantic abstraction that maternity confers the natural dignity of women citizens' and states that 'I do not have the illusion of having been programmed for the nurturing role'.<sup>834</sup> The parallel that Ramphele herself then draws between post-natal depression and South Africa's transition problematises activism and motherhood whilst reinscribing that powerful recurring linkage. This was a linkage remade in the forum of the TRC.

The auto/biographical projects of one activist Thandi Modise suggest some of the affects of the TRC upon the public space available to women to tell their life stories in South Africa. Thandi Modise has not written an autobiography but her life story, and interviews with her, have appeared publically at a number of different times and places. The changes in her life stories as told to different audiences at different times demonstrate the ongoing and contested nature of biography and the changing imperatives and conditions for women's speech and silence. Thandi Modise appeared in

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<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>833</sup> Lewis, "Gender myths and citizenship in two autobiographies by South African women," p.40.

<sup>834</sup> Lewis, "Gender myths and citizenship in two autobiographies by South African women," p.40; Ramphele, *A Life*, p.173.

Caesarina Kona Makhoere's *No Child's Play* as the pinnacle of women's heroism in the struggle. After serving a nine year sentence for sabotage at two Johannesburg department stores, Modise gave an interview to the academic Jacklyn Cock. Cock subsequently published a 'profile' of Thandi Modise, titled 'the knitting needles guerrilla' in her 1991 study *Colonels and Cadres*. Thandi Modise was also profiled in the *Weekly Mail* in 1989 shortly after her release.

In these biographies Modise was regarded as unusual as a woman member of MK but in the interviews her gender was not an obstacle to her becoming a guerrilla, just a matter of pride. Modise's young age was also an important part of her story. She told Jacklyn Cock that when she left South Africa in 1976, she was one a group of ten, five girls and five boys. Two of those five girls 'later returned home and were state witnesses against her'.<sup>835</sup> Modise was the only girl in a group of twenty that left Botswana to go for military training in Tanzania and Angola. Modise said, 'Women guerrillas were a new phenomenon. The male comrades respected us for having the courage to be soldiers. They did everything to make us feel their equals'.<sup>836</sup> Modise described the camps' daily routines and training as equal; 'we did all the same things'. She only genders herself in two ways, through describing her body and appearance and as a mother. She told Cock that, 'we did lots of physical exercises so we all had beautiful bodies'.<sup>837</sup> She also discussed Women's Day and the wearing of special uniforms which 'gave a feminine touch and the women liked to wear them. We drilled in the short dresses on women's occasions and we felt like women. The men whistled but we ignored them'.<sup>838</sup> Cock later quotes Modise saying, 'I'm a guerrilla because I'm a mother'.<sup>839</sup>

Modise gave another interview on her life as an MK guerrilla to Robyn Curnow, an SABC TV journalist, which was published in *Agenda* in 2000. In this interview Modise painted a very different picture of life in the MK training camps, speaking about

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<sup>835</sup> Jacklyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford U.P, 1991), p.151.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*

sexual harassment and the contemporary silences surrounding women's roles in the MK. Raymond Suttner has recognised these two very different narratives and suggested that,

The latter version is more likely to represent Modise's experience. Having just emerged from prison and instilled in tight military discipline, when she did the first interview, Modise may well have suppressed negative experiences. Given the elapse of a decade before the Curnow interview, she may well have felt greater freedom to speak of what she previously concealed. This is not to say that every experience of Modise was replicated for others or that her interpretation of her experience must be accepted in every respect.<sup>840</sup>

Suttner regards the change in Modise's story as a personal one, arguing her change should not necessarily be seen as representative. However, this is in tension with the role she is given in both interviews as a spokeswoman for women in the MK. Also, Suttner is perhaps a little disingenuous not to note the shifts in gender politics over the decade and in particular the controversial public space opened up for women to speak of sexual harassment in the liberation struggle by the processes and criticisms of the TRC.

In their May 1996 submission to the TRC, that criticised its handling of gender issues, Beth Goldblatt Shelia Meintjes argued that 'where women were abused in the [ANC] camps, this needs to be acknowledged and condemned by those involved'.<sup>841</sup>

They wrote that:

We were unsuccessful in our attempts to speak to women about their experiences in the camps. In an interview with Caesarina Kona Makhoere she expressed an unwillingness to speak about the camps but intimated that her experience had been terrible. She said, 'At least in prison I knew I was in the enemy camp'. We interviewed Thenjiwe Mtintso, a senior member of the ANC's army about her experiences. She said that she had no personal experience of sexual abuse in the camps...She was aware of the allegations of rape in the camps and says that women are reluctant to talk about their experiences for two reasons. Firstly, on a personal level, they are not easily able to talk about rape. Secondly, on an organisational level, they do not wish to have their experiences used politically in the TRC where apartheid is equated morally with the ANC's actions.<sup>842</sup>

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<sup>840</sup> Raymond Suttner, "Women in the ANC-led underground," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), p.253.

<sup>841</sup> Beth Goldblatt and Shelia Meintjes, "Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," May 1996, p.29, <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/submit/gender.htm>.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*



Fiona C. Ross has argued that following this submission and the changes made to the TRC's processes of statement taking and the institution of special women's hearings: 'sexual violence was represented in the hearings and in public discourse as a defining feature of women's experiences of gross violation of human rights'.<sup>843</sup> As Meg Samuelson puts it, 'woman's story' and the story of sexual violence became conflated.<sup>844</sup> The politics of silence/speech and individual trauma were a complex matrix many women activists apparently found very difficult to negotiate. Thenjiwe Mtintso appeared as the first witness at the Johannesburg Women's hearing on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1997 and explained her position:

The logic, the politics, everything was very clear, Chairperson, but the emotion was not clear. There was that conflict. Even as I tried to draft the other day when your statement-taker came to me, I tried to fill those forms and I said: can I face the consequences? The consequences which I could not imagine had happened, Chairperson because they are known to me.

What I know is that I have sat for years; I have built an armour around that pain. I have nursed that pain, I have owned that pain. I seem to refuse to move away from that pain. I seem to gain strength from the fact that it is my pain.

The women today have gone beyond that stage that I'm still fighting to get beyond.<sup>845</sup>

What Thenjiwe Mtintso's testimony to her continued silence showed was that the TRC's special women's hearings may have been created as 'protected' spaces for the initial act of speech but this ignored the embeddedness of the hearings and testimony in individual's daily, public and private lives. What the public hearings and TRC report also failed to convey was the differentiated nature of the TRC processes within communities. Fiona C. Ross' anthropological study of the TRC suggested that the Commission's findings did 'not reflect the extent of *young* women's suffering' in particular (emphasis added).<sup>846</sup> Ross suggested this might partly be explained by young women's relative mobility; due to marriage they often did not remain living in the area

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<sup>843</sup> Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto, 2002), p.24.

<sup>844</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.121.

<sup>845</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/women/masote.htm> (Accessed October 2009).

<sup>846</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p.127.

they had been young activists.<sup>847</sup> She also suggested the relationship between activism, suffering and giving testimony was mediated by an individual's current material and social position. For example, she describes the position of one former activist, Mirriam Moleleki:

Although she had been detained four times, held twice for three months at a time in solitary confinement, and her home had been subject to police surveillance and searches, her children threatened and beaten, and her own life threatened, and although she was in regular contact with the Commission, Mirriam did not make a statement about gross violation of human rights.<sup>848</sup>

Ross asked Moleleki why she had not testified to the Commission and she stated that others had suffered more than her and that she was employed and thus had no need for reparations.<sup>849</sup> She did however, work as a 'community briefer' for the Worcester hearings of the TRC. All of this points us to the emergence of what might be crudely described as an economy of struggle history in South Africa that did and does shape the historical narratives that are produced.

In 2000 Robyn Curnow introduced Thandi Modise's biography as revealing 'more than just the struggles of one woman fighting an unjust system...In her experience she was a *woman* soldier and a *woman* political prisoner' (emphasis in original).<sup>850</sup> In this second interview Modise's youthfulness did not enter the narrative; her gender was her defining characteristic, perhaps even to the exclusion of race. Curnow wrote that, 'her narrative touches on a social reality that many South African women have experienced. The difference is that whilst most have remained silent about their apartheid experiences, Modise has spoken out'.<sup>851</sup> In the interview Modise seems acutely aware of herself breaking silences and challenging what she sees as women's continued marginalisation in the ANC. It appears that Thandi Modise's 2000 auto/biographical interview was shaped by her then political position, elected as deputy president of the ANC Women's League in 1993 and an ANC MP to the National Assembly in 1994. The treatment she described in the camps was compounded by what

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<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>850</sup> Robyn Curnow and Thandi Modise, "Thandi Modise, a woman in war," *Agenda* 43 (2000): p.36.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*

she saw as a continuing stigmatizing of women who fought in the struggle by their male comrades.

[When they look at us] women who went to jail, for some reason, they think we must have chosen to fight and go to jail because we are stupid! It is something that really concerns me in the ANC that people who are known to be MK, women who have been to jail, somehow, it's almost that something happened to our brains and we cannot be trusted with responsibilities. That is my impression. It doesn't matter how good we can be.<sup>852</sup>

Interestingly, at least one other woman ANC MP, Pregs Govender, has written a critical account of the gender dynamics of the anti-apartheid movement following her experiences in Parliament. There was perhaps a certain type of woman activist who entered Parliament in 1994 but equally the power and public profile such women were able to accrue perhaps not only made their voices audible but guaranteed an audience.

In the interview with Curnow Modise talked of her time at a camp in Tanzania, as one of six women amongst a hundred men, where the women decided to take karate lessons.

Because right there in Tanzania there had been an incident, there had been a terrible fight, something, I mean, which before 1990 we had been keeping quiet about. But there had been a fight one night over girls...because there had been a feeling among some men that because there are these five, six women there, 'why should they be sex starved?' and there were others who said, 'No, they are not here to be sex slaves, if they want to have affairs they will have affairs, if they don't want to, then you are there to protect them.'<sup>853</sup>

Modise describes daily life in the camps as a constant battle to prove herself. Taking on the role of digging trenches was one of the ways she remembered proving her worth. In contrast to the 'beautiful bodies' she told Jacklyn Cock about Modise recalled the physical strain:

It was difficult. I mean, our hands! I remember I had blisters and later on there were hard calluses which I thought I'd never get rid of [holds up hands to show they are now smooth]. Your body would ache because in the mornings the road

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<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

work...they made it extra difficult – going up and down the mountains. We needed to prove we'd keep up.<sup>854</sup>

Curnow commented that, 'in this masculinised world, the female body hindered them, yet they were proud to be women', and that, 'there is never a sense of Modise or her female comrades ever coming to terms with this contradiction'.<sup>855</sup> In terms very similar to her earlier interview Modise again recalled the special uniforms of the annual August 9<sup>th</sup> 'Women's Day' parade as an enactment of femininity.

There is a sense in the Curnow interview of the collective nature of such oral histories. Like Emma Mashinini's reference to Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography as her own inspiration to write, Thandi Modise refers to what has been said by another woman of her experience of exile, and measures her own memories against these other public pronouncements. 'Sometimes, I think I've blocked it out. I don't know what we used for pads, sanitary pads. I really can't remember. I really don't remember. I know Ma Tambo has been on TV saying they organized [sanitary pads], definitely not the camps I've been in. Definitely not'.<sup>856</sup> She also speaks to what she sees as men's silences on the issue of sexual harassment in the camps. She relates an incident known as 'the Brushman affair', when the women cadres at one camp confronted and chased a night-time intruder in their barracks. He was hidden by his male cadres. Thereafter the women were not spoken to by the men, in what was known as the 'anti-muhlere campaign (muhlere means woman in Portuguese)'.<sup>857</sup> The men were apparently angered that the women had not 'dressed properly before going after the suspect'. Modise comments that, 'up to today, you still can't find an ANC male in that camp to talk frankly about that incident'.<sup>858</sup> This statement is an interesting reversal of the mantra of the TRC era that women would not speak about their experiences of sexual abuse. Instead she locates the silence in male cadre's narratives.

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<sup>854</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*

### III. 2000s: Tales of reconciliation and a heritage economy of oral history.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s the TRC and its dominant objectives of national reconciliation continued to impact upon the production of women's auto/biographical histories of the struggle. Through institutions such as the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, the Mayibuye Centre and various new heritage projects the production of auto/biographical struggle histories was given national prominence and government funding. For example, Zubeida Jaffer's autobiography *Our Generation* was published by Kwela Books, a South African publisher with an interest in women's autobiography in 2003. Rassool puts Jaffer's book in the context of the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation's project of collecting the life stories of former anti-apartheid activists. He suggests that Jaffer, who worked for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation aimed to 'set an example of generating activist life histories' through her own autobiography.<sup>859</sup> Similarly, Pregs Govender's 2007 autobiography *Love and Courage*, that described her life as an anti-apartheid activist and later an ANC MP, began with a dedication to 'the reader': 'I hope that my book will inspire you to write down your memories, your stories'.<sup>860</sup> This is an interesting echo of The Women's Press' aim to encourage more black women writers.

As Rassool has noted, auto/biographical histories especially of black writers in South Africa, 'have tended to be understood merely as revelations of hidden heritage, previously submerged by apartheid'.<sup>861</sup> All three of the struggle autobiographies written by black women examined in this section were described by reviewers (often political contemporaries) as having symbolic importance in breaking open existing silences. The back cover of *Our Generation* included a review from Antjie Krog:

This is one of the stories one always knew existed, but never expected it to surface with such force of tenderness and beauty; such power of self-discovery;

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<sup>859</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.235.

<sup>860</sup> Govender, *Love and courage a story of insubordination*.

<sup>861</sup> Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," p.196.

such courageous pain. Every story finds its narrator. This story of neglected parts of South Africa's liberation found Zubeida Jaffer.<sup>862</sup>

*Love and Courage* is described by Ahmed Kathrada, 'ANC leader, ex-Robben Island prisoner' as 'a brave and telling reflection on our contemporary history [that] opens the space for others to speak'.<sup>863</sup> Sibongile Mkhabela's 2001 autobiography *Open Earth, Black Roses* concludes with a number of 'Letters of Solidarity' from Mkhabela's co-accused from the SSRC sedition trial. Interestingly all of these letters mention future generations and a number speak of Sibongile Mkhabela and themselves as members of the distinct 1976 political generation. For example, Thabo Ndabeni, now director of a consulting company, 'it is gratifying for me to have been part of an epoch making generation' and Dan Montisisi, then an ANC member of parliament, 'Sibongile is such a giant, produced from the fires of the 1970s. This work is indeed the beginning of the documentary history of the youth by the youth'.<sup>864</sup> Interestingly, in this case the focus upon generation elides the gender of the writer. In this *Open Earth, Black Roses* is unique as a work by a young woman youth activist whose gender was not inscribed upon her auto/biographical project by its publisher.

In contrast *Our Generation* was packaged and marketed as a unique take upon the anti-apartheid struggle because it came from a young mother. The back cover reads: 'It bursts onto the contemporary South African literary scene with a refreshing and insightful version of the struggle against apartheid, told from the perspective of a young mother'.<sup>865</sup> The front cover reinforces this subject position through the reproduction of a picture of Zubeida Jaffer as a young woman, holding her baby daughter. As Meg Samuelson has noted, *Our Generation* is 'literally encased in Jaffer's maternity'.<sup>866</sup> Interestingly, Zubeida Jaffer describes the moment when this photograph was taken in the book, at a party after her then husband Jonny's release from Pollsmoor Prison. Jaffer

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<sup>862</sup> Antjie Krog quoted on back cover of Zubeida Jaffer, *Our Generation* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003).

<sup>863</sup> Ahmed Kathrada quoted on the cover of Govender, *Love and courage a story of insubordination*.

<sup>864</sup> Thabo Ndabeni and Dan Montisisi quoted in Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Press, 2001), pp.128-129.

<sup>865</sup> Jaffer, *Our Generation*.

<sup>866</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.182.

describes the photograph as very significant to her, a moment when her family was all-together after twenty years of banning orders and detentions.

Rashid click his shutter and captures that single moment in our lives when the three of us blended into one whole, merged by an unequalled feeling of joyousness which is written on our faces for all the world to see.<sup>867</sup>

On the front cover of *Our Generation* this photograph is reproduced without Jaffer's ex-husband in the picture. The focus is upon her and her daughter, as is the narrative of the book. Samuelson sees the reproduced photograph as symbolic of the autobiography's 'redefinition of motherhood beyond the patriarchal institution'.<sup>868</sup>

Zubeida Jaffer writes at times in a very self-conscious manner, constructing and shaping her narrative before her readers' eyes. This is particularly so in her telling of her public testimony to the TRC. The book appears in part to be speaking alongside that testimony, including some of that which the time and space of the TRC did not allow.

Where did it all begin? In 1966, at age eight, when Dimitri Stafendas stabbed Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd to death and we cringed in our classroom as police vans flew past our school? In 1967, at age nine, when my father kept me from school because the principle at Douglas Road Primary School had decided to comply with a departmental instruction to hoist the apartheid flag and make us sing the national anthem? In 1969, at age eleven when Imam Abdullah Haroon was killed in detention? In 1973, at age fifteen, when one of my dedicated teachers belonging to the Unity Movement invited me to secret meetings to discuss opposition to apartheid? In 1976, at age eighteen, when I watched my friend Tony Cochrane brutally beaten by the riot police on the parade opposite Cape Town's railway station? Or was it that same day, when a doctor at UCT where we were both students refused to treat him, leaving me to get him back home by train, suffering from serious concussion? Was it at the end of 1979 when I observed trade unionists Virginia Engel and Oscar Mphetha lead the Fattis and Monis workers to victory in one of the Cape's most memorable strikes?

For the purposes of the TRC, I start the story a year later in 1980, when I was twenty-two years old.<sup>869</sup>

Jaffer acknowledges the arbitrary nature of trying to pin-point the moment when her activism began.<sup>870</sup> She also reminds the reader that her testimony of the TRC was

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<sup>867</sup> Jaffer, *Our Generation*, p.62.

<sup>868</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.189.

<sup>869</sup> Jaffer, *Our Generation*, pp.127-128.

something that came out of that moment and that experience. Her account of testifying to the TRC is written vividly in the present tense,

There is so much to tell. I am conscious of the fact that eight of us are set down to testify today. I am allowed to speak for as long as I want to but I know that I have to strip years of intense experience down to its bare minimum.<sup>871</sup>

She remembers stopping her narrative; 'I know there is more to say but I have had enough. I just don't have the strength'.<sup>872</sup> Then she writes, 'I regret having ended so abruptly. I needed to complete the story of the second detention. For the sake of all who were listening but mainly for my own sake'.<sup>873</sup> Her autobiography then takes up this narrative from where she stopped in front of the TRC. In this way the autobiography is bound up with this earlier moment of giving testimony.

Meg Samuelson has argued that for Jaffer, 'rather than the TRC being marked as a therapeutic site, it is the memoir that is granted this function'.<sup>874</sup> Samuelson sees this as marked symbolically in the autobiography through the splitting of Zubeida Jaffer as daughter and mother. She suggests that 'anxieties of political failure are located in her daughterly self. Motherhood, in contrast, authorises her political voice'.<sup>875</sup> In Jaffer's TRC testimony, as retold in her autobiography, 'maternal authority is displaced by the return of her daughterly self, in which the TRC locates her activism. Her testimony before the TRC opens with her fraught identity as her father's daughter when she revisits her first incarceration'.<sup>876</sup> Like Deborah Matshoba in Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography, Zubeida Jaffer comes to a stronger activist-self through motherhood. Crucial to Jaffer's achievement of this activist-mother position is the process of writing the autobiography itself. Whilst this may be a radical performance of motherhood as Samuelson suggests, it nonetheless depicts youth activism as an uncomfortable place for a young woman.

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<sup>870</sup> This is a common question asked of activists, indeed it is something I asked those whom I have interviewed. In retrospect, I would have avoided it since it fixes a narrative from its beginnings as that of a political activist, signifying this as the primary topic of interest and filter of experience.

<sup>871</sup> Jaffer, *Our Generation*, p.132.

<sup>872</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.134-5.

<sup>874</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.182.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>876</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184.



In contrast Sibongile Mkhabela's 2001 autobiography *Open Earth and Black Roses* binds the author tightly to the figure of the young woman activist whom she remembers. The book's subtitle is 'remembering June 16 1976'. In an introduction Mkhabela stated that '25 years later, I feel that I should make a contribution to the nation's collective memory'.<sup>877</sup> Conspicuously absent from the book is any notion of writing in order to heal. Sibongile Mkhabela recalls her past self with the same calm, confident sense of purpose with which she writes her contribution to the 'nation's collective memory'. Writing about her involvement in politics at Naledi High in Soweto she says of her young male comrades,

They somehow felt quite unsure about how to work with me. I was not one of the girls, for none of the boys had a claim to bringing me into the struggle. I made an individual choice to be involved. I was not eager to ask them questions about their own meetings; I did not have to. My life was guided by a mix of black political thought and Christian values. In a singular way, the foundation had been laid by Ma, and I had found and defined my well-thought-out private and public political persuasions.<sup>878</sup>

Pregs Govender also presents her young, activist self as youthful, feminine and serious. She says of her time as a student activist working with the Natal Indian Congress at the University of Durban-Westville, 'we were serious young women, laughing as we learnt to defend ourselves against the soldiers'.<sup>879</sup>

Unlike Jaffer both Sibongile Mkhabela and Pregs Govender write of the difficulties of combining motherhood and activism. Pregs Govender addresses the question explicitly:

As a young mother, I could not sustain my activism as before and came to be harshly judgemental of myself. I felt as if I had not slept for ages and began to think my brain would never work again. I could not complete reading anything without being disturbed – even the toilet was no longer a private space...In a study group discussion in our flat, I sat feeling guilty. Everyone else had read a thick wad of photocopied pages on some important theme. In mid-discussion my baby needed to be breastfed and I left, zonked by fatigue. *As I write this, I realize everyone else in the group was male...* I was drawn to women's

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<sup>877</sup> Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*.

<sup>878</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>879</sup> Govender, *Love and courage a story of insubordination*, p.55.

organisations in the hope that they would be sensitive to the difficulties I'd met myself. Unfortunately few of them were.<sup>880</sup> (Emphasis added)

Again, like Jaffer, Govender comes to her (albeit opposite position) through the act of writing the autobiography. Govender remembers her past self, socialized into the world of anti-apartheid activism as, 'harshly judgemental' of herself.

Sibongile Mkhabela depicts her motherhood as a site of vulnerability. Although, crucially this is a vulnerability to inter-organisational conflict not conflict with the apartheid state. She herself rejected taking part in the ideological battles of the 1980s, resenting the suggestion made at the time of her 1982 marriage to Ishmael Mkhabela, a member of AZAPO, that 'this was not simply because two people loved each other, but was a political coup for BC ideology. What utter rubbish!'<sup>881</sup> She remembers fearing knocks on the door at night from the UDF. 'I had no position on the matter. I was pregnant and a mother of a three year old who lived in fear. I had not developed the means or the will to fight my own comrades who had become dangerous'.<sup>882</sup>

Sibongile Mkhabela's autobiography is critical as well as celebratory of the liberation struggle and the current national historical narratives. Mkhabela measures the youth activism of the 1980s against her own in 1976: "'Liberation First, Education Later". I hated this slogan, because I felt it stripped June 16 of its dignity. That day was not a protest against education, but a protest for education'.<sup>883</sup> Mkhabela however reserves her harshest criticisms for the leadership of the liberation struggle during the 1980s. On the day of her release from prison in 1981 she remembers being asked by a former school-mate friend and neighbor if she was now going to join 'the progressive Charterists or the reactionary Black Consciousness camp?'<sup>884</sup> She writes, 'I realized how protected I had been in the women's prison. We had nurtured our fellow feeling, and teased one another about our political tendencies and affiliations'.<sup>885</sup> Mkhabela disapproves of and masculinises the fractured politics of the late 1980s describing the

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<sup>880</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.66-67.

<sup>881</sup> Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*, p.108. Ishmael Mkhabela was President of AZAPO for a year from December 1984-1985.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>883</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

actions of 'frightened, misguided, young men'.<sup>886</sup> Mkhabela speaks for herself and her husband writing that by 1985, 'Ish and I found it increasingly restricting to work within the narrow confines of the feuding liberation groups. We decided to position ourselves within the communities and their struggles, without betraying comrades, our fundamental values, beliefs or integrity'.<sup>887</sup> It seems clear that one of Sibongile Mkhabela's aims in writing her autobiography was to air her criticisms of the 1980s. Her analysis is worth quoting at length:

The political and church leadership of the day swayed in confusion as it tried to be politically correct. When young people with little direction started destroying human life, some leaders were quick to christen them young lions. The young lions and others, who responded to their acts which bordered on anarchy, were devouring the flock, for heavens sake! The need to gain political support for one's group, as though we had already won the space to elect our representatives, was too great. If this issue was fundamentally ideological, it could have led to an approach that could build on what was common among the fragments of the liberation struggle. No, the issue was about winners and losers, and the losers had to die. Political turf was to be won at all costs.<sup>888</sup>

Pregs Govender is also critical of, as well as celebrating, the liberation struggle and the governance of the ANC after 1994. However, she focuses her criticism much more closely on the gender dynamics of liberation politics. The subtitle of her book is 'a story of insubordination' and a sense of herself as an insubordinate woman is what binds and drives the narrative of *Love and Courage*. She discusses her work as national education officer of the Garment and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) trying to combat the difficulties faced by women workers and at the same time highlights her own problems within the Union's leadership. After relating the way in which the ANC dealt with her complaint of harassment from her colleagues she comments, 'no matter which side they were on, the patriarchs would not tolerate insubordination, especially not from a woman'.<sup>889</sup> The culmination of this narrative comes when it is revealed to Govender in 1999 by an ANC leader and government minister that the former head of her underground ANC unit had at one time asked to have her eliminated for

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<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>889</sup> Govender, *Love and courage a story of insubordination*, p.108.

'insubordination'.<sup>890</sup> Govender's ability to write and uncover her own story is clearly linked to her position as a Member of Parliament after 1994 and her subsequent resignation in 2002. Her discovery comes as the result of unresolved questions concerning her unit that she puts to the government minister. This required a physical effort from her. Govender describes how, 'as I waited for the minister, the childhood shyness that had made me stammer through primary school crept back. It sat in my throat, constricting it'.<sup>891</sup> The disclosure that her autobiography represents is obviously still far from complete. Govender uses pseudonyms for some of those most implicated in her narrative, including 'Ahmed' the head of her unit. She expands on her own experiences to remind the reader that she speaks in a context of silence:

The abuse of power had terrible consequences, some of which have now come to light...There were unspoken destinies of 'insubordinate' women and girls whose names no one remembers and whose fate is not recorded. Misogyny, the hatred of the female, crushed and killed insubordinate women and 'girly' boys and men.<sup>892</sup>

The tensions between speech and silence persist for these three women in elite positions, especially when it comes to articulating criticisms of the gendered aspects of their political subjectivities. The broader heritage landscape has been identified by a number of commentators as having very limited space dedicated to the roles of women during the liberation struggle. In August 2000 a monument, the first to commemorate women, was unveiled at the site of the women's anti-pass march on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1956. The monument was situated 'where the two wings of the Union Buildings meet at the top of the amphitheatre, where the historic gathering congregated in 1956'.<sup>893</sup> It included a symbolic grinding stone, recalling the famous song associated with the march *Wathint 'abafazi Wathint 'imbokodo Uzokufu* (You have tampered with the women. You have struck a rock. You will be crushed). Perhaps the most significant thing however, is despite being an 'official public monument', access is severely restricted. Annie

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<sup>890</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, p.181.

<sup>893</sup> Annie E Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p.108.

Coombes describes going through a laborious process of negotiating access to the Union Buildings to view the monument, which the average South African would have neither the contacts nor the time to undertake.<sup>894</sup>

A second project with rather more of a national and international public profile is that of The Women's Jail, in Johannesburg. The Women's Jail museum opened in 2005 as part of the Constitutional Hill complex including the newly built Constitutional Court, library and museums. These new institutions were contained within the buildings of The Old Fort prison that under apartheid had been for white male prisoners; Number Four for black male prisoners; and the Women's Jail. The Constitutional Hill complex self-consciously brought the new South Africa into a dialogue with its past, as one of the curator's Steve Kwen Mokwena put it, 'the fact that the new Constitutional Court is built alongside and parallel to Number Four presented an ideal starting point to tell the story of South Africa's journey from a past that denied human dignity to a present founded on the cardinal principles of freedom, equality and dignity'.<sup>895</sup> An official publication from Constitutional Hill described the opening of the Women's Jail and the meeting of narratives of women's detention under apartheid with the discourses and practices of gender equality in the new South Africa:

On the night of 2 August 2005, the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) officially opened its new offices in the recently completed buildings in the prison's main courtyard. The buildings also housed the regional offices of the Public Protector and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. On the same evening, the exhibition in the old parts of the Women's Jail was opened. In an extraordinary ceremony, women ex-prisoners led the guests in a candlelit procession from Constitution Square to the Women's Jail. Joyce Seroke, an ex-political prisoner and Chairperson of the CGE introduced the evening's proceedings.<sup>896</sup>

The museums, without access to a collection of exhibits or artifacts in any traditional sense relied upon the memories of former prisoners, both political and criminal to reinterpret the buildings as a space in which to tell their experiences of

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<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>895</sup> Quoted in Lauren Segal, Karen Martin, and Sharon Cort, *Number Four: the making of Constitutional Hill* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2006), p.174.

<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*, p.235.

detention. Many former prisoners who became involved in the museum have told of the ambiguous nature of their interaction with the buildings and the memory projects and the museum curators have attempted to address and record such sentiments. This is something that has also been noted of the museum on Robben Island that involved participation by ex-prisoners, sometimes ongoing in the job of acting as tour guides.<sup>897</sup> For example, Vusi Tshabalala, quoted in a museum publication as an 'ex-prisoner and blanket sculptor' remembered in 2005,

I joined Number Four last year as a sculptor and engraver. I wasn't an artist. I learned these things here in Number Four. When Church [a curator] found me, I was working at part-time jobs. At first, I didn't like to work here. I was feeling very bad because I kept imagining the things that happened to me here. But as the days went on, I started to forget. Churchill told me, 'You are no more in prison. You mustn't think too much this place. Take it as it comes, you are working here now'.<sup>898</sup>

The difficulties of working with painful personal memories meant that the curators 'ended up working with specific groups of former prisoners'.<sup>899</sup> According to museum publications these were 'women political prisoners from the 1970s and men from the early 1980s'.<sup>900</sup> Why these particular groups chose to participate in the museum's projects is not something pursued by the curators. There is a suggestion that there was perhaps a particular clarity, especially in memory, to the prison experience of women activists imprisoned in the 1970s. Caesarina Kona Makhoere's auto/biography displays this certainty. Nikiwe Deborah Matshoba who appeared in Ellen Kuzwayo and Mamphela Ramphele's auto/biographies, worked as a researcher for the Women's Jail and chose to tell her own life story within the museum's exhibitions. She recalled the nature of her detention in the 1970s in a way similar to Makhoere:

There was a time during the workshops when I used to have nightmares. Sometimes I woke up at night and I started thinking about what we had been through. I mean it was a long time one spent in here. But I was strengthened by the fact that in the mid-seventies, the prison was a story about anger, bitterness

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<sup>897</sup> Coombes, *History After Apartheid*, p.72.

<sup>898</sup> Quoted in Segal, Martin, and Cort, *Number Four: the making of Constitutional Hill*, p.180.

<sup>899</sup> Lauren Segal, Clive van den Berg, and Churchill Madikida, eds., *Mapping Memory*, 2nd ed. (Parkwood, South Africa: David Krut, 2007), p.1.

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*

and the language was that of war. Now it's different. Yes, it is a fight, but we are now fighting to preserve our heritage.<sup>901</sup>

The women who participated in the first round of workshops that created the opening exhibition at the Women's Jail formed a group to carry on their work, called Sizoya Sibuye (SiSi). Juby Mayet one of the leading members of this group outlined that, 'One of SiSi's chief aims is to make Number Four as famous as Robben Island, because it seems the world at large forgets that women played an important part in achieving democracy for our country'.<sup>902</sup> Indeed the Women's Jail is the only museum space within South Africa exclusively concerned with telling women's narratives.

In this light it is interesting to consider in what ways has the prison shaped the form and character of the narrative of women in the liberation struggle? The life stories collected and disseminated by the Women's Jail understandably focus upon the prison and prison experiences and as a result, this all-female, racially segregated space. Therefore, whilst they may seek to re-address a male-centered heritage narrative as told on Robben Island, the exhibitions do not do this explicitly and there is no space for exploring the interactions of men and women's struggles. The focus on the prison can have a narrowing affect. This can be seen in the biographies of Deborah Matshoba that the museum has displayed and disseminated through publications.<sup>903</sup> Inside the Women's Jail there is an information board showing photographs of Matshoba and the Soweto Uprisings of 1976 and including the following biography:

Nikiwe Deborah Matshoba was born in 1950 and grew up in Kagiso, the township outside Krugersdorp. Whilst promoting literacy in rural areas, she also spread the ideas of the Black Consciousness Movement. She was first arrested in June 1976 under the Terrorism Act. When police swooped on activists after the June 1976 Soweto Uprising, she was arrested and held at the Women's Jail for four months. After her release, she was arrested again under the Internal Security Act and brought back to the Women's Jail for four months. After her release in 1978, she served a five-year banning order, which confined her to the

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<sup>901</sup> Segal, Martin, and Cort, *Number Four: the making of Constitutional Hill*, p.167.

<sup>902</sup> Quoted in Segal, Berg, and Madikida, *Mapping Memory*, p.6.

<sup>903</sup> Deborah Matshoba testified to the TRC at a women's hearing on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1997 and subsequently was the subject of a film directed by Antjie Krog and Konelle Loots, *The Unfolding of Sky* in 1999. Her life was also the subject of a SABC documentary screened in August 2006 in a series entitled *Flowers of the Revolution*.

Krugersdorp magisterial district. While she was in detention, her husband Gilbert Mabale, was also detained, leaving their one-year old son without his parents.<sup>904</sup>

This short biography focuses upon Matshoba's life through her interaction with the prison. In a way it reads as a curriculum vitae of her struggle credentials. Elaine Unterhalter has noted that in male struggle auto/biographies, 'for nearly all the authors their 'real work', whether paid or unpaid, is political work'.<sup>905</sup> She argues that 'the self is not held apart from the work'.<sup>906</sup> The space of the Women's Jail enables women to tell their life stories on an international stage, but their life stories are interpreted in a particular way through the prison experience. The curators of the museum have given much thought to their methods of engaging former prisoners and the residents of Hillbrow in which the Constitutional Court is located. However, certain limitations are literally built into the museum. I am reminded of the DPSC's suggestion that the numbers of women detained by the apartheid state showed the extent of their roles in the struggle. This logic has inscribed certain definitions of struggle and suffering in the post-apartheid order.

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<sup>904</sup> Information Board, Women's Jail, Constitution Hill, visited September 2007.

<sup>905</sup> Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation," p.164.

<sup>906</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165.



## CONCLUSIONS

*I suppose, David confesses, that I don't see the need to flesh her out with detail, especially the kind invented by you. You see, she's not like anyone else; one could never, for instance say that she's young or middle-aged. I think of her more as a kind of – and he has the decency to hesitate before such a preposterous idea – a kind of scream somehow echoing through my story. A Scream, I laugh, a scream? You won't get away with abstracting her now. Besides, Dulcie herself would never scream. Dulcie is the very mistress of endurance and control. Dulcie knows there is only a point to screaming if you can imagine someone coming to your rescue; that a scream is an appeal to a world of order and justice – and there is no such order to which she can appeal. And since when do you know so much about her? he asks.<sup>907</sup>*

This exchange between the characters of David and the narrator in Zoe Wicomb's 2001 novel, *David's Story*, dramatizes some of the difficulties of writing about women in South Africa's liberation struggles. Wicomb sets up a kind of duel between David, the former underground activist and guerrilla, and the narrator, an older academic woman, over the place and meaning of Dulcie, a woman activist and guerilla, in a post-liberation South Africa. David seeks to suppress and abstract the role of Dulcie in his own story, turning her into a kind of symbol. Dulcie's spectral absence from David's story is symptomatic of young women's position in histories of liberation and reconciliation in South Africa. As Meg Samuleson has argued, Dulcie's body is 'an absence that draws attention to other absences...such as the history of women in the struggle, whose historiographical absences are alluded to in the novel's title *David's Story*'.<sup>908</sup> The attitude of David echoes the positions taken by many male activists explored in this thesis, from the young men Jeremy Seekings spoke to in Tumahole, those in Sekhukhuneland who talked to Ineke Van Kessel, the leadership of COSAS and George Ndlozi who testified to the youth hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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<sup>907</sup> Zoe Wicomb, *David's Story* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2001), p.134.

<sup>908</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?: Stories of the South African Transition* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), p.130.

We have also encountered versions of the narrator's interpretation of women as the silent victims of the struggle through the publicity material of the DPSC, women activist's auto/biographical writings and the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This exchange from *David's Story* thus dramatizes some of the central contestations that have surrounded the figure of the young woman in South African struggle histories.

Dorothy Driver has noted that Wicomb never resolves the tensions found in the above extract but rather through the character of Dulcie shows us 'the unrepresentable body in pain' or 'a disturbance at this very time of liberation'.<sup>909</sup> Like Zoe Wicomb, I too have not attempted to provide a comprehensive portrait of young women in the struggle, but instead, have explored their position in the contested historical narratives of South Africa after 1976. This thesis has set itself the task of analyzing the gendered production of histories of South Africa's youth. To do this I have explored some of the most important sites for the production of struggle histories. So, in addition to the field of academic inquiry explored in chapter one, this thesis has considered newspaper stories of commemorative activities, material produced by self-proclaimed youth activists, political trials, organisations set up to monitor the state's repressive practices towards young people, struggle autobiographies, oral histories and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Each chapter has demonstrated that the recording and archiving of political experience involves the gendering of subjects. The individual chapters have traced how the subject of the young woman appears in the various bodies of sources.

I introduced this thesis by highlighting nationalism and silence as two of my major concerns. It is not new to argue that nationalisms have typically been highly gendered projects that are structured by and even dependent upon ideologies of gender difference.<sup>910</sup> In South African scholarship the ways in which ideas of race have

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<sup>909</sup> See Dorothy Driver, 'Afterword' in Wicomb, *David's Story*, p.218.

<sup>910</sup> McClintock, Anne, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.89.

'permeated perceptions of the nation' have also been thoroughly explored.<sup>911</sup> Generation has not so often been explored. In focusing upon *young* women and nationalism, however, I do not merely wish to add generation to a list of subjectivities structured by and structuring nationalism. Nor have I sought to replace the silence of young women in struggle histories with a newly documented, previously lost, voice. Instead I have explored both the absence and presence of young women in the archives of the liberation struggle. In this I have tried to answer the call of Woodward *et al* for the need to 'theorise why there are cycles of silencing and voicing' in history and 'to engage in more open forms of writing which attend to the multiple positioning of the subject, rather than simply to insert static examples of women becoming heard or becoming present'.<sup>912</sup> It is imperative that historians consider critically how, when, where and by whom marginal subjects such as young women have been given voice. Partha Chatterjee has urged scholars of nationalism not to 'underestimate nationalism's capacity to appropriate, with varying degrees of risk and varying degrees of success, dissenting and marginal voices'.<sup>913</sup> I would add that we must also be cognisant of the ways in which silence and absence may be appropriated.

Chapter one examined the theoretical underpinnings of youth as a subject of academic inquiry in the twentieth century and in particular outlined the historiography of youth in South Africa's liberation struggle. In 1976 youth simultaneously emerged as political actors of national significance through the Soweto uprisings and necessary subjects of academic/activist study. Early accounts of 1976 offered differing pictures of the gendered make-up of the young protagonists of June 16<sup>th</sup>. However, a strand of thought that focused upon the participants as a generation, and thus as subjects with important race and class positions but only an implicit gender grew in importance. During the 1980s the contribution of youth to the struggle was abstracted and theorized. It was only in the 1990s that the masculinity of youth was revealed as something to be

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<sup>911</sup> Deborah Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter, "Mothers of the Nation: a Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress," in *Woman - Nation - State*, ed. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p.58.

<sup>912</sup> Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley, eds., *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p.xxv.

<sup>913</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.156.

explained. In widely cited research Jeremy Seekings argued that the maleness of youth could be explained by the move towards a politics of confrontation in the townships after 1984.<sup>914</sup> Seekings argued that prior to this shift youth political groupings had involved the participation of young women. However, after 1984, acting as the vanguard of the struggle to make the townships ungovernable, youth politics was a self-evidently male activity. Indeed, Seekings suggested following the work of Catherine Campbell that this confrontational political activity was a means for the reassertion of a black, urban masculinity that was otherwise curtailed or suppressed by apartheid.<sup>915</sup>

This has remained the dominant historical narrative of youth politics, structuring the responses of those who would refute it. For example, Janet Cherry has recently challenged the validity of this picture for the Eastern Cape, arguing for young women's involvement in all aspects of political activity including violent confrontation.<sup>916</sup> Her work goes some way to showing that just because a political activity is conceived of as masculine, this does not preclude women from involvement. Women can behave as masculine too. In a sense, this thesis does not refute Seekings' arguments but rather extends and alters them. In the early 1990s struggle history was an arena for the creation of masculinities, as it continues to be today. The young activists who told Seekings that politics was for men, were through their conversations with him inscribing politics as male (and themselves as male by their politicisation) by discussing both their own confrontational bodily actions and the physical absence of young women. I have argued that in this situation, even if young women were participating, they could not be acknowledged. Masculinity did not necessarily cause the actual absence of young women from the politics of confrontation. What can be said is that young women's symbolic absence was vital for constituting the masculinity young men associated with confrontation. To make this point the practice of politics must be understood as implicated in the production of subjects. Chapter one showed that the writing of struggle

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<sup>914</sup> Jeremy Seekings, "Gender ideology and township politics in the 1980s," *Agenda* 10 (1991): p.82; Jeremy Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), p.84.

<sup>915</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p.84.; Catherine Campbell, "Learning to Kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 1992): pp.614-628.

<sup>916</sup> Janet Cherry, "'We were not afraid': The role of women in the 1980s township uprising in the Eastern Cape," in *Women in South African History: They remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), pp.281-314.

history has uncritically reproduced the dominant subjectivities produced by the practice of struggle politics. In these histories young women are only present as an absence.

Chapter two traced through newspaper reports the commemorative practices surrounding June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 from 1977 up until the uprisings' twentieth anniversary in 1996. The chapter explored the way in which June 16<sup>th</sup> was linked and eventually became synonymous with youth as a politicised subject. The meaning and importance of June 16<sup>th</sup> was continually reinterpreted and contested as part of the changing dynamics and trajectory of the liberation struggle. Within these contestations the gender of youth was redefined. In the 1970s the figure of the injured young woman was framed as a heroic moral spokesperson who could inspire continued dedication to the struggle. In the 1980s the very same young women were seen to express the tragic sacrifices of youth as victims of the struggle. In the 1990s young women could appear as both blameless victims and violent perpetrators because male activists were seen as the authoritative carriers of the meaning of June 16<sup>th</sup>. Chapter two thus argues that the subject of the young woman was unstable and instrumental within the discourses of struggle commemoration.

Chapter three sketched an interpretation of youth politics as an arena for the creation and contestation of gender ideologies. From material produced by self-identified youth activists it is clear that masculinities and femininities were produced and contested by political activity throughout the period after 1976. It was argued that even when young women were apparently physically absent from such discussions, that absence was constantly invoked by male and female political activists. In the 1970s it seems young women could enter the realm of black consciousness politics as an honorary male or through the respectable, maternally led YWCA. In the 1980s the male leadership of COSAS encouraged the participation of young women in order that they might be 'protected' from consumerist ideals of the beauty queen and exploitative sexual relationships with teachers. In the 1990s the ANC's political legitimacy, particularly internationally, rested upon its position as a non-racist and *non-sexist* organisation. In this context the newly re-launched ANCYL was very anxious to ensure the political participation of young women. Young women's gendered experiences of

youth politics were for the first time sought by the organisational leadership and found expression in public spaces. In the 1990s there was a shift from young men talking about young women's silence and absence to young women being able to articulate their own marginalization. However, absence remained as the lens through which young women's political participation was framed.

Chapter four examined the intertwined discourses of criminality and victimhood which produced many of the sources that document youth political experience after 1976. The apartheid state's practices of criminalising political opposition first took in young activists in significant numbers during the 1976-77 uprisings. In the late 1970s the state sought to label youth political activity as politically criminal through charges such as sedition.<sup>917</sup> Later in the 1980s their strategy was to criminalise and de-politicise the activities of youth and other anti-apartheid organisations through charges such as public violence. In both strategies the state imagined the target of its actions as male. The chapter explores what was sayable by, and about, young women in these contexts. In the SSRC sedition trial, young women witnesses were used extensively by both prosecution and defense to demonstrate their own marginalisation. In the 1980s the daybooks of the DPSC were a unique space for recording some young women's stories of political participation, framed by their detention. These testimonies show young female activists who viewed themselves as in direct confrontation with the apartheid state and at the same time linked with domestic respectability. In its publicity material the DPSC used young, respectably domestic, and heroic, women detainees to counter the state's depictions of youth as criminal young men. The post-apartheid state attempted to rebalance the discourses of criminality surrounding youth through expanding narratives of victimhood (expressed most often at the TRC hearings through mothers who had lost sons) and this sat uncomfortably with the tragic and heroic subjectivities some young activists saw themselves embodying. In the TRC's special public hearings on youth the dominant subject positions of criminal and victim were contested and rejected by some young men and women. Chapter four thus outlines that discourses of criminality and victimhood have created some of the most powerful,

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<sup>917</sup> For a discussion see, Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

enduring and highly gendered subject positions for youth to be heard, but that these positions have limited the articulation of much more varied and complex experiences of young people's politicisation.

Chapter five explored auto/biographies, as a space for women activists to tell their life stories, that was entangled with the broader dynamics of the struggle and struggle histories. Writing an auto/biography was a possibility that was first opened up to black women by feminist presses based in the UK and America in the 1980s. The explicitly feminist framing of these autobiographical projects was at odds with the authors' position on feminism within the struggle, often regarded in the 1980s as a divisive and western ideology. The 'motherist' position of activists like Ellen Kuzwayo figured young women activists as incomplete activists; not fully present in the struggle until they were mothers.<sup>918</sup> The alternative position for young women as daughters of the struggle, framed their participation as a struggle for home but because of this has remained a potentially disruptive position. Daughters of the struggle could also reveal dangerous truths about male activists' home lives. Detention was very important as the central political experience of women's autobiographical projects published in the 1980s. From the 1990s onwards 'breaking silences' was the frame through which women's autobiographical projects were sold. Three out of the four women who published autobiographies in the 1990s had famous husbands or lovers. In the 2000s those women who published autobiographies had high profile post-apartheid political careers. These later autobiographies have engaged with the complexities of 'breaking silences' and in two cases, those of Pregs Govender and Sibongile Mkhabela, have also broken down the distinction between the subject position of young woman activist and mother.<sup>919</sup> In the wider heritage economy of post-apartheid South Africa detention has re-emerged, through the Women's Jail Museum, as the primary lens through which the lives of women in the struggle are told. Chapter five thus argued that autobiographical projects must be read in the context of, and indeed can reveal much about, the shifting economies of knowledge and say-ability.

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<sup>918</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1985).

<sup>919</sup> Pregs Govender, *Love and courage: a story of insubordination* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2007); Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Press, 2001).

All five chapters demonstrated that the figure of the young woman in the liberation struggle has only emerged as a subject in relation to others or in marginal spaces such as detention. The subject of the young woman was never stable and has often been defined by its absence. This thesis has demonstrated that there is no simple reason for the absence of young black women from struggle history and nor is there a straightforward methodological way of breaking their silence. It is the making of history itself that has gendered youth. Future histories will have to engage with the inextricable connection between the liberation struggle and the creation and contestation of gender ideologies. In paying attention to the production of history the aim of this thesis has been to continually ask, as David does, 'and since when do you know so much about her?'



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