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VARIA

coordonné par

RAOUL EHODE ELAH
ERICK SOURNA LOUMTOUANG



Ministère de la recherche
scientifique et de l'innovation

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The ghost of *Winnie Madikizela-Mandela*: exhuming the female spirit in apartheid resistance discourses

Zuhmboshi eric nsuh

Abstract

This paper analyses South African apartheid historiography in order to verify the participation of the South African woman in the fight against apartheid from when it was made an official doctrine in 1948 to when it was abolished in 1990 following the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. The female voice, in the apartheid struggle, has almost been suppressed because historical discourse in South Africa has been a male-dominated domain. Consequently, these male historiographers highlight the exploits of men and, in most cases, excluding those of women in the struggle, thereby, transmitting the false impression that the struggle against racial bigotry in South Africa was a male-dominated business. This paper postulates that the South African womenfolk were also part of the struggle against apartheid although official historiography has systematically precluded them from the struggle. In this regard, the South African woman was not a mere passive observer during the apartheid era but also a participant political activist in the deconstruction of this heinous system of racial prejudice.

Résumé

Cet article analyse l'historiographie de l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud afin de vérifier la participation de la femme sud-africaine à la lutte contre l'apartheid, depuis le moment où celui-ci est devenu une doctrine officielle en 1948 jusqu'à son abolition en 1990, après la libération de Nelson Mandela. La voix des femmes, dans la lutte contre l'apartheid, a presque été supprimée parce que le discours historique en Afrique du Sud a été un domaine dominé par les hommes. Par conséquent, ces historiographes

masculins soulignent les exploits des hommes et, dans la plupart des cas, excluent ceux des femmes dans la lutte, transmettant ainsi la fausse impression que la lutte contre la bigoterie raciale en Afrique du Sud était une affaire d'hommes. Cet article postule que les femmes sud-africaines ont également participé à la lutte contre l'apartheid, bien que l'historiographie officielle les ait systématiquement exclues de la lutte. À cet égard, la femme sud-africaine n'était pas un simple observateur passif pendant l'ère de l'apartheid, mais aussi un activiste politique participant à la déconstruction de cet odieux système de préjugés raciaux.

Introduction

In historiographical discourse, it is argued that history could be false not only when falsehood is propagated but also when essential facts are omitted thereby preventing the reader from having the totality of the truth. Consequently, history is always in the process of being re-written in order to include those elements or facts that had been previously left out. The distortion of history is clearly evident in South African apartheid resistance history where the woman's participation in the struggle has almost been obliterated. The apartheid regime was not only fought against by men; women were very instrumental in this struggle as well. However, the role of women in this fight has been side-lined and not accorded meaningful prominence. This is because historiography in South Africa has, for a long time, been a patriarchal venture.

Andre Brink, in "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature", gives credence to the above view when he argues that history is one of those areas to be revisited by South African writers. In his analysis, he argues particularly that women have been unjustly treated in South African historiography. He comments: "What interests me particularly at the moment is the link between women and history" because women have been "largely excluded from official South African discourses; and history and canon" (23). The reason for this exclusion is the fact that South African "historiography has been for so long a male-dominated territory" (23-24). However, many South African critics of

literary and cultural studies have undertaken the venture to re-write the South African history and to highlight the role played by women in the liberation struggle of this country. Thus, these critics are engaged in giving the woman a voice in South African historiography. By so doing, these critical historians hope to bring in the element of gender balance and objectivity in South African historical discourse. Andre Brink further comments on this idea in the following words: “And it seems to me that this kind of enterprise may serve as a starting point of a completely reinvented South African history: history, in fact, reimagined as her story” (23).

In this guise, this paper seeks to show the relationship between gender consciousness and historiography. In other words, it analyses South African apartheid historiography in order to verify the participation of the South African woman in the fight against apartheid from when it was made an official doctrine in 1948 to when it was abolished in 1990. The female voice, in this struggle, has almost been obliterated because historical discourse in South Africa has been a male-dominated domain. Consequently, these male historiographers highlight the exploits of men excluding those of women in the struggle. From a liberal feminist paradigm, this paper postulates that the South African womenfolk were also part of the struggle against apartheid although official historiography has systematically excluded them from the struggle. In this regard, the South African woman was not a mere passive observer during the apartheid era but also a political activist in the deconstruction of this heinous system of racial bigotry. In fact, the role of the South African woman could be from two major perspectives: the South African woman in apartheid politics and the South African female artist/writer and apartheid resistance.

Female Activism and Political Resistance in South Africa, 1948 to 1994

The year 1948 was a turning-point in the political and constitutional history of South Africa; it was in this year that the racist Nationalist Party (N.P), which was supported by a bulk of Afrikaners, ascended the helm of political leadership after her victory in the general elections. This party, which was under the leadership of the Calvinist protestant cleric Dr Daniel Francois Malan, advocated a programme of total white supremacy (apartheid) and was supported by a vast majority of Afrikaners. The Nationalist Party dominated the political scene, during this period in South Africa until 1994, when the African National Congress (ANC) won the first democratic, non-racial presidential elections in South Africa with Nelson Mandela as President. In fact, in his 1979 B.B.C. Reith Lecture entitled “The Cross of Humiliation”, Ali A. Mazrui described the political situation in South Africa as “an amalgam of slavery and colonization” because “Apartheid shares with slavery the assumptions of hereditary caste roles, that is, status based partly on descent and partly on ascriptive rules of master and servant” (36).

In order to implement the infernal doctrine of apartheid, laws promoting racial bigotry in all spheres of life were enacted by the South African Parliament and repressive measures were used to ensure their implementation. This met with aggressive resistance from a cross-section of the population and especially from the womenfolk although female resistance against the apartheid ideology has not been accorded enough premium in history books. Desiree Lewis, in “Discursive Challenges for African Feminisms”, corroborates the above views when he comments that: “The eighties marked a high point for integrating gender into public and political discourses on human rights in South Africa. Various communities, regional and national organisations provided structures for working women, students and activists to play dynamic roles in anti-apartheid politics” (80). In fact, South African women of all fields of life

joined their male counterparts in adding their voices to the struggle against apartheid.

The visible participation of the South African woman in the political climate of South Africa could be traced back even before the official pronouncement of apartheid in 1948. This is because there was already racial segregation in South Africa before the above-mentioned date. In fact, South African women had been very politically active even before 1948 when apartheid was officially made the state ideology in South Africa. When the African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912, the membership of women were never accepted. It was in 1918 when the first female political organisation or pressure group was founded in South Africa called the Bantu Women's League (BWL) under the leadership of Dr. Charlotte Maxeke. The aim of this league was to protest against the carrying of passes by black women which had been instituted by Prime Minister Louis Botha. This piece of legislation was discriminatory because it targeted only blacks since white men and women were not constrained to carry such passes. At the time of its formation, the Bantu Women's League was incorporated as a branch of the African National Congress (ANC). However, in 1948, the BWL was replaced by the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) when women were officially accepted as members of the movement.

In 1952, South African women of the other races participated in a demonstration that was dubbed the Campaign and Defence against Unjust Laws in which many women were arrested and detained. Also, white women played active roles in organizing the Congress of Democrats, a white organization in alliance with the A.N.C. and the Coloured People's Congress. Furthermore, white South African women were at the forefront for the struggle against apartheid in 1954 when the Federation of South African Women (F.S.A.W) was formed. This was a non-racial organisation which mobilised women to protest against apartheid in general and the introduction of passes for women in particular. The aim of this federation was to work for majority rule in South Africa and end the policy of apartheid. The F.S.A.W. also had a feminist orientation; it was equally

meant to fight for the rights and freedom for the South African woman regardless of her race or ethnicity.

The conference ended with the publication of the “Women’s Charter” which served as an *instrumentum laboris* for South African women. This Charter brought out the general atmosphere in South Africa at the time and also handled political, economic, social, and cultural issues that were plaguing their society. The Preamble of the Charter, adopted at the founding conference of F.S.A.W. on the 17th of April 1954 in Johannesburg, states *inter alia* that “the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and house wives, Africans, Indians, European and Coloured” declared their “aims of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as woman” and also those “that deprive us in any way of our inherent rights to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to any one section of the population” (par.1). More so, The Charter also criticised the state of events in South Africa with the women pledging their unalloyed support for their male counterpart in the struggle against apartheid. In this guise, the Charter further stipulates that the entire South African womenfolk pledged to unite with their male counterparts in the struggle. It is in this light that the Charter stipulates that the women pledge ourselves to keep high the banner of equality, fraternity and liberty. Thus, “As women there rests upon us also the burden of removing from our society all the social differences developed in past times between men and women, which have the effect of keeping our sex in a position of inferiority and subordination” (par.7). Similarly, the women also lampooned on the absence of freedom of speech in South Africa and called on the apartheid regime to create an enabling environment where political freedom could blossom. The women contended that the level of civilisation which any society has reached can be measured by the degree of freedom that its members enjoy. Thus, the Charter concludes that “The status of women is a test of civilisation. Measured by that standard, South Africa must be considered low in the scale of civilised nations” (par.3).

In addition, during the Congress of the People in 1955, South African women were visibly present and took active part in its deliberations and debates. The aim of this Congress was to draw all the necessary and significant forces from the South African society to form a political fortress against the institutional racial superstructure set up by the apartheid regime. In his article, “Freedom in Our Lifetime” Nelson Mandela at the time lauded the success of this congress and commented that “For the first time in the history of our country the democratic forces irrespective of race, ideological conviction, party affiliation or religious belief have renounced and discarded racialism in all its ramifications, clearly defined their aims and objects and united in a common programme of action” (6). In fact, during the conference the women composed a poem entitled “What Women Demand” in which they expressed their worries and what they wanted to be changed in South Africa which range from political to social issues. According to the content of the poem, South African women wanted an overhaul of the racist apartheid system by granting equal rights to all people and also the abolition of the pass laws which limited the movements of non-whites in South Africa. The title of this document portrays the determination of these women to forcefully advance their claims. The women used the word “demand” and not “beg” in order to show their firm belief that what they are asking is not a favour but a legitimate right. At the end of the poem, the women assert that their struggle is not just for the betterment of women but for people from all races. “We demand”, they say “these for all people of all races.” In addition, what is also very noticeable in the poem is the fact that the collective pronoun “we” is used throughout the poem. This is to show that the women are united in their demands and rights.

The apex of female resistance against the apartheid regime was in 1955 when the non-violent white women’s resistance organization called the “Black Sash” was formed under the leadership of Jean Sinclair. This organization campaigned against the removal of Coloured voters from the voter’s registers in the Cape Province by the apartheid regime. Denis M. Ackermann, in “Lamenting Tragedy from “the Other Side” argues that:

“The public lament for injustice haunted the lives of the apartheid politicians, a visible demonstration of (one of a few) pockets of white resistance to racist policies” “The activities of the Black Sash”, he further notes “earned them a generous accolade from Nelson Mandela who, in his first speech after his release from prison, called them “the conscience of white South Africans” (218). Thus, a document, published by the organisation entitled “Our History”, explained elaborately the activities of the movement from 1955 to the 1990s. This document affirms that the Black Sash, throughout the above years, has fought tirelessly against injustice and inequality in South Africa. Although initially the focus of the Black Sash was on constitutional issues, it later on expanded to moral, legal, political and socio-economic issues around racial discrimination. This explains why in 1956, “[...] the women became watchdogs when they began monitoring and reporting of State actions and court proceedings. These activities were soon established as key tactics in the Black Sash strategy to fight Apartheid.” (par. 8) In addition, in 1958 the Black Sash became increasingly concerned that African women in the Cape were being arrested and jailed for trespassing or violating the pass laws set up by the government to restrict the movement of black people. They set up what was called the ‘Bail Fund’ which was used to assist those women who were jailed (par.10) and the activities of the organisation brought its members into serious confrontations with the apartheid regime and within conservative whites.

In addition, on August 9, 1956, the women of South Africa organised a protest march to the Prime Minister’s office in Pretoria where they were demanding the withdrawal of passes for women and a repeal of the pass laws. They presented a petition to the Prime Minister where they expressed the grievances that they harboured against the apartheid regime. The introductory lines of the petition read, *inter alia*, thus: “We, the women of South Africa, have come here today. We represent and we speak on behalf of hundreds of thousands of women who could not be with us. But all over the country, at this moment, women are watching and thinking of us. Their hearts are with us” (par.1). The opening lines of this petition

show the solidarity that existed among the South African women during the protest and their determination to push their ideology to fruition. This view is supported in the second paragraph of the petition when the women protesters equally affirm that “We are women from every part of South Africa. We are women of every race; we come from the cities and the towns, from the reserves and the villages. We come as women united in our purpose to save the African women from the degradation of passes” (par. 2). The above lines from the petition of the women, confirms that the South African women were very united in their struggle against the ills of the Apartheid regime. It also shows the dishonest nature of the Apartheid regime. The women accused the Prime Minister’s government for announcing “aloud at home and abroad that the pass laws have been abolished” meanwhile the Apartheid regime was still arresting South Africans who disobeyed the pass laws. This pass law was later changed to “reference book” which practically meant the same thing.

At the individual level, there were women political icons whose contributions to the collapse of apartheid could not go unnoticed. A visible case in point was Winnie Madikizela-Mandela who is described by Frank Welsh, in *South African: A Narrative History*, as “one of the many casualties of oppression” (507). Notwithstanding, she has not been accorded the political visibility that she deserves in official South African historiography. This is because whenever Winnie Mandela is mentioned in official South African history and politics, she is always pegged to Nelson Mandela (her husband) thus, creating the impression that without her husband she cannot have visibility. In fact, this political iconoclast and nonconformist came into the lamplight in South Africa in the 1950s when she met young people from the African National Congress and was first detained as a political prisoner for the first time in 1958. This did not deter her for she was heavily involved with encouraging the women of South Africa to stand up and refuse to be subjected to the laws of apartheid. It was during this period of her political romance in the ANC that she met Nelson Mandela – who by this time was one of the front-liners within the ranks of the ANC. Furthermore, even in the early years of their marriage,

she had to learn to survive on her own, as Mandela toured different townships, passing on the anti-apartheid message. After her arrest and imprisonment in 1962, she was banned from going out of Soweto. This meant that she became a prisoner within Soweto, the largest township in South Africa. In her typical activism, she ignored the ban and visited Mandela in prison and was jailed in 1967. In May 1969, she was still arrested under the New Terrorism Act. Martin Meredith, in *Nelson Mandela: A Biography*, “Mandela’s anguish over the persecution of Winnie also intensified at this time”. Meredith further recounts that “The two Mandela daughters, Zenani, aged ten, and Zindzi, aged nine, were at home at the time, on holiday from school in Swaziland, and watched as their mother was taken away. On Robben Island, the prison authorities made sure that Mandela knew of Winnie’s arrest by leaving newspaper cuttings in his cell (308).

After her release from a Kroonstad prison in 1975, she was part of the newly-formed African National Congress Women's League which was later on banned in South Africa. However, the banning of this organ did not deter her and her female comrades from fighting against the apartheid laws. In addition, she was involved in the Soweto 1976 uprising and was sentenced to jail again - this time, she had to spend half a year in prison and after her release she was not allowed to go back to Soweto. The South African government re-stationed her in the town of Brandfort and there she remained for nine years, enduring assaults on her house and receiving numerous death threats. Being the strong woman that she was, she again ignored her banning order and left Brandfort for visits to Soweto. For this, she was arrested each time and had to spend time in jail. In fact, Winnie Mandela was venerated worldwide and among the majority of black people; and what put her in a class of her own was her fearless verbal attacks on the apartheid government. The regime responded in turn with arrests, banning orders and jail terms, but they were never able to destroy her or weaken her belief. In 1998, Winnie Mandela competed for the post of chairperson of the ANC party but was defeated by Thabo Mbeki. Winnie died on 2nd of April 2018.

Another female apartheid political activist was Ruth First Slovo. She was born into a family that was very politically-minded. Ruth was the daughter of Jewish immigrants Julius and Matilda First. Her parents were founding members of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1953. She was the wife of Joe Slovo who was the leader of the banned white South African Communist Party. In 1947, Ruth First worked for the Johannesburg City Council, but left because she could not agree with the actions of the council. She then became Johannesburg editor of the left-wing weekly newspaper, *The Guardian*. As a journalist she specialised in expose reporting and her incisive articles about slave-like conditions on Bethal potato farms, the women's anti-pass campaign, migrant labour, bus boycotts and slum conditions remain among the finest pieces of social and labour journalism of the 1950s. In addition, having grown up in a politically-conscious home, First's political involvement never abated. Apart from the activities already mentioned, she did support work for the 1946 mineworkers' strike, the Indian Passive Resistance campaign and protests surrounding the outlawing of communism in 1950. First was a Marxist with a wide internationalist perspective. She was very instrumental in the formation of the underground SACP which was in close links with the African National Congress.

During the state of emergency following the Sharpeville shootings of March 1960, First fled to Swaziland with her children and only returned after the state of emergency had been lifted. In 1963 First was detained following arrests of members of the underground ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto we Sizwe in Rivonia. In the trial, which followed, political leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki were sentenced to life imprisonment. However, First was not among the accused. She was detained in solitary confinement under the notorious 90-day clause, during which she attempted suicide. Her father fled South Africa and soon after her release First also left with her children to join her husband, who had already fled the country, to Britain. The family settled in North London and First threw herself into anti-apartheid politics, holding talks, seminars and public discussions in support of the

ANC and SACP. Her book, entitled *117 Days*, an account of her arrest and interrogation in 1963, was made into a film. Her radical activities and reports on the apartheid era forced the regime to banish her into exile where she was finally assassinated, by Craig Williamson and his henchman Roger Raven, on the 17th of August 1982, in Maputo - through a letter bomb. In *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*, Gillian Slovo (Ruth First's daughter) gives the history of her family and how her parents were actively involved in the apartheid struggle. In the "Foreword" to this book, Gillian Slovo affirms that "*Every Secret Thing* is not a biography – it is a family memoir" and "[It] was written in the heat of my passion to try and work out what my parents mean to me, and what they meant to the country to which they devoted their lives. It is a very partial view – my view of them – and one with which some of their friends might take issue (xiii).

Female South African Artists and Apartheid Resistance

Art in general and literature in particular can effectively be used as a weapon of struggle especially in the context of political oppression/repression, and injustice. In this case, the artist will not only be interested in the aesthetic propinquity or virility of his work but also in its functionality in his immediate socio-political and cultural context. Thus Leon Trotsky, in "Literature and Revolution" argues that artistic creation is "a complicated turning inside out of old forms, under the influence of new stimuli which originate outside of art" (39). He further postulates that "It [art] is not a disembodied element feeding on itself; but a function of social man indissolubly tied to his life and environment" (40). Trotsky's views adumbrate the fact that art is coterminous with social reality and this explains the reason why writers/artists are sometimes visualised as the gadflies of society. In this connection, South African literature/art during the apartheid era could be described as falling with the literary taxonomy of protest art because most South African writers used their art as an instrument of exposing and criticising the ills of apartheid. Thus, female

writers/artists such as Nadine Gordimer, Gillian Slovo, Ann Harries, and Miriam Makeba came up with works which were highly realistic in depicting the injurious nature of the apartheid system.

Nadine Gordimer, an ANC activist and the 1991 Nobel Prize winner in literature, is one of the most profound, prolific and versatile female South African writers of the white race during and after the apartheid imbroglio. Ulrike Auga, in “Intellectual between Resistance and Legitimation: The Cases of Nadine Gordimer and Christa Wolf”, acknowledges that in the South African national liberation struggle, “Nadine Gordimer has always positioned herself in resistance to apartheid”. Thus, “With intensifying political oppression and racial discrimination, she was drawn closer to the ANC. She was closely aligned with the identity-politics of the chartists, advocating resistance without a clearly defined project” (209). This statement shows that Gordimer was very instrumental in the fight against apartheid and, also portrays her as a humanist writer who believes that social justice and equality are necessary ingredients for any progressive society. In fact, Gordimer’s commitment to the changing politics of her society qualifies her as a writer of politically committed literature. Her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953) is based on her own life and is set in her home town. *A World of Strangers* (1958) and *Occasion for Loving* (1963) focus on the illicit love affair between a black man and a white woman. *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) deals with master-servant relation in South African life. In 1974, Nadine Gordimer’s novel *The Conservationist* was a joint winner of the Booker Prize for fiction and in 1979, *Burger’s Daughter* was written following the aftermath of the Soweto Massacre. The novel, as well as other works she had written, was however banned. In 1981, *July’s People* was published. In this work, a family of white liberals flees a violence-stricken Johannesburg into the country, where they seek refuge with their African servant.

The literary career of Nadine Gordimer witnessed a complete volt-face in 1990 following the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. At this point in the history of South Africa, the novelist had to tailor her discursive preoccupations to suit the new socio-political context. Ulrike Auga argues

that ANC policy changed when the negotiated settlement was complete which heralded “a nation-state democracy and market economy and later neoliberalism” in South Africa. It was in this context that “Gordimer became the house critic of post-apartheid South Africa. Such a stance entails the Legitimation and stabilization of the system. Gordimer became the legitimizing intellectual, a role that has been part of the institution of national unity, democracy, and the market economy ever since the French Revolution” (209). Since then, she has been strongly concerned with the reconciliation of races and how “a rainbow nation” could be formed from the ashes of Apartheid. *None to Accompany Me* (1994), her first post-Apartheid novel, deals with a society in the painful ordeal to reconcile itself after decades of racial animosity and umbrage. *The House Gun* (1998) treats the theme of racial violence, torture and insecurity in post-Apartheid South Africa. *The Pickup* (2001) is concerned with the concept of migration, displacement, the search for identity and the culture of survival in the post-Apartheid context.

Gillian Slovo is also one of the South African female writers who was radically iconoclastic against the apartheid administrations and its entire legal system. Gillian has lived in England since 1964, working as a writer, journalist, and film producer. Her first novel, *Morbid Symptoms* (1984) is a detective story with a female character, Kate Baeier, playing the role of an investigator. Her other novels include *Death Comes Staccato* (1987), *Ties of Blood* (1989), *The Betrayal* (1991), *Façade* (1993), *Catnap* (1994), *Close Call* (1995), *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country* (1997), *Red Dust* (2000) and *Ice Road* (2004). *Death by Analysis* (1986) is also a portrayal of the uproarious period of apartheid. Born in 1952 in South Africa. Her father, Joe Slovo, was the leader of the South African Communist Party (S.A.C.P.) and in 1985 he joined the A.N.C. party to become the first white member in the national executive organ of the party. Her mother, Ruth First, was a journalist who was assassinated in Maputo in 1982, by a parcel bomb. From this background, it is easy to understand why Slovo, in her writings, is also very critical of the apartheid regime. In her memoir, entitled *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*, Gillian Slovo conveys the history of her

family in the context of apartheid and how her parents were actively involved in the struggle against the systems.

Zoë Wicomb, the next female, mixed-race, South African writer, was born in 1948 and raised in Namaqualand, South Africa. What is really peculiar with her year of birth is the fact that it was in this year that apartheid was officially introduced in South Africa as a state policy. In the context of her birth, one will realise that this writer chronicles the history of South Africa from the era of apartheid fragmentation to the period of negotiation and post-apartheid reconciliation and nation-building. Also, the fact that she is of a mixed-race depicts the reason the concept of identity crisis is rife in her novel, *Playing in the Light*. The protagonist, Marion Campbell, could be read as an extended metaphor of the author – since she is also of a mixed-race. In an extensive interview with David Robinson, a British journalist and literary commentator, Wicomb revealed that she lived with her aunt in Cape Town where she went to a coloured secondary school and university. At the university, she was inspired by great Western writers and playwrights such as Chaucer, Johnson, Shakespeare and Hardy. Because of her vitriolic criticisms against the Apartheid system, she was forced to go on exile in 1970 to Glasgow. She only came back to South Africa in 1990 when the Apartheid system came to an end.

Coloured South African female writers were also very active in the struggle against apartheid. The symbol of coloured struggle during this period was Bessie Head. She was a South African refugee who had made her home in Botswana. Head is one of the first coloured South African women to be known in the world of letters and literature. She has written three major novels entitled *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, and *A Question of Power* – as well as many short stories. Bessie Head was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa on July 16, 1937. She had a very controversial parentage. This is due to the fact that her mother was a white South African from the bourgeoisie class while her father was a black South African who was employed as their servant. This explains why there was a sort of tragedy attached to her birth – for during this period in South Africa it was unthinkable for a black to have sexual relations with a white woman to the

point of impregnating her. When she was found pregnant, Bessie Head's mother was classified as insane and she was taken to a mental hospital in Pietermaritzburg. The probable reason for this was that, her parents must have thought that she was mad due to the sexual relation she had with this black man taking into consideration that she was coming from a white race which at this time was considered to be the superior race. In "The Tragic Life of Bessie Head", Cecil A. Abrahams testifies that Bessie Head was a mixed-race whose maternal ancestors originated from England and her paternal ones were from South Africa. "Since her birth was unordinary", Abrahams continues, "she made no contact with either set of grandparents". Thus "Her mother, who was white, was admitted by her family to an asylum when she was discovered to be pregnant by their black stable boy. It was in this asylum where Head was born and where her mother committed suicide when Head was barely one year old" (3).

After her birth, Bessie Head was taken from her mother and was brought up by her foster parents until when she was thirteen. Then she was placed in a mission orphanage. Her mother had asked that some of her money be set aside for Bessie's education and when her mother died, a sum of money was made available and Bessie got a high school education in the orphanage where she remained until the age of eighteen. It was while she was growing up in South Africa that the seeds of her writing career were planted. After leaving the orphanage, Bessie Head served as an elementary school teacher in South Africa for two years. She also did part-time journalism and worked for a newspaper magazine in South Africa 'Drum'. This newspaper was primarily for Africans. She took advantage of this and published some of her romance stories in the paper. However, she asserted that her first real creative writing did not begin until she left South Africa for Botswana. In 1964, there was an advertisement in South Africa for teachers in Botswana. Bessie Head applied for this job and was recruited. However, when she went for a visa the apartheid regime at the time gave her an exit permit which was a euphemistic way of sending her on exile from South Africa. The reason for her exile was that at this time

she was among some of the most vitriolic critics against the apartheid regime.

Throughout her stay in Botswana as a stateless person she ran into trauma and depression because of the hardship in which she was exposed to. It is widely believed that it was during this period of her depression that she wrote her most controversial novel, *A Question of Power*. According to Cecil A. Abrahams, this novel as Bessie Head's "most successful and mature novel" (3). This novel has an autobiographical orientation. Elizabeth, the protagonist in the story, is a metaphor for Bessie Head. The problems Elizabeth undergoes in the novel from the time she is born in South Africa to when she is exiled by the Apartheid regime to the small village in Motabeng, in Botswana, are not different from the problems Head also encountered in South Africa before her exile to Botswana. In addition, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* is equally of the coloured race and very aggressive against the Apartheid regime. This was one of the political activities of Bessie Head before she was sent on exile. Cecil A. Abrahams contends that "It is in *A Question of Power* that Head finds an answer to her search for man's evil and his good. And it is here that she realizes that the political and economic institutions can truly be transformed for the betterment of man when man has analyzed and resolved the questions of good and evil embedded in his soul" (Abrahams, 1990, p. 9). In an interview with the *Voice of America* in 1981, Bessie Head accepted the autobiographical nature of *A Question of Power*. She said that she herself had had a mental breakdown and that the character of Elizabeth in the novel is an extended metaphor of herself. This explains why because of the problems she faces in Motabeng; Elizabeth runs into a mental breakdown where she is rushed to the hospital. Bessie Head died in 1986 and was buried in Botswana. She remains one of the most violent critics against the apartheid regime.

Black South African female writers were also involved in the fight against apartheid. The first black South African female writer to publish during the apartheid era was Miriam Tlali whose first novel was *Muriel at Metropolitan*. She wrote this novel in 1969 but it was published in 1975 by

Ravan Press after having been rejected by many publishing houses in South Africa probably because of the novel's radicalism against racism and the apartheid super-structure. Ravan Press finally published this novel only after removing certain extracts they thought would certainly offend the Censorship Board — the South African literary watchdog. But despite this effort, the novel was banned almost immediately after publication because the Censorship Board pronounced it undesirable in the South African political context. This meant that the novel had touched a raw nerve of the apartheid system. Just like Bessie Head's novel *A Question of Power*, *Muriel at Metropolitan* can be regarded as a fictionalized autobiography of Miriam Tlali. The novel explores the relationship between black and white South Africans, particularly in the work-place. Tlali also mirrors the oppression and exploitation of her people and how the apartheid regime maintained and applied its race laws. This novel, which can be described as "protest fiction," was written with the express aim of exposing the evils of the apartheid system and raising the political consciousness and confidence of black people of South Africa. In an exclusive interview with Rosemary Jolly in 1994 at the Harbour Castle Hilton in Toronto, Tlali evoked the precarious circumstances under which this novel was written. According to her, the novel was written in the context where all political organizations were banned and political meetings were not allowed. In this context of massive censorship "We had no platform at all. There was very little protest and I was restless and worried. At university I had met all these very wonderful people, all the politicians who would come and give us a lecture, and teach us about the system. And that broadens you up. For the first time in my life, I was exposed to that kind of thing" (Jolly, 1994, p. 144).

In the novel the narrator details her daily working experiences in a furniture and electronics store. Muriel, the protagonist, finds herself exposed to an environment which actually becomes a microcosm of life in South Africa. Relationships between black and white people are explored in an insightful manner. Muriel's white colleagues see her as inferior to them. Blacks, on the other hand, are portrayed as the oppressed

and the exploited. Muriel's resentment of this status quo appears throughout the novel. Her portrayal of the sensitiveness and insecurity of the police organ of the state is shocking. In a nutshell, this novel captures the sufferings of blacks in South Africa during the period of racial segregation fueled by the apartheid regime. In addition, what is striking about this novel is that when the author was writing the novel, she was more concerned with the content of the novel and not so much on its form or aesthetic qualities. In fact, in her interview with Rosemary Jolly, Miriam Tlali conferred to her that in writing *Muriel at Metropolitan*, she consciously sacrificed aesthetic commitment for political commitment. She argued that her aim of writing at the time was not to celebrate literary craftsmanship but to edify the black South African community of the ills of the Apartheid system. This explains why her interviewer, Rosemary Jolly, questioned her on the aesthetic standards of her work, she replied thus: "I didn't want to do this because it would waste my time. What I was interested in was to get anybody, any African who read the book [*Muriel at Metropolitan*], to be conscious of the system. That was my intention" (144).

In the domain of music, South African female musicians used their musical art in the struggle against apartheid. A prominent female anti-apartheid musician was Miriam Makeba who was popularly known as "Mama Africa" and the "Empress" of African music. Makeba was not only a South African singer; she was also a human rights campaigner. Because of her aggressive criticism of the apartheid administration, she was exiled from South Africa in 1960. Her exile from South Africa was very remarkable because this was the first time that a South African musician was sent on exile on account of apartheid. In an online article, entitled "Miriam Makeba", the writer comments that: "Miriam became an exile in 1960 when South Africa banned her from returning to her birth country - she was deemed to be too dangerous and revolutionary - this was after she had appeared in an anti-apartheid documentary, entitled "Come Back Africa", and this upset the then white apartheid government of South Africa. Miriam only returned to South Africa thirty years later" (par.3). More so, in 1963, she testified against apartheid at the United

Nations and her South African citizenship was taken away from her. She lived in the United States thereafter and her records were banned in South Africa. In 1986, she was awarded the Dag Hammarskjöld Peace Prize from the Diplomatic Academy for Peace. This prestigious award was a tacit recognition of her role in fighting against socio-political and cultural injustice in her native South Africa and the world at large. She only returned to South Africa in 1990 following the release of Nelson Mandela from prison.

Conclusion

In conclusion Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, in *The Genuine Intellectual*, argues that history is faulty not only when lies are told but when essential facts are left out. This paper set out to unearth the missing link in South African apartheid historiography by expounding on the monumental role played by the female folk in the dismantlement of this racial ideology. The above facts have attested that the South African woman also joined the bandwagon in the fight against the apartheid regime from the moment it was made an official policy till when it was finally dismantled. The resistance against racism, during this period, was made visible in the political and cultural domains. She is still occupying the vanguard position in the post-apartheid context and contributing in the reconstruction of the South African society.

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