

**PITIED PLUMAGE AND DYING BIRDS**

**The Public Mourning of National Heroines and Post-Apartheid  
Foundational Mythology Construction**

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By

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## **Abstract**

The original contribution of this thesis is the examination of the official construction of a post-apartheid foundation myth through the analysis of the dead body politics of five iconic South African women that spans the three presidencies that have defined South Africa's democratic era. This thesis examines the death and funeral of Albertina Sisulu, the return and burial of Sara Baartman, and the commemoration of Charlotte Maxeke, Lilian Ngoyi, and Helen Joseph. Sisulu, Baartman, Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph have been constructed as heroines and as foundational figures for the post-apartheid nation in official rhetoric. It will contend that the dead body politics of these women not only informs a new foundational mythology, but also features in the processes of regime legitimation when the ANC-dominated government faces strong societal criticism. Although such official expressions of nationalism may appear exhausted, this thesis will show that nationalism remains a powerful and dangerous force in South Africa that attempts to silence opposition and critical analysis of perceived failing government policies or inaction. This thesis will indicate that as women's bodies and legacies are appropriated for nationalist projects they are subsumed in discourses of domestic femininity in official rhetoric that dangerously detract from women's democratic rights and their ability to exercise responsible and productive citizenship in the post-apartheid state. It will argue that women's historic political activism is contained within the meta-narrative of 'The Struggle' and that women are re-subsumed into the patriarchal discourses of the past that are inherited in the present. This thesis approaches this topic by considering a top-to-bottom construction of post-apartheid nationalism through applying feminist critical discourse analysis to official rhetoric articulated at the public mourning and commemorative rituals of these five women.

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## *Introduction*

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### **“A Habit of Piety”: Mourning National Icons**

*It is not strange that time should have confused the words that once represented me with those of the fate of he who accompanied me for so many centuries. Words, displaced and mutilated words, words of others, were the poor pittance left him by the hours and the centuries.<sup>1</sup>*

- *Jorge Luis Borges*

On 5 December 2013, South Africa’s greatest national hero, Nelson Mandela, passed away. A great sense of sadness seemed to blanket South Africa as the news spread across the country. Ordinary citizens and South African celebrities called into local and national radio stations, appeared on television news channels and attempted – and sometimes failed – to choke away tears of sadness as they expressed their condolences and explained what ‘Madiba’<sup>2</sup> had meant to them. At grocery stores, shopping malls, and other public spaces strangers would engage in conversation to express shock and sadness at the loss of ‘Tata’<sup>3</sup> Madiba’. The South African ‘nation’, however imagined and constructed as it might be, appeared to rally and (re)form in the few days following Mandela’s death. It was a rare experience for a country persistently divided by class and race to present a mostly united front in the face of what was perceived as the post-apartheid nation’s greatest loss. A common sense and understanding pervaded that someone important who had been vital to the creation of the Rainbow Nation, had been lost – an individual who represented so many of the values that the post-apartheid state had been imbued with. In many ways, Mandela was a

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges. “The Immortal”, *Labyrinths*, (Penguin: London, 1970), p.148-149.

<sup>2</sup> Madiba is Nelson Mandela’s clan name – a reference to the ancestor from which he is descended and more meaningful than a surname.

<sup>3</sup> The isiXhosa word for ‘father’ and a term used affectionately by many South Africans to refer to Mandela.

foundational hero; a living embodiment of the qualities that were lauded and meant to be espoused by the citizens of post-apartheid South Africa.

For a student of nationalism/dead body politics this was a fascinating time to witness politicians and the public actively engaging with nationalist sentiment and public mourning and the many ways in which these factors manifested themselves in official rhetoric, the media, and public discourse; for an individual who has lived in South Africa for nearly two decades it was also a time to assess the power of public mourning and nationalism on a more emotional level as realisation dawned that despite a nuanced understanding of the influences of nationalism at work, I was not exempt from experiencing an emotional response to the loss of a national icon.

When I embarked on this thesis, I approached the topic of the public mourning of prominent icons in South Africa with a deep sense of cynicism and tended to view public expressions of mourning and ‘national sadness’ as little more than official rhetoric onto which a wealth of political agendas and nation-building ideologies were scripted. These icons were seemingly considered as little more than the forgotten ‘dying birds’ whose ‘plumage’ was pitied in official rhetoric to allude to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s allegory which he employed in his exploration of the politics of the death of England’s Princess Charlotte in 1817 and from which the title of this thesis owes its provenance.<sup>4</sup> However, the genuine sadness that many South Africans, and indeed, I, expressed at the death of Mandela required a reconsideration of this approach. While political agendas were undeniably attached to the spectacles of public mourning that were enacted around the death of Mandela and the political ideological capital reaped from the death of such a well-loved icon were prodigious, in this particular death the recognition of loss expressed by the public and the genuine emotions that were exhibited cannot be understated. Of course, the case studies of the women addressed in this thesis do not carry the same deep emotional connections – women icons are sidelined to a vertiginous degree in South Africa’s foundational mythology. Sara Baartman, Albertina Sisulu, Charlotte Maxeke, Helen Joseph, and Lilian Ngoyi – the women who make up the case studies of this thesis – do not hold the same iconic status in South Africa as Nelson Mandela. As the ‘father of the nation’, Mandela’s iconic status is unparalleled and many ordinary South Africans relate to him as ‘Tata’. The outpouring of loss and sadness at the burial, commemoration, and death of the individuals addressed in this thesis does stem

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<sup>4</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, “We Pity the Plumage But Forget the Dying Bird: An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte” in David Lee Clark, (ed.), *Shelley’s Prose*, (Fourth Estate: New York, 1988).

predominantly from official rhetoric and groups with vested interests in their legacies rather than from the wider public. However, this does not completely exclude any genuine emotional connection to their lives, celebrity, and legacies from ordinary South Africans.

The initial impetus that sparked an interest in this topic stems from an undergraduate experience where my third-year History class was shown Zola Maseko's film *The Life and Times of Sarah Baartman*. I witnessed with some discomfort the political agendas attached to Baartman's remains, legacy, and repatriation which were all imbued with a sense of sacredness that was the result of the deeply emotive and sanctified nature of death and mourning. By inscribing human remains with political agendas, these agendas, by virtue of their association with the sacred rituals of death and burial, appear to become sacrosanct. In the context of Baartman's particularly emotive life experiences such a re-exploitation (despite the positive context of the existence of a democratic South Africa) seemed crude at the very least. This initial emotional response to dead body politics was further explored in my MA thesis<sup>5</sup> which addressed the iconography of Sara Baartman in post-apartheid South Africa within a context of nation-building and would lead to a deeper interest in the ways that nationalism and public mourning interact to create and reinforce a larger foundational mythology for this country. Having previously completed a short Honours Degree thesis that examined the way that Afrikaner nationalism constructed, employed, and exploited the laden category of 'woman' in establishing power and nationhood it became clear that the female dead body seemed especially vulnerable to political exploitations that sought to symbolically affirm the nation. Of course, women and 'womanhood' have always had a deeply complicated and contradictory relationship with nationalist movements across the world but in post-apartheid South Africa, where women have almost unequalled constitutional equality and protection, this relationship is further complicated by high levels of violence perpetrated against them. With the importance granted to Women's Day celebrations in South Africa and its extension into Women's Month this then led to the question of the role that representations of female icons play in official constructions of womanhood and femininity in South Africa and the ways in which these constructions feed into the larger foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state. A great deal of academic attention has been given to the ways in which South African women interact with nationalism but there appears to be a gap in studies that consider official constructions of female icons within a larger foundational mythology and

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<sup>5</sup> Simone Kerseboom, "'Our Khoi Heroine': Remembering and Re-Creating Sara Baartman in Post-Apartheid South Africa, 1994-2007", MA Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2007.

how these constructions feed into popular perceptions of womanhood, gender, and other socio-political concerns in South Africa. This thesis is a response to some of these questions as nationalism remains a potent force in South Africa that attempts to submerge socio-political discontent and persistent societal inequalities under a layer of nationalist rhetoric that is evident in the official mourning practices and commemorative celebrations of prominent female icons. Moreover, this thesis also attempts to analyse the re-subjectification of women from historical actors to historical subjects in official nationalist rhetoric as nationalist discourses seemingly seek to revoke the status of women as agents in history.

## **Methodology**

The time period addressed in this thesis stretches from 1994 to the present and addresses representations in official discourse and to a lesser extent in the media of the deaths, funerals, and commemorative events of the women considered. It also investigates the myriad ways that these carefully constructed representations which are bolstered by death rituals and dead body politics shape, inform, and create foundational mythologies. The research methodology required the location of newspaper articles, documentaries/films, government-issued speeches and documents, and other official statements pertaining to the subjects of this study. I also consulted secondary sources concerning each of the individuals, as well as representations of each case study in school textbooks, museums, and memorials which indicates how they are represented to the public, mostly through state-funded projects, and identifies the variety of symbolic meanings with which the public is confronted. This is supplemented by interviews with various stakeholders who have vested interests in the case studies. All these sources have been subjected to feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is known for its overtly political stance and its concern with all forms of social inequality and injustice. Feminist CDA is CDA with a determined gender focus that adopts “a critical feminist view of gender relations, motivated by the need to change the existing conditions of these relations...”<sup>6</sup> Lazar states that the “task of feminist CDA is to examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle M. Lazar, “Politicising Gender in Discourse: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as Political Perspective and Praxis”, in Michelle M. Lazar (ed), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2005), p.3.

strategies of talk.”<sup>7</sup> The analysis of official discourse through the application of feminist CDA indicates the importance of language analysis as a method for studying social and political change through texts – whether written or spoken.<sup>8</sup> Discourse is viewed as a site of struggle where the forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out. Official discourse constructs social relations or entities rather than represents these relations and it is the effects of these discourses upon which feminist CDA focuses. Moreover, a primary focus of feminist CDA is the dialectical relations between discourse and power in producing social inequalities and how ideology (meaning ‘in the service of power’) establishes and sustains unequal relationships of power – significantly in terms of gender.<sup>9</sup> Applying feminist CDA as the preferred methodology establishes a distinct feminist politics of articulation<sup>10</sup> that defines the “need to theorise and analyse the particularly insidious and oppressive nature of gender as an omni-relevant category in most social practices.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, through the application of feminist CDA, this thesis analyses and critiques official discourses present in the above mentioned sources. This also demonstrates how the language employed in these discourses have shaped new foundational myths for the post-apartheid state which attempt to sustain a patriarchal social order and entrench political hegemonies that have potentially adverse effects on representations and social understandings of gender and power in South Africa.

### **Notes on Terminology and Theory**

Firstly it must be noted that it is recognised that ‘women’ is not a homogeneous category. The category of ‘women’ is mediated by various hierarchies of difference such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity. Moreover, as Denise Riley suggest in her frequently quoted study of the category of ‘woman’ in history, “‘women’ [are] a ‘volatile collectivity’ whose identities [are] constantly in process, defined and redefined through an endless series of conflicting discursive practices... women [are] cultural constructs ‘all the way down’, the

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<sup>7</sup> Lazar, “Politicising Gender in Discourse”, in Lazar (ed), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, p.10.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski, *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis: A Dialogue on Language and Identity*, (Sage: London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi, 2001), p.62.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Fairclough, “Introduction”, in *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, (Routledge: Oxon & New York, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Wetherell, “Romantic Discourse and Feminist Analysis: Interrogating Investment, Power and Desire”, in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Feminism and Discourse: Psychological Perspectives*, (Sage: London, 1995), p.141

<sup>11</sup> Lazar, “Politicising Gender in Discourse”, in Lazar (ed), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, p.3.

‘effects’ of historically variable discourses...”<sup>12</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that sexual difference cannot be adequately mediated by language alone as women are flesh and blood beings. Laura Lee Downs argues,

Resistance via deconstruction can therefore give us only half a strategy, one which de-centres ‘woman’ as textual/social construct, while leaving aside the dilemmas of women, who must live as subjects in time... For those who live in society, sexual difference is not something which can simply be argued into a corner and then left behind. Rather, individuals must inhabit those gendered categories, even as they strive to unmake them.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, while acknowledging the constructed nature of the category ‘women’, it cannot be allowed to undermine the physical experiences of oppression experienced by women. As June Purvis asserts, “The emphasis on difference at the expense of what women have in common denies the existence of women as a political category and as a subordinate class.”<sup>14</sup> Within this context, the employment of feminist CDA implies “a perspective that is comparativist rather than universalising, attentive to the discursive aspects of the forms of oppression and interests which divide as well unite groups of women.”<sup>15</sup> This thesis, then, while showing that layer upon layer of official constructions of ‘womanhood’ are ideologically plastered onto physical remains, accepts that no representation or recreation of women’s history is definitive.

Sue Morgan states that “[r]ace’, like gender, is a primary system through which western thought (not least) has established hierarchical social classifications on a putative basis of biology and skin colour.”<sup>16</sup> Informed by social constructionist theory, this thesis accepts that bodies of knowledge, theories, and facts (concerning race) are cultural artefacts that are discursively constituted and can be replaced in order to transform social life.<sup>17</sup> Racial classification remains a cogent force in post-apartheid South Africa, justified by a history preoccupied with racial division and white minority political and economic control over

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<sup>12</sup> Denise Riley, “Does A Sex have a History?”, pp.149-159, quoted in Sue Morgan (ed), *The Feminist History Reader*, (Routledge: London and New York, 2006), p.15.

<sup>13</sup> Laura Lee Downs, “If Woman is Just an Empty Category Then Why am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night?: Feminism, Post-Structuralism, and the Problematic Politics of Identity”, accessed at <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/51235/469.pdf;jsessionid=E3E089D06A40477DF7B1F8EFC913E437?sequence=1>, p.18.

<sup>14</sup> June Purvis, “From ‘Women Worthies’ to Poststructuralism? Debate and Controversy in Women’s History in Britain”, quoted in Morgan (ed), *The Feminist History Reader*, p.16.

<sup>15</sup> Lazar, “Politicising Gender in Discourse”, in Lazar (ed), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, p.11.

<sup>16</sup> Morgan (ed), *The Feminist History Reader*, p.27.

<sup>17</sup> Andy Lock and Tom Strong, “Introduction”, in Andy Lock and Tom Strong (eds), *Social Constructionism: Sources and Stirrings in Theory and Practice*, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2010).

resources driven by colonial and apartheid exploitation. Historically, the term ‘black’ has at times been employed by the resistance movements to include other racial groups beside the African population while the apartheid state employed the term ‘non-European’ or ‘non-white’ to group together population groups not classified as ‘white’ and restrict their movements in public spaces. The term ‘non-white’, however, reifies the hegemonic state of ‘whiteness’ and renders ‘white’ as normative and unproblematic and will therefore not be used.<sup>18</sup> For the sake of clarity, this thesis will continue to employ the individual racial categorised terminology in use in South Africa today to refer to the country’s population groups when necessary but with an understanding that these are constructions that are both problematic and contested.

## **Thesis Structure**

The nine chapters that make up this thesis have been laid out along two axes. Chapter 1 serves as the literature review for this thesis and considers the literature that directly relates to the ways in which public/official mourning and dead body politics in the post-apartheid state construct a new foundational mythology for the nation. It briefly situates the context of this thesis before the following chapters embark on a in-depth exploration of the literature that informs the lenses employed to view the central issues addressed in this thesis, namely public mourning, nationalism and foundational mythology creation, and women-and-nation and the ways that these forces interact to shape the present. The chapters that provide the theoretical backbone of this thesis are the first axis and have been laid out in terms of focusing a lens on the central topics addressed here. The second axis follows the progression of the case studies which follow the natural order of firstly witnessing death, followed by the ritual of burial, and then commemoration or a return to the physical remains in order to remember, remind, and – in some cases – reconstruct a ‘national memory’.

Commencing with the broader but central theories that inform this thesis chapters 2 to 5 hone in from the global to the local. Chapter 2 explores the central body of literature and the canonical texts that have informed theories of public and official mourning and nationalist myth-making. Theories of public mourning and dead body politics are explored as historical discourse in this chapter and are further investigated by their application to global female

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<sup>18</sup> Morgan (ed), *The Feminist History Reader*, p.27.

icons to illustrate that the South African case studies in this thesis are neither singular nor unique and are informed by global nationalist tendencies. Chapter 3 further focuses the lens on theorising women and nation and investigates the particular roles assigned to women in nationalist movements in general and the ways in which women dynamically interact with nationalism. This chapter acknowledges its comprehensive analysis of women and nation to the invaluable contribution of the works of Floya Anthias, Cynthia Enloe, Anne McClintock, and Nira Yuval-Davis to the development of the field of gender and nationalism studies. It shows that nationalist movements are almost exclusively male-dominated and serve male interests, yet constructions of womanhood and women themselves play an important role within these nationalisms. This provides a more general theory of women and nation which will inform the rest of this thesis as it situates official representations of iconic women within a larger South African nationalist discourse which constructs the nation's foundational mythology. This chapter will demonstrate the complicated and contradictory relationship that women have with nationalist movements that seek to define specific constructions of womanhood that restrict women's agency. Simultaneously, however, certain women operate within these defined boundaries to assert some form of power. This is expanded upon in chapter 4, which further focuses in on the central topic of this thesis by addressing the historical precedents of women's interaction with African nationalism and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa. Both nationalisms had clearly defined roles for and expectations of women to further the nationalist cause. While seemingly empowering women, these specific discourses defined women's roles in terms of domesticity and motherhood. Yet, women often shaped and adapted these predominantly male-constructed roles to allow for greater public participation within the nationalist movement. Within a post-apartheid nationalist context, constructions of motherhood within the framework of African nationalism are significant as they continue to dominate official discourse in present-day commemorative efforts that 'celebrate' women's anti-apartheid activism and 'honour' struggle heroines. Moreover, this chapter will also argue that the political power wielded through publically mourning women and children, a powerful political tool employed in both these nationalist movements, informs the very constructions of womanhood and motherhood that harness women to the perceived appropriate values of femininity that serves their particular nationalist movement.

In order to bring the discussion into the democratic time-period which this thesis addresses, chapter 5 contextualises the four chapters that follow by outlining post-1994

nationalist tendencies in South Africa. It illustrates the creation of a ‘usable past’ in order to forge a workable present and imagined future for the country. Based on the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), reconciliation became a key aspect around which rainbow nationalism was constructed. Moreover, a successful nationalist movement relies on powerful symbols around which national identity is created. Thus, this chapter also shows how the symbols of the post-apartheid state, embodied by a new flag, national anthem, coat of arms, and the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, were a significant aspect of nation-building while the reconfiguration of public time and public spaces that honoured a new set of historical events and individuals (the national heroic pantheon) played powerfully into the construction of a post-apartheid foundational mythology. This provides the point of departure for the selection of case studies that support the central argument of this thesis that political constructions of iconic women play a significant part in post-apartheid South African foundational mythology creation. Chapter 6 discusses the Women’s Legacy Project launched by the South African Heritage Agency (SAHRA) in 2010, ‘Honouring and Celebrating Women’s Sacrifices and Roles as Midwives of Political Emancipation’ which seeks to commemorate a significant number of South African ‘heroines’ in the public sphere to address imbalances of representation. Immediately it becomes clear through the wording of this project that women’s political activism is framed by discourses of womanhood and domesticity and the attempt to forge a homogeneous category of domestic femininity. Thus, while seeking to ‘honour’ women and their contribution to the advent of democracy in South Africa within the democratic dispensation, women remain restricted by these official nationalist discourses that undermine the constitutional equalities that women are legally guaranteed.

### **The Case Studies**

Chapters 7 to 9 focus on the case studies that are informed and supported by the theoretical chapters that have gone before. Their linear placement in this thesis follows the chronological order of death, burial, and commemoration; the South African nation witnessed the death of Albertina Sisulu, followed the processes of repatriation and the burial of Sara Baartman, and saw the declaration of the graves of Charlotte Maxeke, Lilian Ngoyi, and Helen Joseph – all of whom died before the advent of democracy in South Africa – as national heritage sites. These three chapters draw on the wealth of theory and contextualisation outlined in the

previous chapters and will show how public mourning and dead body politics are reflected in official and public discourse to construct a functional foundational mythology for the present. Furthermore, these chapters illustrate the deeply entangled relationship of nation and women and the many ways in which official constructions of womanhood have the ability to impact gender relations of the present as they continue to (re)position women within a domestic context. Each chapter will show how these women, through the processes of public mourning, the rites of burial, and the more celebratory practices of commemoration, are persistently reshaped and recast to aid the present regime in bolstering their social legitimacy by reminding the ‘nation’ of an oppressive past and the sacrifices made for their freedom during times when social, economic and political conditions in the country become tense.

The women selected for discussion in this thesis are fairly well-known and have become important symbols for resistance to oppression in post-apartheid South Africa. The more recent commemorations of Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi, and the death of Albertina Sisulu as well as the publicity and official attention received by these events led to their selection for consideration in this thesis. Baartman’s selection stems from my initial interest in the ways that mourning and dead body politics intermesh to form a powerful influential force in foundational mythology creation that arose while researching Baartman’s iconography for my M.A. thesis. The remains of these women have selectively been inscribed with political agendas that reflect the socio-political (dis)order of the time-period in which they died, were buried, and were commemorated. Despite the vocality of some of these women during their lifetime, death rendered them silent. Their words have been forgotten, undermined, or re-interpreted by the ostensible ‘custodians of the nation’ and were narrated into their legacies and onto their remains through the forceful political rhetoric that has been issued by some of the most influential politicians and icons in South Africa. Honoured in official discourse as mothers, grandmothers, daughters, and heroines of the nation, their legacies become part and parcel of the gendered and familial language that constructs the nation in terms of family relationships in order to create a sense of national kinship despite the language, racial, religious, economic, and cultural differences that have seen South Africa constructed as the ‘Rainbow Nation’. Moreover, their names are present and visible in the public sphere. The official mourning and commemorative events staged for these women received television coverage: the funerals of Sisulu and Baartman were televised live on the national broadcasting station SABC2, while the commemorative events honouring Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph were briefly aired on SABC2’s popular morning show, *Morning Live*.

Furthermore, Baartman's funeral was strategically planned to fall on national Women's Day, while the declaration for the graves of Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph as national heritage sites were also organised to take place during August – Women's Month. This thesis, then, will investigate how the public spectacle of mourning these women and their representation in official discourse informs, shapes, and creates a foundational mythology for the post-apartheid state as these women, in death, become part of a national pantheon of heroes and heroines. Moreover, it will demonstrate the power of dead body politics in establishing nationalist sentiment and how each particular history and legacy is harnessed in order to shape and influence the present.

The death of prominent struggle activist Albertina Sisulu in 2011 serves as the first case study for this thesis. Sisulu is the only female struggle icon in this thesis who witnessed the transitional period and who served in government during the Mandela presidency. Sisulu, known as the 'mother of the nation' – a title not uniquely reserved for any particular female individual in South African struggle history – came to symbolise the fierce nature of motherhood popularised in the African nationalist movement during the 1950s. As a 1956 Women's March participant and organiser, a member of a 'golden' generation of anti-apartheid activists, and a lifetime of dedication to fighting apartheid oppression within the ANC structures alongside her husband, the more famous Walter Sisulu, Sisulu has always occupied a special and honoured place in South African struggle history. However, in death, that legacy is imbued with a sense of the sacred as it is recognised in official discourse that the nation, with her death, has lost someone important. Sisulu's public importance was recognised with an official funeral that was televised on SABC2 and prominent politicians were invited to read eulogies. What became evident in the official rhetoric surrounding Sisulu's death was the symbolisation of her legacy to reflect and comment on present-day social, economic, and political discourses. The remains and legacy of a female icon were employed to narrate the nation under particular circumstances through the sacred rituals that accompany death and burial.

The second case study of this thesis shows how the repatriation and burial of Sara Baartman in her 'native soil' became symbolic of the founding of a new nation now free from oppression just as Baartman had been freed from her oppressive exploitation as a curiosity in nineteenth century England and France. Unlike Sisulu, Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph, Baartman is silent – with the exception of a problematic court record that briefly gives Baartman a (mediated) 'voice', Baartman has no recorded words – she is always represented

by others. She is the perfect silent dead body to embody narratives of the post-apartheid nation and its foundational mythologies. This chapter is a sequel to my M.A. thesis but here the focus falls on Baartman's funeral, dead body politics, and foundational mythology creation rather than on the systematic construction of Baartman's iconography. Her funeral and the mourning rituals that marked her 'homecoming' became deeply symbolic events on which narratives of nation were enacted. Located in the distant past, Baartman was honoured as the 'grandmother of the nation' by then president Thabo Mbeki and her iconography had been deeply entrenched in Mbeki's African Renaissance philosophy. However, the processes of Baartman's repatriation and burial spanned two presidencies whose nationalist ideological focus differed and it becomes clear how her legacy and remains became imbued with a wealth of narratives as each presidency attached different meanings to this particular individual. Moreover, the contestations over Baartman's remains are indicative of the political power that important dead bodies continue to hold in the present. Despite this initial focus on Baartman's remains, in recent years it has become clear that her political salience has weakened as the present day societal challenges require different icons to narrate the nation. Baartman was an important female icon for the transitional period in South Africa when nation-building required a wealth of (preferably) silent heroes and heroines on whom the post-apartheid nation could be written and narrated.

The three women whose commemoration makes up the final chapter of this thesis are fairly well-known in South African political history. Charlotte Maxeke was the founder of the Bantu Women's League (the forerunner to the ANC Women's League) and influential in organising women's political anti-colonial activism and in initiating the 1913 Women's March in Bloemfontein. Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi were amongst the most prominent female anti-apartheid activists of the 1950s onwards and leaders of the 1956 Women's March. These three glass-ceiling breakers of their times have been grouped together for discussion as the declaration of their graves as national heritage sites was celebrated in one combined event in a collaboration of the South African government and SAHRA in 2010 to launch the Women's Legacy Project. These three women illustrate the tendency in the post-apartheid state to equate women's anti-pass campaigns with women's resistance in its entirety while also enforcing entrenched notions of womanhood and femininity in supposedly honouring women's resistance. Furthermore, the official consideration of the 1956 Women's March as a foundational event for the post-apartheid state and the grand importance assigned

to this march in the public holiday calendar and in official discourse are illustrated and emphasised through addressing this specific commemorative event.

While post-apartheid South Africa has a wealth of female icons that have come to be representative of women's resistance to colonial and apartheid oppression in official discourse, few of these women are as well-known or appear to enjoy the same recognition that their male counterparts receive in public spaces and commemorative events. With the exception of the prominence accorded Women's Day on the public holiday calendar and the importance assigned to the 1956 Women's March as a foundational event for the post-apartheid state, official celebrations and recognition of male liberation leaders and their achievements continue to dominate the public sphere. Iconic women are mostly honoured by having hospitals, clinics, streets, schools, and ships named in their honour. Men, in addition to receiving the same honorary recognition as their female counterparts, tend to be commemorated on a more monumental scale that includes individualised statuary and commemorative stamps issued by the South African Post Office – an honour that is rarely extended to women. Essentially, narratives of 'The Struggle' and resistance to oppression remain quintessentially male. SAHRA has attempted to address this imbalance with a Women's Legacy Project that seeks to remember and honour women in South African history who have made a contribution to a variety of different fields and not political resistance to oppression alone. Although the project's intentions are laudable, it remains framed by popular discourses of femininity and womanhood and funding and project planning indicates that, thus far, the only progress made has been in developing projects of famous struggle heroines. This is indicative of the present focus on developing a strong foundational mythology reflecting a 'glorious past' that seeks to legitimise the current political dispensation as it faces increasing criticism for failing to address persistent socio-economic inequalities.

The public/official mourning of Sisulu, Baartman, Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi reflect the power of dead body politics and the specifics at work when these politics are inscribed on the female dead body and the investigation of these case studies will indicate that nationalism remains a dominant force in South Africa and that its manifestations in official discourse require closer examination. Nationalism, even when seemingly benign, is a dangerous ideology that silences, excludes, and forgets. It constructs who is 'us', who makes up the 'nation', and does not tolerate contestations. Officially-sanctioned discourses of nationalism are reinforced by the power of the state and are rendered even more dangerous when

buttressed by state resources. This thesis does not attempt to calculate or measure the social impact of official nationalist rhetoric that emanates from the officially-sanctioned public mourning and commemorative rituals of iconic South African women. The analysis of official rhetoric in this thesis offers critical perspectives on the unequal social gender arrangements in South Africa that are sustained through distinct language use with goals of social transformation. Moreover, this thesis attempts to advance the understanding of the complex relationship between power and ideology contained in official discourse in sustaining this hierarchically gendered social order. This is especially pertinent in present South Africa as issues of power, gender, and ideology have become increasingly complex and subtle.<sup>19</sup> As a form of ‘analytical resistance’<sup>20</sup> this thesis seeks to identify, analyse, and critique this nationalist rhetoric in order to identify the potentially harmful narratives of regime legitimation and normative domestic femininity that such discourse seeks to embed within a new foundational mythology. Through such an approach it attempts to contribute to ongoing struggles of contestation and change as such narratives could ultimately undermine democratic principles and the potential for South Africans in general, and more specifically women, to fully exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

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<sup>19</sup> Lazar, “Politicising Gender in Discourse”, in Lazar (ed), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

## A Historiography of the Dead Body Politics of South Africa

### Introduction

Post-apartheid nationalism, the central theme around which this thesis is built, is multi-faceted and its popularity and effectiveness in constructing the ‘nation’ waxes and wanes while its meaningfulness shifts and alters. Throughout the following chapters several aspects which shape post-apartheid nationalism will be addressed and the academic literature that has critically examined the central tenets of this thesis will be investigated. This chapter will navigate the more prominent and directly relevant literature that addresses South African dead body politics and the ways in which dead bodies have been employed more specifically in post-apartheid nationalist movements. While post-apartheid dead body politics is addressed to a certain extent in academic literature, it is often done so within a context of heritage development and public history. The studies examined in this chapter will reflect this.

‘Dead body politics’ denotes the symbolic efficacy of dead bodies as physical *embodiments* of particular ideologies for political gain. These dead bodies might be the remains of the famous deceased or they could be the corpses of individuals whose manner of death or their lives have become politicised. They are silent vehicles that can carry multiple meanings but whose potential multiplicity is mitigated by the singularity of the corpse. The physical presence of political dead bodies in the public landscape in the form of graves, mausoleums, and monuments denotes a visible space for representing pertinent ideological concerns. Yet, their legacies which inform official expressions of nationalist discourse can be called upon at any time. This demonstrates the salience of politicised dead bodies to (nationalist) ideology production. Garrey Dennie discusses the importance of what he calls the ‘contested corpse’ in his PhD dissertation “The Cultural Politics of Burial in South Africa, 1884 - 1990”<sup>1</sup> and explores the ways in which political dead bodies became ‘treasured

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<sup>1</sup> Garrey Michael Dennie, “The Cultural Politics of Burial in South Africa, 1884-1990”, (D.Phil. Johns Hopkins University, 1997).

possessions' and 'potent political weapons' and the contestations that arose between families, church, and liberation movements about who would lay claim to the legacy that was left behind by the deceased individual(s). Dennie's exploration of dead body politics briefly predates the publication of Katherine Verdery's impressive theorisation of this topic.<sup>2</sup> Verdery, who coined the term 'dead body politics', applies this phrase to case studies in post-socialist Eastern Europe. The corpses of prominent Eastern European revolutionary and religious heroes and leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens were exhumed and reburied in new locations in the post-socialist era. Verdery examines the socio-political implications of these reburials in constructing national and ethnic identities while also considering physical representations of such icons in the form of statuary when their physical remains were inaccessible or lost. While both phrases are applicable for use in this thesis, Verdery's term 'dead body politics' is preferred here. 'Contested corpses', the term used by Dennie, denotes specific interest groups simultaneously laying claim to politicised corpses for furthering their own agendas. Verdery's terminology situates these 'contested corpses' in a wider framework of nationalist ideology, identity politics, and local contestations which relates more closely to the subject matter of this thesis. Furthermore, correlations exist between post-socialist Eastern Europe and post-apartheid South Africa in terms of socio-political transformation and the search for and construction of nation, national identity, and a 'usable past' after a history of oppression and trauma.<sup>3</sup> This renders the term 'dead body politics' as highly applicable to a case study of post-apartheid foundational mythology creation through the spectacle of the public mourning of the famous dead.

This thesis is concerned with how political and politicised female dead bodies influence and shape the specific nationalisms of the post-apartheid state and is situated within gender and nationalism studies. While most of these studies appear to focus on how women have interpreted and engaged with their positionings in the post-apartheid state, this thesis is concerned with a top-to-bottom approach to this topic: it explores how the lives and legacies of political and politicised dead women are constructed in official discourses in order to complement the establishment and entrenchment of a post-apartheid foundational mythology that is currently still under construction. The body of literature that addresses this topic is

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<sup>2</sup> Katharine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Monica Popescu explores the possibilities of "(re)shaping and (re)conceptualising the relationship between post-communism and post-colonialism" and the interconnections between the post-apartheid and post-communist discourses in Monica Popescu, "Translations: Lenin's Statues, Post-communism, and Post-apartheid", *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16, 2, 2003, pp.406-423.

severely limited which can be attributed to its contemporary timeframe. Moreover, it possibly reflects a deep concern within academia (on whom the burden of investigation and representation has partially fallen) about the lived experiences of women in South Africa in the present and a need to address this outside of official government discourse. While considering how women engage with a post-apartheid nationalism on ground-level is essential, this thesis attempts to address how state-sanctioned narratives and public mourning rituals imbued with official rhetoric of political and politicised dead female icons reveals the positioning that this nationalism attempts to impose on South African women. It also illustrates how such official constructions of womanhood can possibly reflect on and impact the already problematic gender relations in South Africa. The historiography of South African gender and nationalism studies has traditionally tended towards histories ‘from below’ to counter the silencing effect of apartheid’s grand narratives on subaltern voices. Yet, changing political trends in South Africa make it necessary to once again consider how histories ‘from above’ not only reflect societal problems in the present but also how these master narratives of the past have the power to transform and impact the lived experiences of South Africans. Much media attention has recently been given to the dead body politics of ordinary South African citizens who have died as a result of state violence in response to mass protest action or those who have been victims of brutal crimes such as protester Andries Tatane,<sup>4</sup> the thirty-four miners killed at Marikana,<sup>5</sup> and rape and murder victim Anene Booysen.<sup>6</sup> All have become deeply politicised bodies as political parties or politically-motivated individuals seek to exploit their narratives of fatal tragedy for political gain. While exploitation for political gain is not always the case and altruistic intentions are at times promoted, overwhelmingly these individuals, reduced to political bodies, become tools in political disputes.

While it is easy to dismiss official expressions of nationalism as ‘exhausted’ or to fail to take seriously popular expressions of nationalist sentiment it is essential to factor

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<sup>4</sup> The death of Andries Tatane as a result of police brutality during a service delivery protest in Ficksburg in 2011 has become synonymous with public perceptions of increased state violence after the footage of the assault was disseminated in the media.

<sup>5</sup> Also known as the ‘Marikana Massacre’, the deaths of thirty-four miners following violent clashes with the South African Police Service (SAPS) during a miner’s strike at a Lonmin mine in Marikana has led to investigations into the increase in violent state response to protest action.

<sup>6</sup> The violent rape and murder of seventeen-year old Anene Booysen in Bredasdorp in 2013 was highlighted in the media and became a brief rallying point around which the persistent high levels of sexual violence and abuse against women in South Africa were – once again – highlighted.

nationalism into an analysis of current events. Gillian Hart makes a decisive argument for the continued study of nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa and stresses that

post-liberation nationalisms cannot simply be shrugged off or wished away. The challenge instead is to grasp their popular appeal, and work towards critical understandings that can help to denaturalise increasingly dangerous articulations of nationalism. In other words, we have to think *with* nationalism *against* nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis will begin to identify how the dead body politics of iconic women informs the nationalist project of foundational mythology creation while simultaneously reflecting and shaping present day societal, economic, and political discourses. Popular nationalist sentiment is a powerful tool in the armoury of the ruling ANC to temporarily contain or stifle rising civil discontent. However, official expressions of nationalism are also inherently gendered. By inscribing the remains and legacies of deceased women associated with resistance to oppression with grand narratives of the nation, official rhetoric presents its ideal forms of femininity, womanhood, and female citizenship to the public sphere. Yet, these often conflict with the lived experiences of women in the present. Moreover, proclamations of closure of the racial and gender oppression and inequalities of the past dangerously deflect from the very real crisis in gender relations experienced in South Africa. As the following chapters will show, invocations of nationalist sentiment at public mourning events of popular heroines have the ability to entrench traditional and patriarchal concepts of womanhood and simultaneously silence contesting voices and ideologies through the deployment of the emotive foundational myths of the post-apartheid state in which these heroines play a significant part.

The first decade of democracy in South Africa was attended by a wealth of academic literature addressing post-apartheid nationalism, nation-building, and identity construction and the ways that South Africans dynamically interacted with these ideologies that defined the post-apartheid state. As a uniquely positioned state that had experienced a dramatic but relatively peaceful socio-political transition, the power of rainbow nationalism and the rhetoric of the TRC was effectively harnessed from ‘above’ to construct a new and inclusive national identity for ‘below’. However, it would be facile to consider discourses of nationalism as simple cynical manipulations imposed from ‘above’. In the immediate years following the 1994 national elections official rhetoric utilised symbols and narratives of

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<sup>7</sup> Gillian Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony*, (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: Scottsville, 2013), p.12.

national unity that had popular appeal and spoke to deeply emotive histories and experiences of struggle and victory. It was sanguinely intended that a South African identity should supersede, or at the very least, co-exist with racial, ethnic, religious, or regional identities already firmly entrenched. Moreover, articulations of nationalism that invoked popular understandings of freedom, justice, and liberation reinforced the ruling party's hegemonic project.<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, this bold and optimistic nationalism would become the subject of global academic interest as South Africa emerged from international pariah to become the world's template of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peaceful transition. However, after ten years of democracy academic focus tended to shift away from post-apartheid identities, the construction of new grand narratives, and rainbow nationalism as the optimism of the transitional period could no longer disguise the growing socio-economic crisis and the preoccupation this held for South Africans in public discourse. The flimsy disguise of the Rainbow Nation could not plaster over the histories of racial oppression, exploitation, dispossession, and economic inequality and the discourses of an official post-apartheid nationalism would quickly be dismantled only to be recalled sporadically at events such as the 2010 FIFA World Cup.<sup>9</sup>

Chapters 2 to 5 carefully trace and examine the theories of mourning, dead body politics, and nationalism (internationally and locally) that are the foundation for this thesis. The focus for this literature review regards the body of literature that relates directly to the dead body politics of post-apartheid nationalism with a brief consideration given to two seminal studies that address the dead body politics of the Anglo-Boer War and the political funerals of the 1980s. Considering the long history of competing nationalist movements in South Africa is essential to a more nuanced understanding of a state-sanctioned post-apartheid nationalist movement but the extensive bodies of literature and theories that address women's positioning within African and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa will be considered in chapter 4 and to avoid overlap will not be examined here. While the colonial nationalism of South Africa remains an under-researched topic, women never featured strongly in the attempt to establish a white male-dominated South African identity; white women served as racial boundary markers and as the moral compass of the white 'nation'. The aggressive progression of Afrikaner nationalism effectively employed the Afrikaner woman as martyr/heroine in its campaign for socio-political, economic, and ethnic

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<sup>8</sup> Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, p.23.

<sup>9</sup> However, as Hart indicates, this moment of 'romantic rainbowism' was accompanied by violent xenophobic attacks and threats. p.171.

dominance. African nationalism favoured the image of the militant and strong black mother fighting for her children and family. This served to contain women within a nationalist discourse that recognised women's importance in furthering the cause of black liberation but simultaneously contained women within a domestic framework of political activity.

As a result of the limited body of literature that addresses the dead body politics of female icons in the post-apartheid state,<sup>10</sup> this literature review will consider the broader literature that investigates post-apartheid foundational mythology creation through dead body politics. This literature review will also explore a topic that has received greater academic attention; the dead body politics of famous struggle heroes and its ability to contribute to the construction of a foundational mythology for the post-apartheid state. Struggle icons such as Solomon Mahlangu and Hector Pieterse have become prominent founding figures in the post-apartheid heroic pantheon and have been addressed extensively in studies considering themes such as nationalism, identity, and heritage and memorialisation in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>11</sup> Altogether, male icons feature more prominently in the commemorative public landscape and have been addressed more extensively as individuals in academic studies as a result. The only female post-apartheid icon that has truly received abundant academic and official attention is Sara Baartman and this stems from a historic preoccupation with her body politics and the academic interest she has received since her death ranging across the fields of science, humanities, and the arts.<sup>12</sup> Baartman is the only woman in this

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<sup>10</sup> Only Sabine Marschall has addressed the commemoration (but not necessarily dead body politics) of female icons in South Africa within the context of post-apartheid heritage development. Sabine Marschall, "Serving Male Agendas: Two National Women's Monuments in South Africa", *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 33, 8, 2004, pp. 1009-1033. "How to Honour a Woman: Gendered Memorialisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *Critical Arts*, 24, 2, 2010, pp.260-283.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Baines, "The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40, 2, 2007. Gary Baines, "Commemorating Solomon Mahlangu: A South African Struggle Martyr", Paper presented at 'Recycling Myths, Inventing Nations Conference', University of Aberystwyth, Newtown, Wales, 2010. Angel David Nieves, "Places of Pain as Tools for Social Justice in the 'New' South Africa: Black Heritage Preservation in the 'Rainbow' Nation's Townships", in William Logan and Keir Reeves (eds), *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*, (Routledge: Oxon and New York, 2009). Sabine Marschall, "Visualising Memories: The Hector Pieterse Memorial in Soweto", *Visual Anthropology*, 19, 2, 2006. Sabine Marschall, "Memory and Identity in South Africa: Contradictions and Ambiguities in the Process of Post-Apartheid Memorialisation", *Visual Anthropology*, 25, 2012. Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, "'I Saw a Nightmare': Violence and the Construction of Memory (Soweto, June 16, 1976)", *History and Theory*, 39, 4, 2000. Ruth Kerkham Simbao, "The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Soweto Uprisings: Reading the Shadow in Sam Nzima's Iconic Photograph of Hector Pieterse", *African Arts*, 40, 2, 2007. Darren Newbury, "'Lest We Forget': Photography and the Presentation of History at the Apartheid Museum, Gold Reef City, and the Hector Pieterse Museum, Soweto", *Visual Communication*, 4, 3, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> A wealth of literature addressing Sara Baartman exists following her inclusion in George Cuvier and Geoffrey St. Hilaire's seven-volume "Histoire Naturelle des Mammiferes avec les figures originales d'apres des animaux vivants" (Natural History of Mammals with original pictures after living animals) published between 1818 and 1842. The few listed here intend to reflect the preoccupation of academia with Baartman across the years.

thesis whose life has been recorded in two separate biographies despite having the least archival or recorded information available.<sup>13</sup> Sisulu shares a singular authorised biography with her husband, Walter Sisulu, written by her daughter-in-law Elinor Sisulu.<sup>14</sup> Joseph extensively recorded her life experiences in her autobiography, *Side by Side*,<sup>15</sup> but her life has not been examined through meaningful and critical biographical research. Maxeke and Ngoyi have no existing biographies with the exception of educational booklets intended for primary school pupils.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, autobiographies of liberation leaders often become important national texts – perhaps even foundational texts for the new nation. Elleke Boehmer addresses the significance of the autobiography of the leader of national independence movements (almost always male) and states that “the leader’s tales operate as inaugural symbolic texts shaping and justifying configurations of status and power in the post-colonial nation (-to-be), including the interconnection of nationalist ideology and gender politics.”<sup>17</sup> The male leader’s autobiography, in a sense, becomes the biography of the rise of the nation and the touchstone on which the values of the nation are reflected. Boehmer argues that the autobiographies of liberation leaders are often published to coincide closely with the moment

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Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1978). Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe, 1815-1817”, in Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (eds), *Deviant Bodies: Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995). Sander Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature”, *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1985. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Flamingo’s Smile: Reflections in Natural History*, (Norton: New York & London, 1987). Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*, (Routledge: New York and London, 2005). Percival R. Kirby, “The Hottentot Venus”, *Africana Notes and News*, 6, 3, 1949. “More About the Hottentot Venus”, *Africana Notes and News*, 10, 4, 1953. “A Further Note on the Hottentot Venus”, *Africana Notes and News*, 1954. Zine Magubane, “Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the ‘Hottentot Venus’”, *Gender & Society*, 15, 6, 2001. Terry M. Provost, “Profiles of the Black Venus: Tracing the Black Female Body in Western Art and Culture – From Baartman to Campbell”, PhD Dissertation, Concordia University, 2001. Sadiya Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman, the Hottentot Venus”, *History of Science*, 47. Barbara Sorgoni, “Defending the Race: The Italian Reinvention of the Hottentot Venus During Fascism”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8, 3, 2003. Z.S. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot”, in Bernth Lindfors (ed), *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2009). Rachel Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman, Born 1789- Buried 2002*, (Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg & Cape Town, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Elinor Sisulu, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, (David Philip Publishers: Claremont, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Helen Joseph also wrote two other biographical accounts, one of the treason trial and the second a publication of a personal journal. Helen Joseph, *Side By Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph*, (William Morrow & Co: New York, 1968), *Tomorrow’s Sun*, (John Day Company: New York, 1967), *If This Be Treason*, (Andre Deutsch: London, 1963). *If This Be Treason* was also turned into a made for TV movie in 1998, directed by Cedric Sundstrom and written by Roy Sargeant.

<sup>16</sup> Part of a series of educational booklets titled “They Fought for Freedom” which features short biographies of prominent South African anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists. Dianne Stewart, *Lilian Ngoyi*, (Maskew Miller Longman: Cape Town, 1996). Julie Frederikse, *Helen Joseph*, (Maskew Miller Longman: Cape Town, 1995). Maxeke, however, has no existing biographical works dedicated exclusively to her life.

<sup>17</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2005), p.66.

of independence indicating the crucial part such biographies play in the inscription of the new nation. Boehmer cites the release of Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (which could be considered as one of post-apartheid South Africa's foundational texts), in 1994 as a prime example of this global trend and also refers to the release of Walter and Albertina Sisulu's authorised biography in 2003 as possibly being timed for publication close to the ten-year anniversary of democracy in South Africa. Boehmer continues to situate the male leader's autobiography in the familial makeup of the nation:

In the act of writing his autobiography the male nationalist leader validates his role as the chief and representative son of the nation, and then – as he and the nation reach political maturity – as its father. He confirms, in other words, his pre-eminent, even dynastic, position in the national family drama. From this it is already clear that, for the literate middle class at least, the 'hero's' autobiography operates as an important vehicle in the articulation and authorisation of the dominant gender both of anti-colonial resistance and of nationalist self-imagining.<sup>18</sup>

With female activist autobiographies being overshadowed by those of their male counterparts and critical biographies of prominent female struggle icons lacking, the nation, in effect, is inscribed with male hopes and aspirations. Moreover, as Boehmer suggests, the autobiographies of prominent female leaders tend to "give predictable insights into the at-times-critical yet also broadly supportive relationship of South African women to the always male-led nationalist liberation movement, in which national freedom was prioritised over women's rights."<sup>19</sup> Elinor Sisulu's authorised biography of Albertina and Walter Sisulu signifies an important departure from this trend as it foregrounds the symbiosis of the political relationship between her parents-in-law. However, as Boehmer suggests, "[f]or the rest, it is almost exclusively the case that father figures and brother-comrades pass on political inspiration and words of guidance to the new national leaders. The patrilineal genealogy that their interrelationships build undergirds the male dominance of the wider national family network."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.73. This is well illustrated in the case of former Namibian president Sam Nujoma whose autobiography sought to bolster his credentials as Namibia's founding father – a title he was officially awarded by the Namibian Parliament in 2004. Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma – My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia*, (Panaf Books: London, 2001). André du Pisani, "Memory Politics in 'Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma – My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia'", *Journal of Namibian History*, 1, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

Post-apartheid nationalism, defined by nation-building and multiculturalism, has seen three different presidencies highlight different aspects and employ its influence for various ends. The immediate post-1994 era saw Nelson Mandela stress rainbow nationalism where the focus fell on creating a multi-racial and stable South Africa after a dramatic and swift socio-political transition. Rainbow nationalism made the transitional period in South Africa possible but was quickly undermined by the realities of the continued racial, economic, and social inequalities that it sought to ‘cover up’. Thabo Mbeki’s presidency saw a change in focus to African Renaissance philosophy and positioned the ANC at the head of the battle against racism. While continuing to champion nation-building and multiculturalism the stress also fell on creating a geo-political awareness and pride in pre-colonial African development and African identities. Jacob Zuma’s presidency has been somewhat ambiguous and identifying a clear nationalist trajectory during this period is difficult. Zuma’s ascendance to the presidency – also known as the Zunami (Zuma tsunami) – has been defined by populist politics. Rather than ascribing to a model of appeal to the ‘mindless masses’, Zuma’s populism is grounded in his ability to “articulate multiple, often contradictory meanings into complex unity that appeals powerfully to ‘common sense’ across a broad spectrum.”<sup>21</sup> Zuma positioned himself as the hero of national liberation, a man of the ‘left’, a traditionalist, and as an anti-elitist in re-articulations of race, class and nationalism that “are also shot through with gender and sexuality.”<sup>22</sup> Zuma, in many ways, was able to resonate with millions of poor black South Africans through his “capacity to connect with and speak to the painful articulations of race, class, gender and sexuality” that signify, for many, their everyday experiences.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, articulations of the nation and liberation remain crucial in retaining popular consent and the over-arching ideologies of nation-building remain observable in official rhetoric while the entrenchment of ‘The Struggle’ as foundation myth has become increasingly predominant.<sup>24</sup> The positioning of women within post-apartheid nationalism has remained fairly static over the past two decades, yet Zuma’s presidency, marked by strong traditionalist patriarchal influences, has caused an observable shift in how

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<sup>21</sup> Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, p.203.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.203.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205.

<sup>24</sup> ‘The Struggle’ serves as the meta-narrative for the post-apartheid state. Following Lyotard’s concept of the meta-narrative, Paul Connerton explains that meta-narratives “are institutionalised, canonical and legitimating; they pretend to represent an external object and then they pretend not to be a narrative; they issue from what [Lyotard] calls ‘the grand institutionalised narrative apparatus’; they are ‘official’; they are the ‘legitimations of theorists; they tell the stories *‘which are supposed to rule.’*” (Italics my own). Applying this observation to a post-apartheid context the meta-narrative of ‘The Struggle’ serves as a tool for regime legitimation. Paul Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body*, (Cambridge University Press: New York; 2011), p.2.

these positionings are observed and interpreted in public discourse. While official discourse has stressed government's continued dedication to women's equality and empowerment in the democratic state there has been an observable change in the perceived disposition of government and some of its officials in recent years and often displayed in bombastic unofficial statements made to the media which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Despite the varieties of interpretations and meanings assigned to post-apartheid nationalism in the past two decades of democracy the constant of foundational mythology creation and fortification has remained. As the ANC-led government has affirmed its firm grip on political power once again in the 2014 national elections, a foundational mythology that enshrines the struggle and its (ANC-affiliated) icons will continue to be honoured in official rhetoric and in state-sanctioned public commemorative efforts. Dead body politics will continue to powerfully inform this foundation myth as the 'golden generation' of struggle heroes and heroines ages and passes on. The positioning of iconic women within this nationalism has played an important part in enforcing the myth of the dissolution of gender discrimination in the post-apartheid state but has dangerously deflected from the high levels of violence committed against women in South Africa in the present. The official narratives that are inscribed on these women's bodies at their funerals or commemorations not only reflect on or attempt to diffuse dominant themes of public dissatisfaction or protests at play in the public sphere but have also served to establish normative concepts of gender in South Africa and continues to employ these women's bodies and legacies in the service of post-apartheid nationalism and regime legitimation. Foundational mythology creation, dead body politics, and women and nation and the multitude of ways in which these themes interact are at the theoretical centre of this thesis. As the following chapters explore this theory more closely this chapter will address the extant historiography and the central texts that apply the functional theme of dead body politics to a South African context. Divided into three brief sections, this chapter will first address the historiography of dead body politics in South Africa paying attention to the deeply entrenched mythology of the concentration camps of the Second Anglo-Boer War (also referred to as the South African War) more recently re-addressed in the work of Liz Stanley and then the power of the political funeral during the struggle for liberation as investigated by Garrey Dennie. This will then progress into a consideration of the literature addressing the dead body politics in post-apartheid South Africa of Hector Pieterse and Solomon Mahlangu; perhaps two of the most iconic figures symbolising the moral bankruptcy and violent nature of the apartheid state.

## **A Review of Dead Body Politics in South Africa**

The dead body politics of the post-apartheid state is an emerging but still limited field of research. While the cultural politics of burial and death have been addressed in studies ranging across several disciplines the significance of who lays claim to specific deceased individuals and the political salience of such claims remains confined to a small volume of articles and chapters.<sup>25</sup> With the deeply entrenched political nature of mourning in South Africa – the result of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past – the political power of mourning and laying claim to the struggle icons of the past may yield economic gain and promote political and cultural legitimisation projects. For this reason, it is important to address the dead body politics of the present and the ways in which this is yielded in establishing, entrenching, or contesting hegemonies. The studies addressed below focus on tangible heritage sites associated with traumatic histories that resulted in deaths. With the exception of the Anglo-Boer War, dead body politics has overwhelmingly focused on male dead bodies as ‘tangible heritage’ which have become sites of contestation. As post-apartheid heritage is built on a legacy of trauma it would be impossible to address every memorial or monument erected to the deceased heroes of the past in this chapter. Instead, this chapter focuses on those academics and their studies whose works have informed and shaped the theory of this thesis while also demonstrating an understanding of the larger field of study within South Africa in which this thesis is located.

### ***The Second Anglo-Boer War***

The dead body politics of the Second Anglo-Boer War is a fitting departure for a discussion of the historiography of women and dead body politics in South Africa. The deaths of approximately 26,000 Boer women and children in British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War would become a powerful factor in fuelling Afrikaner nationalism. Deliberate dis-remembering and re-casting would foster a narrow but effective mythology of the camps that continue to persist in the present. Women played an important part within this nationalist myth-making process as they, as *women*, came to symbolise the trauma inflicted upon the putative Afrikaner ‘nation’ which was still in its infancy at this time. Liz Stanley’s

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<sup>25</sup> These almost exclusively relate to the commemorative practices surrounding the iconic figure of child-martyr/victim, Hector Pieterse. More recently, Scully and Crais and Samuelson have addressed the dead body of politics surrounding Sara Baartman but these will be further discussed in chapter 8.

*Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War*,<sup>26</sup> provides an insightful look into the exploitation of the memory of the deceased women and children to promote an Afrikaner nationalist agenda. Stanley explores the local memories of the camps – represented by private memories, family grief, and local graveyards and community monuments – and how these would be superseded by politically motivated official state commemorations which shaped the meta-narrative of the war.<sup>27</sup> Stanley initially focuses on the memoirs written and published by proto-nationalist women survivors of the camps and how they served as perfect vehicles for enhancing early Afrikaner political agendas. These testimonies, supported by the memoirs of famous Boer generals would, according to Stanley, establish a meta-narrative through the use of fictive devices and employing powerful Biblical references and imagery in the texts which juxtaposed the ‘good’ Afrikaners with the ‘evil’ British and the pre-war racial ordering of society as a harmonious Eden.<sup>28</sup> This meta-narrative, Stanley shows, consists of four themes; that the war was fought to preserve the Boer ‘way of life’, the destruction of and removal of Boer women from the farms exposed them to humiliation and ill-treatment by British and blacks, that the camps were in fact, ‘murder camps’ and the camp hospitals places of punishment and death, and the fourth theme, ‘the worst thing of all’, was that the removal to the camps exposed Boer women to the gaze of blacks, and even *worse*, that they were treated like blacks.<sup>29</sup> As will be shown in chapter three, the deliberate mistreatment of Boer women (the ‘bearers’ of the nation) and children (the future of the nation) would, in later years, be recast in a nationalist light as a direct attack on the Afrikaner nation and an insult to its male pride. Moreover, nationalist narratives of the camps situated women as martyrs, victims, and heroines central to the survival of the Afrikaner nation in an ethnic nationalist mythology in which women would come to play a central role – significantly even more so after white women in South Africa gained the vote in 1930. The mythology of the ‘death camps’ would be enhanced in the late 1940s through their association with the concentration camps of Nazi Germany and, through its interrelation with ideologies of deep suffering and victimhood, became an alibi for apartheid policies once the Nationalists had gained political victory in South Africa. This reflective re-interpretation of the camps, according to Stanley, allowed “nationalism and nationalists to grief-ride on, and gain political and moral capital from, the Shoah, thereby

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<sup>26</sup> Liz Stanley, *Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> The 1913 Women’s Monument is an important aspect of the officially sanctioned commemorations of the war. The Monument will be discussed at length in chapter 4 and to avoid overlap will not be addressed here.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes...* p106.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.117-118.

avoiding responsibility for institutionalised racism and apartheid.”<sup>30</sup> Yet, these themes of suffering and victimisation would, oddly, resurface in post-apartheid South Africa. In a reconciliatory spirit that also recognised the black suffering in the British camps, Thabo Mbeki in 1999 spoke of the Boers as ‘freedom fighters’ who “‘asserted the right of all colonised people to independence’ and of ‘mutual suffering and interdependence, in spite of inequalities, of both black and white during the South African War.’”<sup>31</sup> Stanley suggests that the absurdity of such statements could be indicative of a new nationalist foundation myth in the making; one built on the traditional nationalist motifs of mutual suffering brought upon South Africans by an oppressive ‘outsider’. However, Stanley cautions against such deliberate misrememberings in the name of nation-building and reconciliation. Such laboured reconstructions of the past, after all, only serve to silence traumatic histories of racism and oppression that simply cannot be erased as their legacies continue to persist in the present. Traumatic histories, especially those relating to the suffering of the nation’s women (and children), are deeply emotive experiences in a nation’s past that are often called upon to construct or enforce national unity in the face of societal upheaval. While Stanley focuses on the private and official mourning practices that emerged after the Anglo-Boer War and which developed and altered over the following decades, the manner in which nationalist rhetoric employed the emotive category of death and loss resonates in the present. While a great deal of research exists that examines the suffering experienced by Afrikaner women and especially the 1913 Women’s Monument in a context of promoting Afrikaner nationalism and foundational mythology creation, Stanley has extensively addressed the ways in which mourning and commemoration influence such mythologies. Moreover, as Elizabeth van Heyningen states, “Stanley has done South African historians a signal service by opening up a history which has been trapped in a paradigm of suffering and sentimentality for far too long.”<sup>32</sup> This is a cautionary statement indeed; when mythologies of traumatic pasts become so deeply entrenched and sacralised in society that critical investigation is considered subversive, nationalist desires will continue to employ these mythologies to fortify hegemonies. This has the potential to be detrimental in terms of constructions of gender and gender relations. In post-apartheid South Africa, where a foundational mythology rooted in the years of struggle against the apartheid state is being established, this sacralisation of a grand narrative of the past is becoming increasingly observable with critical revision

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>31</sup> Thabo Mbeki, quoted in Ibid., p.266.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen, “Book Review: *Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War*”, *South African Historical Journal*, 56, 1, 2006, p.248.

aggressively labelled in official circles as ‘counter-revolutionary’. As will be shown in the following chapters, the deaths, funerals, and public mourning of women whose legacies and lives form part of this grand narrative ‘in the making’ reflect a worrying trend. Women’s bodies are employed in narratives of nationalist ideologies that often attempt to ‘re-domesticate’ women with an acutely gendered rhetoric that is indicative of the existing dichotomy of official rhetoric and actual perceptions of womanhood in South Africa. While Stanley, in part, addresses the dead body politics of a large group of seemingly anonymous and singular ‘womenandchildren’, this thesis is concerned with the dead body politics of individual and well-known women icons of the post-apartheid state. The Boer women and children-martyrs, unified yet unindividuated by their experience of death in the camps, were a moderately silent<sup>33</sup> group to appropriate for nationalist projects. This ‘silence’ of a large and anonymous group contrasts sharply with the dead body politics of iconic individuals whose prominent words have often been recorded and are, at times, well-known. Yet, as will be shown in this thesis, even recorded words are easily manipulated for contesting claims or can come to mean different things to different people at different times. Herein lies the power of dead body politics – *the dead cannot contest such manipulations*.

### ***Funerals as Sites of Struggle***

Dennie addresses dead body politics in South Africa through his study of the cultural politics of burial in black communities stretching over a period from 1884-1990 in his PhD dissertation. Of special interest to this thesis are his final three chapters that discuss the mass political funeral that dominated the political landscape of protest in the 1980s. The prominence of dead bodies and funerals as a site of political protest inspired a sense of justified outrage and unity against a common enemy and was indicative of the political salience of the deceased. Shaped by a historical context of avoiding the debasement of black corpses by white municipalities, pauper funerals were avoided at all costs within black communities and for Dennie this is a stark reminder that, in many ways, the black funeral in white-controlled South Africa has always been political. By affirming the value of their dead,

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<sup>33</sup> With the exception of their journals and the private memories of their families. However, journals selected for publication tended to coincide with the contemporary dominant ideologies of Afrikaner nationalism. Stanley, *Mourning Becomes...* (2006).

black South Africans contested the racially debasing nature of colonialism and apartheid.<sup>34</sup> Historically faced with persistent white municipal resistance to black mourning practices, death in black families was a site not only for the outpouring of grief and mourning, but was often accompanied by a deeply politicised clash of interests. Dennie commences his study of this particular topic with the mass-funerals that followed the 1976 Soweto student uprisings and also pays special attention to the mass funeral of murdered Black Consciousness (BC) activist, Steve Biko. The killing of children by the apartheid state during the Soweto uprising would become a particular and justified site of community outrage and funeral attendance was a statement of political intent. Moreover, as the apartheid state tightened its control against any form of opposition the mass funeral became a space where black mourning rituals were employed in direct confrontation with the state. Indeed, as Dennie shows, the “mass politicised funeral became a weapon of choice as Black South African mourners wove their pain of bereavement into a fabric of political resistance to apartheid.”<sup>35</sup> The use of political slogans, songs, and eulogies introduced a new component to black South African mourning rituals.<sup>36</sup> Dennie argues that this introduction of new mourning practices to traditional rites of burial “elevated their anti-apartheid struggle from a political commitment to a near sacred imperative”<sup>37</sup> that would extend beyond the boundaries of Soweto and become part of black mourning ritual across South Africa.<sup>38</sup>

Changing funeral rites after Soweto would further enhance their political nature as, for the first time, children had become involved in the mourning rituals for their school and class mates. At the Soweto funerals thousands attended, even if unknown to the deceased, to show their solidarity with the affected families. The state feared these mass funerals as they were seen as a convenient cover for the organisation of black political activity as no other avenues of public black political expression existed. The politicised students of Soweto did indeed use these funerals to organise themselves in the aftermath of the massacre. Continuous clashes with the police at these funerals deeply entrenched the new politicised culture of mourning at

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<sup>34</sup> Terence Ranger has also addressed this topic in an insightful article concerning burial practices in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Terence Ranger, “Dignifying Death: The Politics of Burial in Bulawayo”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34, 1/2, 2004, pp.110-144. More recently, Michelle Hay addressed the cultural politics of death within a context of land restitution claims concerning Roodepoort West Cemetery in the post-apartheid state. Michelle Hays, “‘The Last Thing that Tells Our Story’: The Roodepoort West Cemetery, 1958-2008”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 2, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Dennie, “The Cultural Politics of Burial”, p.234.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.241.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.242.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.242.

funerals. Dennie shows that the occurrence of political violence at funerals was an unprecedented development in the history of black mourning rituals and following Soweto, even the peaceful funerals became political as attendance itself became a political gesture.<sup>39</sup> Dennie identifies the new political consciousness of black mourners by the performance of political songs, slogans, dances, and political eulogies at politicised funerals. The locality of these political funerals reached national distribution as the unrest of Soweto spread to the rest of the country. The funeral of prominent Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, in 1977 would draw approximately twenty thousand mourners despite a concerted effort from police to stop people from reaching the funeral. Biko's funeral, however, was more than a ceremony at his graveside. According to Dennie, hundreds of thousands of black mourners gathered at commemorative services across the country, turning churches, factories, streets, homes, and shops into political localities as every tribute to Biko's life became an indictment of apartheid. Biko's death became an occasion for nation-wide mourning "with unparalleled political potency and enormous political consequences."<sup>40</sup> As Dennie eloquently states, Biko's life had been a 'tapestry of resistance' to apartheid and his stature as a heroic figure within the anti-apartheid movements and his relentless persecution by the state resulting in his murder had turned him into South Africa's most famous martyr.<sup>41</sup> With Biko's death placed firmly in the tradition of Christian martyrdom, his philosophies "gained new life and legitimacy from the very fact that he died because of them."<sup>42</sup> Biko's funeral and the memorial events organised around the time of his burial were religio-political events and attendance became a necessary political action – especially as some of these events had met with violent reaction from the state resulting in more deaths – delivering further judgement on the apartheid state. Biko's funeral demonstrated the new ritualised politics of mourning which usually accompanied the death of a black political activist.<sup>43</sup> The police's invasion of the sacred space of the funeral strengthened black resistance to apartheid and the martyrs of the struggle strengthened the political platforms of the organisations that produced them.

During the turbulence of the 1980s and the declaration of a state of emergency the government placed a ban on funeral activities such as memorial and commemorative services taking place outdoors in areas considered to be 'unrest areas' and gave the Commissioner of Police the power to immediately classify any area as an 'unrest area'. Furthermore, only

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.241.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.244.

<sup>41</sup> A title Biko still holds in the post-apartheid era with frequent commemorations in his honour.

<sup>42</sup> Dennie, "The Cultural Politics of Burial", p.257.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.267.

ordained ministers of a religious denomination were allowed to speak at funerals in these areas and it became a criminal offence to criticise the government in such sermons. It also banned the large funeral processions that accompanied the death of important individuals, restricting them to vehicular processions with the police selecting an appropriate route which they would monitor. The display of any flags, banner, pamphlets or posters was forbidden, as was the use of a public address system. The ceremony could last no longer than three hours and attendance was limited to 200 persons.<sup>44</sup> This state control over the large public funerals restricted political expression, yet the size of a funeral did not influence its politics or the militancy of its attendants. Many smaller, politicised funerals were held for lesser known individuals and occurred far more often than the mass political funerals. The state was aware that politicised funerals were instrumental in radicalising the black communities.<sup>45</sup> However, it failed to understand that through restricting these funerals they were creating the response that they sought to suppress. Dennie expresses this sentiment well and states that the “government never understood that radicals were created in the cauldron of repression.”<sup>46</sup> The government was never truly able to restrict the political content of eulogies at funerals and these remained strongly politicised throughout the 1980s.

Dennie also considers the contestations that arose around the burial of Dr. Neil Aggett, a white trade unionist, and Sabata Dalindyebo, a Thembu Chief opposed to apartheid and how the struggles for control over their bodies reflect the struggles between the demands of private grief and public politics. This particular chapter of Dennie’s dissertation perhaps relates most closely to the focus of this thesis. Where Dennie examines the dead body politics of the political mass funeral of the struggle years this thesis addresses the dead body politics of those women who contributed to the success of the liberation struggle in the post-apartheid state.<sup>47</sup> Dennie’s focus, however, remains on the topic of how the politics surrounding these ‘contested corpses’ influenced and altered African mourning rituals in South Africa. This thesis takes a broader approach to show how dead body politics has the ability to entrench the foundational mythologies of a new nation. Of course, the glaring contrast lies in Dennie’s study of what would have been considered subversive funerals and this thesis’ focus on official funerals. Yet, a continuity can be observed in that what once was subversive is now official. The official funerals of the present celebrate and commemorate those who

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.324.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.364.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.365.

<sup>47</sup> Sara Baartman is, of course, the exception, but she is constructed in official rhetoric as a ‘heroine’ and a symbol of the end of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa.

contributed to the struggle against the state that would have labelled them subversive and the mourning rituals of the political funerals of the past have been incorporated into the official funerals of the present.

Chapter 7 of Dennie's dissertation addresses the political mass funeral in South Africa. Dennie describes the violent years of confrontation between the apartheid state and black communities during the period 1984-1990 as a decade which witnessed the constant production of dead bodies in black townships.<sup>48</sup> Dennie ensures that the distinction between the mass funeral and the political funeral are not collapsed but recognises that, in South Africa, most mass funerals during this decade were inherently political. As a result, the focus of his study falls on the distinctions between the political mass funeral of famous political leaders and the smaller politicised funerals of lesser known individuals. Drawing a comparison between the mass funeral of Tsiet Mashinini, a famous political activist and the funerals of three lesser known activists – Prakash Napier, Yusuf Akhakilwaya, and Happy Boy – Dennie shows how even smaller and less visible funerals were not necessarily less politically militant in nature. Dennie argues that the political funeral “became a powerful tool for drawing previously un-politicised individuals into the influence of resistance movements, especially once the state attempted to extend its influence and control into the sacred space of the funeral ritual.”<sup>49</sup> Funerals of activists, regardless of the numbers in attendance, became sites of political mobilisation and recruitment; grief and outrage could draw un-associated family members and friends of the deceased into the liberation movements that often played an important part in the organisation of the funerals and delivering politicised eulogies while these events were marked by political songs, sermons, and addresses. Importantly, in terms of liberation theology, Dennie recognises that the sacred nature of the funeral saw “religious belief [become] political conviction; and political action [become] a religious necessity.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Dennie concludes that the politics of each funeral are ultimately, situational – a point that the case studies in this thesis will reflect.

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<sup>48</sup> Dennie, p.350.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.401.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.376.

### *Male Dead Body Politics in the Post-Apartheid State*

While Stanley's and Dennie's studies address the cultural importance and political salience of pre-democratic South African dead body politics, the case study of Hector Pieterse emerges repeatedly in articles dealing with post-apartheid heritage and commemorations of which dead body politics are an inherent aspect. More than any other notable post-apartheid icon, the legacy of Hector Pieterse has been contested by those laying claim to and hoping to benefit from his iconic positioning as a foundational figure and child-martyr. Hector Pieterse stands as a text-book example of the political salience inherent in the silence of dead bodies on which the new nation can be inscribed and through which it can be narrated. The events of 16 June 1976, now celebrated as Youth Day in South Africa, have repeatedly been under contest in competing claims by organisations and individuals laying claim to the organisation of the youth uprisings in Soweto. Gary Baines argues that this "has obvious political implications for groups seeking to stake their right to the story of the liberation struggle that has become the cornerstone of the new nation's collective memory and identity."<sup>51</sup> Baines' illuminating article, "The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976", addresses how and why South Africans remember June 16 through a study of 'memory texts': the iconic Sam Nzima photograph, the TRCs rehearsal of the events of June 16, the Hector Pieterse Museum, and the commemorative events that celebrate Youth Day. It considers how the processes of remembering and forgetting the events of June 16 in the post-apartheid state influences the construction of a national identity and questions "whether it is possible (or even desirable) to aspire to some sort of consensus about the meaning of the past in order to forge a sense of nationhood."<sup>52</sup> Baines shows how the iconography of Pieterse originates from the acclaimed photograph taken by journalist Sam Nzima. Pieterse, it is believed, was amongst the first victims of the police shootings on the protesting students. As a result of this photograph – which captured the lifeless body of the 13-year old boy being carried away by the anguished Mbuyisa Makhubu – and its syndication in the international media, Pieterse became the embodiment of the uprising and the ultimate symbol of apartheid brutality.<sup>53</sup> Baines questions why this photograph evoked such a strong emotional response as "the picture imparts little

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<sup>51</sup> Gary Baines, "The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40, 2, 2007, p.283.

<sup>52</sup> Baines, "The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle", *IJAH*, 40, 2, 2007, p.286.

<sup>53</sup> Seventeen-year old Hastings Ndhlovu was also killed within the first hour of police fire, yet his story has never received the same official attention as Pieterse's.

information and has little or no referential value.”<sup>54</sup> For Baines, the composition of the photograph and the manner in which it captured the human anguish of the moment partly explains its power. Its representation of innocence and victimhood and the senseless death of a child lends itself to powerful symbolic associations. Moreover, Baines argues that it is the relative anonymity of Pieterse “that makes him the ideal symbol of a sacrificed childhood that has no life beyond the picture. He is the ‘perfect victim’; a symbol of the unfulfilled potential of youth cut down in their prime – South Africa’s own Anne Frank.”<sup>55</sup> These symbolic associations and inscriptions have only become more politically salient in the post-apartheid state as it seeks national heroes, martyrs, and icons to bolster a new foundational myth for the nation. Yet, Pieterse was not a political activist nor involved in student protest politics. Rather, as his sister Antoinette Sithole remarked at the TRC hearings, her brother was “in the wrong place at the wrong time.”<sup>56</sup> However, the image and its ability to lend itself to strong symbolic associations rendered Pieterse as an icon of the struggle. His death became a martyr-act for the struggle against apartheid legislation and his eternal silence and anonymity presented a clean slate on which narratives of struggle, morality, and eventual victory could be projected – and indeed, were done so extensively in the post-apartheid state. Baines shows that through the TRC processes

an ANC-approved narrative came to be integrated into a newly created national master narrative. Thus, the story of the Soweto uprisings became part of a triumphalist grand narrative of the liberation struggle, which is the foundation myth of the post-apartheid state.<sup>57</sup>

Hector Pieterse, then, became synonymous with the uprisings in the post-apartheid state and Baines argues that in “the case of the Soweto uprising, the students/participants have been virtually airbrushed out of the ‘official’ narrative and their agency has been downplayed.”<sup>58</sup> Amidst contestations between various political parties and individuals over who inspired and orchestrated the 1976 uprising and despite indications that it was student activists themselves who organised the protest action, the official version of events has allowed the ruling ANC as the emerging victor in the democratic state “to appropriate the story of the Soweto uprising at the expense of the other liberation parties.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Baines, “The Master Narrative of South Africa’s Liberation Struggle”, *IJAHS*, 40, 2, 2007, p.286.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.288.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.290.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.291.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.293.

This official version of events has become manifest in the Hector Pieterse Memorial precinct in Soweto which includes a memorial, a wall of names, and a museum. Despite acknowledging the other victims of the Soweto uprising, “the precinct is clearly devoted to one symbolic figure.”<sup>60</sup> Sabine Marschall identifies the Hector Pieterse Memorial precinct as a “key structure in the visualisation in the foundation myth through commemorating the Soweto uprising and specifically Hector Pieterse.”<sup>61</sup> Moreover, for Marschall “the memorial represents a significant shift towards an increasingly formal, public, and ‘official’ form of commemoration”<sup>62</sup> that is aimed at a wider public rather than those directly bereaved and which “condenses emotions and projects them onto one person, whose suffering represents that of all those nameless and faceless others.”<sup>63</sup> Most importantly, however, Marschall points out that “[m]emorials are never erected for the sake of the dead, who demand our respect. Rather, they are set up by the living for the sake of the living.”<sup>64</sup> Once again Marschall makes an emphatic statement and recognises that commemorative markers such as memorials and monuments to the dead tend to be “proud monuments glorifying resistance [and] intended to forge a sense of collective identity among the living.”<sup>65</sup> While for some there is a genuine desire to honour the dead, memorials for the political and politicised dead, in their visible, public, and lasting capacity, are open to political reinterpretation, exploitation, and strategic appropriation. What Baines identifies as the (mis)appropriation and politicisation by government of Pieterse has silenced the voices of Pieterse’s family who have been mostly excluded from commemorative processes or financial compensation and indicates that while private memories fade with time, “the authority of public memory increases as time passes, for it invariably becomes the more widely accepted version of the past.”<sup>66</sup> Nowhere does this become more discernable than in the official celebration of 16

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.296.

<sup>61</sup> Sabine Marschall, “Visualising Memories: The Hector Pieterse Memorial in Soweto”, *Visual Anthropology*, 19, 2006, p.149.

<sup>62</sup> Marschall, “Visualising Memories”, *VA*, 19, 2006, p.151.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>64</sup> Sabine Marschall, “Pointing to the Dead: Victims, Martyrs and Public Memory in South Africa”, *South African Historical Journal*, 60, 2008, p.103.

<sup>65</sup> Sabine Marschall, “Memory and Identity in South Africa: Contradictions and Ambiguities in the Process of Post-apartheid Memorialisation”, *Visual Anthropology*, 25, 2012, p.190. In this particular article Marschall explores this point in the context of the conflict that exists between large scale state funding for commemorative markers of resistance history and the stark fact that these markers are often situated in impoverished communities who may lack access to even the most basic of services. Marschall questions that, despite heritage development often being intended to promote parallel economic development through tourism, this rarely transpires and shows that state-directed projects are “geared towards the functionalist, bureaucratic delivery of lasting memory-markers installed at a specified cost to achieve specified outcomes.” (p.202).

<sup>66</sup> Baines, “The Master Narrative of South Africa’s Liberation Struggle”, *IJAHS*, 40, 2, 2007, p.297.

June as Youth Day – a public holiday. This annual commemoration celebrates and remembers the struggle of the ‘youths’ against apartheid legislation and involves a variety of official celebrations with the Hector Pieterse Memorial as the focal point of official Youth Day commemorative activities.<sup>67</sup> As officials pay tribute to the heroes of the struggle “such ritualised remembering tends to drown out multiple voices in favour of a singular privileged one.”<sup>68</sup> Official rhetoric reflects an ANC-controlled foundation myth in which the name ‘Hector Pieterse’ has “become synonymous with the sacrifice made by the younger generation in the name of the struggle.”<sup>69</sup> For Baines, then, the heroicisation of Pieterse and the annual commemoration of Youth Day exemplify the processes of nation building.<sup>70</sup> As will be shown in the case studies of this thesis, dead body politics are a vital aspect of nation building and regime legitimation in the post-apartheid state. The case of Hector Pieterse is a relevant study to consider as he exemplifies the protean meanings that can be inscribed on a body/memory whose silence and singularity seemingly renders these – at times conflicting – meanings invariable.<sup>71</sup>

The dead body politics around the iconic martyr-figure of Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu have become a similar site of political contestation. Bill Nasson identified Mahlangu as the first modern martyr of the liberation movement.<sup>72</sup> Marschall, who has addressed the dead body politics of traumatic and violent histories in several studies of contested heritage sites in the post-apartheid state, illustrates the contested nature of two post-apartheid heritage sites that have been informed by dead body politics in her article “Pointing to the Dead: Victims, Martyrs and Public Memory in South Africa.”<sup>73</sup> Analysing mainly the Umkhonto Memorial and the PAC memorial in Mamelodi and briefly addressing the Sharpeville memorial, Marschall reveals the politicised and contested nature of these two post-apartheid memorials steeped in a deeply traumatic past. In this important study of dead body politics, Marschall points to the manner in which both the ANC and the PAC have competitively employed the salient politics of death to enhance their respective public profiles and entrench and remind

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.299.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.300.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.300.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.301.

<sup>71</sup> Perhaps, more interestingly, it must be noted that in the case of Pieterse the memorial/museum named in his honour has trumped his physical remains, buried at Avalon Cemetery, in official importance. This attests to the ideological power of the memorial/museum in memory production and foundational mythology creation that a simple gravesite with a headstone cannot reproduce.

<sup>72</sup> Bill Nasson and Tom Lodge, *All, Here, And Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, (New Africa Books: 1991), p.44.

<sup>73</sup> Marschall, “Pointing to the Dead”, *SAHJ*, 60, 2008, pp.103-123.

the nation of their ‘Struggle’ credentials. Mamelodi, the site of the Mamelodi Massacre in 1985 and a township representative of mobilised opposition to apartheid legislation, has become home to two ‘opposing’ memorials: the predominantly ANC-inspired Umkhonto memorial on Solomon Mahlangu Square (also known as the ANC monument, MK statue, or Solomon Mahlangu memorial<sup>74</sup>) unveiled in April 1991, and a PAC memorial unveiled at Mamelodi Cemetery in August 1992. Each public memorial, on the surface, represents an acknowledgement of the fallen cadres of the respective political parties. Yet, Marschall’s analysis indicates that these memorials play

an important and ongoing role in the competitive process of laying claim to key icons of the ‘Struggle for Liberation’, demonstrating ownership of significant events, and strategically appropriating selected dead heroes, fallen comrades or scores of victims.<sup>75</sup>

By claiming ownership of contributions to the struggle for liberation, each movement effectively writes itself into the foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state. However, as the ruling governing party, the ANC, more than any other political party, has the political, organisational, and financial influence to orchestrate and guide what will be remembered and how narratives of liberation will be narrated in the public space.<sup>76</sup> Marschall acknowledges that indeed,

today, the school curriculum, the media and the heritage sector entrench the popular notion of the freedom struggle, a teleological narrative, implying relative coherence and unity, a more or less concerted effort toward liberation, ideologically and logistically led by the ANC and crucially supported by Umkhonto we Sizwe...<sup>77</sup>

While the impetus for a monument to commemorate the victory of an historic organised rally against authorities considered illegitimate came from the non-party affiliated Mamelodi Civic Association, Marschall relates from interview evidence that all its members were ANC supporters at the time the decision was made to raise a monument.<sup>78</sup> The design appears to be based on the ANC logo, the wheel, the spear and the shield, which are held aloft by a stylised

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>76</sup> Perhaps most apparent in the 2012-year long ANC Centenary celebrations which was accompanied by the declaration as national and regional heritage sites of several locations associated with ANC stalwarts and events.

<sup>77</sup> Marschall, “Pointing to the Dead”, *SAHJ*, 60, 2008, p.104.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.106.

male figure. This statue was placed adjacent to the site of the Mamelodi Massacre, reinforcing the symbolic significance of the site. Marschall indicates that the surrounding square was renamed in honour of Mamelodi activist, Solomon Mahlangu, who was executed by the apartheid government in 1979. Born in Mamelodi, Mahlangu became involved in struggle politics in the context of the 1976 student uprisings. He joined the ANC and left the country to be trained as a member of MK in 1976. Upon his return to South Africa in June 1977, Mahlangu was arrested following a shooting incident in Johannesburg in which two whites were killed. Although it was accepted by the court that Mahlangu had, in fact, never fired a shot, he was sentenced to death on 2 March 1978. Mahlangu's sentencing received international attention and on the eve of his hanging the UN Security Council held a meeting to protest the execution and President Jimmy Carter of the USA, made a personal appeal for commutation of sentence. Marschall relates how

Mahlangu immediately became a martyr to the liberation struggle and an icon of the prevailing injustice; his execution prompted a new wave of international condemnation of the apartheid regime. Mahlangu was originally buried in Atteridgeville, but was exhumed and reburied in the local Mamelodi cemetery two years after the unveiling of the Umkhonto memorial; his grave site is easily identifiable by a fairly prominent memorial stone, topped by a cylindrical marker displaying the ANC logo.<sup>79</sup>

The symbolically charged act of moving the body of Mahlangu nearer to the monument is indicative of the importance and the sense of the sacred that the presence of symbolically significant dead bodies can lend to a site. Chris Hani, who in 1991 had assumed the position of chief of staff of MK and a high-ranking member of the SA Communist Party, unveiled the Umkhonto memorial. Hani's presence, according to Marschall,

stresses the organisational aspect; Mahlangu's symbolic significance as a courageous member and martyr of the liberation struggle; the memorial as a tribute to him as an individual hero, but also to all those who died with him for the cause of liberation. It is a tribute to the ANC as an organisation and liberation movement in alliance with the Communist Party.<sup>80</sup>

Marschall emphasises that while Mahlangu and the victims of the Mamelodi massacre were fundamentally non-aggressive, the memorial relates clearly to the armed struggle and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.108.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.108.

primarily honours MK.<sup>81</sup> This contradiction then, Marschall argues, “certainly underlines the opportunistic appropriation and symbolic coding of popularly rooted and emotionally charged past events for the political needs of the present.”<sup>82</sup> In short, dead body politics has shaped a deeply emotional narrative of resistance that seeks to entrench grand narratives in order to inform a new foundation myth for the post-apartheid state which, at its centre, establishes the ANC and its stalwarts as the supreme organisational and driving force of ‘The Struggle’. This assertion will be reinforced in the case studies addressed in chapters 7, 8, and 9 of this thesis.

While the memorial project reflects an ANC-driven narrative of the organisation’s prominence in the struggle history in Mamelodi that was centred around the iconic martyr-figure of Solomon Mahlangu, the impetus for such a project apparently emerged in response to a planned PAC initiative to set up a large-scale pyramidal stone memorial in a prominent position in Mamelodi cemetery.<sup>83</sup> Despite this, the PAC memorial was only unveiled a year after the Umkhonto memorial. The memorial was erected in honour of Poqo (the military wing of PAC) cadres executed by the apartheid regime and to APLA (Azanian People’s Liberation Army)<sup>84</sup> fallen combatants. The memorial is intended as a collective tombstone intended to restore the dignity of those dead PAC/Poqo members apparently buried in mass graves in Mamelodi cemetery without funerals by the apartheid regime who had withheld executed prisoners from their family members. While the initiator and builder of the PAC memorial denies that one memorial was put up as result of the other, Marschall argues that the competitive history of the ANC and PAC does support the speculation that the ANC memorial was erected in response to a planned PAC memorial.

While both memorials attempt to honour those activists of Mamelodi associated with their respective movements, it is only the Umkhonto memorial that has received official attention through recent upgrades to the site. As Marschall argues, the careful selection of which sites receive these upgrades and renewed official attention “points to an increasing institutionalisation of certain memories and the entrenchment of a particular interpretation of the past anchored around selected events and persons.”<sup>85</sup> The Umkhonto memorial, according to Marschall, has always been associated with Mahlangu but through its visual design has

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.111.

<sup>84</sup> APLA was the successor to Poqo after the organisation fell apart in the face of repressive apartheid regime responses to its violent tactics and extreme anti-white ideologies.

<sup>85</sup> Marschall, “Pointing to the Dead”, *SAHJ*, 60, 2008, p.113.

represented a collective form of memorialisation. However, the individual persona of Mahlangu has come to assume an increasingly prominent role. In 1999 the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Square project was officially launched in order to develop and upgrade the area. In 2005, an imposing bronze statue of Solomon Mahlangu, situated on a high pedestal, was unveiled in place of the Umkhonto memorial. Further development of the site takes the visitor on a metaphorical journey to the newly erected Umkhonto memorial leading up to the monumental Mahlangu statue. For Marschall, the erection of such a monumental statue represents a shift to an elitist approach to commemoration which is focused on individual leaders, martyrs, and heroes and which is manifested through a wider trend of erecting statues of individual male leaders throughout the country.<sup>86</sup> According to Marschall, the “intention was to personalise the struggle for freedom through the example of Mahlangu, and to pose a respected model of identification for the youth of Mamelodi today.”<sup>87</sup> As will be shown in the following chapter, national identification with the moral superiority of a (often) deceased (or sometimes mythical) hero or heroine is a central aspect of dead body politics and foundational mythology creation. Through his iconisation in the post-apartheid state, Mahlangu has become a heroic martyr who has become part of a national pantheon of heroes and heroines designed to morally inspire the new South African nation. The official focus on carefully selected individuals like Mahlangu arguably limits the choices of how the public remembers the past. As Marschall suggests, the “narratives proffered by the heritage sector and addressed mostly at the younger generation...tend to leave little room for divergent memories and alternative interpretations.”<sup>88</sup> Contestations to the increasingly hegemonic narratives of the past do emerge but are often limited and arise from individuals or communities who sometimes chose to engage in their own forms of remembrance of events they have experienced themselves or that are meaningful to them on a personal level.<sup>89</sup>

By addressing the prominent dead body politics of two iconic male post-apartheid hero-martyrs it becomes clear that what on the surface appears to be a re-shaping of South African historical narratives through the institutionalisation of official discourses of black resistance politics to white oppression requires deeper analysis. Post-apartheid dead body politics speak of the formation of hegemonic narratives of the past that silence voices of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.116.

<sup>89</sup> This is evident in Hankey where the community has started organising their own events to commemorate Sara Baartman as a venerated ancestor rather than an official symbol for the post-apartheid state.

opposition in the attempt to create a foundation myth of ‘The Struggle’ that, as Marschall argues, consciously or inadvertently, tends to coincide with an ANC-preferred reading and interpretation of past events. The dead body politics of famous political and politicised women reflects this trend as this thesis will show. However, women tend to be honoured in public spaces in significantly less individualistic and personalised memorials and monuments and the official narratives that define their lives and legacies tragically reflect the contradictory positioning of women in present South African society.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter served to demonstrate the larger body of literature of dead body politics in South Africa that can be broadly divided into three separate categories. As the following chapters will investigate these topics more closely, the discussion above is intended as a brief introduction to earlier and relevant approaches in South African historiography that engage with the powerful relationship between public and official mourning and nationalism. Dead body politics in post-apartheid South Africa tends to reflect power struggles and competition for recognition for roles played in the struggle for liberation that is presently being monopolised by an ANC-dominated narrative. Moreover, the expression of dead body politics in official rhetoric is often indicative of present day societal and economic disputes that are emotionally enhanced by the presence of dead bodies so augmenting their salience as political tools. The prominent role played by dead body politics in political discourse in South African history is neither unique nor singular. The following chapters will show that dead bodies play an important role in foundational mythology creation and bolstering political ideologies and claims through their status as sacred objects on the global level. Moreover, the political salience of dead bodies was harnessed in the South African context by early Afrikaner nationalists and African nationalists alike to lend credibility and integrity to their political projects. These trends persist, and although perhaps distasteful to a critical observer, the sacred status of dead bodies across cultures and countries and the emotional state of death amongst survivors and those who associate or identify with the deceased render them powerful tools (perhaps even weapons) for political claims and actions. Despite the prominence and importance of dead body politics in the post-apartheid state in constructing official narratives of struggle and victory, studies within this field are lacking and dead body politics tends to be attached to larger studies of post-apartheid heritage development and contestations rather than being addressed in its own right. This thesis will expand upon the

field of dead body politics in post-apartheid South Africa by recognising that the physical presence of dead bodies that are considered as important in the present represent more than the country's heritage; they are physical yet symbolic markers that, when harnessed for ideological pursuits, have the power to define the foundational mythology of the 'new' South Africa. Baines and Marschall have examined the political salience of dead bodies in a context of foundational mythology creation in South Africa but have done so indirectly and without employing the phrase 'dead body politics' itself. This thesis will expand upon the work done by Baines and Marschall by further focusing the lens on the dead body politics of prominent South African female icons within a context of foundational mythology creation but also with an understanding that the ideologies that are shaped by the official narratives about these women are indicative of the tragic dichotomy of women's perceived positioning in South African society and their lived experiences in the post-apartheid state.

## Chapter 2

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### Theories of Public Mourning and Nationalist Myth-Making

*Men do well to mourn for the dead: it proves that we love something besides ourselves; and he must have a hard heart who can see his friend depart to rottenness and dust and speed him without emotion on his voyage to “that bourne whence no traveller returns.” To lament for those who have benefited the state is a habit of piety yet more favourable to the cultivation of our best affections.<sup>1</sup>*

- Percy Bysshe Shelley

#### Introduction

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote this statement in response to the death of England’s Princess Charlotte in 1817 – an occasion marked by a public display of grief and mourning as well as political rhetoric. According to Shelley, “the moral benefits derived from public and private mourning differ in degree, not kind [and] he defines public affections as a critical aggregate of private sympathies.”<sup>2</sup> While this is a somewhat simplistic and perhaps exaggerated notion of the relationship between the private and the public, Shelley’s poetic take on public mourning is often echoed in the official rhetoric issued at the deaths of important public figures. Public funerals and the work of mourning play an essential role in nationalist myth-making. The nature of public funerals and the subsequent commemorations of important deceased individuals or past traumatic events are politicised. The political nature of such events lends them to become fundamental components of larger nationalist project.

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<sup>1</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, “We Pity the Plumage But Forget the Dying Bird: An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte” in David Lee Clark, (ed.), *Shelley’s Prose*, (Fourth Estate: New York, 1988), p.164.

<sup>2</sup> Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1994), p.205.

Mourning implies that there is grief for something that has been lost, that a process takes place in which that loss is confronted. But questioning what has been lost begs the question of what it is that remains. David Eng and David Kazanjian suggest that “loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained.”<sup>3</sup> This imputes to loss a creative quality to the politics of mourning which this thesis will address.

Firstly, this chapter will establish the theoretical framework of mourning that will inform discussions of case studies in later chapters. It will examine theories of mourning as they have been shaped by scholars of psychology, anthropology, and history before entering into a discussion about how this thesis will apply these theories to a study of official public mourning<sup>4</sup> in post-apartheid South Africa. Although theories of mourning are often considered the domain of psychoanalysis due to Freud’s significant contribution in his paper ‘On Mourning and Melancholia’<sup>5</sup> and the consequent pathologising of the process of mourning, this chapter will attempt to avoid providing a discussion grounded in psychoanalysis. This chapter will approach theories of mourning as a historical discourse while drawing on the contributions of psychoanalytic theories to the study of public mourning. Where psychoanalysis interprets mourning as a discourse amongst the living and that which has died, or has been lost, a historical account of mourning considers mourning as a discourse amongst the living where the past becomes a “crucial partner of the present.”<sup>6</sup> A brief discussion of the development of individual and private mourning as a subject of psychoanalytic studies will be followed by an account of psychoanalytic theories of public mourning in societies as initially developed and applied by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich. Although this literature has almost exclusively focused on public mourning rituals on the European continent and the United States of America in the last century, strong correlations can be found in the recent public and state mourning of important female political figures in South Africa.

The public mourning for women who have in some way contributed to the body politic for the ‘greater good’, or are perceived to have done so, is at the centre of this thesis. In order

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<sup>3</sup> David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains” in David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (eds), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2003), p.2.

<sup>4</sup> The addition of the term ‘official’ implies state-sanctioned public mourning of prominent public figures.

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, “On Mourning and Melancholia”, in Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski, Sergio Lewkowicz (eds), *On Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia*, (Karnac Books: London, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.4.

to shape the discussion that will take place in the following chapters a brief account of similar and somewhat more well-known cases of public mourning for the passing of politically significant women such as Princess Charlotte and Eva Perón will be provided. Not only will this illustrate that the public mourning of important women contains and animates a variety of discourses, it will also show that this is a phenomena that has spanned centuries and continents and will dispel any notions that what is happening in South Africa in the present is a singular event completely distanced from what has happened elsewhere. However, it must be noted that the circumstances and agendas that have shaped the particular dead body politics that are central to this thesis are of course unique to South Africa as a country that has undergone a relatively peaceful transition from minority rule to democracy.

Informed by Katherine Verdery's seminal work *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*,<sup>7</sup> a closer examination of the political efficacy of named and famous corpses will take place. This will allow for a continuity of theoretical discussion, starting with death leading into burial and memorialisation which then continues into eventual commemoration. A discussion examining the social symbolism of burial will follow in order to determine the ritualised importance of this practice to allow the dead to 'rest in peace' and allow them to once again resume their place in society with a continuity of purpose that is susceptible to political and ideological moulding. The memorials erected to the known and important dead – which comprise several ways in which the dead are physically remembered – can represent a variety of meanings to different groups of people. This multiplicity of meanings and their physical presence in both the geographical and political landscape allows for a very tangible remembrance of these dead – they are still present but separated from the living. The importance of the connection between the burial of public figures and their entrance into a pantheon of national heroes and heroines will be addressed. This will indicate that the social practices of mourning and burial shape how these public figures will be remembered and how their publicly remembered contributions to the nation informs the creation of a new foundational mythology.

The role of foundational mythology in nationalist movements will be discussed briefly within the context of the theories of nationalism that this thesis ascribes to and applies to individual case studies. This examination serves to contextualise the significance of foundational mythologies within nationalist movements, and how these mythologies serve as

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<sup>7</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1999).

symbolic statements about the social order that, in turn, serve a legitimating function for new political dispensations. The focus falls especially on the myths constructed around individuals who are considered to have contributed beneficially to the existence of the modern nation. The narratives of their lives are interpreted and reinvented by nationalists in order to serve as a source of inspiration and unification for the nation.

This chapter is intended to create the general framework of thinking for the rest of this thesis. The theories introduced and addressed here will be applied more thoroughly to each case study in the following chapters. Each case study that will be examined will draw on all elements discussed in this chapter but vary to which degree they apply. All nationalisms are contextual and therefore unique. In two decades of democracy in South Africa, the new post-apartheid nationalism has repeatedly changed focus. Each elected President and his cabinet have attached a different meaning to what South Africans and South Africa, as a nation, should work towards to achieve that ‘golden era’ that most nationalist movements advocate and use to create unity in each ‘imagined community’. Without concentrating on South Africa, this chapter will demonstrate that while most studies on nationalism focus almost exclusively on Europe, the USA, and at times Asia, the seminal works that have shaped modern academic nationalist discourse can be applied, although in altered form, to the South African case study with which this thesis is concerned.

### **Applying Psychoanalytic Theories of Mourning**

This thesis is concerned with the official rhetorical uses of grief in the politicised lamentations of public mourning of women who have been assigned the status of national mothers, heroines and martyrs. This is grounded in a wealth of literature about grief, mourning, burial, and nationalism crossing several disciplines. This thesis, however, will give a historical account of the work of mourning in the context of public funerals and how the narratives shaped by this politicised form of mourning become part of a new foundational mythology for the post-apartheid state. Yet, the place of psychoanalytic theory in studies about public mourning cannot be ignored. They have informed and shaped the way that scholars analysing public mourning approach and think about societies that have undergone traumatic events and how those societies deal with such histories. Indeed, nearly every study concerning public mourning will, however briefly, refer to Freud’s initial research into individual mourning and melancholia in order to define how societies deal with loss.

A theoretical discussion of grief, mourning, and burial within the context of public funerals is necessary before continuing with its application to specific case studies in the following chapters. It is important for the purpose of this thesis to distinguish between grief and mourning. Grief is the emotional response to the impact of loss. Corr *et al.* explain that “[t]he word grief signifies one’s reaction, both internally and externally, to the impact of loss.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, grief is a personal or societal reaction to the loss of a loved one. Mourning, Kastenbaum explains, “refers to the culturally patterned expressions of the bereaved person’s thoughts and feelings.”<sup>9</sup> Stroebe and Schut note that “[m]ourning refers to the social expressions or acts expressive of grief, which are shaped by the practices of a given society or cultural group.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, with its focus on the public space, this thesis will approach the term ‘mourning’ as the ways in which state and society express and memorialise grief as a national event when burying and commemorating those women whom the state has identified as being essential to the project of nation-building in South Africa. The state converts the private grief of a deceased individual’s family and friends into a public mourning process that is meant to be shared by the nation. However, the grief of public mourning – whether a society is mourning the loss of a national hero or heroine, or the loss of certain ideals or geographical space – is a somewhat different phenomenon. For Shelley, mourning is a “cultivator of affections which promote social bonds.”<sup>11</sup> This observation will be applied throughout this thesis as women’s lived experiences are inscribed with the political morals and qualities which are considered to be important to fostering ‘unity in diversity’ and building the nation in post-apartheid South Africa – whether this is actually promoting unity or not.

Although it was Freud’s 1917 paper that has been considered as one of the most influential works on the development of the study of mourning, his work was restricted to studies of private mourning as, indeed, are most recent psychoanalytical studies. Despite this, theories of private mourning have been applied to studies of public mourning and thus it becomes of some importance for this thesis to have a basic understanding of the terminology employed by psychoanalytic studies as this is a point of departure for understanding how mourning can be studied as a historical discourse. Freud wrote that “mourning is regularly the

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<sup>8</sup> C.A. Corr, C.M. Nabe, and D. M. Corr, quoted in Jeanne Katz, “Introduction” in Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz, and Neil Small (eds.), *Facing Death: Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, (Open University Press: Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2001), p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, & Human Experience*, (The C.V Mosby Company: Saint Louis, 1977), p.241-242.

<sup>10</sup> M. Stroebe and H. Schut, “Culture and Grief”, *Bereavement Care*, 17, 1, 1998, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.206.

reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."<sup>12</sup> Freud distinguished between normal mourning and abnormal mourning which he termed melancholia. Although modern psychoanalytic theories problematise these distinctions it is vital for the purpose of this thesis to create a basic understanding of what is implied by these two processes. For Freud normal, or successful, mourning leads to resolution. This idea of resolution presented by Freud involves realising that the loved one has really gone, being able to find a new love object and the eventual re-entry of the mourner into society. Freud argues that "we are familiar with this experience, we know that it will pass and therefore we take it as normal."<sup>13</sup> For Freud, "...when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."<sup>14</sup> In essence, the work of mourning allows the mourner to relinquish past attachments and consequentially to form new ones.

Abnormal or pathological mourning, which Freud identified as melancholia, is the result of the inability to disentangle the self from the lost love object. According to Ian Craib, in the case of melancholia,

...the mourner identifies with the lost loved one and directs the criticism and anger which belongs to the lost one to the mourner. Melancholia, then, is a state in which we have taken the lost loved one inside and kept him or her there, attacking ourselves rather than the person who is lost.<sup>15</sup>

Melancholia, then, prevents the mourner from fully relinquishing their hostility or anger toward what has been lost. Forter, following Freud's work on mourning and melancholia, states that melancholia

...entails an ambivalent incorporation of the object as a strategy for keeping one's argument with it going and results in a sense of inner desolation, an incapacity to form new attachments, and a self-bereavement whose unconscious target is the internalised object – but whose intensity can nonetheless culminate in the melancholic's suicide.<sup>16</sup>

Freud found that,

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<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", in James Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, (Hogarth Press: London, 1957), p.243.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Craib, *Experiencing Identity*, (Sage Publications: London: Thousand Oakes, and New Delhi, 1998), p.159

<sup>14</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' in Glocer Fiorini, Bokanowski, Lewkowicz, *On Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia'*, p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Craib, *Experiencing Identity*, p.159.

<sup>16</sup> Greg Forter, "Against Melancholia: Contemporary Mourning Theory, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and the Politics of Unfinished Grief", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14, 2, 2003, p.134.

The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning – an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale...[and] an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the work of mourning cannot take place and the mourner is unable to return to social life, or cannot continue with life at all. By juxtaposing normal and abnormal mourning, Freud endeavours to pathologise melancholia as he characterised “the melancholic’s sustained devotion to the love object as not only pathological but also antithetical to the ego’s well-being, indeed, its continuous survival.”<sup>18</sup> However, Freud’s insistence that it is only because mourning is understood so well that it is considered normal appears to imply that if melancholia was better understood it would cease to be considered pathological. It is this striving for a clearer understanding of the melancholic’s attachment to loss that “might depathologise those attachments, making visible not only their social bases but also their creative, unpredictable, political aspects.”<sup>19</sup> This in turn would allow the past to remain steadfastly alive in the present, to actively induce a tension between the past and the present. Although Freud changed his mind on the subject of incorporation of the love object, later claiming in *The Ego and the Id*<sup>20</sup> that “incorporation, originally associated with melancholia, was essential to the task of mourning.”<sup>21</sup> What is essential to melancholia is that the mourner does not know what it is in the other person that has been lost and “mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom.”<sup>22</sup> For Freud melancholia is an “enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object... [M]elancholia results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object, place, or ideal.”<sup>23</sup> It is this very maintenance of mourning, the continuing dialogue with loss and its remains, and the possibility of interpreting loss as a creative process that becomes a significant point of departure for a study of public mourning.

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<sup>17</sup> Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ in Glocer Fiorini, Bokanowski, Lewkowicz, *On Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’*, p.22.

<sup>18</sup> Eng and Kazanjian, “Introduction” in Eng and Kazanjian (eds), *Loss*, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, (Woolf: London, 1927 (1935 reprint)).

<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, (Verso: London and New York, 2004), p.20-21.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.22.

<sup>23</sup> Eng and David Kazanjian (eds), “Introduction” in Eng and Kazanjian (eds), *Loss*, p.3.

Despite the influence of Freud's paper, psychoanalytical studies of mourning have ploughed new ground.<sup>24</sup> The distinctions that Freud made have been blurred and their very validity questioned. The pathological nature of melancholia implies that it may be destructive to the melancholic, yet it is important to question whether mourning can ever be truly completed or if it necessarily requires a forgetting or letting go of the lost love object and the acquiring of a new love object to take its place. As will be shown in this chapter, a continual state of mourning – an ongoing engagement with what has been lost – rather than a self-destructive melancholia, need not be destructive for the societies that attempt to confront traumatic histories of loss. It can be a positive engagement to produce new meanings in the present, even if these meanings are often politically motivated and manipulated. Although psychoanalysis is primarily focused on the private sphere several psychoanalysts have realised the importance of studying the phenomena of a nation in mourning.

The traumatic events of the twentieth century have resulted in an increase of studies on societal mourning in order to investigate the societal traumas of war and genocide on the citizens of states directly affected by such events. Applying psychoanalytic theory to the public, or collective sphere, in 1967, German psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich published *The Inability to Mourn*.<sup>25</sup> This study focused on the inability of post-war Germany to confront its Nazi past. Asserting that the majority of German citizens identified with and supported Hitler, they argued that the enforced rupture of individual egos from Hitler as the Führer and ego-ideal, the sudden reversal of his qualities, should have caused a kind of melancholic crisis, “a collective plunge into depression...”<sup>26</sup> Melancholia was, for the Mitscherlichs, a condition of authentic mourning:

a state arising from the loss of identifications so profound as to be constitutive of one's self, and a state which must be worked through in order to establish the sense of separateness that enables one to relinquish what one has lost.<sup>27</sup>

The Mitscherlichs argued that,

Before Germans could really begin to perceive the full magnitude of the crimes committed in the name of the fatherland and to mourn for the victims of Nazism, they would have to work

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<sup>24</sup> It does not fall within the scope of this thesis to discuss the many different fields of psychoanalytic study that have been developed in the last century.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour* (trans. Beverley R. Placzek), (Grove: New York, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Forter, “Against Melancholia”, *Differences*, 14, 2, 2003, p.135.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.135.

through the traumatic shattering of the spectacular relations they had maintained with Hitler and the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>28</sup>

This process would have allowed the German people to overcome the “narcissistic identifications that provided the psychosocial support for the Holocaust.”<sup>29</sup> This, in turn, would result in the ability of the German people to mourn the genocidal deaths caused by a regime which they had supported. The Mitscherlichs identified many ‘evasion’ strategies employed by the German people to avoid having to confront this past and to undergo the process of working through a potentially debilitating melancholia. This was achieved by a derealisation of the past, a sudden shift of identifications with Hitler to the democratic allies and the self-identification of the German people as victims.<sup>30</sup> The Mitscherlichs indicate that this led to an unconsciously sustained rupture of the past which “has been responsible for much of the psychic and political immobility of large segments of the German population.”<sup>31</sup> The Mitscherlichs argue,

That so few signs of melancholia or even of mourning are to be seen among the great masses of the population can be attributed only to a collective denial of the past. The very grimness with which the clearing away of the ruins was immediately begun – which, in oversimplification, was taken as a sign of German efficiency – itself betrayed a manic element. Perhaps this manic defence also explains why news of the greatest crimes in Germany’s history was received with so few indications of outward emotion.<sup>32</sup>

Margarete Mitscherlich, in her 1985 evaluation of the state of the political culture of West Germany, showed that the post-war generations “inherited not guilt so much as the denial of guilt, not losses so much as lost opportunities to mourn losses.”<sup>33</sup> For Margarete Mitscherlich “...we must acknowledge that the younger generation, which feels itself to be innocent, has inherited not a past that has been worked through, but rather its denial and repression.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1990), p.3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Forter, “Against Melancholia”, *Differences*, 14, 2, 2003, p.135.

<sup>30</sup> Similarly, there has been a trend in South Africa for Afrikaners to identify themselves as victims of both the apartheid regime and the post-apartheid regime, avoiding the label of ‘perpetrator’ and focusing on the rights of minority groups in a democratic South Africa. Kees C.S. van der Waal and Steven Robins, “‘De la Rey’ and the Revival of ‘Boer Heritage’: Nostalgia in the Post-apartheid Afrikaner Culture Industry”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 4, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, p.28.

<sup>33</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p.34.

<sup>34</sup> M. Mitscherlich quoted in Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p.35.

Although the ‘*Historiker-Streit*’<sup>35</sup> (Historians debate) of the late 1980s showed how a post-war generation was attempting to deal with its traumatic past, more recent debates centring around German victimhood have shown that the period of German history from the rise to power of Hitler and the eventual defeat of Germany by the Allies and questions of culpability and victimhood remain at the forefront of German historical consciousness.

The Mitscherlichs’ study and application of theories of private mourning and melancholia to the public sphere was groundbreaking and their work coined many of the keywords that would shape public debate in post-war Germany.<sup>36</sup> Although they approached mourning through psychoanalytic theories, their work characterised the nature of the debates around German history in the 1980s and became a valuable source in understanding theories of societal mourning, or, indeed, a society’s inability to mourn. Although the Mitscherlichs saw melancholia as a state to be worked through in order for mourning to be successful, this thesis will reject the need for societies to complete the work of mourning. This thesis will suggest that societies that have suffered traumatic pasts are in a continual state of mourning and that this state may produce new meanings from historic loss rather than merely act destructively through deliberate misrememberings.

The focus of several, recent psychoanalytic studies of mourning, appear to be concerned with thinking in terms of emphasising the creative dimensions of mourning.<sup>37</sup> Although Freud never probed the relationship between mourning and creativity in his “Mourning and Melancholia”, the contemporary psychoanalytic view and expectation of gaining something positive out of the mourning process can undermine the individual’s continuous and lasting painful emotions for the lost loved object. Yet, for societies to creatively engage with a traumatic past can create new meanings about such a past while also shaping understandings of the present.<sup>38</sup> Harlow, in her study on the many displays of public mourning in New York after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 shows that “creative acts not only give those encountering death a project to focus on, but also provide them with a way to physically enact grief – to give shape to sorrow, and to evoke the presence of the dead among

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<sup>35</sup> For further reading on the *Historiker-Streit* consult Bill Niven, *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York and Basingstoke, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Martin Dehli, “Shaping History: Alexander Mitscherlich and German Psychoanalysis after 1945, in *Psychoanalysis and History*, 11, 1, 2009, p.62.

<sup>37</sup> Ilana Harlow, “Shaping Sorrow: Creative Aspects of Public and Private Mourning”, in Samuel Heilman (ed), *Death, Bereavement and Mourning*, (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and London, 2005), p.33.

<sup>38</sup> This is not to deny that such confrontations can remain painful for victims or their descendants, but rather to ensure that such pasts remain part of the historical consciousness.

the living.”<sup>39</sup> This transformation of the energy of loss into a creative energy is clearly seen in exercises of public mourning and commemoration. This thesis will argue in the following chapters that in post-apartheid South Africa the Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes, viewed as memory work, worked against melancholia but created a society in perennial or continuous mourning which is further enhanced by the creation of memorials and the commemoration of traumatic events and the public mourning of prominent deceased individuals.

After 30 years of conducting a study of hundreds of mourning processes and their various consequences, psychoanalyst Vamik D. Volkan has in recent years identified the perennial mourner and extended this term to include societies that he identifies as being perennial mourners.<sup>40</sup> This term applies to individuals and societies “who are unable to bring their mourning to a practical conclusion...”<sup>41</sup> For Volkan some of these perennial mourners lead miserable lives while other express their unending mourning in more creative ways. Volkan states that,

The perennial mourner, to a large extent, cannot identify with the enriching aspects of the mental representation of the lost object and the adaptive ego functions associated with this mental representation. This kind of mourner cannot find ‘suitable reservoirs’ for externalising the representation of the lost person or thing. On the other hand, the mourner does not end up identifying totally with the lost object representation and does not, in other words, go through a ‘normal’ mourning process or develop depression. Instead, these mourners keep the object representation of the lost person or thing within their self-representation as a specific and unassimilated ‘foreign body’.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the perennial mourner is ‘stuck’ in his/her mourning process and employs concrete animate or inanimate objects such as photographs as linking objects that symbolise “a meeting ground between the mental representation of a lost person or thing and the mourner’s corresponding self-representation.”<sup>43</sup> By creating and employing these linking objects the mourner makes the mourning process unending and externalised. The mourner can then locate and access these objects whenever they wish to, and store them away when they feel

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<sup>39</sup> Harlow, “Shaping Sorrow”, in Heilman (ed), *Death*, p.33.

<sup>40</sup> Vamik D. Volkan, “Not Letting Go: From Individual Perennial Mourners to Societies with Entitlement Ideologies”, in Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski, and Sergio Lewkowicz (eds), *On Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia*, (Karnac Books: London, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Volkan, “Not Letting Go”, in Glocer Fiorini, Bokanowski, and Lewkowicz (eds), *On Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia*, p.98.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.101.

anxious about the complicated mourning process. Volkan advances his argument by focusing on memorials and monuments as shared linking objects in order to understand societal mourning and identifies the building of memorials and monuments as a common societal expression – a symptom – of societal mourning. He identifies memorials and monuments as psychological containers in which the remaining unpleasant feelings about the past can be sealed.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the physical presence of monuments and memorials in the landscape inherently implies that these feelings can be accessed at any time in the future. It is here that the connection between psychoanalytic theories of mourning and a historical discussion of public mourning can be made. The memorials and monuments of post-apartheid South Africa are imbued with complex ‘unpleasant’ feelings about the apartheid past. They are sealed in these memorials for visitors to explore, but tend to be brought back into the socio-political sphere at occasions such as the anniversaries of specific historical events in order to legitimate the new political dispensation which has ensured that all that was wrong with the previous dispensation has now been done away with and that the nation, through looking back on the traumatic past, can see a brighter future ahead.

However, this loss need not only be sealed in physical monuments or memorials made of concrete materials. Mourning the physical remains of past heroes and heroines, and even lost ideals can become a renewed focus of engaging with the past in the present. By considering the mourning process as never being ‘completed’ or ‘finished’ allows loss to become available to alternative meanings of the past and alternative identifications in the present.<sup>45</sup> Eng and Kazanjian, referring to Freud’s identification of melancholia,

...find in Freud’s conception of melancholia’s persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a “grasping” and “holding” on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains. This engagement generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future. While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.105. Volkan has applied his theory of perennial mourning, and monuments and memorials as ‘linking objects’ to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and labels the TRC as an abstract monument which was effective for societal healing and which was bolstered by ‘reparative leaders’ such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. He argues that the TRC “proceedings in South Africa remain as the strong shared linking object, a monument that absorbs and then tames affects and allows social mourning to continue and be worked through.” Vamik D. Volkan, “Memory, Narrative, and Forgiveness: Reflecting on Ten Years of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, Dr. Vamik Volkan’s Keynote Address on Trauma, Mourning, Memorials and Forgiveness at “The Next Chapter: Consequences of Societal Trauma Conference”, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Tammy Clewell, *Mourning, Modernism, Postmodernism*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire and New York, 2009).

relationship to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects.<sup>46</sup>

Eng and Kazanjian suggest that,

while the twentieth century resounds with catastrophic losses of bodies, spaces, and ideals, psychic and material practices of loss and its remains are productive for history and for politics. Avowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternative meanings.<sup>47</sup>

For Tammy Clewell this refusal to heal sustains “bereaved memory for the work of establishing new constellations for identity and culture”.<sup>48</sup> Thus, by rejecting notions of successful or completed mourning, that mourning and the work of grief is the sole domain of the psyche rather than socially shared rituals it becomes clear that nations are melancholically, creatively, and continuously confronting loss as a way to critically engage with the past in order to create new meanings in the present.

### **Dead Body Politics**

Schor argues that mourning is a force “that constitutes communities and makes it possible to conceptualise history.”<sup>49</sup> Schor continues,

As we approach the millennium,<sup>50</sup> our century continues to afford us cautionary reminders that we need the dead to be fully human: by the Holocaust deniers, on the one hand, and by the tenaciously political mourners of AIDS victims, on the other, we are reminded that both forgetting and remembering the dead have enormous consequences for the present and the future of our world. Even as we give life to the dead, the dead shape the lives we are able to live.<sup>51</sup>

The implication here indicates that the socio-political meanings assigned to dead in the present shape the moral expectations of the living. The many traumatic social and political events of the twentieth century have led to reflections on the rupture of social ties amongst

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<sup>46</sup> Eng and Kazanjian (eds), “Introduction” in *Loss*, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>48</sup> Clewell, *Mourning*, p.4.

<sup>49</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.4.

<sup>50</sup> Schor’s work was published in 1994, but her commentary here still bears great significance in terms of the traumatic natural disasters and especially the human-made disasters of the twenty-first century.

<sup>51</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.4.

large groups and the processes of collective mourning related to them. Drawing on psychoanalytic theories of mourning it will become clear that changing trends in private mourning influence how this is institutionalised in public displays of mourning. The death of Princess Charlotte that is referred to at the outset of this chapter is a fitting point of departure for a discussion of mourning women in the public sphere which is at the centre of this thesis.<sup>52</sup> The subsequent examination of the death and public mourning of the political figure of Eva Perón and Princess Diana will also indicate that the general increase in the privatisation of death, mourning, and funerals since and throughout the twentieth century have made public mourning more restrained with a public being at odds with genuinely mourning a figure with whom they had no real personal relationship. Schor, in *Bearing the Dead*, focuses extensively on the death of Princess Charlotte as an example of the ‘British Culture of Mourning’ during the 1800s. Not only does this serve as an exclusively British example but the public mourning of a popular female political figure that Schor describes is a practice that finds resonance, albeit with many differences, in South African nationalisms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and indeed, in many other nations.

When Princess Charlotte died in childbirth on 6 November, 1817, the British nation mourned her passing. Within two weeks of her death nearly 200 documents were published that captured the ‘nation’s sorrow’. Memorial services were held across the nation and on the day of her funeral on 19 November 1817, all commercial activity was halted. The funeral was an aggressively marketed event with tickets being sold for the aisle at St. George’s Chapel in Windsor, and exorbitant prices were charged at inns along the procession route. Despite her death being described as being ‘above politics’, two distinct narratives emerged. The first was the clear monarchical crisis. Issues of legitimacy amongst the siblings of the Prince Regent meant that with the death of Princess Charlotte and her child, the crown could possibly fall into the hands of a foreign ruler. Contemporary issues such as the “pressure for reform, workers’ uprisings, Dissenters’ liberties, the emerging distinction between masculine and feminine ‘spheres’, the role of women in the home and society at large, and the character and function of the royal family”<sup>53</sup> were communicated within the documents published after her death expressing the nation’s sorrow. These documents would also emphasise the Princess’ domestic and feminine virtues, her benevolence, sense, her sweetness, and describe her

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<sup>52</sup> I have selected Princess Charlotte for the purposes of this chapter as, despite more recent examples of politically influential women being mourned in the public sphere by their respective countries, these women are often enconced by the modern cult of celebrity which differs vastly from the public mourning of politicised women in South Africa.

<sup>53</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.198.

marriage to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg as the “very model of domestic harmony.”<sup>54</sup> Schor argues that the national mourning for Princess Charlotte was manifest in a paradoxical politics when she states that “these documents conscript the Princess in death for the marshalling of a national moral consensus that would conceal fissures in the body politic.”<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the death of the Princess becomes inscribed with a revision of the patriarchal family “in accordance with the emerging middle-class meaning of ‘family’ – a group of contemporaneous individuals related by blood or marriage residing within a household, usually under a male head.”<sup>56</sup> Simultaneously, pamphlets criticising the female relatives of Princess Charlotte for not attending her on the childbed or on her deathbed served to alert women “that if the family is to be the moral guardian of society at large, it is for them to be the moral guardians of the family.”<sup>57</sup> Thus the moral and domestic roles of women in British society were entrenched through discussions of the Princess’ ‘betrayal’ by female relatives through their equation of femininity, domesticity, and morality and by “reviving the sentimental precept that private affections are constitutive of public morality and national character.”<sup>58</sup> Not only does the private become public in the context of morality, in the case of the Princess’ death, private mourning became constitutive of public displays of mourning. Thomas Beck indicates this in his elegy,

Now should a Nations Sorrows flow!  
 For lo! Tremendous cause appears,  
 When public grief and private woe,  
 Combine to ask a people’s tears.<sup>59</sup>

This simplistic conflation of the public and private is, of course, problematic. However, the poetic nature of such writings lends them to oversimplification and this very conflation of public and private mourning is evident in the rhetoric issued at many state funerals. Returning to Shelley’s address quoted at the head of this chapter, Shelley also asserts that public and private mourning differ only in degree, not in kind. For Shelley, then, public affections are a

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.222. This finds strong resonance with the official rhetoric issued at the death of Albertina Sisulu (chapter 7) which highlighted her strong relationship with her husband, Walter Sisulu.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.227.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.199.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Beck, “An Elegy on the Lamented Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte”, quoted in Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.196.

critical aggregate of private sympathies: public mourning is merely the “public erection of signs of private sympathies that indicate the ‘the sorrow and indignation which fill[s] all hearts.’”<sup>60</sup> Thus, rather poetically expressed, the private (mourning for a famous figure) is public, and indeed, in the case of mourning an object of public love and admiration, political.

Argentina stands out as a case study in several central texts on mourning and indicates what Antonius C. G. M. Robben has labelled “the Argentine political obsession with corpses and spirits”<sup>61</sup> that has continued into the twentieth century. Eva Perón, affectionately known in Argentina as ‘Evita’, was one of the most charismatic and prominent figures of twentieth century Argentine politics and is a more recent and prominent case of a female political figure becoming a nationalist icon after her death. The national obsession with her corpse after her death in 1952 indicates the political power that remains might wield by those who lay claim to them. Perón became influential serving as Argentina’s First Lady from 1946 until her death in 1952.<sup>62</sup> She was represented as the embodiment of the Argentine feminine ideal<sup>63</sup> and her involvement in charity left a legacy of newly built schools, hospitals, homes, and a community named Ciudad Evita (Evita City) through an amalgamation of city planning and personality cult. This charity work resulted in Perón gaining a fierce devotion from the general population.<sup>64</sup> Perón fought for women’s suffrage and established the Female Perónist Party which had great influence in her husband, Juan Perón, winning the 1951 elections and nearly led to Perón taking the Vice-Presidency. Her popularity led to her being awarded the title ‘Spiritual Leader of the Nation’ which she received shortly after Juan Perón’s inauguration. Although Eva Perón was admired in life, her status as a national heroine was confirmed after her death of cancer in 1952.<sup>65</sup> Her body was embalmed by Spanish physician Pedro Ara, she was granted a state funeral, and in the space of two weeks an estimated 65 000

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<sup>60</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.206.

<sup>61</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, “State Terror in the Netherworld: Disappearance and Reburial in Argentina” in Antonius C. G. M. Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, (Blackwell Publishing: Malden, Oxford, and Carlton, 2004), p.140.

<sup>62</sup> For the purposes of this thesis no full biographical account will be given of Eva Perón’s life. For her biography consult John Barnes, *Eva Perón*, (Fontana-Collins: 1978). Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Peron: A Biography*, (St. Martin's Press: 1997).

<sup>63</sup> Eva Perón’s femininity was represented as the Argentine ideal, yet it was disputed by some of the higher social classes as her birth to unmarried parents and career as an actress was considered to be immoral. However, she enjoyed great support from the general population.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Fraser and Marysa Navarro, *Eva Perón*, (W W Norton: New York, 1980).

<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, Eva Perón was never told of her diagnosis by her physician although she did receive treatment for her illness. In addition, the Argentine public was also never informed in an attempt to conceal the fatal nature of her illness for fear that it would increase the vulnerability of the Perón regime. Barron H. Lemer, “The illness and Death of Eva Perón: Cancer, Politics, and Secrecy” in *The Lancet*, 355, 2000. Julie Taylor, *Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1981).

mourners passed by her body in state.<sup>66</sup> A grand monument was planned where her body would eventually be stored. This commodification and glorification of Perón's body has been interpreted as the Perón government sentimentalising Eva Perón's death in an attempt to secure their support base amongst the general public.<sup>67</sup> However, after the successful 1955 military coup d'état the cult of Evita and the glorification of Perón came to an end. Their names were removed from all public buildings, squares, and streets and Eva Perón's embalmed body was removed from the trade union headquarters where it had been kept since her state funeral in anticipation of the completion of the monument that would be her final resting place.<sup>68</sup> After the removal from public display, Perón's body underwent a journey that is both strange and phantasmagorical. Several sources claim that the embalmed body was shipped out of Argentina in 1957 by the right-wing military junta led by General Aramburu that took power after the overthrow of Juan Perón with a number of identical coffins containing wax sculptures of Perón being sent to different destinations to ensure that the real location of her body would remain concealed. The fictional account of Eva Perón's life, *Santa Evita* by Eloy Martinez, ascribes to Colonel Moore King, who was in charge of removing Perón's body, the following pertinent lines:

You know very well what is at stake...It is not the cadaver of that woman but the destiny of Argentina. Or both, which to many people seems the same. Look how the dead and useless body of Eva Duarte has become confused with the country... [By] embalming it, you moved history from its place. You left history inside. You realise that whoever has this woman, has the country in its fist?<sup>69</sup>

This is a fictional account of a conversation between Perón's body and the Colonel, but the removal of the embalmed body to a secret location by the new, and somewhat unstable, administration indicates the political power that her remains were believed to have held and the "survival after death of political ideals evoked by the presence of human remains."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Robben, "State Terror" in Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*.

<sup>67</sup> John Kraniauskas, "Porno Revolution: El Fiord and the Eva-Perónist State" in *Angelika: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 6, 1, 2001. Alexander Craig goes so far as to say, "Certainly, there seems little doubt that her death from cancer in 1952 removed from Perón one of his main supports and helped to bring about his fall three years later." Alexander Craig, "Perón and Peronism: Personalism Personified", *International Journal*, 31, 4, 1976, p.708.

<sup>68</sup> Robben, "State Terror" in Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*.

<sup>69</sup> Eloy Martinez, *Santa Evita*, quoted in Robben, "State Terror" in Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*, p.140.

<sup>70</sup> Robben, "State Terror" in Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*, p.141.

In 1970 a Montoneros commando force kidnapped and executed General Aramburu who had been responsible for the 1955 coup. Amongst the list of charges against him were the disappearance and profanation of Eva Perón's body.<sup>71</sup> Documents surfaced that placed Eva Perón's remains in a cemetery in Milan where they had secretly been buried. Her body was flown to Buenos Aires for examination and authentication, and then returned to Juan Perón who was living in exile in Madrid. The embalmed body remained in his house for several years where, apparently, his third wife would lay atop Eva Perón's coffin in order to receive her spiritual energy.<sup>72</sup> When Juan Perón returned to Argentina to head up the new government in 1973, Eva Perón's body remained in Madrid. When Juan Perón died in 1974 his wife, Maria Estella Martinez de Perón, took over as president of Argentina. Shortly after Juan Perón's death a Montoneros task force abducted the body of General Aramburu as ransom for Eva Perón's embalmed corpse. Maria Perón repatriated the body of Eva Perón and placed her next to the embalmed body of her husband at the presidential residence. Eventually, after the 1974 military take-over in 1976, Eva Perón's body was given to her sisters to be reburied in the family tomb.

The political power of Eva Perón's embalmed remains attests to the political ideologies that have been assigned to her in life and after death. However, the silence of her remains makes them available to overt political manipulation by those who lay claim to them or claim to be stakeholders of her legacy. The consequent mythologising of Perón's life and legacy has ensured that Eva Perón lives on as a mythological figure in global popular culture and heritage tourism in Argentina which is propagated by her continued representation in literature, on stage, and in film.<sup>73</sup>

The employment of the public, dead, female body and the processes of public mourning for socio-political rhetoric are not uncommon. Instead, this is a practice that is intrinsically linked to the gendered language of nationalism. The death of Princess Charlotte became a national tragedy and all those who bore witness, despite political divisions, constituted a national audience which consumed pamphlets, newspapers and documents

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> For further reading about the myths created around the image of Eva Perón consult Karen Bishop, "Myth Turned Monument: Documenting the Historical Imaginary in Buenos Aires and Beyond", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 30, 2, 2007. Gwendolyn Diaz, "Making the Myth of Evita Perón: Saint, Martyr, Prostitute", *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 22, 2003. Julie Taylor, *Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1979). Marta E. Savigliano, "Evita: The Globalisation of a National Myth", *Latin American Perspectives*, 24, 6, 1997.

reporting and lamenting her death. Similarly the deaths, and indeed, lives, of public women such as Eva Perón, Eleanor Roosevelt, Frida Kahlo, Indira Gandhi and Princess Diana became events around which discourses of femininity, family, and nationalism were assessed and entrenched. Their public status, or celebrity as in the case of Princess Diana, is what allows for their deaths to result in public mourning, even if that public has only experienced them as remote public figures. Adam Smith's theory of sympathy shows that this is a phenomenon of identification with a remote public figure:

We cannot truly grieve for every one who dies beyond the circle of those especially dear to us; yet in the extinction of the objects of public love and admiration and gratitude, there is something, if we enjoy a liberal mind, which has departed from within that circle.<sup>74</sup>

Writing in 1759, Smith's words find even greater application in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the ubiquitous nature of the media in all its forms and the phenomenon of what has been termed 'celebrity culture'. The access that the media allows the general public into the lives of public figures allows for the sympathetic identification of these public figures as familiars. According to Smith, sympathy results from our tendency to imagine ourselves in the place of the suffering. When a public figure dies the identification that takes place is, according to Schor, a second-order sympathetic identification: "This phenomenon calls forth intense affections for remote figures, even to the point where our sympathy rivals the 'true grief' we bear"<sup>75</sup> for those dear to us. Schor continues to show that, according to Shelley's theory of 'celebrity', public mourning is "simply mourning for the imaginary, intimately known simulacrum of a public figure."<sup>76</sup> Thus, the imagined relationship with the public figure allows individuals to sympathise with their passing and this mourning is then enacted in the public space through the rituals associated with public mourning. Verdery indicates that it is when the genealogies of the famous dead have been successfully integrated into the national imagery, citizens, in some way, can view them as 'ours'.<sup>77</sup> It is important to note that these feelings of mourning and sympathy for important public figures are not shared by all members of the public and that the phrase 'a nation in mourning' constitutes a myth of mourning often perpetuated by the media and politicians. James Thomas, in his study of the public mourning of Princess Diana, illustrates this point that despite the intense media focus

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<sup>74</sup> Adam Smith, quoted in Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.164.

<sup>75</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.206.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.206.

<sup>77</sup> Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p.114.

on those individuals of the general public in deep mourning for the Princess, many of the British public felt very little for her at the time of her death and were sceptical about her sudden sanctification.<sup>78</sup> Thomas illustrates that despite the privatisation of death, at the occurrence of a high profile death,

older and conflicting traditions of communal mourning quickly and spontaneously re-emerge. In other words, death temporarily becomes renationalised and everyone is expected to mourn regardless of whether they feel personal loss.<sup>79</sup>

Despite this, the myth of a nation in mourning persisted as negative reactions to Princess Diana's death were sidelined in the media and often deemed deviant echoing perceptions as outlined by Shelley that "To lament for those who have benefited the state is a habit of piety yet more favourable to the cultivation of our best affections."<sup>80</sup> Thus, despite the increasing modern perception that only those close to the dead are entitled to genuine grief there appears to remain a societal expectation that it is necessary to mourn the passing of a prominent public figure. For the purposes of this thesis then, it becomes important to note that in a country as culturally and ethnically diverse as South Africa, a nation in mourning is indeed a myth, that although some genuinely mourn, and the expectation to mourn or to express sympathy exists there is no actual nation in mourning. This myth is constructed 'from above' in order to build the image of a united nation in mourning. That it is the 'nation' that has lost something in the death of an important public and – often in the case of post-apartheid South Africa – political figure.

The five women who will be discussed in the following chapters were hardly celebrities in the modern sense of the word. However, in post-apartheid South Africa they occupy a special place in the socio-political and cultural spheres. Their names are familiar through their presence in the public sphere, their lives frequently honoured by politicians and the media, and their deeds taught at schools and universities. This has allowed South Africans some form of social 'relationship' with these figures, an intimacy at a distance, a knowledge of who they were and what they 'were like'.<sup>81</sup> When these women are mourned or

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<sup>78</sup> James Thomas, *Diana's Mourning: A People's History*, (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, *Diana's Mourning*, p.92.

<sup>80</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "An Address to the People" in Lee Clark, (ed), *Shelley's Prose*, p.164.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas, *Diana's Mourning*.

remembered by the South African nation – as an imagined community<sup>82</sup> – the political rhetoric that is indulged in by government and prominent stakeholders shapes public memory of these women in a manner that not only legitimises the current political dispensation but also mythologises their legacies (as happened with Princess Charlotte and Eva Perón). This places these women firmly in a new post-apartheid foundational mythology that is typically based on the years of the struggle against apartheid but can also reach back to resistance to the early colonisation of southern Africa. This is not to say that their deaths, funerals, or commemorations are simply media or political events – each of these women were real individuals who led lives that impacted the future of their country. But what this thesis will suggest is that their public mourning and remembering has been primarily mediated by political rhetoric that has shaped their legacies to suit current political ideologies.

### **Burial and Memorials to the Dead**

The physical remains of the dead occupy a sacred space in most societies,<sup>83</sup> whether this is informed by respect for the dead or fear of retribution if the remains are not subjected to the proper rituals of passing. The remains of the named and famous dead are exposed to a burial politics that determine their place in that particular society. In countries that are undergoing dramatic (and often violent) political and regime changes the historic dead and newly dead that are honoured in the present come to form part of a new pantheon of heroes and heroines that inform a new foundational mythology for the state. The famous political dead of the previous regime are cast aside, forgotten, and neglected – or in worst case scenarios defiled – while the new heroes and heroines are buried, re-buried, or commemorated. This section will briefly address the symbolic importance of the funeral<sup>84</sup> and also the significance of the material culture of death in the form of graves and memorials. This will apply to the

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<sup>82</sup> This term, first coined by Benedict Anderson, will be problematised below.

<sup>83</sup> The international outcry at the attempt of Somali pirates to hold to ransom the remains of French feminist activist, Marie Dedieu, who died while in their captivity, indicates the strong international sense – despite cultural differences – of how dead bodies should be treated and respected. Dedieu was kidnapped on 1 October 2011 from the Kenyan island of Manda by a suspected Somali terrorist group. Wheelchair bound and in need of regular medication, she is believed to have died from septicaemia that developed after her captors did not give her the medication she required for heart problems and cancer treatment. On 20<sup>th</sup> October the French Minister of Defence announced that the pirates were attempting to obtain money in return for her body. This attempt at demanding cash for the return of Dedieu's remains was declared as being “despicable” and the pirates were declared as having “suck to a new low”. AFP News Agency, “Somalis Pirates Sink to a New Low?”, 20 October 2011, at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/afp-news-agency-agence-france-presse/somalia-pirates-sink-to-new-low/234347859952207?ref=nf> accessed 4 November 2011.

<sup>84</sup> It will focus on those theories that are significant to the scope of this thesis. The symbolism of burial and funerals is an immense topic that cannot be thoroughly addressed in this thesis.

following chapters in a multitude of ways as each case study will examine a unique politics of burial and symbolic meaning production around the named and famous dead.

The political and symbolic efficacy of famous corpses lies in their tangible nature, their ‘thereness’. But dead bodies also speak to feelings of a common humanity that include meanings, emotions, the notion of what is sacred, and they have the ability to establish a new moral order when their lives and actions are remembered and honoured in the public sphere. This discussion about the symbolic and political salience of dead bodies will be informed by Verdery’s work as one of the most comprehensive studies of dead body politics. Verdery shows that,

Bones and corpses, coffins and cremation urns, are material objects. Most of the time, they are indisputably *there*, as our senses of sight, touch, and smell can confirm. As such, a body’s materiality can be critical to its symbolic efficacy: unlike notions such as “patriotism” or “civil society”, for instance, a corpse can be moved around, displayed, and strategically located in specific places. Bodies have the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making past immediately present.<sup>85</sup>

The physical remains of the dead, then, render the past present through their materiality. When these remains are inscribed with particular meanings captured in ideologically-loaded phrases such as ‘freedom fighter’, ‘mother of the nation’, ‘national heroine’, and ‘rainbow nationalism’, as is often the case in South Africa, they become the physical markers of such ideologies. It states that in this grave, at this memorial, these ideologies are present and real – and due to the public nature of these spaces they become the moral order of the nation. In this way dead bodies become, what Verdery has termed, “symbolic vehicles”.<sup>86</sup> They carry the meanings and symbolisms that the living have assigned to them. However, the concreteness of dead bodies, their actual presence, comes to mean less than the ideologies they symbolise.<sup>87</sup> The dead are silent; they are what the living make of them by the way their lives and living words have been interpreted. Words can be spoken for them, or their own words rendered ambiguous by quoting them out of context. Their histories can be rewritten and reinterpreted to suit a variety of political agendas. This leads Verdery to conclude that it is “easier to rewrite history with dead people than with other kinds of symbols that are

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<sup>85</sup> Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p.27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>87</sup> This will become clear in the discussion of the burial of Sara Baartman in chapter 8. But it must also be noted that the exception to this is times of celebrating anniversaries and commemorative events where the physical remains and the material markers such as graves once again become the centre for such celebrations.

speechless.”<sup>88</sup> It is not unusual for one dead body to be assigned a variety of meanings. For Verdery remains are concrete, yet protean; they are open to a variety of readings.<sup>89</sup> What makes dead bodies symbolically effective for Verdery is their “ambiguity, multivocality, or polysemy.”<sup>90</sup> It is worth quoting Verdery at length here:

Because corpses suggest the lived lives of complex human beings, they can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions. While alive, these bodies produced complex behaviours subject to much debate that produces further ambiguity. As with all human beings, one’s assessment of them depends on one’s disposition, the context one places them in (brave or cowardly compared with whom, for instance), the selection one makes from their behaviours in order to outline their ‘story’, and so on. Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé – several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered. They lend themselves to analogy with *other people’s* résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story, from several different vantage points.<sup>91</sup>

It becomes clear that dead bodies, and especially those of the famous dead, are powerful tools for political symbolism which is employed in nation building, especially at times of political upheaval or transitions. When these meanings are constructed through political rhetoric and become part of the hegemonic power structures their subaltern meanings are sidelined and often disregarded in political ideology production. However, this multiplicity of meanings is undermined by the singularity of the body. The famous dead have only one name and one body and for Verdery this creates the illusion that the bodies have only a single meaning and that they hold the same meaning for all present.<sup>92</sup> This would assign to the dead a single meaning for the living. Despite this, it is the very ability of dead bodies to evoke a variety of understandings that allows them their effectiveness as political symbols or even as symbolic capital to be used for political profit.<sup>93</sup>

The remains of the political dead are the main focus of this thesis. But one cannot separate these bodies and the meanings inscribed on their remains from their funerals or commemorations as this becomes the space where political rhetoric is publically enacted. The ritualised mourning practices enacted at funerals have been extensively researched by

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<sup>88</sup> Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p.29.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28-29.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

anthropologists, encompassing many different cultures. However, this thesis is not concerned with the different cultural manifestations of mourning but rather how mourning has been enacted in the public space in post-apartheid South Africa. Despite this, the contribution of anthropological research to theories of mourning cannot be disregarded. After all, while Freud studied mourning as an individual task, Santner importantly states that,

Mourning, if it is not to become entrapped in the desperate inertia of a double bind, if it is to become integrated into a history, must be witnessed. To repeat an earlier formulation, mourning without solidarity is the beginning of madness.<sup>94</sup>

Darian Leader also indicates that “every documented human society gives a central place to public mourning rituals”<sup>95</sup> and that, after all, “mourning...requires other people.”<sup>96</sup> Although each of these societies differs in rituals of mourning and burial, in a general sense, in every society there is an obligation to mourn and to ensure that correct funerary practices are observed.<sup>97</sup> According to Robben “...death evokes moral and social obligations [that are] expressed in culturally determined funeral practices.”<sup>98</sup> Robben asserts that “[m]ourning is not a spontaneous emotion but a collective obligation manifested in appeasement rites.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, it is essential that mourning and funerals are considered as important societal practices that “provide a focus for collective, participative behaviour.”<sup>100</sup> These practices, or rituals, take place at burial and funerary rites and at shrines and memorials to the deceased. For the purposes of this thesis it is essential to consider the practices that accompany the burials and commemorations of iconic women as societal obligations that are moulded by the political ideologies of the post-apartheid state.

Although funeral rituals differ across different cultures they share certain aspects. As this thesis cannot possibly give an account of all funerary practices enacted by different cultures across the world it is important to point out the general aspects that many of these rituals share which is of importance for discussions in later chapters. The central purpose of

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<sup>94</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p.28.

<sup>95</sup> Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, (Hamish Hamilton: London, 2008), p.8.

<sup>96</sup> Leader, *The New Black*, p.8.

<sup>97</sup> Notwithstanding situations such as war or natural disasters when such rituals are not always possible.

<sup>98</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, “Death and Anthropology: An Introduction”, in Antonius C. G. M. Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*, p.9.

<sup>99</sup> Robben, “Death and Anthropology”, in Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*, p.7.

<sup>100</sup> Jenny Hockey, “Changing Death Rituals”, in Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz, and Neil Small (eds), *Facing Death: Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, (Open University Press: Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2001), p.203.

the funeral is to signify the event of a death. It is worth quoting Grainger at length here on his analysis of the symbolic purpose of the funeral ritual,

The reality of death, both the actual death of the person who has died and the reactive trauma of the people who are bereaved, is symbolised in a ritual enactment which aims at its own kind of completeness. In the funeral, death and its concomitant states of *mind* (for the bereaved) and of *being* (for the dead person) are symbolised, not reproduced. The relationship between the funeral and the work of grieving is one of contiguity rather than congruity; the funeral's purpose is to institute the work of grieving not to contain or complete it. Its comprehensiveness in its most typical form is the comprehensiveness that all funerals aspire to...a symbolic comprehensiveness, the basic and irreducible iconography of essential change, which must first of all be asserted ideationally before it can be ratified existentially.<sup>101</sup>

The funerary rite is the rite of final passage; it is the symbolic chasm that makes death final and real; it separates the dead from the living in a leave-taking ceremony that is a ritual performance of a social nature. Ilana Harlow indicates that,

The presence of a corpse at funerary rites is necessary not only for the psychological purpose of making death real to the bereaved, but it is also necessary for transition rites to be performed, for the dead to be incorporated into the hereafter. Without a body, there are no funerals, only memorial services.<sup>102</sup>

The organised mourning enacted at funerals insists that the death has occurred and that this must be accepted. John Hinton indicates the value of the traditional funeral practices in establishing the reality of death:

Viewing the body and taking part in the funeral emphasise beyond all doubt that the person is really dead. The condolences, the discussion of the deceased in the past tense, the newspaper announcements, the public recognition of the dead, all affirm the loss.<sup>103</sup>

Grainger adds that even more than the grave monument “the funeral says clearly and finally, ‘it is finished. Here he lies. Make no mistake; he is dead.’”<sup>104</sup> Thus, the central purpose of the funeral is to recognise that the formerly living are now dead. Not only does this change the state of being of the deceased, it also transforms the structural position of survivors.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Roger Grainger, *The Social Symbolism of Grief and Mourning*, (Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London and Philadelphia, 1998), p.130.

<sup>102</sup> Harlow, “Shaping Sorrow”, in Heilman (ed), *Death*, p.48.

<sup>103</sup> John Hinton, *Dying*, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1967), p.184.

<sup>104</sup> Grainger, *The Social Symbolism*, p.134.

<sup>105</sup> Hockey, “Changing Death Rituals”, in Hockey, Katz, and Small (eds), *Facing Death*, p.206.

Anthropologists define the funerary ritual as an event that “makes change” and “moves participants, emotionally, ideologically and structurally.”<sup>106</sup> These changes are – in the case of the public funeral – dependant on the collective nature of the funeral ritual. Émile Durkheim, who has had a lasting influence on our understanding of the anthropology of death, emphasised “that the individual grief experienced at the death of another human being is expressed collectively in culturally prescribed ways of mourning.”<sup>107</sup> The funeral is never completely private for those who were close to the deceased, it is a collective ritual and is always enacted in a socially, and culturally, prescribed manner. For Grainger,

[t]he funeral is the celebration of a lived life, a completed gesture... It takes all the gesture and movements of the past and projects them into a final statement, a statement about finality in which it somehow manages to find hope.<sup>108</sup>

The funeral, then, becomes the symbolic leave-taking ceremony; the rite where a life is celebrated and remembered. In the case of the modern public or state funeral this remembrance is enacted by stakeholders and reaches a wider audience through the use of television, radio, print, and electronic media. These funerals often become sites where strategies, conflicts, and struggles for control are subtly or overtly expressed, yet the public funeral also has the ability to address and overcome cleavages in society. The multiplicity of agendas around official public funerals will be addressed in later chapters where the political rhetoric issued at these events is analysed but it is of importance to illustrate how the ritualistic nature of the funeral allows for these contending forces to take shape. Funeral ritual is often shaped and informed by religious rituals and anthropologists have drawn attention to the

unifying force of religious ritual, whereby the rite becomes a language capable of expressing opposing ideas and accommodating differences and contradictions within the framework of a comprehensive codification of experience.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, the religious funeral ritual can actively promote harmony and does not necessarily express an existing unity. This will become increasingly clear when the public funeral in post-apartheid South Africa is discussed in the following chapters as these funerals are

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>107</sup> Robben, “Death and Anthropology”, in Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial*, p.7.

<sup>108</sup> Grainger, *The Social Symbolism*, p.129-130.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.116.

always accompanied by religious ceremony in conjunction with a political rhetoric that promotes nationhood.

Once the funeral and burial has been completed the dead are not cast aside or forgotten. Instead a wealth of material culture around the deceased is created. Shrines and memorials to the dead are erected – whether they are tombstones, shrines, or mausoleums – marking their place and remembering their presence. According to Grainger, “[i]n some shape or form there is almost always a tangible memorial to the dead.”<sup>110</sup> Returning to Volkan’s theory these memorials to the dead become repositories for memory, a place to return to and remember the lives of the deceased, the meanings assigned to those lives and their presence in the past and their loss and absence in the present thus transforming them into sites of ritual. These memorials can hold a wealth of memories; memories both personally experienced and politically shaped. Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, in their study on death, memory, and material culture trace,

[the] connections between the crises of death and the formation of memory, the relationships between loss and recovery, how memories operate to render present that which is absent and here we find concepts of death and memory intimately bound together. Indeed, we witness death acting as a deep incentive to remember and the process of dying can give license to intense phases of memory making with all of its attendant material complexity – from the disposal of the corpse to the repeated act of returning to the graveside with flowers.<sup>111</sup>

Hallam and Hockey clearly illustrate the significant relationship between death and memory, and subsequently, as this discussion will seek to show below, the connections between memorials and memory creation for political ideals.

The graves and the memorials erected to the dead function as shrines where people can pay their respects to the person that has been lost. When a public figure is being remembered or mourned these sites become public spaces. Referring to the appearance of public shrines to commemorate the victims of the 9/11 attacks on the US, Harlow indicates that,

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, (Berg: Oxford and New York, 2001), p.3.

The public shrines were designated places where people who would not officially be considered mourners but who were experiencing feelings of sorrow and loss could define themselves as mourners.<sup>112</sup>

This allows those who were not personally affected by loss to share in the sorrows of a traumatic event that shocked the country. This can then also be applied to the commemoration of the deceased public figure. Their graves and the memorials erected to them become places where those not immediately or personally affected by their passing can still define themselves as mourners, or simply show the understanding that, indeed, they feel and understand that something has been lost by the nation in that death. Heilman, in his work on the 9/11 attacks, states that,

While the bereaved always feel vulnerable, when those lost have been particularly powerful in life or figures of collective or symbolic significance, the vulnerability among the bereaved is especially acute. The need then for the memorials or funerals to resolve these feelings of helplessness becomes magnified.<sup>113</sup>

While this vulnerability might not be as intensely acute in cases of natural death, memorials and funerals allow the nation to have a material site where such feelings may be confronted and where the loss of a famous public figure and their symbolic significance to the nation can be mourned. Hallam and Hockey refer to these physical memorials to the dead as the material culture of death. They show that this material culture,

mediates our relationship with death and the dead; objects, images and practices, as well as places and spaces, call to mind or are made to remind us of the deaths of others and of our own mortality.<sup>114</sup>

Placing emphasis on the material culture that encompasses places and spaces, Harlow continues to apply Durkheim's theories to these public shrines:

Although they were sites of ritual, their character was 'eminently social', as Émile Durkheim might have phrased it. Even though (or perhaps specifically because) they were venues for the simultaneous display of a *range* of spiritual and political sentiments, the shrines symbolised a sense of 'us-ness.' As Durkheim has noted, "An emblem is useful as a rallying point for any sort of group by expressing social unity in material form; thus making it more

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<sup>112</sup> Harlow, "Shaping Sorrow", in Heilman (ed), *Death*, p.49.

<sup>113</sup> Samuel Heilman, "The Aftermath of Death: Collective Reintegration and Dealing with Chaos in Light of the Disasters of September 11", in Heilman (ed), *Death*, p.177.

<sup>114</sup> Hallam and Hockey, *Death*, p.2.

obvious to all...The emblem is not merely a convenient process for clarifying the sentiment society has of itself: it also serves to create this sentiment.”<sup>115</sup>

Although Harlow’s discussion applies to a country experiencing loss due to a traumatic event it becomes important to note that on certain anniversaries of such events, or occasions where such events are remembered, this sense of ‘us-ness’ that Harlow refers to is re-enacted and re-enforced. In the case of shared trauma the remembrance thereof becomes politicised. The remembrance of victims of colonial exploitation or women who sacrificed their freedom for the struggle in South Africa and their graves and memorials similarly contain this political power to create the image of a unified South African nation, despite a very recent traumatic and divisive past. As Heilman shows,

Visiting them is a way to demonstrate that while life goes on, they are not forgotten. Indeed, in some ways those memorial places give them a life greater than they had when they were still among the living. As Henry David Thoreau long ago noted: “Who is most dead – a hero by whose monument you stand, or his descendants of whom you have never heard?”<sup>116</sup>

The sites associated with the lives of such women become the very rallying points and emblems that Durkheim refers to; they have the ability to create and entrench the official scripts of the moral sentiments of the ‘new’ South Africa.

Returning to Grainger’s reference to finding hope in the ritual of the funeral, it is implied that this hope lies in the restoration of a relationship with the dead. Although this relationship between the dead and the living must be inherently different to a relationship between living individuals, it does not mean that this relationship is not possible. The living, or those that are ‘left behind’ after the passing of a loved one, can benefit from this ongoing relationship to – but not with – the dead.<sup>117</sup> As has been pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, this thesis considers mourning as a discourse amongst the living with the past being an active ‘player’ in the present. Consequently, the dead and their lived experiences become part of the present and a discourse amongst the living. This is especially true when applied to

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<sup>115</sup> Harlow, (quoting Durkheim) “Shaping Sorrow”, in Heilman (ed), *Death*, p.34.

<sup>116</sup> Heilman, “The Aftermath of Death”, in Heilman (ed), *Death*, p.182.

<sup>117</sup> Once again it is important to distinguish between psychoanalytic theories of mourning as a discourse between the living and that which has been lost and the historical discourse of mourning that this thesis is concerned with. This does not imply that this thesis does not acknowledge that a relationship does not exist between the living and the dead – on the contrary, this relationship is deeply emotional. After all, the deceased was a living person with loved ones who may deeply mourn the passing of a family member, partner, or friend. What this thesis will focus on, however, is how the living interpret the dead for present political gain and to establish a new moral order for the present; thus, it applies theories of mourning as a discourse amongst the living.

case studies of the dead who, in life, have somehow contributed to, or are represented as having contributed to the body politic for the ‘greater good’. The imagined relationship that the living maintain with these public figures is animated by the politicisation of their remains and legacies but it continues to be the living who shape, apply, and either benefit or are disadvantaged by these discourses.

Verdery’s work on the political lives of dead bodies in post-socialist Eastern Europe finds great resonance with how those political dead that have been assigned new meanings in the present re-enter the socio-political arena in post-apartheid South Africa, where dead bodies become inscribed with new national identities and shape a new foundational mythology for the ‘nation’.<sup>118</sup> Verdery’s study focuses on the manipulation of politicised corpses in the post-socialist era and how this manipulation shapes how the past is assessed and remembered in the present.<sup>119</sup> This not only speaks to ideals of re-imagining the nation but also to shaping identities and borders – especially in the former Eastern Bloc countries. The dynamic relationship that exists between the meanings inscribed on dead bodies by political stakeholders and the dead bodies which they employ attests to the silence of the dead but yet indicates how present they are in contemporary politics. As a result the politics of mourning and remembering the political dead becomes a powerful means of producing foundational mythologies for new regimes attempting to legitimise their rule.

### **Establishing Nationalist Mythologies: The Politics of Mourning**

This section will bring together all the elements of public, politicised mourning discussed above and illustrate how they operate together to form new foundational mythologies that are nationalistically inclined. Before embarking on this particular discussion it is important to explore the relationships that exist between myths and nationalism in order to better comprehend how the myths created around and on dead political women shape new foundational mythologies. Few concrete examples for such an exploration exist and this particular discussion is only meant to provide a general theoretical basis for the following chapters which focus on the post-apartheid state as a relatively new democracy and where

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<sup>118</sup> It is, of course, acknowledged that many significant differences exist between post-socialist Eastern Europe and post-apartheid South Africa. Where South Africa saw a relatively peaceful transition and put reconciliation and multi-culturalism at the forefront of the ideals of the new nation, several post-socialist nations were left reeling from ethnic based violence and the break-up of countries as a result of irredentist claims and disputes.

<sup>119</sup> Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, (1999).

such case studies are recent and incredibly dynamic. Thus, this particular section will provide a general overview of foundational mythology creation and its role in establishing nationalist ideologies before it is applied comprehensively and uniquely first to South Africa in general, and then to each case study in particular in the following chapters. It will not attempt to give an overview of the historiography of nationalist studies or the many different approaches to understanding nationalism in practice. Rather, it will focus on the theories of nationalism that this thesis borrows insights from and will apply in further discussions to a country that seems to have an exception for every ‘rule’.<sup>120</sup>

To effectively define the term ‘nation’ has proven to be distinctly complex. Hobsbawm has grappled with this issue of definition in his important work, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*.<sup>121</sup> This thesis will apply Hobsbawm’s premise that a student of nationalism needs to be agnostic in his/her approach, implying no *a priori* definition of what constitutes a nation.<sup>122</sup> For Hobsbawm, the objective attempts to establish criteria for nationhood such as common language, common territory, or common history have failed as “language, ethnicity, or whatever – are themselves fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous...”<sup>123</sup> It is this ambiguity that makes these traits convenient for employment by nationalists. Subjective attempts at definition would imply that a nation exists where people consciously identify themselves as part of a nation. However, Hobsbawm sees this attempt at definition as insensibly to subordinate “the complex ways in which human beings define and redefine themselves as members of groups, to a single option: the choice of belonging to ‘nation’ or ‘nationality’.”<sup>124</sup> In countries such as South Africa such a definition would certainly fall short due to the multitude of identities that people subscribe to. For Hobsbawm then, “[t]he ‘nation’ as conceived by nationalists can be recognised prospectively; the real ‘nation’ can only be recognised *a posteriori*.”<sup>125</sup> As South Africa is a country that is still experiencing a post-apartheid nationalist movement it would be impossible to clearly define the South African ‘nation’ at this time. As a result, this thesis will analyse how the ‘nation’ is being constructed from above and how it is conceived by nationalists.<sup>126</sup> As Hobsbawm

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<sup>120</sup> This is to arrive at a contextual understanding of nationalism.

<sup>121</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, 1990).

<sup>122</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, (1990).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>126</sup> Although some attempt will be made to give brief reflections on the view from below as observed in letters to newspapers and comments posted on online articles as they relate to the case studies of this thesis.

indicates, “...nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, it will show that the South African nation exists as a concept imagined by nationalists and that indeed, the concept of the ‘nation’ is created before it exists.

It is accepted by most scholars of nationalism that nations are ‘imagined political communities’.<sup>128</sup> This phrase, first employed by Benedict Anderson implies that,

Nations are created in the historical and sociological imagination, through identification with generalised communal heroes set in equally generalised but vividly detailed locations and times; though we can never meet them, we can ‘know’ our fellow citizens, the members of our cultural nations, through these identifications and descriptions in journals, novels, plays, and operas.<sup>129</sup>

This is not to be as anxious as Ernest Gellner in *Thought and Change*<sup>130</sup> to illustrate nationalism as being false and depending on fabrication for its efficacy when he states that “[n]ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist”,<sup>131</sup> but rather to employ Anderson’s terms of ‘imagining’ and ‘creating’ the nation. This thesis, following Anderson, will consider nationalism mainly as a form of discourse. Anderson indicates that nations are imagined as limited, sovereign, and as communities. Limited because of its boundaries and its inability and unwillingness to become coterminous with all of humankind,<sup>132</sup> sovereign as most nations dream of being ‘free’, and imagined as a community “because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”<sup>133</sup> Hobsbawm, in particular, shows how nations and nationalism are the product of historicist and literary creations of symbolism mythology and national history, and expands on considering the modern nation as a piece of social engineering. Speaking of the ‘nation’ and its associated nationalism and national symbols, Hobsbawm comments that, “[a]ll these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only

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<sup>127</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p.10.

<sup>128</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Verso: London, 1983).

<sup>129</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1999), p.44.

<sup>130</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson: London, 1964).

<sup>131</sup> Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p.169.

<sup>132</sup> Globalisation has countered this, yet national identity and the creation thereof remains a prominent feature of, for example, advertising products in television commercials.

<sup>133</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.16.

because historical novelty implies innovation.”<sup>134</sup> Smith continues to interpret this ‘imagining’ and ‘creating’ in gastronomic terms,

...nationalists and their followers have put together the various ingredients of the nation – history, symbols, myths, languages....In doing so, they often select elements with diverse origins, particularly if, as so often happens in modern societies, the state’s boundaries include various ethnic communities. So, the modern nation is a composite artefact, cobbled together from a rich variety of cultural resources.<sup>135</sup>

Such ingredients will be discussed in chapter 5 with respect to the creation of a South African identity on top of the many ethnic identities that exist in South Africa that, historically, have been both divided and entrenched through apartheid legislation. Even more so, the current South African nationalism encourages ‘unity in diversity’, simply inserting an ambiguous South African identity<sup>136</sup> on top of existing ethnic identities. As Smith indicates, national identity denotes both a central ideal of the ideology of nationalism, and as an analytical concept.<sup>137</sup> This thesis will, in further chapters, apply Smith’s working definition for national identity as

the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements.<sup>138</sup>

However, to continue with Smith’s gastronomic analogy, the past three decades have also seen the development of a further element in the thinking about nations and nationalism and this is the insistence on the imaginative quality of the national community and the fictive nature of unifying myths.<sup>139</sup> Smith asserts that,

There is a polemical, satirical intent here: to unmask the nation and reveal the power games of nationalism. Specifically nationalist instruments of elite manipulation are symbolic: they involve the creation of a culture-ideology of community, through a series of emotive symbols and myths, communicated by print and the media. But in fact it is ultimately a specious

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<sup>134</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1983), p.13.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, *Myths*, p.165.

<sup>136</sup> Which, in contrast to many other regional nationalisms, seems to firstly be determined by state borders. Hereafter the South African identity seems to be defined by attempts at defining common traditions and histories that seek to replace a divisive past.

<sup>137</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, (Polity Press & Blackwell Publishing Ltd: Cambridge, Oxford, and Malden, 2001).

<sup>138</sup> Smith, *Nationalism*, p.18.

<sup>139</sup> Smith, *Myths*.

community, one that parades as a collective cure for the modern disease of alienation between state and society...<sup>140</sup>

This might seem a rather cynical approach, yet, in the South African case, rather than focusing on unifying myths as being fictitious – although some are – the focus will rather be on their reductionist nature. Many of the unifying myths of the post-apartheid state, rather than fictitious, are incredibly selective about which histories are remembered and which histories will be left out of the official narratives about the past. Rather than adopting a hyper-critical stance and ‘unmasking’ the fallacies of nationalist movements in post-apartheid South Africa this thesis will delineate and explore the foundational myths that are being shaped in the present to legitimate the post-apartheid state.

Nationalist movements attempt to create nations and legitimise states through the use of politicised myths about the past. As this thesis will apply what anthropologists have termed a functionalist approach to myth as pioneered by Émile Durkheim,<sup>141</sup> the narratives of myth will be observed as having the function of legitimating social structures when new political rule demands justification or sanctity. These myths are not narratives that are in opposition to truth; rather they serve as symbolic statements about the social order. Joanna Overing indicates that “[m]ythical discourse reminds a community of its own identity through the public process of specifying and defining for that community its distinctive social norms.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, the function of foundational myths is to establish the social and political norms for a community which can be deemed especially necessary after periods of swift socio-political transition – as was the case in South Africa – while simultaneously legitimising the current political dispensation. It is important to note that the use of the term ‘myth’ can be deemed somewhat judgemental if understood in the commonsensical way as an ‘untruth’. Despite this, it is often clear when the state employs political structures and public events to create the narratives of political legitimisation to establish the new social norms that attend a socio-political shift. This is evident in South Africa where the transition from minority rule to democracy sees the construction of new narratives of the nation as a work in progress. Foundational myths then, reach into the past in order to define the future of the nation. Schöpflin states in his study of the function of myths,

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.165.

<sup>141</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (Dover Publications: New York, 2008). (First published 1912).

<sup>142</sup> Joanna Overing, “The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective”, in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, (Hurst & Company: London, 1997), p.7.

Every group, every political system, virtually every area of human endeavour has to make a start and seeks to mark that by some special act which is accorded mythic qualities. In this connection, one is dealing with a moment of novation which is not necessarily as drastic and radical as a revolution, but which, it is felt by the participants, deserves special note in order to point to the future. The implicit, sometimes explicit, message is that afterwards everything will be different ('better') and that the newly founded system has dispensed with whatever made the old reprehensible.<sup>143</sup>

The creation of new foundational mythologies is not restricted to past events in its make up but will naturally include persons who have contributed to the existence of the modern nation. Such individuals will be inscribed with heroic qualities and possess traits that are considered favourable for emulation by their descendants – the inhabitants of the modern nation. Smith suggests that,

...while definitions of grandeur and glory vary, every nationalism requires a touchstone of virtue and heroism, to guide and give meaning to the task of regeneration... Heroes provide models of virtuous conduct, their deeds of valour inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants.<sup>144</sup>

These heroes or heroines are often deceased – if not entirely mythological – and this allows their silence to become a valuable tool for present political rhetoric. Ownership of their physical remains – if these are in existence – allows for greater commemorative and memorial possibilities which strengthens their nationalist symbolism and ensures their entrance into a national pantheon of heroes and heroines that form a central part of any nationalist mythology. The repetition of their life stories – as interpreted and edited by nationalists – in political rhetoric, electronic and print media, at their funerals and subsequent commemorative events ensures that these few selected heroic individuals become part of a national pantheon of heroes and heroines and the foundational mythology of the new nation. These mythologies of the glorified past are created and serve as a unifying force for the future where the modern nation should seek to emulate the morals of the nation's heroes and heroines.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to show how the mourning of political women in post-apartheid South Africa influences the creation of foundational mythologies. The deaths of women who in life contributed to the eventual transformation of South Africa from white

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<sup>143</sup> G. Schöpflin, "Functions of Myth", in G. Hosking and G. Schöpflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, p.29.

<sup>144</sup> Smith, *Myths*, p.65.

minority rule to democracy are honoured, their qualities praised and narrated as the societal norm in political rhetoric. Kastenbaum shows that,

[t]here are times when the bereavement and grief of individuals finds clear expression in a heterogeneous society... But [when] that death represented part of a national, shared cause...collectively they signified a loss felt by the entire nation.<sup>145</sup>

Thus, being mourned and remembered by the ‘nation’ and their legacies narrated through political rhetoric, in death these women become part of a national pantheon of heroes and heroines around whom the foundational myths of the state are constructed. As shown above with the cases of Princess Charlotte and Eva Perón, women’s bodies are inscribed with nationalist narratives and their legacies become an integral part of the foundational mythologies that establish societal norms for the new state. The gendered language of nationalism ensures that they are defined by their relationship to men and are seen as grandmothers, mothers, wives, or daughters of the nation – often depending on their age at death and the gendered and reproductive roles they held that these familial and generational terms describe.<sup>146</sup> The generalised terms used in many studies of nationalism suggests that nationalism sublimates or subordinates social differences to its dominance: that somehow loyalty to the nation overrides all other individual commitments and that national belonging is uniform for all who share in it.<sup>147</sup> The works of Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm, and Smith contain no sustained analysis of gender issues within nationalist movements. It would be irresponsible to assume that all members of a nation – or, in this case, women – relate to nationalist sentiments in a uniform manner. More obviously, different groups of women in different nations experience nationalism and citizenship in different ways and have different levels of access to the economic, political, and social spheres. There is no universal experience of nationalism for women. However, what is of importance here is how deceased politicised women are subsumed by the gendered nationalist discourses of post-apartheid South Africa and how the narratives inscribed on their legacies and remains determine not only the social norms and appropriate behaviour for women in South Africa, but due to the unifying nature of nationalism, the social norms for all South Africans.

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<sup>145</sup> Kastenbaum, *Death*, p.244.

<sup>146</sup> The complex relations that exist between gender and nation will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>147</sup> Graham Day and Andrew Thompson, *Theorising Nationalism*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire and New York, 2004).

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to establish a general theoretical framework that will be applied throughout the following chapters. It has drawn on theories of nationalism and discussed the ways in which the dead are buried, remembered, and politicised in order to create a solid theoretical basis for the discussion of the interaction between the public mourning and commemoration of deceased politicised women and foundational mythology creation in post-apartheid South Africa. This has been achieved, firstly, through a brief analysis of applicable psychoanalytical theories of mourning to illustrate the mechanisms of the work of mourning both at an individual and societal level. As psychoanalytic theory has had a significant impact on the field of mourning it was imperative to show how developments in this field have influenced the way historians or scholars of nationalism can apply these theories to case studies of societal or public mourning. A brief consideration of theory from Freud to the Mitscherlichs and then Volkan has shown how theories of individual mourning have shaped theories of public mourning and subsequently led to considering societies with traumatic pasts as perennial mourners whose monuments and memorials serve as linking objects, or psychological containers (or touchstones),<sup>148</sup> in which the complex and emotive memories of the past are temporarily sealed, but always present and accessible. This then, allows for a consideration of the graves and corpses of the famous dead, being part of the material culture of death, as linking objects – and potential unifying objects – for the ‘nation’.

In order to illustrate how the lives, deaths, funerals, legacies, and corpses of deceased famous political women inform discourses of gender, femininity, identity, and nation, a brief discussion of the case studies of Princess Charlotte and Eva Perón was given. In addition, this discussion also raised issues of the public’s identification with and mourning for well-known women with whom they had no real personal relationship and resulted in the conclusion that, despite the real sense of loss felt by some for such individuals, the ‘nation in mourning’ is a myth in itself used to foster a sense of unity, especially in times of social or political unrest, or simply to legitimate the existing political dispensation. While the ideologies inscribed on these women and their remains and their entrance into a pantheon of heroes and heroines as symbols, the actual material culture of death and the symbolic nature of the funeral is what strengthens these symbolic meanings. The importance ascribed to the dead in most human

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<sup>148</sup> Although Volkan’s terminology serves a purpose as an extended metaphor about monuments as sealed containers that contain the past until it is ready to be confronted by the ‘nation’ at important historical celebrations or anniversaries, this thesis would prefer to consider monuments and memorial sites as symbolic touchstones of (national) memory that are susceptible to constant re-interpretation and representation.

societies lends them to sacralisation. More importantly, the famous and political dead are particularly viable for use by nationalists and politicians as symbols. Not only do dead bodies contain an element of the sacred, they are also tangible, silent, and have a concreteness that transcends time.<sup>149</sup> The funeral, initially, becomes the space in which the dead are recognised as lost to the world of the living and to the nation. The grave or memorial becomes the marker where ritualised and performative practices can take place – whether these are anniversary celebrations or public commemorative events. Here political rhetoric inscribes the remains of the lost heroes or heroines with the symbolic meanings that will form part of the foundational mythology of the nation that promotes harmony and unity. Essentially, the dead, their lives, and imagined legacies are a discourse amongst the living.

Having established that the public mourning of politicised corpses in countries undergoing socio-political change may lead to the creation of myths about the past a broad discussion of the purposes of foundational mythology creation within nationalist movements showed that these myths function as legitimating and sanctifying narratives for new political dispensations. The political rhetoric articulated at the funerals of the famous political dead is echoed in print and electronic media, their life stories and living actions assigned mythic moral qualities that serve not only as legitimating narratives for the new political dispensation, but also as a moral compass for the members of the nation who are encouraged to emulate the positive qualities of the heroic dead. These narratives are consequently perpetuated at commemorative events, the names of the famous dead placed on street signs, buildings, and public spaces promoting them into a pantheon of national heroes and heroines which is an inherent part of any foundational mythology.

This, then, is at the core of public mourning. The loss of a person who has contributed to the body politic for the greater good is a loss that is – or is constructed as – felt by the nation. It is the nation that has lost not just a hero or heroine, but also the ideologies and symbolic meanings ascribed to that person. This is what must be mourned by the nation. It is the very public ‘witnessing’ of this loss that allows for the iconisation, sacralisation, and mythification of the famous dead, whether it is through televising their funerals, large public commemorations, renaming important public spaces in their honour or, as in the case of many deceased South African struggle heroes and heroines, the declaration of their graves as National Heritage sites. Shelley recognised the importance of public mourning in 1817 as he

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<sup>149</sup> Verdery. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*.

showed that public mourning “helps to maintain that connection between one man and another, and all men considered as a whole, which is the bond of social life.”<sup>150</sup> Whether it is a traumatic event that affects a society, or the death or commemoration of one of its most important citizens, rituals of public mourning have a significant ability to unify heterogeneous, or divided, societies through the inevitable ‘realisation’ – or, at times, the state sanctioned ‘realisation’ and rhetoric asserting that – it is not only the individual that has lost something, but indeed, the entire nation.

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<sup>150</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, quoted in Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, p.206.

## Theorising Women and Nation

*The notion of what the nation was in its finest hour – when it was most unified, most altruistic – will be of a community in which women sacrificed their desires for the sake of a male-led collective.*<sup>1</sup>

- Cynthia Enloe

### Introduction

Motherland, fatherland, ‘mother of the fatherland’, mother tongue, homeland, patriotism, fraternity, mother of the nation, sons of our soil; the language of nationalism is clearly familial and gendered. While most nationalisms assert a shared past and future, building on common experiences, women’s experiences of nationalist movements always differ to how men view and experience the ‘nation’. Women and men are assigned particular roles in most nationalist movements unique to each nation’s constructions of masculinities and femininities,<sup>2</sup> and each country’s particular economic, social, and political situation. The main focus of this chapter is on the positions and positionings of women in nationalist movements. Yuval-Davis illustrates in her seminal work, *Gender & Nation*, that constructions of nationhood involve specific notions of ‘womanhood’ and ‘manhood’ and that it is necessary to analyse ‘womanhood’ as a relational category.<sup>3</sup> Although the focus will not fall on constructions of masculinities in nationalisms it is an essential aspect to consider when discussing constructions of ‘womanhood’ – even when these two categories are not necessarily oppositional.

When considering most of the prevailing theorisations about nations and nationalism it is apparent that most of these texts have either ignored gender relations or considered them to

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, (University of California Press; Berkeley, 2000), p.63.

<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to use plurals as constructions of gender are not singular in any nation-state, especially in multicultural societies.

<sup>3</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, (Sage Publications: London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 1997).

be irrelevant. This, of course, does not render them extraneous. However, considering the use of terms such as ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’ common to most of these works their inability to relate such terms back to women and their positioning within nationalist movements, referring instead to intellectuals or state bureaucrats, suggests an inadequate conceptualisation of nationalism. For Yuval-Davis this is remarkable as an earlier major school of nationalism, known as the primordialists, see in nations a “natural and universal phenomenon which is an ‘automatic’ extension of kinship relations.”<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously, scholars of nationalism such as Gellner and Smith stress the importance of intellectuals and bureaucrats in re-discovering collective memories and *creating* and *producing* new foundational mythologies and nationalist ideologies. However, it is not simply the intelligentsia and bureaucrats who produce nations; it is women who produce and reproduce nations biologically, culturally, and symbolically.<sup>5</sup> This then leads to the question of why women remained ‘hidden’ in earlier studies of nationalism. Several explanations may account for this. First, women (and the family) have traditionally been considered as occupying the private sphere which was not considered politically relevant. Yuval-Davis explains that as “nationalism and nations have usually been discussed as part of the public sphere, the exclusion of women from that arena has affected their exclusion from that discourse as well.”<sup>6</sup> Second, Yuval-Davis citing Rebecca Grant, shows the shortcomings of early theorists of nationalism with the statement that Grant,

claims that the foundation theories of both Hobbes and Rousseau portray the transition from the imagined state of nature into orderly society exclusively in terms of what they both assume to be natural male characteristics – the aggressive nature of men (in Hobbes) and the capacity of reason in men (in Rousseau). Women are not part of this process and are therefore excluded from the social and remain close to ‘nature’. Later theories followed these assumptions as given.<sup>7</sup>

It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that feminist scholars began to correct the theoretical displacement of women in nationalism studies. The work of scholars such as Enloe, Jayawardena, Yuval-Davis and Anthias influenced a change in the previously gender-blind theorisations of nationalism studies which resulted in an eventual explosion of

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<sup>4</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

contextual studies considering the roles and spaces assigned to and inhabited by women in nationalist movements.

While all nationalisms are contextual and all women experience these movements in different ways, it is possible to theorise about the relationship of women and the nation. This chapter will first analyse women and gender relations (in a very general sense) in order to establish some of the questions about constructions of gender that must be examined within the context of the gendered nature of nationalism. Second, continuing the discussion of nationalism in the previous chapter, the discussion here will focus on theorising state as separate from ‘nation’ and ‘society’ as the state often plays a crucial role in nationalist projects that are inherently linked to gender relations. Third, and most importantly, this chapter, informed by the work of Yuval-Davis and Anthias,<sup>8</sup> will examine the links between nation and gender, which Yuval-Davis has captured with the phrase: “Nationed Gender and Gendered Nations”.<sup>9</sup> In this discussion the five major roles of women in nationalist movements, as theorised by Yuval-Davis and Anthias, will be examined. It will look at women as biological reproducers of the nation, as symbols and signifiers of difference in male-dominated nationalist discourse, as transmitters and producers of cultural narratives, as reproducers of the boundaries of the nation, and as active participants in national movements through participation in armies, congresses, trade union activism and community organisations.<sup>10</sup> This in turn will frame the discussions in the following two chapters focusing on the positionings of women in nationalist movements in South Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Analysing Women and Gender Relations**

Yuval-Davis insists that any discussion of the issues around women and nationalism has been informed by the three central – but crudely reduced – questions posed by feminist literature. First, why/how are women oppressed? This question has been shaped largely by the dichotomous constructions of social spheres such as the nature/civilisation and public/private domains, theories concerning patriarchy, the sex-gender system, and ‘gender regimes’ which

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<sup>8</sup> Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman-Nation-State*, (Macmillan: London, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.21.

<sup>10</sup> Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa”, *Transition*, 51, 1999, p.105.

determine the power relations between men and women.<sup>11</sup> The second question, the sex/gender debate, concerns the differences between men and women, and whether these differences are a result of biological or social factors or a combination of the two which was questioned by the rise of postmodernist and poststructuralist frameworks of analysis that problematised the basis and the boundaries between the categories of 'woman' and 'man'. The third question "concerns the differences among women and among men and their effects upon generalised notions of gender relations"<sup>12</sup> which was initially raised by black and ethnic minority women and became part of feminist deconstructive postmodernist analyses. By briefly addressing these three central questions a discussion about women and nationalism can be built.

In both the private/public and nature/civilisation dichotomies women are positioned opposite to men. While women have generally been identified with the private domain of the family and with nature in social sciences literature, men occupied the public and civilised domain. According to Grant, the identification of women with nature is not the only cause of their exclusion from the public domain, but also why, in most cultures, women are socially less valued than men. Simone de Beauvoir argued that "[i]t is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal: that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills."<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, while women have the ability to create life naturally, men are forced to create culturally. As a result of this, women have, traditionally, also been more confined to the domestic sphere to raise children. Thus, as humans tend to value their cultural products above natural creations and as every culture is aimed at controlling and/or transcending nature, "women end up with an inferior symbolic position."<sup>14</sup> However, it is important to note that such generalised considerations assume specific western cultural values of 'nature' being inferior to 'culture'. This assumption would detract from the "historically specific ways in which gender relations are constructed in different societies and the ways they are produced."<sup>15</sup> In addition to this, these generalised theories also do not consider the ways that different members of a society value themselves and other genders. Similarly, generalised theories of patriarchy must also be critiqued as the diverse forms of social relations must be differentiated as they often do not consider the power that women hold over some men and other women in different societies.

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<sup>11</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, *Gender*, p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Grant quoted in *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

It is imperative that gender, ethnicity, and class are considered as being intermeshed and it is equally important to reject the notion that women's oppression can be reduced to biological sexual differences. As Yuval-Davis states:

Contrary to what the notion of patriarchy suggests, women are not usually just passive recipients and non-participants in the determination of gender relations. Probably most importantly, not all women are oppressed and/or subjugated in the same way or to the same extent, even within the same society at any specific moment.<sup>16</sup>

However, Yuval-Davis does note that this does not suggest that there are no hegemonic social discourses and practices within societies that relate "to the organisation of sexual difference and biological reproduction and establish forms of representation around these."<sup>17</sup> Understanding that the social construct of gender, rather than the biological category of sex, has led to the sexual division of labour, power, and dispositions is central to feminist politics. Judith Butler adds that "when 'gender' is understood to be constructed by 'culture' in the same way that 'sex' is constructed by 'nature', then not biology but culture becomes destiny."<sup>18</sup>

Ann Oakley addressed the cultural constructions of gender in her influential work *Sex, Gender and Society*.<sup>19</sup> Oakley holds that there is little correlation between biology and gender and states: "If gender has a biological source of any kind, the culture makes it invisible."<sup>20</sup> It is generally assumed that biology determines gender and therefore the social differences assigned to gender. For Oakley gender roles and identities are the result of social stereotypes (perpetuated in the media and school textbooks) and parental models. This is established in the "mass of associations that have emerged between an individual's masculinity or femininity and socially determined norms of behaviour, attitude, expectation and role."<sup>21</sup> However, assumptions about biology still shape women's lives – especially in nationalist rhetoric. The industrialisation of many societies resulted in the division of work and family, where previously, in many pre-industrial societies, work and family were the responsibility of all members of the family. The industrial revolution happened at a time where women were

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler quoted in Ibid., p.6.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, (Temple Smith: London, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> Oakley, *Sex*, p.187.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.187.

often tied to the home as a result of frequent childbearing.<sup>22</sup> This kept women in the home at a time when men were removed from it. Despite improvements in health and technology, very little has changed these assumptions about gender roles. Sex is an organising principle of social structure in modern society, despite popular belief to the contrary, and it plays a great part in determining social roles. Oakley indicates that in societies where this is the case the anxiety about even a temporary reversal of sex and gender roles is most acute.<sup>23</sup> The *Volksmoeder* ideology, one of the building blocks of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, is one such response to anxiety about the reversal of ‘traditional’ gender roles.<sup>24</sup> However, what is of importance here is that gender clearly precedes sex and that the cultural constructions of “the social division of labour...and of meaning...is the very means by which sexual differences are constructed (and used) as natural and pre-social.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, sexual difference or biological reproduction has no necessary social effects and therefore does not serve as a material base for gender. Furthermore, Yuval-Davis shows that,

[g]ender should be understood not as a ‘real’ social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse which relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference as opposed to their economic positions or their membership in ethnic and racial collectivities.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In many small-scale societies women often continue their duties up until the moment of childbirth and resume their responsibilities soon after. Some of these societies encourage hard labour as being beneficial to the mother and child. In Western and westernised societies the opposite is often true. Women have traditionally been encouraged to rest during pregnancy and after birth to remain in the home with the child for the first few years of its life to promote the mother-child bond which modern society has insisted is the foundation of adult security and mental health. However, this also rests on an assumption that is strongly contested by case studies of several pre-industrial societies. Of course, children need stable emotional relationships and good physical care, but this primary care does not necessarily need to be given by a female.

<sup>23</sup> This is becoming especially clear in the USA where the 2012 Republican candidate race saw an increase in the issuing of misogynist rhetoric while regressive laws forcing women considering abortion to undergo invasive prenatal testing procedure were endorsed and passed in what has been popularly referred to as the ‘Republican War on Women’. Often policies and legislation seeking to regulate or control sexual reproduction are aimed at women and created by men seeking to ‘reassert’ their power over women at times when women gain greater access to the economy and the power of the state. See Nicholas D. Kristof, “When States Abuse Women”, *New York Times*, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/opinion/sunday/kristof-when-states-abuse-women.html?ref=todayspaper> accessed 4 March 2012. Maureen Dowd, “Have You No Shame, Rush?”, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/opinion/sunday/dowd-have-you-no-shame-rush.html?ref=todayspaper> accessed 4 March 2012. In South Africa itself, the sexual assault and stripping of Nwabisa Ngcukana by a large group of men at a taxi rank for wearing a miniskirt, and the occurrence of similar assaults on women deemed to dress in a fashion that some men have considered to be ‘inappropriate’ has resulted in the re-examination of pervasive notions of patriarchy and other forms of male dominance in a country that is attempting to give women equal rights – if only in law rather than practice. See Louise Vincent, “Women’s Rights Gets a Dressing Down: Mini Skirt Attacks in South Africa, at [https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=311877372175341](https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=311877372175341), accessed 5 March 2012.

<sup>24</sup> This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>25</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

She argues that that sexual difference should be considered as a mode of discourse, “one in which groups of social subjects are defined as having different sexual/biological constitutions.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, both sex and gender can be analysed as modes of discourse, but with different agendas.<sup>28</sup> The separation between these two discourses is essential; otherwise, as Butler has indicated, biology becomes destiny. Considering sexual differences as a mode of discourse is not to say that the body is merely a passive mediator of the cultural constructions of gender. The body is always sexed and never passive. As Yuval-Davis (following Donna Haraway) stresses, the self is always situated.<sup>29</sup> But this situated knowledge does not only relate to gender relations, it also applies to all social relations. Sex (biological or discursive) or gender differences do not solely situate the body or the self. Larger, or macro, divisions such as class, ethnicity, ‘race’, nation, age, and ability all influence where subjective identities are situated and they are always situated in relation to others and never confined to sex alone. These very distinctions imply that the category ‘women’ cannot be a unified category unless these differences are suppressed. Denise Riley sees ‘women’ as a fluctuating identity that has been “historically and discursively constructed always in relation to other categories which themselves change.”<sup>30</sup> But this does not mean that these changing identities are simply proliferated. As Elizabeth Weed argues,

The lack of reliable positive identity does not mean an endless proliferation of differences. It means, rather, that the very categories of difference are displaced and denaturalised through the articulation of those categories with the structures of domination in which they were historically produced.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, these historical structures of domination determine which differences are considered to be socially and politically relevant.<sup>32</sup> However, as Yuval-Davis illustrates, one of the most important differences amongst women is their membership of ethnic and national collectivities and these differences should be understood within structures of domination and as articulated by other social relations.<sup>33</sup> This membership can affect the power relations between women in a specific society but also “the extent to which their membership in the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>30</sup> Denise Riley, “Does Sex Have a History? ‘Women’ and Feminism”, *New Formations*, 1, 1987, p.35.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Weed, “Introduction: Terms of Reference”, in Elizabeth Weed (ed), *Coming To Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, (Routledge: Oxon & New York, 1989)., p.xix.

<sup>32</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.11.

collectivity constitutes a ‘forced identity’.”<sup>34</sup> The concept of the ‘forced identity’, a term first employed by Amrita Chhachhi,<sup>35</sup> will become of interest when considering the many ways in which nationalisms employ specific images and notions of womanhood and femininity as well as the ways in which some women accept, adopt, and endorse these identities while others (such as the silent corpses or symbols which are the case studies of this thesis) are simply inscribed with these ideologies.

### **State, Society, and the Family**

Nation and state are seldom, if ever, coterminous. Homogeneous societies are unlikely to exist within the boundaries of any modern state while the ‘nation’ will often extend beyond the boundaries of the state. Every state will have within its boundaries members of different societies and ethnicities who might or might not consider themselves to be part of the ‘nation’. It is the ability of different groups, even within the collectivity considered the hegemonic nation, to access the power resources of the state that indicates the separation of state and society. As Chapter 2 addressed some theories of nationalism that constitute the theoretical basis of this thesis it is not necessary to repeat these here. What this section will address is the need to differentiate analytically between state, society, and the family while considering them as separate but interrelated social and political spheres.<sup>36</sup> This is, of course, inextricably linked to the questions around what makes a ‘nation’ and how nationalist projects relate to the state and how the structure of the family influences nationalist movements.

Treating the state as completely autonomous or, reductively, seeing the state as merely serving the interest of certain economic classes (as some Marxist theories hold) results in considering it as merely a managerial structure or as dedicated to social control through force, coercion, and repression. This issue

relates both to the boundary between the state and the economy and to that of civil society in as much as it leads us to ask who and what social forces construct the political project(s) of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>35</sup> Amrita Chhachhi, “Forced Identities: The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India”, in D. Kandiyoti (ed), *Women, Islam and the State*, (Macmillan: London, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.12.

the state and in what way or sense it is a neutral vehicle in itself which can be used as an instrument by various social forces.<sup>37</sup>

However, before exploring this significant observation by Anthias and Yuval-Davis, it is essential to establish the importance of the state as a meaningful analytical category. The category of the state which has been eroded by Foucauldian and postmodernist paradigms fails to explain the continued struggles in civil society for access to the state and state power “or the extent to which the different positionings of men and women, kinship units and various ethnic collectivities...is determined by their differential access to the state.”<sup>38</sup> For Yuval-Davis,

[t]heorising the state as a sphere separate from both ‘the nation’ and ‘the civil society’ is vital for any adequate analysis of the relationships between gender relations and national projects, in which the state often plays crucial roles.<sup>39</sup>

Developments in the conceptualisation of the state have broadened out from seeing it as a managerial structure or as dedicated to social control.<sup>40</sup> Three noticeable trends are distinguishable. First, the shift has been to focus on the social analyses of the state as incorporating a number of different institutions that seemingly appear to be private and/or ideological such as schools, church, and the media. Second, in the Marxist tradition, the tendency is to focus on the state as the place where the global interests of capital are channelled through either capital accumulation, or as the state “co-ordinating the different interests and activities of fractions of capital.”<sup>41</sup> Third, the Foucauldian and postmodern paradigms have rejected the idea of the unitary state and focus on the law, social policies, and institutional arrangements “and discourses as heterogeneous elements which are not reducible to ‘the state’.”<sup>42</sup> Although it is clear and accepted that the state is not unitary in its practices, intentions, or effects, it is important to retain the concept of the state. Social theorist Max Weber defined the state in terms of power. For Weber, the state is “an organisation that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>43</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis expand on this and define the state as:

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<sup>37</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman*, p.4.

<sup>38</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>40</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman*, p.4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>43</sup> Max Weber, quoted in H. Gerth and C. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (Routledge & Kenan Paul: London, 1948), p.78.

A body of institutions which are centrally organised around the intentionality of control with a given apparatus of enforcement (juridical and repressive) at its command and basis. Coercion and repression are then to be seen both as forms of control and as a back-up. Different forms of the state will involve different relationships between the control/coercion twin which is the residing characteristic of the state. Using this formulation, the state can harness a number of different processes, including ideological ones, through juridical and repressive mechanisms at its command.<sup>44</sup>

Education and the media are the prime institutions for ideology production in the modern liberal-democratic state but are not always part of or even owned by the state as such. However, states differ in the extent to which their powers are concentrated in local or central state governments. Furthermore, states will also differ in their tolerance towards political projects that are in conflict with the hegemonic political projects of the state.

According to Yuval-Davis, the conflation of the state and civil society, and public and private domains allows for only a westocentric reading of states and societies.<sup>45</sup> It is therefore important to differentiate between state institutions, civil society institutions, and the domain of family and kinship relations. Civil society “includes those institutions, collectivities, groupings and social agencies which lie outside the formal rubric of state parameters outlined but which both inform and are informed by them.”<sup>46</sup> These may include institutions such as schools, the media, and trade unions which produce their own ideological content but can also be subjected to those of the state. Civil society may also include voluntary associations and the economic market. States differ in the extents to which they tolerate those forms that conflict with their own political projects. The domain of the family “includes social, economic and political networks and households which are organised around kinship or friendship relations.”<sup>47</sup> All three domains produce their own ideological content and are informed by and inform one another, and have differential access to political and economic resources.

As was indicated in the previous section where gender relations are discussed, women in most Western and westernised societies are traditionally considered to occupy the

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<sup>44</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman*, p.5

<sup>45</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

‘private’,<sup>48</sup> or family domain. The nation and the family are closely interlinked. Smith has argued that the metaphor of the family is indispensable to nationalism as both evoke “strong loyalties and vivid attachments.”<sup>49</sup> If the ‘nation’ is synonymous with the public sphere, political participation and access to public life, women gained membership of the nation in different ways and at different times than men. This is relevant to understanding the connections between gender and nation and is indicative of the complex links between

family structures, the private/public spheres, and the relationships of men to women [which are] carried over into the structure of the nation-state in ways which continue to be determinative.<sup>50</sup>

According to Day and Thompson, in some respects, nationalism actually foregrounds these links. Analysing Mosse’s work on nationalism and sexuality,<sup>51</sup> Day and Thompson describe how the emergence of modern bourgeois society sharpened the distinctions between the proper realms of male and female activity, linking them to notions of respectability. Women were increasingly seen as belonging to the home, while men went into the public sphere engaging in politics and business affairs. The growth of strongly masculine fraternity groups, ‘hotbeds’ of nationalist sentiments, added to the close association between sexuality and nationhood. If masculinity was the foundation of the nation, then women were accorded primacy as custodians and teachers of social traditions within the realm of the family, or at times, in the public sphere but through decidedly ‘proper’ occupations befitting the married middle class woman such as charity work. The formation of modern nations and the social changes associated with this stimulated

a firmer delineation of gender-boundaries, which coincided with the simultaneous rise of the bourgeois public sphere and the privileging of the patriarchal household as a microcosm of the social, economic and political order.<sup>52</sup>

The strong images of the roles and duties of the mothers and fathers within this microcosm of the family were transferred symbolically to the nation. “Men and women were expected to fulfil national obligations in the same way as they conducted their household duties: by

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<sup>48</sup> Due to most states having a significant interest in regulating the life of family and to control its sexual reproduction with policies on contraception, abortion, child care, and sometimes pre-marital sex (almost exclusively aimed at women), the public/private dichotomy is obviously blurred.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1991), p.79.

<sup>50</sup> Graham Day and Andrew Thompson, *Theorising Nationalism*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire and New York, 2004), p.118.

<sup>51</sup> G.L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, (Wisconsin University Press: Madison, 1985).

<sup>52</sup> G. Sluga, quoted in Day and Thompson, *Theorising*, p.118-119.

carrying out distinct and complementary functions.”<sup>53</sup> At its very crudest, this meant that women should ‘produce’ the nation through childbirth while men were trained for combat, ready to protect the ‘womenandchildren’ (a heavily laden phrase coined by Enloe)<sup>54</sup> and thus, the future of the nation. This was conducive to promoting the view of the nation as a natural extension of family and kinship relations “which harmonised well with interpretations of the nation that stressed its organic, biological foundations.”<sup>55</sup> This also allowed for definitions of gender to appear natural and fixed through the structural organisation of the family in society which were underwritten by the assumptions about the fixed biological and sexual nature of men and women.

Inserting the notion of ‘race’ into the dynamics between nation, family, and gender, Balibar examines how the connections between them produce particular results.<sup>56</sup> Genealogy, along with the relationships of marriage and descent that operate through the family, assumes “a central importance for placing people into their various ethnic, national and racial groups.”<sup>57</sup> Systems of alleged natural differences are accompanied by conceptions of human ‘nature’, including sexual schemas that comprise issues such as heredity and ‘interbreeding’. The resulting acts of classification and hierarchy establishment that this entails “are operations of naturalisation *par excellence* or, more accurately, of projections of historical and social difference into the realm of an imaginary nature.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, for Balibar, ‘racial’ characteristics are always interpretable as metaphors for differences between the sexes. Sexual relationships and marriage normally form within the national population and the individual is embraced within the large family or kinship network of the ‘nation’. Thus, the family is nationalised and so are the relationships between men and women. Although the family is considered to be in the ‘private’ domain, the interest of the state in regulating family life blurs the distinction between what is public and what is private. The rise of the ‘nation-state’ saw the transfer of control over the family shift from religious institutions to central governments which keep records of, for example, family connections.<sup>59</sup> The emphasis on connections of “family, blood and sexuality draws ideas of nations and race close together:

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>54</sup> Cynthia Enloe, “Womenandchildren: Making Feminist Sense of the Persian Gulf Crisis”, *Village Voice*, 25 September 1990 at <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/> accessed 1 March 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Day and Thompson, p.119.

<sup>56</sup> Etienne Balibar, ‘Racism and Nationalism’, in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation and Class: Ambiguous Identities*, (Verso: London, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> Day and Thompson, *Theorising*, p.119.

<sup>58</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein quoted in Day and Thompson, *Theorising*, p.119.

<sup>59</sup> Including birth registers and identity documents. Despite this, some religious institutions such as the Catholic Church still exert a great amount of influence over family planning amongst its own membership.

hence, every discourse on the ‘fatherland’ or nation which associates these with defence of the family and birth rate is already ensconced in the universe of racism.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, it is ensconced in the universe of sexism. Whilst McClintock points out that all nationalisms are gendered,<sup>61</sup> Nagel adds the rider that, “the moral economy of nationalism is gendered, sexualised and racialised.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Positions and Positioning of Women in Nationalist Movements**

There is no single nationalism, nor is there one narrative of the nation. Nationalisms are dangerous not simply because they should be opposed as Hobsbawm suggests, but because they represent relations to political power, and as indicated above, access to the coercive apparatus of the state.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, as McClintock argues, “no nationalism in the world has granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state.”<sup>64</sup> All nationalisms are at all times implicated in discourses of gender power and are dependent on powerful constructions of gender difference. The following discussions will explain how and why gender plays such a significant role in constructions of nations and how women are positioned and position themselves in nationalist movements. Women are by no means passive bystanders meekly accepting the ideological roles assigned to them by the men who serve as spokespersons for nationalist ideologies. Women will often fully engage with these social powers insofar as nationalist movements allow them and enforce conformity with nationalist ideologies of womanhood on other women. Anthias and Yuval-Davis argued against the links between women, the state, and ethnic/national processes taking any prescribed form but have identified five central ways in which women tend to relate to nationalism: women as the biological reproducers of national groups, as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the nation and as transmitters of its culture, as signifiers of ethnic/national differences, and as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles. Each of these categories will be briefly identified and analysed before being applied to the South African case in the following chapters. However, different historical contexts will construct these roles in different ways and the importance of each of these roles will differ. In other words, in

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<sup>60</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein quoted in Day and Thompson, *Theorising*, p.120.

<sup>61</sup> McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven”, p.104.

<sup>62</sup> Joanne Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2003), p.146.

<sup>63</sup> The apartheid state is a notable example of this and will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

<sup>64</sup> McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven”, p.105.

a South African context, different regimes facing unique political circumstances will select and apply the discourses of women and nation which it requires or deems necessary to re-establish and bolster normative gender standards.

### ***Women as the Biological Reproducers of the Nation and as Reproducers of its Boundaries***

The combination of these two categories identified by Anthias and Yuval-Davis is not presumptuous. Considering women as the biological reproducers of the nation and as reproducing the boundaries of the nation can be connected through the attention nationalist movements accord to *women's* reproductive rights. Whether it is to have more or fewer children, or with which men it is appropriate to have children, all national boundaries are constructed by sorting people into 'us' and 'them'. Women, as the 'biological' producers of children, are also the bearers of the collective within these constructed boundaries.<sup>65</sup> Yuval-Davis has expanded on the categories identified by Anthias and herself in her important book *Gender and Nation*, and it is upon this work that the following discussions will draw. Before embarking on a discussion of how nationalist discourses can construct women as the bearers of the collective, a word of caution is necessary in relation to the use of the term 'reproduction'. It is inconsistent in meaning (it can range from defining women's biological roles to explaining the existence of social systems over time), and has been criticised for being both tautological (assuming that 'reproduction' takes place) and static (unable to explain growth, decline, and transformation processes while women act as both maintainers and modifiers of social processes).<sup>66</sup> However, the term 'reproduction' will be retained in the sense of human and social reproduction including the reproduction of national, ethnic, and racial categories.

Nationalisms place people into the categories of 'us' and 'them' and defines who belongs to the nation and who does not. Especially within ethnic nationalisms women's reproductive abilities and their presumed 'natural' role of bearing children comes under close scrutiny. If those nationalisms also happen to have access to the state resources of judicial enforcement, women's reproductive rights can come under attack by laws seeking to control their bodies and often reduce women to 'wombs'. Significantly and immutably, it is almost exclusively women that face legislation determining their reproductive rights and access to

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<sup>65</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.26.

<sup>66</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman*.

reproductive health care. Yuval-Davis argues that “women’s positioning in and obligations to their ethnic and national collectivities, as well as in and to the states they reside in and/or are citizens of, also affect and can sometimes override their reproductive rights.”<sup>67</sup> This section will focus on the ‘natural’ role of women to produce children and how this impacts the construction of the nation and women’s social positioning through firstly addressing the idea of ethnic or racial purity and belonging and what Yuval-Davis has identified as ‘people as power’ or somewhat more simplistically: the pure power of numbers. This will be followed by a discussion of eugenicist and Malthusian discourses in establishing the importance of the ‘quality’ of the nation, and population control to indicate how states can encourage and control, sometimes through legislation, how, when, and by whom the nation is reproduced.

The myth of the ‘common origin’ plays a role in the construction of most ethnic and national collectivities and one usually joins the collectivity by being born into it. This would be the ‘purest’ way of belonging to a collectivity. ‘Outsiders’ can conceivably join the national collectivity through intermarriage but in collectivities preoccupied with the ‘purity’ of the blood such ‘contamination’ would not always be accepted. Nazi law stated that ‘pure’ blood can be ‘contaminated’ even if one eighth or one sixteenth is the blood of ‘others’, while the ‘one-drop’ rule, which has operated in the construction of the definition of ‘who is black’ in the USA, are clear examples of a preoccupation with the ‘purity’ of the ‘race’.<sup>68</sup> If there is a preoccupation with the ‘purity’ of the ‘race’ it is then also likely that there will be a preoccupation with the sexual relations between members of different collectivities. Apartheid legislation in South Africa included the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act which forbade marriage and sexual relations between whites and members of other racial groups. This was repealed by the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Act of 1985 which would be the first significant step towards the abolition of apartheid by allowing whites and members of other racial groups to seek legal permission to marry. Furthermore, children of mixed marriages in South Africa would be considered a separate social category, or belong to the ‘inferior’ collectivity – as during slavery – while in Mexico, children born of Spanish settlers and aristocratic Indians would belong to the ‘superior’ collectivity, although this is somewhat rarer in colonial societies.<sup>69</sup> Biology is not always the deciding factor in belonging to a collectivity. The membership of a child might depend on either the father’s membership of a collectivity or cultural/religious order (such as

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<sup>67</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.26.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

Islam), exclusively on the mother's membership of a collectivity (such as Judaism), or the child might have access to dual membership or voluntary choice membership dependent on applicable religious or customary laws.

With respect to nations constituted from several specific ethnic groupings, Yuval-Davis indicates that 'common destiny' rather than 'common origin' might be vital in the constitution of the nation. Post-apartheid South Africa is undoubtedly a 'nation' looking towards a common destiny. Yet, in such settler societies as the USA and Australia there would be an implicit, if not explicit, hierarchy of desirability of 'origin' and culture "which would underlie the nation building processes, including immigration and natal policies."<sup>70</sup> In colonial and apartheid South Africa (although not a 'settler society' in the true sense) there were similar hierarchies that have, to a certain extent, extended into the post-apartheid state with the 'desirability' of certain origins and cultures changing within different historical contexts. Furthermore, while the position of women as refugees, migrants, and immigrants can be affected by nationalist constructions of boundaries, all women are affected by differential natal national policies.

In the 'people as power' discourse, the future of the nation is seen as depending on its continuous growth.<sup>71</sup> This growth can include immigration (as in the case of colonies and some modern nation-states like Israel), or can be based on the reproductive powers of women. Yuval-Davis, citing Japan as an example, shows that,

The need for people – often primarily men – can be for a variety of nationalist purposes, civil and military. They can be needed as workers, as settlers, as soldiers. For example, in Japan the government is currently offering a reward of 5000 yen a month for each child under school age and twice as much for third children. They are worried as the birth rate in Japan is now the lowest in its history... The official reason for this campaign is the welfare of 'the nation': if Japan's population declines it will cause 'labour shortages, sluggish economic growth and higher tax burdens to support social services for the elderly.' This campaign, however, has raised echoes of the coercive 1930s campaign to 'breed and multiply' for the good of the Japanese empire.<sup>72</sup>

In countries like Australia and Israel, selective and exclusive immigration was encouraged for 'nation building' processes. While the sparse Aboriginal population in Australia could offer

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.29.

no resistance to this immigration, the Palestinians resisted Jewish settlement, resulting in the militarisation of nation building shortly after the state formation of Israel by encouraging women to have more children by developing a variety of policies and declaring a ‘heroine award’ for women who had ten or more children.<sup>73</sup> This is indicative of the ‘demographic’ race between Israel and the Palestinians and the elevation of motherhood to a political status. However, national conflict in a contested territory is not the only reason for a ‘demographic contest’ to take place. Maintaining an ethnic majority is seen as crucial in retaining dominance of the hegemonic collective. Yuval-Davis shows how government in Bulgaria encouraged ethnic Bulgarian women to have more children in their ‘demographic race’ with Turkish and Romani minorities who had higher birth rates.<sup>74</sup> More recently, anxious public debate amongst right-wing groups in The Netherlands has placed focus on the immigration and birth rates of predominantly Islamic minority groups as a threat to ethnic Dutch hegemony.<sup>75</sup>

Yuval-Davis identifies national disasters such as the civil war and revolution in Russia which led to population depletion as a cause for nations to place pressure on women to bear more children while pro-natalist ideologies have also been connected to the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust. In Israel, not having children or having children outside of the Jewish community has been seen as “contributing to a ‘demographic Holocaust’.”<sup>76</sup> However, Nazi Germany is considered as the height of coercion of women to breed children for the sake of the nation. With the *Lebensborn* programme,

SS men were encouraged to father as many children as possible with Aryan women of ‘pure stock’. The men were not expected to marry the women and the children would be brought up by the state.<sup>77</sup>

However, while Aryan women were forced to have children, the Nazis forced others not to have them as part of a Eugenicist discourse on national reproduction.

The pseudo-science of eugenics is concerned not with the size of the nation, but its ‘quality’. Eugenics attempts to predetermine the ‘quality’ of offspring through selective

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<sup>73</sup> Yuval-Davis, “National Reproduction and the ‘Demographic Race’ in Israel”, in Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman*.

<sup>74</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.30.

<sup>75</sup> Frank J. Lechner, “The Travails of Integration in The Netherlands”, paper presented at the International Symposium on Interculturalism, May 2011. [http://www.symposium-interculturalisme.com/pdf/actes/Chap1\\_2LECHNER.pdf](http://www.symposium-interculturalisme.com/pdf/actes/Chap1_2LECHNER.pdf) Accessed 14 March 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.31.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

breeding. Once again, Nazi Germany would be a prime example of state sanctioned eugenicist policies aimed at selective breeding in order to produce not simply a ‘healthy nation’ but also a nation of purported ‘superior stock’ and biologised cultural traits. ‘Pure Aryans’ were encouraged to breed while a forced sterilisation programme targeted those considered as *Lebensunwurdiges* (life unworthy of life).<sup>78</sup>

According to Yuval-Davis, “the effect of Malthusian<sup>79</sup> policies is often highly gendered.”<sup>80</sup> It is women’s reproductive abilities that are targeted when states ‘set up shop’ in their wombs and treat women as state property with laws controlling not only reproduction but also women’s access to reproductive health care. Regulating and controlling women’s reproductive abilities in the interest of ‘the nation’ can be enforced through legislation, and customary or religious laws. As recently seen in the USA, women controlling their own bodies (through the use of various methods of contraceptives, access to abortions and other reproductive healthcare) can be seen by some men as a direct threat to their authority. By ‘shaming’ women through employing customary and religious rhetoric, many women would hesitate to

take any action which would be considered as a betrayal of sacred religious and customary laws... [R]eligious authority is being invoked in order to legitimate conflicting positions concerning women and their reproductive options.<sup>81</sup>

In response to women entering the workforce and having more control over their bodies and reproduction, strong fundamentalist movements may arise to tighten the control over women and reproductive rights in the name of custom, tradition, and religion.<sup>82</sup> Legislation

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>79</sup> Malthusian discourse follows the predictions of Thomas Malthus who explained that the human population is expanding at a faster rate than global food resources can supply and that the planet would not be able to sustain this human growth. Only famine, pestilence, poverty, wars, and slaughters would keep the human population size under control. Although Malthus underestimated the ability of the planet to feed the growing human population and the ability of humans to counter rising birth rates through voluntary choices, Malthusian prophesies persisted and increasingly focused on developing countries

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>82</sup> In February 2012 in Wisconsin, USA, a bill was proposed by conservative Glenn Grothman and Donald Pridemore, to criminalise single or ‘nonmarital’ parenthood by claiming that single parenthood is a leading factor in child abuse. This bill was aimed almost exclusively at single mothers (who outnumber single fathers 5 to 1 in Wisconsin). Pridemore, a co-sponsor of the bill, stated that women should not jump into divorce, but rather look at alternatives. See “Senate Bill 507” at <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/proposals/sb507>, Bonnie Rochman, “According to a Wisconsin Bill, Single Moms are a Child-Abuse Threat”, *Time*, at <http://healthland.time.com/2012/03/14/according-to-a-wisconsin-bill-single-moms-are-a-child-abuse-threat/>, John Celock, “Donald Pridemore, Wisconsin Legislator, Says Single Parenting Leads to Abuse”, *Huffington Post*, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/12/donald-pridemore-wisconsin-lawmaker-child-abuse-divorce-single-parents\\_n\\_1340319.html?ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/12/donald-pridemore-wisconsin-lawmaker-child-abuse-divorce-single-parents_n_1340319.html?ref=mostpopular) accessed 16 March 2012.

controlling women's reproductive rights sees women as continuously acted upon, and rarely seen as actors in their own right despite fierce resistance.<sup>83</sup> Thus, it is not only states that reduce women to wombs, nationalist movements, ethnic nationalist movements, religious and customary groupings are influential factors in controlling women's reproduction.

### ***Women and the Ideological Reproduction of the Collectivity and as Transmitters of its Culture***

Women contribute in a variety of ways to the ideological reproduction and the transmission of the culture to the 'nation'. At the most basic level, women as mothers teach and transmit culture to their children as women continue to be the main socialisers of children. However, women as teachers, artists, writers, playwrights, and film makers can contribute to ideology (re)production and culture transmission and are often deeply involved in the reproduction of national narratives.<sup>84</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis indicate that "[t]he role of women as ideological reproducers is very often related to women being seen as the 'cultural carriers' of the ethnic group."<sup>85</sup>

Culture has historically been conflated with ethnicity and race, explained in evolutionary terms or analysed from relativist perspectives. However, it is not the cultures *per se* that have been transformed but discourse analysis allows a more nuanced understanding of culture from a

static reified homogenous phenomena common to all members of national and ethnic collectivities, into dynamic social processes operating in contested terrains in which different voices become more or less hegemonic in their offered interpretations of the world.<sup>86</sup>

This means that cultural discourses are in constant conflict with one another and that cultural homogeneity is the result of hegemonisation rather than having a shared point of departure within the collectivity. However, cultural homogeneity is limited and more noticeable within

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<sup>83</sup> Enloe, *Bananas*, p.16.

<sup>84</sup> The German film director Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*, certainly stands out as an example of a woman actively (re)producing nationalist ideologies.

<sup>85</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), "Introduction" in *Woman*, p.9.

<sup>86</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.41.

the centre of society than its margins, being affected by the social positioning of its carriers.<sup>87</sup>

Gill Bottomley claims that,

‘Culture’, in the sense of ideas, beliefs and practices that delineate particular ways of being in the world, also generates conscious and unconscious forms of resistance – to homogenisation, to devaluation, to marginalising by those who fear difference.<sup>88</sup>

For Yuval-Davis this then raises questions about the persistence and continuity of cultures as well as the relationships between cultures. While Smith and Armstrong have argued for the enduring ability of cultural myths and symbols that are reproduced generation after generation, this apparent durability can be misleading. Yuval-Davis, labelling these myths and symbols as ‘cultural stuff’ notes that we cannot be sure how much ‘cultural stuff’ has and has not survived historical changes while also indicating that the meanings of those that have survived will most likely have undergone radical changes and often become symbolic markers of identity.<sup>89</sup> Referring to Jonathan Friedman’s work on cultural identity, Yuval-Davis indicates that cultures are not just

arbitrary collections of values, artefacts and modes of behaviour. They acquire, to a greater or lesser extent, ‘stabilising properties’ which are inherent in the practices of their social reproduction. These practices of social reproduction are not just processes of cloning, but processes of social interaction in which motivation and desire play their part. As a result, cultural models become resonant with subjective experience. They become the ways individuals experience themselves, their collectivities and the world.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, culture and the many ways through which it manifests (myths, artefacts, behaviour) is incredibly dynamic and constantly changing within different historical contexts. Yet, it contains stabilising properties within a context of the nation’s common origin (whether invented or not) and its common destiny. It ultimately situates individuals within the boundaries of their collectivity as ethnic or national culture defines ‘us’ in opposition to ‘others’.

Religion bears a close connection to culture but cannot be reduced to it. Religion often becomes “incorporated into hegemonic traditions of the different collectivities and acquires

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>88</sup> Gill Bottomley quoted in Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

specific cultural signifiers which would associate it with those collectivities.”<sup>91</sup> This is evident in the political landscape of the USA where political rhetoric often conflates religious and cultural discourse. The language framing the recent spate of laws targeting women’s reproduction in several states appears indicative of a longing to return to ‘good old’ American values which often represent this conflation of religion and culture.<sup>92</sup> Religious and cultural discourse is always embedded concretely, and historically, in power relations. For Yuval-Davis,

[t]his is true not only in relation to hierarchies of power within the religious and cultural institutions and their relations to more general structures of class and power within the society, but also in relation to the religious and cultural imaginations and their hierarchies of desirability as well as constructions of inclusions and exclusions. Sexuality and gender are central in this.<sup>93</sup>

This leads to the consideration of the importance of gender relations to the social reproduction of culture. Yuval-Davis argues that gender relations often come to be seen as “constituting the ‘essence’ of cultures as ways of life to be passed from generation to generation.”<sup>94</sup> Here, the construction of ‘home’ is of particular importance, including the relations between adults, and adults and children in the family. Furthermore the ‘home’ becomes a microcosm of the social reproduction of the national culture through the ways the family cooks and eats, divides domestic labour responsibilities, the bedtime stories that are told to children, and the type of games that are played, “out of which a whole world view, ethical and aesthetic, can become naturalised and reproduced.”<sup>95</sup> As women are historically considered to be the ‘homemakers’ and situated in the domain of the family, it is often women that reproduce culture within the home through assigned gender roles that in turn also become part of a learned world view that might be reproduced generation after generation.

It is not only within the confines of the home and the family that women reproduce culture. Women also reproduce culture through more public means. This does not always need to take the form of cultural propaganda as in the case of Leni Riefenstahl’s famous film,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>92</sup> See Sarah Emily Duff, “Lie Back and Think of Santorum” at FeministsSA.com at <http://feministssa.com/2012/02/24/lie-back-and-think-of-santorum/> for a brief discussion of Catholic anti-abortion and anti-contraception sentiments and Rick Santorum’s conflation of radical feminism and the use of contraception. Accessed 24 February 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 43.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

*Triumph of the Will*, but can be achieved in several different ways. As already indicated above, women as writers, artists, poets, film directors, and playwrights can reproduce cultures through their work, but women can also reproduce culture through enforcing culturally constructed modes of behaviour (often defined by men) on other women. This tends to occur at times where traditionally accepted gender roles are shifting as a result of various social, economic, and political historical changes. Culture, politically conflated with religion and identity, often becomes a rallying call for adjusting the behaviour of – what are considered to be – ‘deviant’ women. This will become clear when discussing the *Volksmoeder* ideology of Afrikaner nationalism in chapter 4.

It is important to emphasise here that ethnicity cannot be reduced to culture. The tendency to conflate ethnicity and culture “leads to inability to attend to the political dynamics of ethnic difference.”<sup>96</sup> Identity narratives are a major tool in ethnic projects struggling for specific positionings within the collectivities that exist within the boundaries of the state, or in the case of multicultural societies, the constructed ‘nation’. Ethnicity is

primarily a political process which constructs the collectivity and its ‘interest’ not only as a result of the specific relations of those engaged in ‘ethnic politics’ with others within that collectivity. Gender, class, political, religious and other differences play a central role in the construction of specific ethnic politics, and different ethnic projects of the same collectivity can be engaged in intense competitive struggles for hegemonic positions.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, ethnic politics is not always enmeshed with the struggles of oppressed or minority groups. As Yuval-Davis indicates, the measure of success of hegemonic ethnicities is their success in ‘naturalising’ their social and cultural constructions for which these projects employ a wealth of available resources (political, economic, or cultural – relating to customs language, religion and other cultural artefacts and memories).<sup>98</sup> Differentiating between culture, ethnicity, and identity pre-empts debates on the notion of ‘authenticity’. According to Yuval-Davis “[a]uthenticity assumes fixed, essential and unitary constructs of cultures, identities and groupings. ‘Authentic voices’ are perceived as their ‘true’ representatives.”<sup>99</sup> The claim to ‘authenticity’, especially in the identity politics of multicultural societies, can become a political resource, but can also give rise to what Chhachhi

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<sup>96</sup> Aleksandra Ålund quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

has called ‘forced identities, or, what Kubena Mercer<sup>100</sup> has called the ‘burden of representation’<sup>101</sup> and it is women who are often the carriers of this burden.

### ***Women as Signifiers of the ‘Nation’***

The symbolic image of the ‘nation’ as a woman is not uncommon. Whether it is Mother Russia, Mother Ireland, or even a continent in the form of Mother Africa; states and nations can, at different times, use the image of the nation as a woman for different purposes.<sup>102</sup> Britannia, Germania, Columbia, Hibernia, Helvetia, and the Dutch Maiden are just a few female personifications of nations.<sup>103</sup> Whether it is the ‘motherland’, ‘homeland’, or ‘fatherland’, ideas of nation and gender appear to blend seamlessly together until they become indistinguishable. Women, who often bear the ‘burden of representation’, are constructed as the symbolic representations of the nation’s identity and honour “both personally and collectively”.<sup>104</sup> As Yuval-Davis explains, especially in early peasant societies, the dependence of people on the fertility of ‘Mother Earth’ has contributed to the association between collective territory, collective identity, and womanhood.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, women are connected with children in the collective imagination and therefore also with the national, or collective, and familial future; it is, supposedly, for the sake of the ‘womenandchildren’ that men to go war. But it is not only in times of war that women come to represent the collectivity. In times of significant socio-economic changes that can affect constructions of gender and gender positionings within societies, it is often women that come to represent the honour of the ‘nation’. Women, confined by ‘proper’ behaviour and ‘proper’ clothing, quite literally, embody the line that signifies the collectivity’s boundaries.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Kubena Mercer, “Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics”, in J. Rutherford (ed), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1990).

<sup>101</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 45.

<sup>102</sup> While some countries are referred to as ‘motherlands’, many nations refer to ‘home soil’ as the ‘fatherland’ (whether this is the country of birth or the country of origin of diasporic communities or their ancestors). In The Netherlands, Queen Wilhelmina was known as the ‘*Moeder des Vaderlands*’ (‘mother of the fatherland’) during her reign, reinstating the significance of the mother-image and the connections between the ‘nation’ and the family domain in nationalist imagery. However, the term ‘*Vader des Vaderlands*’ (‘father of the fatherland’) is a term used for Prince Willem van Oranje-Nassau (William of Orange).

<sup>103</sup> It is acknowledged that many nations employ male personifications and that often these personifications are ‘warriors’ or in some way contain ideological ideals of honour and bravery so constructing traditional male gender roles considered favourable. But for the purposes of this thesis the focus will fall on female iconography.

<sup>104</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 45.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

When it is women that represent nations and their honour, and it is the ‘womenandchildren’ that need protection, rape becomes a powerful weapon, especially during ethnic conflicts.<sup>107</sup> Rape is an extreme example of the gendered effects of war and ethnic conflicts. The Geneva Convention defined rape as a “crime against honour”, rather than as a mode of torture and Yuval-Davis argues that this ‘honour’ seemingly refers to that of the men and the community, rather than that of the women themselves.<sup>108</sup> When women symbolise the honour of the nation, when a woman is ‘violated’ by an ‘other’, it is the entire ‘nation’ that is violated by extension.<sup>109</sup> In this way, rape constitutes the ultimate transgression of national boundaries. Women who belong to the collectivity represent the nation’s reproductive potential, making them vulnerable. As Day and Thompson contend, in such situations the nation can be driven back to essentialising conceptions that insist upon the biological and ethnic foundations of nationhood and identity.<sup>110</sup> Thus, women’s material and symbolic importance to the nation exposes them to violence and ‘violation’, especially in times of conflict.

Indicating the ambivalent position of women in the collectivity, Yuval-Davis argues that, although women symbolise the nation and the *raison d’être* of specific ethnic and nationalist projects, they are often excluded from the collective ‘we’ of the body politic and retain an object, rather than a subject position.<sup>111</sup> This implies that the construction of womanhood has a property of ‘otherness’. Enloe argues that,

The very experiences of a nationalist campaign...frequently harden masculine political privilege. If men are allowed to take most of the policy-making roles in the movement, they are more likely to be arrested, gain the status of heroes in jail, learn public skills, all of which will enable them to claim positions of authority after the campaign is won. If women are confined to playing the nationalist wife, girlfriend or mother – albeit making crucial contributions to a successful nationalist campaign – they are unlikely to have either the skills or the communal prestige to gain community-wide authority at a later time.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The conflict in Bosnia received special media attention due to the systematic rape of Bosniak women by Bosnian Serbs. Women who became pregnant as a result of rape faced the prospect of also losing the respect and support of their families and community due to traditional notions of shame and honour. This resulted in few reports and even fewer prosecutions.

<sup>108</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 110.

<sup>109</sup> This will be discussed further in chapter 8 in the context of Sara Baartman as a representation of colonial South Africa being ‘violated’ by European men.

<sup>110</sup> Day and Thompson, *Theorising*, p.125.

<sup>111</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 47.

<sup>112</sup> Enloe, *Bananas*, p.63.

The inferior power positions that women occupy in many societies are the result of strict cultural codes that determine what it is to be a 'proper' woman. These cultural constructions of womanhood constrict women and discourage them from breaking out from such positions to avoid being considered as 'deviant'. Yuval-Davis holds that,

[t]he collective 'wisdoms' which are used to justify this state of affairs often sound very similar to other 'common sense' notions which are used to exclude, inferiorise and subjugate 'others' – such as 'women are stupid', 'women are dangerous' or 'women are impure and could pollute us'.<sup>113</sup>

Contentions such as these become increasingly pertinent when considering the colonial and apartheid context that this thesis will address in the following chapter. While some nationalists have been the victims of racism and colonialism, others have been the perpetrators. Nationalist movements in a colonial context usually manifest in one of two ways: It can be an imperial nationalist movement that seeks to extend its cultural and religious hegemony or, in sharp contrast, the colonial project has the ability to unite members of the different subjugated ethnic groups to oppose colonial hegemonies. However, in both nationalisms women play a central role as symbols. The constructions of the 'other' as seen through the gaze of the coloniser not only impacts on the colonised, but also the colonising women. Yet, colonised women bear a double burden of oppression: both of colonialism and of the masculine nationalist movements that seek to free them of colonial domination through employing the colonised woman as a symbol of colonial violation. Discussing the colonised woman, Enloe shows that they,

have served as sex objects for foreign men... They have bolstered white women's sense of moral superiority by accepting their religious and social instruction. They have sustained men in their communities when their masculine self-respect has been battered by colonists' contempt and condescension... Women as symbols, women as workers and women as nurturers have been crucial to the entire colonial undertaking.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, rarely do nationalist movements consider how women's experiences can lead to an understanding of how a people became colonised, or how it can lead to a rejection of psychological and material domination. Rather, "nationalism typically has sprung from

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<sup>113</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 47.

<sup>114</sup> Enloe, *Bananas*, p.44.

masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope.”<sup>115</sup> However, rather than addressing the position of women in society to address societal inequalities,

nationalist movements rarely, if ever, take women’s situation as their point of departure. On the contrary, nationalism often suppresses women’s concerns, or puts them aside until the ‘more important’ issue of the nation’s fate is decided.<sup>116</sup>

Despite this, it is women that serve as powerful unifying symbols for colonial and anti-colonial nationalist projects. The ‘civilising’ mission of colonial nationalism places women at the centre of constructions of ‘proper’ behaviour. As Enloe argues, sexual relations between colonial men and local women were ‘winked at’, whilst affairs between colonial women and local men were a threat to imperial order. Enloe continues:

Ladylike behaviour was a mainstay of imperialist civilisation. Like sanitation and Christianity, feminine respectability was meant to convince both the colonising and the colonised peoples that foreign conquest was right and necessary. Ladylike behaviour would also have an uplifting effect on the colonising men: it would encourage them to act according to those Victorian standards of manliness thought crucial for colonial order. Part of that empire-building masculinity was protection of the respectable lady. She stood for the civilising mission which, in turn, justified the colonisation of benighted peoples.<sup>117</sup>

‘Ladylike’ behaviour would also have a positive effect on local women while setting a ‘proper’ code of behaviour was also meant to keep a distance between colonising women and local men (which ties in with notions of women as the biological reproducers of the nation and as symbolic of the boundaries of the collectivity).

Enloe contends that women have not had an easy relationship with nationalism:

Even when they have suffered abuse at the hands of colonialists and racists, they have often been treated more as symbols than as active participants by nationalist movements organised to end colonialism and racism.<sup>118</sup>

According to Enloe, arguments about the proper roles of women in nationalist struggles and in the future nation-state have depended on five central assumptions about women. She argues that the ideological weight assigned to women’s attire and sexual purity are the result

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.44.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.108.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.42.

of women being viewed as: the community's most valuable *possessions*, the principle *vehicles* for cultural transmission, the *bearers* of the future nation, the members of the community most *vulnerable* to defilement and exploitation by foreign rulers, and as being most susceptible to *assimilation* and cooption by insidious outsiders.<sup>119</sup> These assumptions reflect Anthias' and Yuval-Davis' identifications of the five central ways in which women are positioned and position themselves within nationalist projects. Women from oppressed national communities are at times conflicted by the connections between their national identity and their emerging political identities as women. With South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, like many other colonised nations, women who participated in anti-colonial struggles were faced with a two-pronged fight. Their struggle for women's rights was often overshadowed by nationalist interests as women were encouraged to focus on nationalist goals first.<sup>120</sup> For some women participating in nationalist movements through the accepted roles as bearers of the nation's culture and children can prove empowering. Yet, women who choose to participate in other ways that takes them out of the home might meet with strong resistance from a husband or father or other male family member. Furthermore, when a nationalist movement comes under siege from outside forces women are often convinced to lay aside their grievances within the movement until the threat has passed.

Enloe states that "every time women succumb to the pressures to hold their tongues about problems they are having with men in a nationalist organisation, nationalism becomes that much more masculinised."<sup>121</sup> More than any other ideology, nationalism requires women to play an active part but women are often confined to symbolic roles of nurturing mothers, supportive wives, or honourable 'maidens' who represent the honour and future of the nation. Women, especially in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, have played active parts in nationalist movements through militaries, trade unions, and other political organisations. But even in these roles, women still interact with constructions of traditional gender roles sometimes imposed upon them by men and other women, or subjugate their gendered identity to the needs of the nationalist project.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>120</sup> Joyce M. Chadya, "Mother Politics: Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Women Question in Africa", *Journal of Women's History*, 15, 3, 2003.

<sup>121</sup> Enloe, *Bananas*, p.60.

### *Women as Active Participants in Nationalist Struggles*

Of all the categories discussed, this one probably requires the least explication and will be further contextualised in the following chapter. Women actively contribute to national projects in a multitude of ways: as combatants in militaries and other armed formations, or as active politicised participants in trade unions or political organisations. Yet, their vital contributions to nationalist struggles within armies or organisations are almost never accorded equal recognition to that of men. Their participation might give them some social and political status after a successful national liberation struggle but women rarely achieve the same level of recognition or political office as their male counterparts in national liberation groups.

Enloe argues that when a nationalist movement becomes militarised, male privilege tends to become more entrenched. This militarisation calls on communal unity in the name of national survival, “a priority which can silence women critical of patriarchal practices and attitudes; in so doing, nationalist militarisation can privilege men.”<sup>122</sup> Notions of military are heavily masculinised but women also participate in militaries. However, this is never on an equal basis with men. Although women do not always participate in direct combat and are often excluded from it in both traditional armies and liberation forces (with certain exceptions) they, traditionally, have had specific roles in warfare: from producing and nurturing new (male) soldiers, feeding and harbouring combatants, as secretaries, decoys, or “to take care of the dead and wounded or to become the embodied possession of the victorious.”<sup>123</sup> But women can become soldiers as well. Throughout human history, images of women as soldiers are not uncommon. The Amazons are the best-known example of this but women like Joan of Arc and Boadicea leading men into battle have also had lasting impressions in popular imagination. Yet, these images do not necessarily serve the purpose of demonstrating that women are just as capable as men of heroic conduct during warfare. Yuval-Davis argues that “[t]hese images usually have either enhanced the constructed unnaturalness of women as fighters, or been made in such a way to collude with more generalised notions of femininity and masculinity in the society from which the women fighters have come.”<sup>124</sup> They have the ability to construct women fighters as somewhat ‘unnatural’ or even romantic. Since the formal incorporation of women into the military,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>123</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 95.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

however, romantic images of war heroines have become more common.<sup>125</sup> During World War Two, the women in the workplace were typified by the iconic image of Rosie the Riveter in the USA, while famous female bomber pilots were iconised. Palestinian Leila Khaled has been elevated to the status of heroine for her involvement in the hijacking of American planes in the 1970s. Advancement in military technology has resulted in a decline in face to face combat, making differences in physical strength between men and women of less importance so allowing women a more equal footing with men in militaries. But the differential power relations between men and women in formal militaries have not been erased. Until recently, women in the U.S Army were not allowed to enter full combat while certain countries still bar women from the infantry and armour and special operations forces which are considered to be the most dangerous jobs.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, women soldiers and combatants are frequently subjected to sexual harassment and rape in the military.<sup>127</sup>

In the case of revolutionary movements (which will apply to a South African struggle context), two distinctions can be made in the manner in which they incorporate women into the struggle and their position in society after a successful revolution. Yuval-Davis uses Valentine Moghadam's identifications of the two revolutionary movements:

One which uses women as a symbol of liberation and modernisation, in which case women would be encouraged to participate actively in the military; and one which uses women as a symbol of the national culture and tradition which is to be reclaimed, in which case women are virtually excluded from formal participation, and the nature of their supportive roles is highly controlled.<sup>128</sup>

Whether they are honoured as fighters or revered as mothers, once again, women remain *symbols* of a fight against oppression. Women's roles as soldiers in the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), was limited and women were regarded with contempt by some of their male counterparts.<sup>129</sup> However, their active participation in the struggle did contribute to

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>126</sup> "Military to Ease Rules on Women in Combat", *USA Today* at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-02-08/war-women-pentagon/53017764/1> accessed 16 March 2012.

<sup>127</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 101. For more recent news and insights on rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment in the U.S military see *Service Women's Action Network* at <http://servicewomen.org/our-work/litigation/military-rape-litigation/>

<sup>128</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p. 103.

<sup>129</sup> It is noteworthy that Winnie Mandela, who never trained as a military cadre, has, frequently donned the MK uniform. This can be interpreted as an attempt to publically assert her militancy and to retrospectively identify with the armed struggle perhaps to counter her waning stature in the post-apartheid state.

a post-apartheid dispensation that constitutionally guarantees gender equality.<sup>130</sup> Statutory and non-statutory armies have subjected women to patriarchal and paternalistic power relations and employed women as images and symbols of their particular ideologies. This is not to suggest that women who participated in armed revolutionary movements did not contribute equally to their respective national struggles but rather demonstrates that women's positions and roles in armies are never free of particular cultural constructions of gender and its attendant power relations.

Trade Unions have provided an important platform for the social and political advancement of women within nationalist movements despite the dominance of men in the industrial sector. This is decidedly true for South Africa where, historically, trade unions have been an influential and powerful political force. In South Africa, women have entered the arena of politics through trade unions and often these trade unions have had a close, although somewhat controversial, relationship with nationalist movements. The Garment Workers Union (GWU) attempted to align the moral qualities of the *Volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) with those of mostly single, poor Afrikaans women working in factories during the 1930s as these women were considered to be the most vulnerable to 'loose' morals and a threat to the purity of the Afrikaner nation.<sup>131</sup> In later years, as changing socio-economic conditions saw black women recruited into the GWU, women like Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph started their political activities in the GWU through which they branched out into the politics of the anti-apartheid movements in which they became leading figures. Pass-carrying 'Africans' (black men) were prevented from joining unions but black women were exempt from this rule. The increasing racial stratification in South African society after 1948, however, meant that class differences became secondary to racism. Many black women factory workers, fairly well paid compared to other black women, and well-established urban residents by the 1950s became staunch members and leaders of community and political organisations.<sup>132</sup> However, the increasing threat of pass laws, forced removals, political repression and racially exploitative legislation (some of which targeted black women exclusively) threatened the stability of the lives of these women and their families leading to black women workers becoming increasingly political and more willing to enter political

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<sup>130</sup> Yet, as the case studies in this thesis will indicate, an analysis of recent official rhetoric demonstrates a tendency toward emphasising normative domestic femininity.

<sup>131</sup> Louise Vincent, "Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1, 2000.

<sup>132</sup> Iris Berger, "Generations of Struggle: Trade Unions and the Roots of Feminism, 1930-1960", Nomboniso Gasa (ed), *Women in South African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers*, (HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2007).

organisations that fought against the repressive laws of the apartheid state.<sup>133</sup> This illustrates the interaction between working class shop-floor and wider community concerns of which women bore a significant brunt.

No discussion of women as active participants in nationalist struggles and gender relations, whether this is as members of trade unions or participants in militaries, can be reduced to discussing ‘men’ and ‘women’. Notions of class, race, ethnicity, age, and ability all form contributing factors as to how women are positioned in such movements. This will become clear in the following chapter which discusses women’s positioning within the different nationalist movements in South Africa in the twentieth century.

## **Conclusion**

The five categories identified by Anthias and Yuval-Davis serve as a useful point of departure for categorising the ways in which women are positioned and position themselves within different nationalist movements. Of course, these categories are not shaped by solid boundaries and different women and different nationalisms will apply to a combination of the categories. Identifying how women are positioned within different nationalist movements allows for a further analysis of gender relations within certain collectivities. This can also serve as a platform for recognising where states may fall short, or improve upon, citizenship rights and the legislative treatment of women within their boundaries, despite cultural differences. This is imperative in multi-cultural societies where culture or ‘tradition’ may be invoked to justify the differential treatment of different women.

Societal and cultural gender constructions inform how nationalist movements position women. The strong correlations between notions of the family and the ‘nation’ inform these constructions of gender roles and how they are applied to women as symbols of the national collectivity. Often these constructions revolve around notions of femininity and womanhood which determine which women are ‘proper’ and which women are not. In this way, nationalist movements have the ability to place certain women at the ideological centre of what constitutes the nation through their cultural control of women’s behaviour. Women as symbols, martyrs, and heroines of the nation define what moral qualities should constitute the nation and how other women should behave. Women constructed as national ‘wombs’,

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<sup>133</sup> To avoid overlap this will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

depicted in roles as mothers, wives, teachers, artists, and soldiers, or portrayed as vulnerable, honourable, feminine, brave, and resourceful contribute to nationalist movements as symbols and active participants. At times these roles are embraced and enforced on other women, at other times these roles are rejected resulting in the construction of the 'deviant' woman who is seen as the polar opposite of the female symbolic representation of the nation. In whichever way different women are positioned, or position themselves in nationalist movements, their relationship to the nation is always gendered.

## **The Political Power of Motherhood: Women and Mourning in Afrikaner and African Nationalism**

*If nationalism is not deeply informed, and transformed, by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege.<sup>1</sup>*

- Anne McClintock

### **Introduction**

The caution issued by McClintock at the head of this chapter has direct application to the post-apartheid state. While women in post-apartheid South Africa enjoy full *de jure* access to equal citizenship rights, their *de facto* experience of citizenship in the democratic state has been less substantive. Women in South Africa have demonstrated great gender awareness and activism – significantly so in the transition years. This activism and mobilisation of women as women has an extensive historical trajectory forged in the histories of the nationalist movements in South Africa in the twentieth century and informs the present (problematic) positioning of women in South African society. This chapter will address how Afrikaner nationalism and African nationalism have positioned women and how women have positioned themselves in these movements. It will also show how the mourning of some of each movements' political and politicised women and other political activists not only becomes a platform for the dissemination of nationalist rhetoric and resistance to an oppressive regime but also becomes an important space for the consolidation of moral values and appropriate gender behaviour. This consideration of the intersections between women's positioning within South African nationalist movements and dead body politics is necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa", *Transition*, 51, 1991, p.122.

to allow for a continuity of discussion while also having profound implications on the present and the future of gender relations in South Africa. It will show how nationalist movements have employed women, the image of 'woman' and discourses of motherhood for nationalist ideological purposes throughout the colonial and apartheid eras in South Africa and that the present official nationalist sentiments in this country have built on these representations albeit with a different agenda. The theoretical foundation laid in the previous two chapters informs the following chapters which examine the manifestations of post-apartheid nationalism in the past two decades.

While nationalism offers the possibility of collective agency for women, they are often restricted from exercising that agency to redress the power imbalances that exist between women and men. Discourses of nationalism tend to constitute women as mothers, biological reproducers of the nation and transmitters of its values rather than as rights-bearing citizens. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that the relationship between nationalism and women's liberation cannot be symbiotic as the trajectory of South Africa's transition to democracy has shown. However, while nationalism might, in some instances, be enabling for women, "the unchallenged authority of nationalism is a major barrier to feminism."<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, the power that motherhood as a political discourse permits within nationalist movements has been effectively exploited by women. Women's collective action, spurred on by their roles as mothers is characterised as 'motherism' by Kaplan.<sup>3</sup> Kaplan distinguishes between female consciousness and feminist consciousness. Female consciousness stems from women's recognition of their nurturing role in society and when the family or community are threatened women use collective action in the name of motherhood to fight such a threat. However, this female consciousness develops into a feminist consciousness once women harness this power to mobilise and force political change and alter the status quo. While women in South Africa have made great strides in ensuring equal citizenship in the post-apartheid state, this equality is only enjoyed 'on paper'. By operating within the gender confines that the nationalist movements permit, it has been impossible to break down the public/private dichotomy that continues to persist in the modern state. While motherhood and 'motherism' afforded women a political platform and agency during times of political

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<sup>2</sup> Shireen Hassim, *Women's Democratic Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority*, (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison and London, 2006), p.40.

<sup>3</sup> Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona 1910-1918", *Signs*, 7, 3, 1982, pp.545-566.

uncertainty and turmoil, it has become a 'trap' in the present as it has served to reinforce gender stereotypes.

The notion of 'woman' and all its attendant ideological constructions becomes amplified in colonial societies. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the colonising woman becomes a boundary marker of racial purity and 'civilised' behaviour. The colonised woman becomes a symbol of oppression and colonial violation and thus one of the central rallying points around which anti-colonial nationalist struggles initially organise and continue to make recourse to for impetus. Each woman is a symbol for a different ideological project and different women represent different aspects of each nationalism. While Afrikaner and African nationalism have, more or less, the same historic vintage, they involve very different racial and gender components. In both Afrikaner nationalism and African nationalism in South Africa women are employed not only as symbols, but also as active participants, initially in ideology construction, but in the second half of the twentieth century, increasingly more in militant movements as the struggle against the apartheid regime became more pressing and violent. Despite significant ideological differences, each movement assigned women specific symbolic significance shaped by cultural constructions of gender and sex. One of the most significant aspects of womanhood that is defined by nationalist movements is that of motherhood. Both Afrikaner and African nationalism employed notions of motherhood in aid of the nationalist cause. But 'motherhood' is not an unchanging concept and throughout the decades of the twentieth century different aspects of motherhood were highlighted. Moreover, nationalist interpretations of motherhood were not inflicted on passive, silent women. Women appropriated, enforced, contested, and amended man-made ideologies of motherhood and 'mothers of the nation' for their own benefit. Although the content of 'motherhood' as political discourse differs in Afrikaner and African nationalism, both notions are politicised and women are always constructed in terms of their relation to the family while 'fatherhood' is inconsistently politicised excepting circumstances that require the reinforcement of male authority. There is an apparent tension between the power that the notion of motherhood accords women in nationalist movements and the powerlessness that women often experience in society. This tension is clearly articulated within women's position within the family. As Shireen Hassim argues, the family is at once the place of women's affirmation and their subordination.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, within nationalist movements,

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<sup>4</sup> Shireen Hassim, "Family, Motherhood and Zulu Nationalism: The Politics of the Inkatha Women's Brigade", *Feminist Review*, 43, 1993, p.19.

women are heralded as martyrs of the struggle and the source of the regeneration of the nation. Yet, they are often denied active leadership positions. Motherhood and ideologies of ‘mother of the nation’ are still active in post-apartheid South African nationalisms and, although the context has changed and the rights of women are stressed by government policies, discourses of domestic femininity have been shaped and informed by nationalist ideologies. As a result, these policies continue to fail women in the private and domestic spheres.

This chapter will firstly consider how women were situated in Afrikaner nationalism through addressing the *volksmoeder* ideology and the multitude of ways this construction of ideal womanhood was acted upon and enacted by women. It will also look at how the mourning of the many women and children (to the exclusion of the men and black women and children) who died in the British concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War became a catalyst that bolstered Afrikaner nationalist sentiment. The chapter will then continue to focus on the rise of African nationalism within South Africa after the creation of the Union and the growing involvement of women within the ranks of the political parties fighting against the oppressive apartheid regime. It will also consider how constructions of motherhood played an important part in women’s resistance to and victimisation by the apartheid regime and how their role in this struggle was interpreted by their male counterparts.

### **Afrikaner Nationalism and the *Volksmoeder* Ideology**

Although many early Afrikaans-speaking historians<sup>5</sup> traced the spirit of Afrikaner nationalism back to the Great Trek of the 1830s, it is now accepted that Afrikaner nationalism as a cohesive social movement can be dated to the early 1920s and 1930s, while its roots can

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<sup>5</sup> Historians such as J.A. Coetzee, *Politieke Groepering in die Wording van die Afrikaner-nasie*, (1941), A.J.H. Van Der Walt, J.A. Wiid & A.L. Geyer, *Die Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika vol.1*, (1951), C.M. van den Heever & P. De V. Pienaar, *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner vol.1*, (1945), amongst many others, traced the formation of a nationalist sentiment amongst the Afrikaans-speaking population back to the Great Trek. Other historians such as F.A. van Jaarsveld, place the foundation of an Afrikaner nationalism somewhat later (in fact, shortly after the Great Trek) in the years 1869-1881 citing a reaction to British imperialism and the First Transvaal War of Independence (1880-1881) as markers of the development of a nationalist sentiment. F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism*, (Human & Rousseau: Cape Town, 1961). Sheila Patterson, on the other hand, commences her study of the ‘Boer people and the Afrikaner nation’ by stating that the birth year of the Afrikaner nation was as early as 1657 when the Dutch East India Company decided to settle the Cape. Sheila Patterson, *The Last Trek: a Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner nation*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.: 1957). However, Afrikaner political mythology would focus on the Great Trek as foundation of the Afrikaner nation enmeshed in the religious rhetoric of Exodus establishing the Afrikaners as a ‘chosen people’.

be traced throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> It was in these years that Afrikaans cultural organisations voiced the common myth of descent, shared history and culture, the association with South Africa as a territory and group solidarity that defined Afrikaners as an ethnic group. However, by the 1930s the political mobilisation of this ethnic group seeking to secure state power defined it as a ‘nation’ and its social movement as Afrikaner nationalism. The previous existence of some kind of ethnic consciousness amongst a substantial portion of Afrikaners was critical for the emergence and success of this ethnic nationalism. However, a nationalist ideology grounded in language, culture, and religion which allowed for the early development of the nationalist movement was not sufficient for its eventual political aim: control of the state. This section will address the development of Afrikaner nationalism by examining how the public mourning of the Afrikaner women and children who died in the British concentration camps strengthened this social movement. It will then move on to a discussion of the *volksmoeder* ideology which, to a certain extent, drew on the constructions of womanhood from the *Voortrekker* women and the experiences of women in the camps to exemplify the strength and honour of the ideal Afrikaner woman in an urban industrial society. It will show that women interacted with and animated this ideology – initially propagated by men – and played a powerful role in the construction of an Afrikaner identity and nationalist following.

### ***The Vrouemonument***

On 16 December 1913 a monument was unveiled in Bloemfontein in memory of the Afrikaner women and children who had died in British concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War. In contrast to many war monuments across the world which tend to focus on male heroics, male patriotism, and male martyrdom, this was a statue of a woman holding a dying child and dedicated to women as victims, martyrs and heroines. Throughout the war Afrikaner women and children were removed from farmsteads and incarcerated in the camps in a British High Command strategy which intended to curtail the activities of Boer guerrilla fighters who continued to use the farms as bases and for continued supplies in their war effort.<sup>7</sup> A staggering 27,927 Boers died in the camps as a result of poor administration,

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<sup>6</sup> The early development of an Afrikaner ethnic consciousness can be traced back to the nineteenth century.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Grundlingh, “The National Women’s Monument: The Making and Mutation of Meaning in Afrikaner Memory of the South African War”, in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie, *Writing a*

neglect, incompetence and disease.<sup>8</sup> Grundlingh states that this amounted to approximately ten per cent of the Boer population in the two Boer republics. Moreover, Grundlingh asserts that in terms of fatalities it was undoubtedly a women's war with fatalities in the camps at more than double the men killed in action on both sides.<sup>9</sup> The deaths of so many women and children left behind a legacy of bitter memories for many Afrikaners and the decision to erect a monument to this memory only a decade after the event would certainly lead to a rise in tensions in the early years of Union.

This section will briefly look at how the changing cultural landscape of South Africa in the twentieth century altered and shifted the narratives and meanings assigned to the women's monument. Monuments (notwithstanding their wilful removal or destruction) remain present in the public landscape as touchstones of public memory but their meanings are never static and change as the historical contexts change. The public mourning of the deceased which is embedded in the women's monument would come to represent different political motivations as the Afrikaner nationalist movement grew, gained momentum, and eventually took control of the country through 'constitutional' means. The intentions behind the erection of the monument differed vastly from the meanings extracted from it in the 1920s and 1930s and shifted again once the nationalist movement was successful and attained its goal of controlling the state. Moreover, the gendered nature of the monument lent itself to a particular type of meaning manipulation that saw women cast as victims, martyrs, heroines, and as racial boundary markers for an entire nation. The Afrikaner woman as mother and wife, ideologically and physically, played an essential role in the success of the Afrikaner nationalist movement.

The unveiling of the monument on December 16<sup>10</sup> 1913 was a significant affair attended by approximately 20,000 people.<sup>11</sup> Although ex-Free State President M.T. Steyn had called for the event to be a solemn occasion and most speakers adhered to a conciliatory tone in the spirit of Union, it was inevitable that bitter memories of the war would be raised.

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*Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, (Ohio University Press & David Philip Publishers: Athens and Cape Town, 2002), p.18.

<sup>8</sup> Grundlingh, "The National Women's Monument", in Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, *Writing a Wider War*, p.18-19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>10</sup> Formerly known as the Day of the Vow, or 'Dingaan's Day', this date commemorates the *Voortrekker* victory over the Zulus at Blood River. This day was celebrated as a public holiday in South Africa until it was renamed the Day of Reconciliation in 1995 to promote the new spirit of reconciliation and unity of the post-apartheid state.

<sup>11</sup> Grundlingh, "The National Women's Monument", in Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, *Writing a Wider War*, p.26.

Christiaan de Wet, a well-known *bittereinder*<sup>12</sup> general, outlined the historical travails of the Afrikaners and questioned the progress that had been made since the war and asked whether it was progress in the ‘right direction’ for Afrikaners.<sup>13</sup> The favourable reaction of the crowd to de Wet’s speech indicated that, unsurprisingly, under the surface of conciliation, bitter emotions and feelings of injustice remained amongst many Afrikaners. Grundlingh contends that it was only in later years that the monument provided a “vast reservoir of unexpressed emotions that could be channelled along nationalistic lines of common suffering, humiliation, and a need for retribution”<sup>14</sup> and that political messages of nationalist intent did not dominate the proceedings of the unveiling. However, it is impossible to ignore the implicit politicised message contained within a statue commissioned barely a decade after the war that commemorates the senseless deaths of approximately 26,000 Boer women and children in *British* concentration camps. Certainly emotions were expressed and the response of the crowd to a stronger ethnic political message shows that people were already acutely aware of reading such a message in the monument. Furthermore, Steyn ensured that the British had no representation in the project rendering it, ultimately, exclusively an Afrikaner monument.<sup>15</sup> However, Grundlingh does indicate that these emotions would only be harnessed explicitly for nationalist purposes in the following decade and be made effective by the increased promotion of Afrikaner ethnic unity which did not yet exist at the time of the unveiling of the monument.

If the nationalist intentions for the monument only emerged later as a comprehensive ideology, what did this monument say about Afrikaner women at its conception and unveiling? Sabine Marschall is clear on the monument’s portrayal of Afrikaner women, firstly, as victims.<sup>16</sup> Women in nationalist movements often come to embody the ‘nation’ and the pain and humiliation inflicted on the women of the ‘nation’ is, by extension, inflicted on the nation in its entirety – perhaps being interpreted even more so as an affront to the men of the nation. Marschall refers to the central sculpture and is worth quoting at length here:

The pathos of the entire monument is condensed and epitomised in Anton van Wouw’s emotionally charged central sculptural group. Formally modelled on a conflation of the

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<sup>12</sup> The ‘bitter-enders’ refers to the Afrikaner men who had fought on until the bitter end of the Anglo-Boer War despite imminent defeat.

<sup>13</sup> Grundlingh, “The National Women’s Monument”, in Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, *Writing a Wider War*, p.28.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>15</sup> Sabine Marschall, “Serving Male Agendas: Two National Women’s Monuments in South Africa”, *Women’s Studies*, 33, 2004, p.1017.

<sup>16</sup> Marschall, “Serving Male Agendas”, *Women’s Studies*, 33, 2004, p.1009.

Christian iconographic traditions of *Anna Selbdritt* and the *Pieta*, the group consists of a seated woman with bare feet and a look of sadness, despair, and exhaustion on her face. She is holding a dead child on her lap, clearly evoking the lamenting Mary holding the deceased Son of God. The implied message here is one of suffering and martyrdom, but also ultimate triumph. This is expressed through the standing woman next to her, upright and ‘properly’ dressed in *Voortrekker* clothes, including the ‘*kappie*’ or bonnet, which soon became the standard signifier of the traditional Afrikaner woman. With a determined look on her face, she gazes into the distance – spatial and temporal – expressing the women’s resilience and determination to survive. Yet it is not so much her personal survival that counts, but the survival and ultimate triumph – through the will of God – of the Afrikaner nation.<sup>17</sup>

Encapsulating the notions of suffering and martyrdom the statue comes to represent nearly 70 years of Afrikaner hardships; from the Great Trek to defeat in the Anglo-Boer War. However, the determined stare into the future indicates the resilience of the Afrikaner nation, and despite its sacrifices, its willingness to rise again and survive and triumph. Shrouded in religious iconography this monument becomes a signifier of the inextricable links that existed between Afrikaner political and religious life, especially in the context of the growing Christian Nationalist movement. Moreover, it imbued the politicised messages ascribed to the monument with sacred and moral superiority through its association with Christianity, death, and martyrdom.

The monument not only made a statement about the Afrikaner nation but – even more so – would be assigned meanings that would come to make statements about women in Afrikaner society as the nationalist movement grew. Referring to Elsie Cloete’s study of the commemorative publications on the National Women’s Monument, Marschall outlines two central conclusions that emerged from this analysis. Firstly, before the successful completion of the nationalist movement’s rise to power, “the rhetoric used was designed to confine the Afrikaner women even more tightly into the mythology of Afrikanerdom as submissive, docile emissaries of the *volks*-ideal.”<sup>18</sup> Secondly, once political and economic power had been achieved, “women were quietly discarded as progenitors and nurturers of the *volk* but remained subject to a patriarchy that had simply modernised itself.”<sup>19</sup> The monument,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.1014.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.1012.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.1012.

signifying men's experiences even more so than the experiences of women,<sup>20</sup> has, as Marschall significantly states, "served as an opportunity for Afrikaner men to make statements about women, thereby defining and confining their role in Afrikaner society."<sup>21</sup> With the growing impetus of the Afrikaner nationalist movement, the deaths of the women in the camps was a 'noble cause' quickly appropriated and exploited to further the nationalist cause. The affront to Afrikaner women was an affront to the Afrikaner nation as a whole and the 'protection' of women meant the survival of the nation which would be further encouraged by the control of women's behaviour through the *volksmoeder* ideology. According to Liese van der Watt, the central sculpture of the monument is in fact one of the earliest visual representations of this ideology that associates women with the domestic sphere and situates women first and foremost as mothers in the realm of the home extends this metaphor to women as mothers of the Afrikaner nation and all the 'responsibilities' that come with such a title.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, the portrayal of women as passive victims in the monument stands in stark contrast to the active roles Afrikaner women took up in various historical struggles and battles and even within the camps during the war.<sup>23</sup> The emotional nature of the events in the concentration camps lent itself to exploitation by nationalist proponents and the statue itself encourages visitors to share in the mourning, sorrow, and the anger of a nation that was wronged through what was perceived as a cowardly victimisation of its women and children – those considered to be the most vulnerable and defenceless members of a nation. However, the resilience of the Afrikaner woman depicted in the monument implies martyrdom and heroism but the lack of identification of a single, or several heroines ensures that Afrikaner women are represented as types, not individuals. For Marschall, this means that the experience of women is universalised "to include not only Afrikaner women, but the entire Afrikaner *volk*."<sup>24</sup> This apt observation applies even more strongly as the *volksmoeder* ideology came to the forefront of nationalist doctrine in the 1930s where issues of racial purity were essentialised and women became the boundary markers of the racial purity of the nation. However, Marschall does show that during the emergent phase of the *volksmoeder*

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<sup>20</sup> No women served on the monument committee while later additions to the monument tended to focus on male achievements in Afrikaner ethnic history. Moreover, initially it was only men who were buried at the foot of the obelisk. *Ibid.*, p.1013.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1012-1013.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1014.

<sup>23</sup> Grundlingh, "The National Women's Monument", in Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, *Writing a Wider War*, p.19.

<sup>24</sup> Marschall, "Serving Male Agendas", *Women's Studies*, 33, 2004, p.1015.

ideal, “the emphasis was on patience and resilience in the face of suffering, which became institutionalised through the construction of the National Women’s Monument.”<sup>25</sup> The values and emotions visually represented in the monument were indicative of a time where Afrikaners, despite the positive sentiments of Union, still felt the bitter defeat of the war and no coherent nationalist movement had taken root to direct these emotions into a comprehensive ideological framework of intra-ethnic support and cooperation. For Marschall, the visual and textual signifiers of the monument serve to confine women “in a tightly defined role of suffering and victimisation”<sup>26</sup> and referring back to Cloete’s work, the textual references to the monument presents the reader with “role models of women who are patient, suffering, afflicted, frail, defenceless, tender, delicate, refined, and civilised.”<sup>27</sup> Grundlingh, analysing these brochures and other materials describing the symbolism of the statue published at the height of the nationalist movement, states that these documents increasingly

depicted the role of women as singularly in service of male nationalism. It was often no longer a case of honouring women *per se*, but one of yoking them to another project in which they were represented as silent victims who sacrificed their lives on the altar of freedom and love of the fatherland.<sup>28</sup>

Once the nationalist project had been successfully achieved, the Women’s Monument would pale in its importance compared to the more celebratory and blatantly nationalist *Voortrekker* Monument. From the 1960s onwards the cultural terrain of the monument became a site that commemorated the war in more general terms. The ‘absent male’ statue space was filled up with statues calling into remembrance men going on commandos, prisoners of war, and the bitterenders.<sup>29</sup> Such additions shifted the focal point of the monument from remembering women (albeit be it in their many symbolic representations) to remembering the Anglo-Boer War. Women had served their purpose in achieving a nationalist victory for Afrikanerdom and their place in Afrikaner political mythology would be eclipsed by historical male heroes and martyrs.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.1016.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.1016.

<sup>27</sup> E. Cloete quoted in Sabine Marschall, “Serving Male Agendas: Two National Women’s Monuments in South Africa”, *Women’s Studies*, 33, 2004, p.1015.

<sup>28</sup> Grundlingh, “The National Women’s Monument”, in Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, *Writing a Wider War*, p.32.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.33.

## *Volksmoeders*

The *volksmoeder* ideology defies a concrete definition. At its most simplistic it positions (certain) women as mothers of the nation. Applied to the mythical homogenous category of ‘Afrikaner women’ it represented the Afrikaner woman-mother as the cornerstone of her household and as a central unifying force for her people through her display of heroics, patriotism, and perseverance in adversity. The *volksmoeder* ideology was popularised in early Afrikaans literature written by men<sup>30</sup> at a time of rising Afrikaner urbanisation. In its most conservative form, this ideology could be interpreted as men controlling women by “giving them a well-defined but circumscribed position within society, to which some status, honour and respectability are attached.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, the attributes that define this ideology vary greatly. Early academic orthodoxy held that the *volksmoeder* ideology was forced on and accepted by hapless and submissive Afrikaner women by Afrikaner men. Subsequent studies have shown that women of different classes interacted with and shaped the contours of this ideology. This is not to deny that this ideology of motherhood formed part of a greater male-dominated nationalist movement (it clearly does), or even to reject the notion that women embraced this protean ideology in order to be considered ‘respectable’ within a patriarchal society. It simply indicates that women were not the hapless victims of an enforced gendered ideology and shows that women embraced and helped to shape this ideology which allowed them greater independence and a ‘respectable’ place in public life.

Gaitskell and Unterhalter have identified three historical phases in the way Afrikaner nationalism has employed discourses of motherhood.<sup>32</sup> The first phase, the years directly after the Anglo-Boer War, correlates with the unveiling of the Women’s Monument and saw women as silent victims while their strength during times of great suffering was represented as symbolic of sustaining the ‘nation’ in its time of defeat. The second phase, roughly representing the years between the two world wars and the height of the nationalist push for

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<sup>30</sup> Notably the work of Willem Postma (brother-in-law of famous Afrikaans poet Totius, journalist and advocate of Afrikaner nationalism) *Die Boervrouw, Moeder van Haar Volk* (The Boer Woman, the Mother of her Nation), published in 1918 at the request of two Afrikaner organisations, and historian, Eric Stockenstrom’s, *Die Vrou in die Geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse Volk* (The Woman in the History of the Dutch-Afrikaans Nation), published in 1921, were popular texts that defined the *volksmoeder* ideology in the twentieth century.

<sup>31</sup> Elsabe Brink, “Man-made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the *Volksmoeder*” in Cherryl Walker (ed), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (David Philip and James Currey: Cape Town and London, 1990), p.273.

<sup>32</sup> Gaitskell, D. and E. Unterhalter. “Mothers of the Nation: A Comparative Analysis of the Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress”, in Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman-Nation-State*, (Macmillan Press: Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London, 1989), pp. 58-78.

unity amongst Afrikaners, would be characterised by the *volksmoeder* ideology which saw motherhood as far more political, active, and mobilising. The home was an ideological sphere for raising children with a strong Afrikaner identity. Yet motherhood was also public, extending to the Afrikaner nation, and women were encouraged to move outside the home and uplift the nation as a whole. During the third phase, when the nationalist project was successful and Afrikaner political power was ensured, discourses of motherhood were dedicated to ensuring the ‘purity’ of the white Afrikaner nation to assist in the survival of white domination in South Africa.

This section will briefly outline the history of the *volksmoeder* ideology and show how both working class and middle class Afrikaner women related to this ideology within the context of the broader nationalist movement. It will argue that, although the twentieth century image of the *volksmoeder* did emanate from a patriarchal society fearing changing gender dynamics as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation, different women took this historic, religious, and ultimately nationalist construction of motherhood and shaped it to work for them in many different ways. Working class women used this ideology to allay male (and female) fears of miscegenation as the nationalist movement sought to ensure the racial purity of the *volk*. These women applied the foundational mythology of female hardship and endurance to their situation as women and mothers working outside the home so asserting their ‘respectability’ and membership of the Afrikaner nation. Middle class women used it to maintain their foothold in the public sphere without losing respectability in a patriarchal society that preferred to keep their women quiet and in the home. Although middle class women operated in a more narrowly-defined version of the *volksmoeder* ideology they would push the boundaries for ‘respectable’ female public activity and political participation. For women of both classes things ‘domestic’ and ‘womanly’ would become both public and politicised through their interaction with this increasingly nationalist ideology of the *volksmoeder*.

The *volksmoeder* was an icon shaped by Afrikaans literature and inspired by the Afrikaners’ history which enmeshed it in a foundational mythology of resistance, perseverance, and hardship. This literature, written by men, was prominently published after the unveiling of the Women’s Monument and sought to give the newly urbanised Afrikaner girls and women an appropriate role model in the *volksmoeder* ideal.<sup>33</sup> The Afrikaner women

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<sup>33</sup> Brink, “Man-made Women”, in Walker (ed), *Women and Gender*, p.280.

of the Great Trek, (the *Voortrekker* women), were upheld as the embodiment of all the essential *volksmoeder* ideals. These women were represented as tough, self-sufficient, serving as doctors, nurses, teachers, and soldiers during the Great Trek, but they were also religious, freedom-loving, honourable, selfless, and incorruptible.<sup>34</sup> While the ‘orthodox’ version of the *volksmoeder* ideology represented the Afrikaner woman’s highest calling and greatest fulfilment as being found in her own home, physically and morally reproducing the ‘nation’, this ideology would be neither timeless nor unchangeable. As the Afrikaner nationalist movement became increasingly concerned with white poverty, the focus shifted from the private home to the role women could play in the moral and physical upliftment of the nation’s poor. Vincent shows that “initially, it was expected that Afrikaner women would exercise the public dimension of their role as *volksmoeders* solely by way of charity organisations such as the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV).”<sup>35</sup> Although the ACVV never challenged male authority and initially set itself against the female suffrage<sup>36</sup> it did claim a legitimate place for women in the public sphere and challenged conservative notions about women’s roles.<sup>37</sup>

While the end of the Anglo-Boer War saw an increase in Afrikaner urbanisation, the rapidity of urbanisation increased as a result of escalating impoverishment of the rural white population in the years after World War I.<sup>38</sup> As many Afrikaners moved to the cities, the burden to seek work and provide for families quickly fell onto the women. The farming and rural skills of the men meant they were ill-equipped for urban employment. Women’s ‘traditional’ skills allowed them to find work as teachers, nurses, clerks, typists, and as religious workers. However, one of the key areas in which recently urbanised Afrikaner women found employment was in the burgeoning manufacturing industry and the clothing industry in particular.<sup>39</sup> Vincent points out that it was only at the level of mythical nationalist precepts that the category of ‘Afrikaner women’ was homogenous.<sup>40</sup> In the context of high infant and maternal mortality rates many Afrikaner women began to question the notion of motherhood itself. Furthermore, for poor women large families were unsustainable while

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<sup>34</sup> Louise Vincent, “Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930s”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1, 2000, p.64.

<sup>35</sup> Vincent, “Bread and Honour”, *JSAS*, 26, 1, 2000, p.65.

<sup>36</sup> It is important to note that the extension of the right to vote to white women in 1930 was less the result of shifting perceptions of women in society than the need to protect white hegemony.

<sup>37</sup> Marijke du Toit, “The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: *Volksmoeders* and the ACVV, 1904-1929”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Vincent, “Bread and Honour”, *JSAS*, 26, 1, 2000, p.62.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

marriage was seen as a sacrifice of independence for young working women. The idealised image of the *volksmoeder* as a hard-working but refined housewife and charity worker was far removed from the reality of many working class Afrikaner women.<sup>41</sup> Although many working women mostly supported the prevailing view that a woman's place was in the home raising her family their situations did not allow for this. As one garment worker commented somewhat sardonically: "Does it serve any purpose if we women work amongst the pots and pans and these are empty? Must we fold hands and wait until food falls into the pots automatically?"<sup>42</sup> An investigation into the conditions in several industries found that the living circumstances of female employees was "saddening in the extreme"<sup>43</sup> with many young Afrikaner girls living in squalid conditions. Rather than evoking sympathy amongst the middle class, the female factory workers were initially regarded as morally suspect. Vincent argues that "[r]ecently urbanised young women living in slum conditions in the backyards of Johannesburg's suburbs and removed from familial ties were seen as a threat to the ideological and racial 'purity' of the *volk*."<sup>44</sup> As issues of racial purity and racial exclusivity became powerful tools for the nationalist project, leading women from the Garment Workers' Union (GWU) would publically challenge the notion of poor women as threats to racial purity through reinterpreting the *volksmoeder* ideology to appeal to working class women while also allaying nationalist fears of miscegenation.

The GWU emerged as a powerful voice in the South African labour movement in the 1930s. Its membership consisted mainly of Afrikaner women and by the late 1930s most of the major office bearers within the union were Afrikaner women. Through magazines published in both English and Afrikaans (one in particular *Die Huisvrou* (The Housewife) addressed a female audience and allowed them to express their views) the GWU promised to forward the fight of garment workers for decent wages and improved standards of living. Through material and ideological support, the GWU sought to develop a strong sense of working class identity amongst its members. However, as Vincent indicates, "the union was not the only ideological contender for the hearts and minds of urban working class Afrikaner women."<sup>45</sup> The 1930s witnessed the contestation of the support of working class Afrikaner women and the "terrain upon which this battle was fought was Afrikaner nationalism's

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>42</sup> Anna Jacobs, *Garment Worker*, February 1940, quoted in Brink, "Man-made women" in Walker (ed), *Women and Gender*, p.289.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent, "Bread and Honour", *JSAS*, 26, 1, 2000, p.65.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.64.

gender ideology encapsulated in the notion of the *volksmoeder*.<sup>46</sup> With the image of the *volksmoeder* entangled in the romanticised scenic rural foundational mythology of the Afrikaners, working women had very little in common with this sentimentalised notion of ideal womanhood. Instead, they identified the hardships suffered by the *Voortrekker* women – the bread and butter issues – as the traditions of their people that they were bearing as urbanised, working women. Many of these women embraced their ethnic identity as Afrikaners and argued that their fight for a better life was, in fact, “the very best tradition of Afrikanerdom.”<sup>47</sup> As the nationalist movement attempted to appeal to working class women and competed with their class identity, the *volksmoeder* ideology was reinterpreted by working class women and appealed to them as new arrivals to an urban centre where their ethnicity and religion formed the foundation for their identity. As Vincent argues, nationalist ideology had very little to offer these women,

Yet, the idealised depiction of Afrikaner womanhood symbolised by the *volksmoeder* icon was in many senses a very attractive one, particularly to women whose social standing was somewhat shaky. Women had been given a central place in the most significant historical memories of the Afrikaner nationalism. Unsurprisingly, working class Afrikaner women did not readily surrender the image of themselves as resourceful, proud and morally unimpeachable. Leading Afrikaner women at the GWU were at pains to show how the positive characteristics associated with the traditional *volksmoeder* image were just as applicable to their new lives as factory workers.

Thus, ethnic identity was never eschewed by working women in favour of class identity. Moreover, their insistence on their dignified and respectable place within Afrikanerdom unwittingly made them propagandist for cross-class ethnic unity which lay at the heart of the success of the nationalist movement. While the unions mostly ignored the importance of ethnic identity to its members the attack of nationalists on the ‘purity’ of working class women meant that racial exclusivity became important to these women in order to be considered as ‘respectable’ members of their *volk*. Questions of racial purity interacted very directly with the *volksmoeder* ideology. It was essential to the nationalist project that working class women voted as Afrikaners rather than as socialist workers once white women gained the franchise in 1930. The dismal failure of labour and socialist parties in the elections showed that ethnic identity remained of great importance to recently urbanised Afrikaners

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.67.

who had no socialist traditions. It was also important that women raised their children with a nationalist rather than working class consciousness. It was through the *volksmoeder* ideology that these notions were popularised amongst working class Afrikaner women and led many of them to support a nationalist agenda rather than a socialist one.

As racism and racial purity became one of the most powerful anti-union tools of the nationalist movement, support for racial exclusivity became important for working Afrikaner women. It was the responsibility of the white Afrikaner woman to keep her race 'pure'. Afrikaner poverty was seen as a threat to this purity as young working girls would be away from the control of their families, working side by side with black factory workers and living in squalid conditions in 'racially mixed' areas. This made working women vulnerable to accusations of degeneracy and delinquency. Their response was to turn to the appeal of the "ideological armoury of the *volksmoeder* to establish their credentials as members of the white Afrikaner *volk*"<sup>48</sup> and they employed their supposed racial heritage to their advantage. There was initial resistance from middle-class Afrikaners to consider poor Afrikaners as anything more than a 'fallen' section of their *volk*. But the numerical advantage of poor Afrikaners and the 1938 Great Trek centenary celebrations<sup>49</sup> would contribute to the promotion of an Afrikaner nationalism that was inclusive and unified and working women were encouraged to take part in the celebrations not as a class, but as Afrikaners. Working women had taken it upon themselves to reinterpret their experience of poverty and hardship using an established gendered ideology that was part of Afrikaner nationalist iconography to gain respect and respectability. They would enthusiastically lay claim to a cultural heritage espoused by Afrikaner nationalists. In doing so they challenged ideas of the impropriety of women engaging in paid labour and promoted unity amongst Afrikaners at a time that the nationalist movement actively sought to gain political power.

For middle class Afrikaner women the nationalist movement's preoccupation with white poverty became a point of entry into the public sphere. As *volksmoeders*, women could enter public life through (often) church-aligned charity work helping to improve the lives of the poor. The ACVV,<sup>50</sup> a national organisation dedicated to philanthropic work with close

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.74.

<sup>49</sup> Around the time of the celebrations a wealth of articles appeared in popular magazines about the role of women in the history of the Afrikaner *volk* in their relation to men as mothers and daughters. Many of these articles drew on the popular image of the *volksmoeder* popularised in the works of Postma and Stockenström.

<sup>50</sup> Initially called the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Vrouwe Vereniging* (South African Women's Society), by 1907 the word Christian had entered the title followed by the replacement of 'South African' with 'Afrikaans', indicating a clear delineation of an ethnic-specific definition of *volk*.

ties to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), became a platform for many middle class women to engage in charitable work outside of the domestic sphere. Established in 1904, the formation of the ACVV was largely driven by increasing incidence of white poverty. Women's philanthropic work became an important part of shaping Afrikaner identity and nationalism as they initially acted outside the explicitly political realm and entered and affected the private lives of a constituency that would be vital to the victory of the nationalist movement.<sup>51</sup> Sidestepping politics that were seen as fracturing Afrikaners, the ACVV would come to focus on the very definition of 'Afrikaner'.

Marijke du Toit's work on the ACVV shows that Afrikaner women initially drew on a maternalist discourse shaped in the late nineteenth century through DRC magazines which enmeshed religious and nationalist discourse. The early ACVV women attempted to ensure the independence of their organisation and maintain their foothold in the public sphere whilst also signalling their support for the dominant gender order.<sup>52</sup> In the 1920s, the second generation of ACVV nationalist women created a politicised dominion of 'women's issues' through taking up leadership positions in cultural, philanthropic, and party-political organisations. These women embraced motherhood, yet, also sought to influence and play a central role in formulating social policy.<sup>53</sup> By focusing charity work on a specific definition of Afrikaner in terms of race, religion, and language, the racialised Christian charity in which these women engaged began to be fused with an Afrikaner nationalist mission.<sup>54</sup> With ACVV leaders stressing the crucial role played by mothers and daughters in the survival of the *volk*, their identification with a pre-nationalist religious gendered discourse was increasingly moulded into "explicitly Afrikaner nationalist form."<sup>55</sup> Du Toit indicates that in the years following the founding of the ACVV the entanglement of religious and nationalist identity amongst Afrikaner women was apparent: "Working for *kerk, volk en taal* (church, people and language) – this was the ACVV motto – involved a crucial reshaping of the older discourse of maternal duty."<sup>56</sup> While women's duty to their church was initially emphasised, in later years their duty towards their *volk* was added to women's social responsibilities. The older religious discourse of motherhood and the new nationalist interpretation shared one central trait according to du Toit:

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<sup>51</sup> du Toit, "The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism", *JSAS*, 29, 1, 2003, p.156.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163.

the promotion of an idealised version of motherhood and an articulation of maternal duty that focused on the privacy of the home. Perhaps this emphasis and the familiar sight of women practising charitable work explain why Afrikaans female philanthropic societies such as the ACVV attracted few negative comments from those unused to women speaking or acting in public.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, in the early years after its formation, the ACVV members would refrain from speaking at public events, instead allowing church ministers from the DRC to speak on their behalf and the organisation quickly positioned itself against the ‘unbiblical’ suffragettes and feared that these women threatened domestic life.<sup>58</sup> The praise the ACVV received for its ‘proper’ behaviour suggests, for du Toit, an uneasy acceptance of women’s public activities, especially in the context of the female suffrage movement and its indication of women’s understanding of their changing role in society. As the ACVV’s projects became more extensive and its members became more active in the public sphere the “novelty of female speakers [became] subsumed in a discourse emphasising their maternal attributes and familial responsibility.”<sup>59</sup> As the poor women of the *volk* needed upliftment, these women of the ACVV would step outside the home in order to ‘rescue’ their people. While emphasising their femininity, the ACVV women would also stress that theirs was a committed and assertive womanhood that would rise to defend the interests of their language, church, and nation without transgressing the ‘traditional’ boundaries of their culture.<sup>60</sup>

The 1920s marked a distinct shift in the leadership of the ACVV and saw the organisation take a new interest in party-politics and equating politics with matters of national interest. Prominent leaders such as M.E. Rothmann were aware that political issues pertaining to welfare and the economy were matters of women’s interest. The ACVV established house-keeping schools to instruct poor young Afrikaner girls in domesticity and household duties and aid them in gaining respectable employment as domestic workers in middle class Afrikaner households. However, there was some reluctance to place these young girls in urban positions because of the perceived dangers of urban life. Concern was also given to uncaring employers forcing young girls into the ‘station of coloureds’ through equal pay and treatment.<sup>61</sup> The ACVV ran hostels for ‘factory girls’ which were closely supervised as part of their mission to ensure the cultural upliftment of these young women. Within the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.165.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.172.

hostels recreational activities included reading groups, dancing lessons, drama, and compulsory church attendance.<sup>62</sup> For the ACVV the lot of white working Afrikaner women was an important question to address and they feared that poor urban Afrikaners were “forgetting that they belonged to an exclusively white and culturally distinct *volk*.”<sup>63</sup> This was perceived as a threat to the racial purity of the nation and it was important to protect those “uncertain edges of whiteness.”<sup>64</sup> This emphasis on ‘whiteness’ aided the nationalist movement in entrenching racial identity. The ACVV called on middle class Afrikaner women in their positions as wives and mothers to help the young working women of the *volk* to maintain their respectability in an urban setting.

Identifying the need for women to become active participants in defining social policies that related to the maintenance of Afrikaner identity and pride, ACVV leaders such as Rothmann became public supporters of the female suffrage movement. Referring to Rothmann and other leading ACVV members, du Toit shows that,

She and her colleagues were vocal in the face of what they saw as an urgent task for Afrikaner nationalism – rescuing the ‘Afrikaner’ poor from forgetfulness of their identity – and made no apologies for their public action. But what they offered were the variations of assertive women on the *volksmoeder* theme... As men’s partners, their primary role was related to the family – a *volksaak* (national issue) often undervalued and unrecognised.<sup>65</sup>

Rothmann, together with other prominent female Afrikaner nationalists, “constructed a maternalist discourse that drew on mainstream notions of women’s primary role as mother and did not fundamentally challenge the idea of separate spheres.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, through a reinterpretation of the *volksmoeder* ideology to include a heroic and mythic past of active female participation in defence of the *volk* that did not challenge the fundamental gender discourse, middle class Afrikaner women could claim responsibility for social spaces that existed outside of the domestic sphere and claim some power for women in those redefined spaces. While praising the virtues of domesticity and femininity, the women of the ACVV legitimised women’s relationship to politics and the community in the public sphere and so carved out an acceptable and respectable space in which they could extend their public participation.

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<sup>62</sup> Vincent, “Bread and Honour”, *JSAS*, 26, 1, 2000, p.72.

<sup>63</sup> du Toit, “The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism”, *JSAS*, 29, 1, 2003, p.173.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.173.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174-175.

Far from being ‘man-made women’, as Elsabe Brink’s argues,<sup>67</sup> it is clear that Afrikaner women “participated in the construction and articulation of a gendered Afrikaner nationalism.”<sup>68</sup> The image of the *volksmoeder* as an ideal version of womanhood found wide appeal amongst both middle class and working class Afrikaner women. Their engagement with a discourse of motherhood – initially articulated by men – coincided neatly with the male-dominated cultural and nationalist movement and ensured the identification of a narrowly confined Afrikaner identity that intersected with Christian-Nationalist discourse and racial privilege. What is clear is that rather than having this ideology thrust upon them by men, women shaped this ideology in order to extend their influence, both social and political, within a patriarchal society that feared changing gender relations. Drawing on the image of the formidable *Voortrekker* woman, both working class and middle class women were able to invoke the heroic mythology of the ‘Afrikaner’ past and employ the exemplary characteristics of these idealised heroines to validate their present circumstances and positioning while simultaneously supporting a nationalist project that sought to entrench white Afrikaner hegemony.

### **African Nationalism and the ‘Mother of the Nation’**

Having gained control of the state through constitutional means, Afrikaner nationalists sought to prevent African nationalists from doing likewise. African nationalism in South Africa was a process of evolving means to gain rights for (initially) black Africans. This nationalism emerged in a state dominated by a white minority that sought to entrench its control of all the mechanisms of the state and the economy by denying access to these mechanisms to the black majority. The centrality of the ‘mother of the nation’ and the ideologies of motherhood within African nationalism will be discussed in order to indicate the continuity of these ideologies in the current South African political climate as the ANC is seeking to stamp its mark, and indeed, its dominance, upon the new foundational mythology of the nation.

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<sup>67</sup> Brink, “Man-made Women” in Walker (ed), *Women and Gender*, (1990).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

### *Mothers of the Nation, Politicised Motherhood, and the Struggle for Equality*<sup>69</sup>

Women's resistance to white hegemony has been a vital component of the success of the liberation movement. Through their mobilisation in the struggle against apartheid, women have sought to articulate their own political interests and their interests derived from the particular experience of gender oppression.<sup>70</sup> Yet, it is important to note that acting politically as women does "not necessarily imply that the gender identities that are invoked are progressive, in the sense of seeking to eliminate the hierarchies of power."<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, women's activism in South Africa was born in the crucible of political resistance against apartheid. The autonomy of women's organisations was often diminished through their alliances to the internal resistance movement which sought to mobilise women as anti-apartheid activists and not necessarily as women with a political platform of women's issues. Whether in supportive roles or as active participants in the nationalist struggle, women's contributions are always cast in a different hue and explained, remembered, and commemorated with the language of family and of the home. As in Afrikaner nationalism, the role of the black woman firstly as mother, has been highlighted in the struggle against apartheid. But, necessarily, the contribution that black women made to the trajectory of African nationalism took a significantly different course than that of white Afrikaner women. The 'mother of the nation' discourse and notions of motherhood in African nationalism differ in content to the *volksmoeder* ideology and its political efficacy changed over time as the context of the liberation struggle changed. Women's participation in the struggle was not only a fight against white political, economic, and social domination, but, for some women, also a struggle against the male-dominated patriarchal structures that dominated the liberation movement for most of its active years.

While the ANC had, from its inception, put forward an ideology of national unity across racial lines, its make-up was, in fact, exclusively male, hierarchical, and influenced by an upper house of chiefs which protected patriarchal authority. Women had shown their political readiness early on with the march on Bloemfontein in 1913 to protest the extension of the pass-laws to women and faced arrests, imprisonment, and hard labour. Yet, women

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<sup>69</sup> Women as activists, soldiers, trade unionists, and politicians have participated in, initiated, and organised many protest actions throughout the struggle for liberation ensuring its eventual success and securing the inclusion of gender equality in the new constitution. However, it would be impossible to address them adequately here. Several significant events will be addressed in later chapters and to avoid overlap will not be discussed in great detail here

<sup>70</sup> Hassim, *Women's Democratic Organisations*, p.3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

were denied political representation, could only join the ANC as ‘auxiliary members’ in a supportive role to men, and did not have the right to vote. But women’s militancy could not be suppressed and the Bantu Women’s League (BWL), affiliated to the ANC, was formed in 1918 by Charlotte Maxeke, and was influenced by a small Christian educated elite. The BWL, much like the ACVV, was dominated by “welfarist models for women’s public activities and restricted its activities to a narrow range associated with the ‘upliftment and education’ of girls” which had little relation to the struggles against economic and social exploitation faced by women every day.<sup>72</sup> However, its formation was followed by another pass protest led by women. Thus, as McClintock indicates: “women’s first tentative steps into African nationalism stemmed less from the invitation of men than from their own politicisation in resisting the violence of state decree.”<sup>73</sup> However, these politicised women remained confined within the boundaries of the domestic. McClintock continues:

At this time, however, women’s potential militancy was muted, and their political agency domesticated by the language of female service and subordination. Women’s volunteer work was approved insofar as it served the interests of the (male) ‘nation’, and women’s political identity was figured as merely supportive and auxiliary. As President Seme said: “No national movement can be strong unless the women volunteers come forward and offer their service to the nation.”<sup>74</sup>

However, these ‘services’ were initially confined to provide the catering and organise entertainment at meetings and conferences.<sup>75</sup> It was not until the ANC adopted a new constitution in 1943, and at the women’s insistence, that women could gain full membership and voting rights within the organisation. However, women’s roles within the movement remained subordinate, “confined to building a nation for their husbands and children.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1948 the BWL was renamed the ANC Women’s League (ANCWL). Women’s accelerated urbanisation as part of an increased need for secondary labour resulted in women’s growing involvement in township resistance. The formation of the ANCWL provided a strategy by which to channel women’s militancy into the national liberation

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>73</sup> McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven”, p.115.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.115.

<sup>75</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (Onyx Press: London, 1982), p.33.

<sup>76</sup> McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven”, p.115.

movement.<sup>77</sup> The task of women activists, then, was to mobilise women within the broader struggle for liberation. Hassim argues that,

...women won their new status in part as a consequence of the ANC's efforts to build up a mass membership, with women regarded as potential recruits, and in part in recognition of the need to 'upgrade the status of women', part of the new modernising language of an emerging nationalism in the ANC.<sup>78</sup>

However, the ANCWL retained its auxiliary status and constituted a substructure of the ANC. Women were mobilised as *women* less out of a concern of gender equality, however, and rather in the interest of mass mobilisation. Despite this, the formation of the ANCWL was highly significant and offered women the opportunity to expand the notion of equality – previously embedded in masculinist Africanism<sup>79</sup> – to include gender as well as race. Walker states:

A body aiming to represent the interests of the majority of South African women had been set up within the premier African political organisation – the ANC had finally come to incorporate women, one half of the people it claimed to represent, into its political frame of reference. A structure was created whereby African women could be channelled into the national liberation movement on a footing that was, at least theoretically, equal to that of men.<sup>80</sup>

In the 1950s the ANCWL would thrive as part of the Defiance Campaign, the Congress Alliance and the formation of the multi-party Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). The Women's Charter was formed at the founding of FEDSAW in 1954. This Charter called on all South African women as wives, mothers, working women, and housewives, regardless of race to stand together for the removal of laws that discriminated against women and refused them equal opportunities.<sup>81</sup> It called for the right to vote, the abolition of child labour, land redistribution, worker benefits and union rights, universal education, and housing and food subsidies.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, it called on men to extend to women complete equality in law and in practice if they hoped to completely free themselves of the evils of discrimination and inequality. This placed the struggle against women's

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<sup>77</sup> Hassim, *Women's Democratic Organisations*, p.22.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>80</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.90.

<sup>81</sup> The Women's Charter, which preceded the Freedom Charter, inspired much of its substance. *Ibid.*, p.115

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

oppression not only parallel to the struggle against apartheid, but was also a challenge to deeply entrenched gender hierarchies.<sup>83</sup> In 1955 Oliver Tambo placed women's emancipation at the forefront of the liberation struggle, declaring that a strong movement could not be built without the full participation of the women. He also urged men to aid women in domestic chores so that women could be freed from their household duties and given the opportunity of being politically active.<sup>84</sup> 1956 would prove to be a significant year for women's political activity when a multi-racial alliance between the ANCWL and FEDSAW organised a protest march against passes for women that saw over twenty thousand women march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Women's political efficacy was proven and they would continue to play significant roles in the liberation struggle. But women's emancipation was a topic that would not be thoroughly addressed within the ANC until the late 1980s and until such time, the dominant position on women's emancipation within the ANC was that it was secondary to national liberation.

As in Afrikaner nationalism, women's political agency in African nationalism is embedded in historically contextualised discourses of motherhood. "Mother", states Hassim, "became a central trope in national liberationist discourses on gender."<sup>85</sup> Winnie Mandela was long known, and to a certain extent still is known, as the 'Mother of the Nation'. Albertina Sisulu has been honoured with this title as well, and singer Miriam Makeba was affectionately known as 'Ma Afrika'. The ANC and its allies have placed a great deal of emphasis on the image of the 'mother', especially in phases of mass mobilisation such as the 1950s and then the 1970s and 1980s. As already indicated above, women's opposition to pass laws and repressive legislation aimed at or which included women, was usually voiced in the ideology of motherhood and the political language of 'motherism' as Gaitskell and Unterhalter and McClintock show in statements made by FEDSAW and ANCWL women.<sup>86</sup> Often, the term 'women' was used interchangeably with 'wives' and 'mothers' within anti-apartheid women's organisations.<sup>87</sup> 'Motherhood' spoke to the common experience of women in rural and urban areas, working in formal or informal sectors. Furthermore it also appealed to white women to join the resistance to apartheid based on the shared experience of motherhood which was placed under threat by the violent apartheid state. The outrage against

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<sup>83</sup> Hassim, *Women's Democratic Organisations*, p.25.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>86</sup> McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", and Gaitskell and Unterhalter, "Mothers of the Nation", Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman-Nation-State*.

<sup>87</sup> Gay W. Seidman, "'No Freedom Without the Women': Mobilisation and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992", *Signs*, Winter 1993, p.296.

the extension of passes to women found its focal point in the notion of motherhood arguing that, as mothers, black women deserved better treatment than that given to their male counterparts.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, black women used motherhood to justify their militant political protest action. McClintock explains that “African women have embraced, transmuted, and transformed [motherhood] in a variety of ways, working strategically within traditional ideology to justify untraditional public militancy.”<sup>89</sup> Hassim reinforces this point, and argues that the

immediate household struggles of women that derived from their gender roles as mothers and housewives shifted the conception of political onto terrain in which women had a direct and demonstrable interest and in which their political action was legitimated and applauded by the dominant political movements...<sup>90</sup>

However, Hassim continues,

On the one hand, women activists were able to leverage greater power for women with the nationalist framework through the privileging of motherhood as the central political identity for women – that is, by mobilising women in ways that were consistent with the gendered role definition on which nationalism is predicated. On the other hand, the emphasis on nationalism marginalised alternative discourses, in particular that of feminism.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, initially, women’s activism was accepted by the male dominated resistance movement if it arrived out of a concern for the domestic sphere and women acted on a political platform as mothers and housewives. Such a strategy attempts to overcome the divide between the public and private spheres as it affects the lives of women. However, this emphasis on the ‘universal’ shared experience of motherhood, glossed over the varied experiences of

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<sup>88</sup> Gaitskell and Unterhalter, “Mothers of Nation”, in Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman-Nation-State*, p.69.

<sup>89</sup> McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven”, p.116.

<sup>90</sup> Hassim, *Women’s Democratic Organisations*, p.15.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p.18. Feminism was vilified within the national liberation movement from the 1970s onwards, and reduced to a homogeneous ideology (which it certainly was not) primarily associated with (white) academic Western women that had no application to the experiences of black women in apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, feminism was seen as divisive to the nationalist movement as it was perceived as demanding greater autonomy for women’s movements while its ideologies were perceived as antithetical to the male-dominated leadership inside the country and in exile. The accusation of subscribing to ‘Western’ ideologies or influence within the nationalist context was enough to delegitimise a social movement and the ANC developed an uneasy relationship with feminism which was seen as addressing women’s reproductive issues which were secondary to community-based struggles in the national liberation struggle. Sheila Meintjes (quoted in Hassim, *Women’s Democratic Organisations*, p.77) articulates that “...feminism is what we *did*, but not what we *spoke*.” However, Gertrude Fester has proposed that ‘motherism’ could be considered as a form of South African feminism. Gertrude Fester, “Women’s Organisations in the Western Cape: Vehicles for Gender Struggle or Instruments of Subordination?”, *Agenda*, 34, 1997, pp.45-61.

motherhood that emerged from different racial and class positions. Furthermore, ‘motherist’ politics within a nationalist context could render discussions of reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, and sexual choice as apolitical “because addressing these issues required reconsidering the traditional identities of women and thus posed a serious challenge to the private sphere that could not be easily accommodated...”<sup>92</sup> Political discourses of motherhood may have empowered women, but this “empowerment still takes place within the overriding confines of patriarchal authority and is thus of limited value as a basis for challenging gender oppression.”<sup>93</sup> Wells has been critical of motherism as a limited force for political change and states:

Motherism is clearly not feminism. Women swept up in motherist movements are not fighting for their own fights as women, but for their rights as mothers. . . . Motherist movements must be recognised as limited in scope, duration and success in achieving their goals.<sup>94</sup>

The exploitation of motherism by women had, however, strategic benefits in drawing white women into the struggle against apartheid so “denting the supposed unity of white support for apartheid.”<sup>95</sup> Gender identity, articulated in ‘motherism’ had the ability unite women across racial and class differences, and in the context of the apartheid state’s attempts to regulate relationships between different races, such unity was considered to be politically progressive. Importantly, Hassim argues, the Women’s League and the Federation,

drew on a deep sense of ‘female consciousness’, which develop[ed] from the ‘cultural experiences of helping families and communities survive.’ Female consciousness impels women to political action and, while ‘emphasising roles they accept as wives and mothers, [they] also demand the freedom to act as they think their obligations entail.’<sup>96</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, women mobilised around a wide range of issues – working women’s struggles, attempts by local state institutions to regulate women’s economic activities, and the control of women’s mobility through the extension of pass laws, and rural poverty. All these were issues taken up by a variety of organisations ranging from

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>93</sup> This has become evident in the post-apartheid state. Cheryl Walker, “Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 3, 1995, p.422.

<sup>94</sup> Julia Wells, “The Rise and Fall of Motherism as a Force in Black Women’s Resistance Movements”, (Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Natal; Durban 1991).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>96</sup> Temma Kaplan quoted in Ibid., p.28. Kaplan develops the theory of ‘female consciousness’ further in T. Kaplan, “Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona 1910-1918”, *Signs*, 7, 3, 1982, pp.545-566.

the Communist Party of South Africa to trade unions and women's organisations. However, by the 1950s, Hassim argues, all these struggles had been subsumed and homogenised within the larger nationalist narrative of the struggle for liberation.<sup>97</sup>

Gaitskell and Unterhalter have identified the application of the ideology of motherhood as a shared experience and its appeal for a non-racial alliance with white women of the 1950s as the first phase out of three distinct phases of motherhood as a contested ideology within the African nationalist movement of the ANC and its allies. The banning of the ANC in the 1960s<sup>98</sup> changed the political landscape for women's political involvement and it would be in the violence of the 1970s that the ideology of 'motherhood' would be called on again albeit in a different context and with a different purpose.

The violence of the Soweto Uprisings of 1976 and more significantly, the state's use of violence against children re-invoked the totemic image of motherhood. In the aftermath of the uprising and in the 1980s, motherhood would come to represent strength, suffering, and sadness. Black mothers, in mourning and forced to bury their children who died as a result of state violence, became a central icon to the struggle. This period would raise the ideology of motherhood to include the image of militant strength; of women fighting for their 'nation', for their sons and daughters, for their families, and standing tall in the absence of husbands imprisoned by the apartheid state. Women, as mothers of the nation, were lauded as the titans of the struggle as the violence of the state entered their homes and targeted their families and destroyed the public/private dichotomy. McClintock shows that

Paradoxically, the sheer randomness of attacks by the South African Defence Force on homes and children has brought the war irrevocably into the lives of most women, deeply and widely politicising those who might otherwise have remained aloof. Women organise increasingly as the militant protectors of their communities and activist children, and as a consequence the image of the militant mother, the revolutionary and political mother, began to enter official ANC rhetoric.<sup>99</sup>

The apartheid state would also target black women activists as mothers, exploiting their specific vulnerabilities as a means of political terror. McClintock continues,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>98</sup> During most of the 1960s and early 1970s, the ANCWL in exile, known as the Women's Section, operated as a network of solidarity rather than as a mobilising agency. Shireen Hassim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: The ANC in Exile and the Question of Women", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3, 2004.

<sup>99</sup> McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.116.

The burden of parental guilt falls more cruelly on women activists than on men. All too often, women detainees under interrogation are tormented by the police who deride them as failed mothers, reminding them of helpless and unattended children at home, accusing them of ‘loose morals,’ and playing on the wracking social contradictions in the women’s lives between the vocation of parenthood and the vocation of activism.<sup>100</sup>

The accusation of being a bad mother or parent for ending up in detention is an accusation unthinkable to level at men and is a burden laid almost exclusively on women activists. However, it was not only the state that would accuse black women of being bad mothers for ‘abandoning’ their children. Winnie Mandela, long hailed as the ‘Mother of the Nation’ faced significant criticism and lost prestige when vilified in the media for her alleged role in the murder of Stompie Sepei and the kidnapping and torture of four Soweto youths in her home. Despite being revered for her courage in fighting apartheid, her own incarceration, torture, constant harassment, and banning by the state, these events severely undermined her iconic status as the ‘Mother of the Nation’.<sup>101</sup> While women act within the prescribed roles of contemporary gender ideologies they can be honoured as mothers of the nation. But once women step outside of these boundaries, become torturers instead of simply enduring torture, become killers instead of accepting martyrdom, they come under intense scrutiny – perhaps more so than their male counterparts.

In the 1980s, the formulation of ‘triple oppression’ had great currency in activist circles.<sup>102</sup> Black women were seen as the most oppressed because of their threefold oppression as blacks, workers, and women. During this period the ‘rural black woman’, in particular, assumed iconic status to “be invoked as the moral subject of the women’s movement.”<sup>103</sup> Gaitskell and Unterhalter have identified the increase in women’s political activism during this period with a rise in women-headed households. Women’s increasing wage employment, living without the support of male relatives, and their mobilisation in

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.116.

<sup>101</sup> Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, “Controlling Woman: Winnie Mandela and the 1976 Soweto Uprising”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33, 3, 2000, pp.585-614. Elizabeth le Roux also addresses Winnie Mandela’s demonisation in the media and argues that because “of the institutionalised discourse of female subjectivity there is no room for the legitimate expression of aggressive impulses...[P]erhaps one of the reasons why Madikizela-Mandela has been depicted in this way is because she is so well known – at once one of [the ANC’s] most popular and most reviled politicians. She is also a very powerful female figure in her own right, having shrugged off her image as wife of the leader. And, when women are vocal and powerful, their power always has negative connotation and they are seen as ambitious, confrontational, and stubborn.” Elizabeth le Roux, “Unsung Heroines: Media Reflections of the Social Conflict in South Africa”, *African and Asian Studies*, 1, 4, 2002, p.359.

<sup>102</sup> Hassim, *Women’s Democratic Organisations*, p.43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.43.

trade unions, women's organisations, and civic associations all shaped the new perception of motherhood in ANC rhetoric as activist and as a dynamic force for change, rather than something that requires protection.<sup>104</sup> However, as McClintock argues,

exalting women for their maternal power alone has calamitous consequences, erasing and undermining the multifarious other forms of women's work, which come to be figured as temporary departures from women's manifestly maternal destiny, and are hence undervalued and underpaid... Exalting motherhood makes it very hard for women to stay single, to choose not to have children, to come out as lesbian or bisexual. The heterosexual family within the sanction of matrimony acquires the inevitability of destiny, and women are seen not as independent members of the national community, but as wives responsible to the nation through their service to men.<sup>105</sup>

It is here that the prestige of motherhood essentialises heteronormativity and pressures women to remain subjected to the patriarchal structures of the male-headed household which extends to the metaphor of the nation as a family unit – especially once the nationalist movement has achieved its goal. However, women's empowerment and emancipation, at women's insistence, would appear on the agenda before the transition. Women's military participation in organisations such as MK and their political activity in general encouraged these debates within ANC structures. But male resistance to placing such issues at the forefront of the ANC agenda echoed the mantra that 'women's issues' should take a backseat to the more important goal of national liberation as these matters were considered to be 'divisive' and the women were simply being 'difficult'.<sup>106</sup> Again, McClintock delivers insightful commentary:

To ask women to wait until after the revolution serves merely as a strategic tactic to defer women's demands. Not only does it conceal the fact that nationalisms are from the outset constituted in gender power, but, as the lessons on international history portend, women who are not empowered to organise during the struggle will not be empowered to organise after the struggle.<sup>107</sup>

The ANCWL had learned this lesson from other successful liberation movements in Africa that had failed to honour its promises to its women activists and thus attempted to ensure a

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<sup>104</sup> Gaitskell and Unterhalter, "Mothers of the Nation", in Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), *Woman-Nation-State* p.73.

<sup>105</sup> McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.117.

<sup>106</sup> Hassim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy", p.445.

<sup>107</sup> McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.122.

position of equality for women within the ANC and South Africa once the liberation struggle had been won. While women's organisations were numerous in South Africa, their alliances to the broader liberation movements restricted their autonomy and put the mobilisation of women for national liberation at the forefront of their agendas. While issues pertaining to women's private lives and bodily autonomy were discussed within such movements, they were considered to be secondary to national liberation. By suppressing such debates in favour of mobilising women for nationalist purposes, women were subsumed in the patriarchal discourses of nationalism and confined to acting within the confines of nationalist symbolic imagery of domestic femininity. The power of nationalism to symbolically 'domesticate' women has had dire consequences for women's lived experiences in the post-apartheid state. While women are ensured constitutional equality, this equality does not extend to the private and domestic lives of many women and the new nation-building project further subsumes women in nationalist discourse within the democratic state. This issue emerges with the conflation of the woman-citizen of gender equality policy or the de-gendered individual subject of rights, and the mother-citizen of the nation who is called upon for political mobilisation or the nation-building project.<sup>108</sup> As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the nationalist discourse of 'motherhood' continues to emerge in post-apartheid nationalist rhetoric and is lauded at events commemorating historic women's struggles and uprisings.

Shortly before liberation, the ANC had committed itself to gender equality and upheld this commitment into the democratic era. But this commitment was not easily won and had taken several years of relentless pressure from the ANCWL to achieve. Women's active involvement in MK – although excluded from traditional combat roles – changed debates around gender and equality within ANC structures. By 1991, women made up approximately twenty per cent of MK.<sup>109</sup> While the militarisation of the struggle can be considered a setback for women as it favoured male activists, this presented an opportunity for women as the movement began to recognise their contribution to the struggle.<sup>110</sup> It was under Tambo's presidency of the ANC that women gained significant opportunities within the organisation. Tambo selected women to serve as representatives of the movement abroad and this exposed

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<sup>108</sup> Linzi Manicom, "Constituting 'Women' as Citizens: Ambiguities in the Making of Gendered Political Subjects in Post-Apartheid South Africa", in Amanda Gouws (ed), *(Un)Thinking Citizenship: Feminist Debates in Contemporary South Africa*, (Ashgate Publishing: Hants Burlington, 2005), p.29.

<sup>109</sup> Female participation in MK rose sharply after the influx of assertive and politicised young women into exile and ANC camps following the 1976 uprisings.

<sup>110</sup> Hassim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy", p.440.

these women to the rising international tide of feminism. Thus, rather than thinking of a return to domestic ‘normality’ after the struggle had been won, women within the ANC started to think about what liberation would offer them.<sup>111</sup> As a result, women began to develop more effective strategies to integrate gender equality into the core principles of the ANC. Initially, women were met with antagonistic attitudes from male NEC members whenever they raised issues that concerned them. Tambo, however, was more willing to consider their proposals and created a space for women to place their grievances and concerns in the context of the liberation struggle as a whole. It was at the 1985 conference in Kabwe that the NEC formally recognised that “women’s equality would deepen and enhance the quality of democracy itself.”<sup>112</sup> Although women remained drastically under-represented in the NEC,<sup>113</sup> the Interim Constitution of 1993 included the pronouncement of South Africa as a non-racial and non-sexist society. With the threat of women’s (re)marginalisation in the new democracy looming,<sup>114</sup> women’s organisations (all located differently in South African society) understood that it was necessary to participate in women’s-based politics to achieve a shared objective. The formation of the Women’s National Coalition, made up of the ANCWL and a large variety of local and national organisations, in 1992, served the purpose of influencing the negotiations for transition in favour of women’s equality in all spheres of social, economic, and political life. The Coalition drew up the Women’s Charter for Effective Equality outlining, after significant research, the diversity of demands of women across the racial and class divides in South African society. This Charter edged towards considering women as rights-claiming agents within the democratic state rather than as gendered, maternalist anti-apartheid struggle participants. Yet, the Charter, despite being adopted in June 1994, was never truly drawn on for significant political action as the Coalition fell apart after many of its leaders entered parliament after the 1994 elections. The inclusion of ‘women’ as a separate category in addition to ‘race’ in the Interim Constitution was the result of women’s insistence and relentless pursuit of equality after having participated equally with men in the struggle.<sup>115</sup> Manicom argues that the category of ‘women’ of the politics of transition,

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.443.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.447.

<sup>113</sup> Despite having pushed for a quota system for the NEC at the ANC July 1991 Conference, this initiative was outvoted by the majority of delegates and not one member of the NEC came out in favour of this.

<sup>114</sup> In the first rounds of negotiations at CODESA all political parties involved selected all-male teams.

<sup>115</sup> Sheila Meintjes, “The Women’s Struggle for Equality During South Africa’s Transition to Democracy”, *Transition*, 30, 1996, p.47.

was integral to the building of an emergent discourse of socio-economic and legal equality and rights-bearing citizenship... That strong emphasis on 'women' expressed the politics of democracy and non-racialism... against other contending constructions of women-citizens...<sup>116</sup>

The transitional category of 'women' contested the marginalising categories of race and class. "Yet", Manicom contends, "[r]esonating culturally in the signifier 'women' is a widely held construction of women-as-mothers or maternal citizens, claiming their rights by virtue of their moral responsibilities in the family, community, and to the nation."<sup>117</sup> According to Manicom, this has resulted in this maternalist discourse being "powerfully embedded in popular perceptions of the place of women in the South African nation-state and often discernible in public speech of state actors."<sup>118</sup> Within a new post-apartheid nationalism and its attendant rise in sexual violence, the continued emphasis on women as mothers and the reduction of 'woman' to a biological identity has done little to promote or protect the rights of women as equal citizens of the democratic state.

In the years that followed the transition women's rights and equal status have been enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. Women have gained greater representation in parliament, in senior leadership positions within government, head up large and small businesses, and enjoy greater employment opportunities through affirmative action policies. Yet, at ground level, many women in South Africa remain embattled through the unrelenting obstacles of 'tradition' and 'culture', socio-economic positioning, and the high numbers of violent acts committed against women. Reactively, government's response to this was the formation of the Department of Women, Children, and Persons with Disabilities in 2009, a government department that seemingly 'willy-nilly' grouped together three apparently homogeneous groups (which previously enjoyed their own departments and representation) which even on a surface level have no clear overlap of interests. Women are once again grouped together with children in a maternalist discourse reminiscent of the 1950s and, furthermore, womanhood seems to be synonymous with infantility and disability.<sup>119</sup> Gouws argues that a "discourse of gender mainstreaming has contributed to depoliticising gender

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<sup>116</sup> Manicom, "Constituting 'Women' as Citizens", in Gouws, *(Un)Thinking Citizenship*, p.31.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31. This will be shown in the following chapters.

<sup>119</sup> Women's rights, although enshrined in the constitution, have in recent years taking knocks of a public nature through the irresponsible utterances of popular and powerful senior and junior politicians in South Africa and the maintenance of National and Provincial Houses of Traditional Leaders. Although women retain an honoured place in the mythology of the struggle and are thus respected by these politicians, they fail to enact in practice that which they preach on days of national commemorations and celebrations that involve the remembrance of women.

activism and to turn gender into a technocratic concept.”<sup>120</sup> Gender and gender violence has been depoliticised (placing it in the private/domestic sphere despite being deeply political<sup>121</sup>) and women’s activism and women’s rights seem to have been pushed aside as government funding for vital services such as rape crisis centres has virtually dried up. Women are being paid lip-service on the appropriate occasions and struggle heroines have their names plastered on state-funded public spaces. Exorbitantly expensive events are organised by government in the ‘memory’ of these women who broke the glass ceilings of their time in order to provide future South African women with equal opportunities and equal rights. Yet, many girls and women in the present lack access to basic education that would allow them a chance at enjoying any of these opportunities and rights.

Despite the early politicised militancy of women against oppressive legislation and the continued fight against the triple oppression of race, class, and sex throughout the liberation struggle, women’s rights to equality within the private sphere in South Africa are still under threat and this struggle continues well into the democratic era. Gouws laments the celebration of the constitutional guarantees of gender equality and non-sexism while a large portion of the population, mostly women, lack the effective right to dignity and bodily integrity.<sup>122</sup> While women protested in the 1950s against inequality from a basis of the shared experience of outraged motherhood this would shift towards an image of the militant mother fighting the apartheid regime for the safety of her family following the violence enacted upon children by the state in 1976. With the influence of international feminism women within the ANC engaged their male counterparts to ensure the emancipation of women after the struggle had been won. Yet, the significant gains made by women during the transition have been derailed, perhaps even reversed with the reassertion of ethno-nationalism and communal identity politics and the inability of gender policies to break down cultural barriers and localised patriarchies.<sup>123</sup> The recent release of the Green Paper on Families<sup>124</sup> seems to strengthen the reduction of women to ‘wifely motherhood’ and attempts to entrench a return to conservative

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<sup>120</sup> Amanda Gouws, “Introduction”, in Gouws, *(Un)Thinking Citizenship*, p.2.

<sup>121</sup> In the context of a liberal democracy, women’s citizenship is deeply flawed. As citizens they are removed from their social contexts and considered as having equal access to rights and opportunities. Yet, in the private sphere, women often lack access to these rights as the state does not intervene at this level and women are subjected to patriarchal, cultural, traditional, and economic systems of dominance.

<sup>122</sup> Gouws, “Introduction”, in Gouws, *(Un)Thinking Citizenship*, p.23.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>124</sup> A document that was in draft version for over a year and was quickly dug up for debate after President Jacob Zuma stated in a televised interview that it is the role of women to get married and have children, that having children is ‘extra training for a woman’ and that being single – for women – is ‘not right’. Verashni Pillay, “Zuma: Women Must Have Children”, *Mail & Guardian*, 22 August 2012, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-21-zuma-women-must-have-children> accessed 23 August 2012.

values of 'family' by entrenching heteronormativity through othering families that are not composed of a husband, wife, and their biological offspring. In the case studies that are addressed in later chapters the ideology of motherhood is an overriding theme whether the women in question were mothers or not and will be addressed in a context of the creation of a new foundational mythology built on the body politics of the deceased and the commemorated. Yet, in present commemorations of anti-apartheid heroines, the militant motherism of the 1980s has been cast aside and the pacifist tendencies of this discourse have become essentialised as the government faces increasingly violent uprisings in the mining sectors and protests against poor service delivery. Such commemorative events become powerful platforms for political rhetoric that at once glorifies the struggle past and invokes that 'golden age' and its attendant moral qualities to address the violent socio-economic protests of the present.

## **Conclusion**

A century of nationalist movements have shaped the history, present, and future of South Africa. The exclusively white male nationalism of the early twentieth century created a unified country of white privilege. Systematically invented, this white South African identity would not endure in the face of a history of Afrikaner resistance to British domination. The strength and momentum of the Afrikaner nationalist movement saw it rise to power within three decades. Aided by its ability to operate within the constitutional boundaries of the Union the movement's access to the mechanisms of the state would ensure white Afrikaner privilege for the following four decades. The exclusivity of the Afrikaner nationalist movement came at the expense of the political, social, and economic rights of a majority black population. The rise of African nationalism was a direct response to the two exclusively white nationalist movements of South Africa. It would take eight decades of negotiation and violence for the African nationalist movement to gain access to power. Increasingly unable to operate within the confines of the law and in the public sphere, the movement faced a violent response from the state. However, with changing international relations and growing unrest within the country the apartheid state had to enter into negotiations with leading organisations of the national liberation struggle and relinquish its privileged access to power. The success of the struggle has 'set the scene' for the following discussions in this thesis as it did not endorse the racial or ethnic exclusivity that had shaped the white nationalist movements.

Rather, its focus on a multi-racial South Africa has allowed for a fairly peaceful and stable transition to democracy. This has been attended by the creation of a new South Africa nationalism and identity as a 'glue' that would hold together a 'nation' built on a wealth of cultural and ethnic differences and a history of violence, oppression, and exploitation.

Women had no place or representation in the colonial nationalism that created the conditions required for Union. It was created on the basis of white male privilege and the ensured continuation thereof, shaped by a common experience of a rugged masculine geographical setting, and wrought out of the fear of 'native' discontent that threatened this privilege. In Afrikaner and African nationalism, however, the experiences of women would feature largely in creating a deeply emotional response from the collectivity. When the men of the collectivity are unable to protect *their* women from the abuses and violence of the 'other', discourses of motherhood feature prominently in harnessing male anger and offence into the nationalist movement. Mothers of the nation represent commanding symbols of national boundaries and a national future but also represent appropriate female behaviour. In South Africa this ideology has been steeped in discourses of sacrifice, maternal strength, and martyrdom. Understanding the power that such ideologies can wield within male-dominated nationalist movements, women accepted these titles and moulded them to work for them and to push the boundaries of accepted gender behaviour. Of course, there were limitations as women's identities within nationalist movements are contingent on men, but women were not the hapless victims of a male nationalist agenda that defined their behaviour. For both Afrikaner and black women, 'motherhood' became a powerful political resource. While Afrikaner women operated within a context of white privilege that afforded them some power, black women would call on shared experiences of womanhood and motherhood to cross racial boundaries and challenge oppressive legislation. Women's militancy arose early in the African nationalist movement and would remain a powerful force of social change throughout the struggle. Furthermore, it ensured the theoretical protection of women's rights and equality in the new Constitution of South Africa. Yet, 'motherism' failed to challenge the patriarchal dominance of the national liberation movement. This has resulted in the private/public dichotomy being upheld with the result that women continue to experience forms of private powerlessness despite gender equality being constitutionally enshrined.

Clearly, citizenship in South Africa continues to be inextricably linked to ‘naturalised’ social roles which legal rights cannot easily dislodge.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Cheryl McEwan, “Gendered Citizenship in South Africa: Rights and Beyond”, in Gouws, *(Un)Thinking Citizenship*, p.182.

## Recreating a 'Usable' Past and Forging a Common Destiny: Reconciliation and Post-1994 Nationalism

*We, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

The history of the twentieth century in South Africa is a history of nationalisms: each nationalism inspired, informed, and spurred on its historical antithesis. The new nationalism of the post-apartheid state appears unaware of its historical roots and strong correlations with the nationalist movements that have gone before it. In an odd turn, the new state-sanctioned nationalism that followed the transition to a democratic dispensation finds itself drawing on similar notions of 'nation' as Afrikaner nationalism but has employed the language of a revived Pan-Africanism,<sup>2</sup> albeit altered to include minority groups in South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa, with its history of colonial and apartheid oppression had to find a common ground on which a new 'South African' identity could be constructed. Meskell shows that,

[b]uilding a new national history entails forging a national culture: a self-conscious fusion, combining shreds of regional cultural legacies and international symbols... [T]o be

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<sup>1</sup> "Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa", 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) at <http://www.justice.gov.za/policy/african%20charter/africancharter.htm>, accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> A revived Pan-Africanism found its initial drive during Mbeki's presidency and followed on and, to a certain extent, incorporated the rainbow nationalism of the Mandela presidency.

compelling and successful it must form an assimilative tradition, drawing upon the knowledge of particular ethnic groups to enlarge them, thus creating a broader national embrace.<sup>3</sup>

As the foundational mythologies of the past were constructed within specific ethnic nationalist contexts, South Africa needed a new foundational mythology that would unite its citizens rather than pander to one specific ethnic group. With no background of traditional unifying elements such as language, shared history, religion, culture, or ethnicity, the multi-cultural state had to invent commonalities that would allow citizens to identify themselves as South Africans with a common destiny and loyalty to one nation-state. This is not unusual for the modern state which is almost always ethnically heterogeneous. But it is the state that seeks to create a nation out of the various ethnic communities by “adopting the ideological postulates of nationalism as its legitimation...”<sup>4</sup> This has predominantly been a top-to-bottom approach in South Africa where government, political elites, and state institutions have actively engaged in nationalist identity creation which are reproduced in public events and spaces and the media. This entailed submerging potentially divisive issues under a discourse of peace, equality, and unity.

The reconstruction of a usable communal past has been essential in fostering a sense of national unity. The usable past, from an instrumentalist or functionalist standpoint, is a past (or pasts) whose uses are determined by the needs and preoccupations by present-day political elites.<sup>5</sup> This past needed to serve the interests of political elites and thus the national past had to be tailored for mass consumption. Moreover, a usable past was an important factor in promoting and legitimising the post-apartheid state while also inspiring a new moral order through the heroes and heroines it selected to honour and commemorate. Yet, the usable past is malleable and remains open to reinterpretation as present needs shift and alter. National myths and symbols are powerful factors in constructing the usable past as South Africa is promoting a civic nationalism that is superimposed on existing ethnic and cultural identities.

Successive presidencies have added their own unique stamp to what it means to be ‘South African’ in the post-apartheid state and have developed new notions of ‘nation

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn Meskell, “Trauma Culture: Remembering and Forgetting in the New South Africa”, in Duncan Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke & New York, 2006), p.160.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1999), p.257.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, (Hurst & Company: London, 1997), p.37.

building' and what it will take to build a successful multi-cultural nation. This new national identity is expressed in a variety of ways and enacted at sporting, commemorative, and other mass spectacles. It is symbolised in a new national iconography carefully invented to showcase the inclusiveness of the new nation. It is articulated in eleven official languages, each protective over its place and future in the 'new' South Africa. It is affirmed by celebrating the (often) violent events that contributed to the existence of the new state and honouring those martyrs, heroes and heroines that sacrificed families and lives for its formation. It creates a new moral order that legitimises the new state and its actions in opposition to the 'evil' of the old order.

It is impossible to address post-apartheid nationalism without taking into consideration the work of the TRC and its contribution to the (re)construction of a new national history. The history of the TRC processes is well-known, analysed, and documented. It will be briefly outlined here in order to contextualise the 'spirit' of the new South African nationalism that was shaped by the narratives that emerged at the TRC hearings. This section will show how a new nationalist movement was forged out of a divisive past and polarised population and imbued with a Christian theology fused with an idealised African philosophy. Furthermore, the TRC processes will be analysed in terms of a society dealing with a traumatic past and confronting loss. The work of mourning was performed on a public platform and narratives of painful loss were confronted as relatives of victims of disappeared and murdered individuals sought answers that would aid the completion of their mourning processes. It will also briefly outline the complexities that arose in women's testimonies to the TRC in a society steeped in patriarchal influence which confined the narratives that women were able to share on a public platform to what was considered 'proper'. By focusing on women's testimonies at the Human Rights Violations (HRV) hearings this section will show how the construction of 'nation' was influenced by the narratives of mourning and loss spoken by women and how these testimonies reflected women's positioning within the new nationalism of the post-apartheid state.

Secondly, this chapter will address the formation of a new iconography for the nation-state. The powerful symbols that emblematised the forces of nationalism such as flags, coat of arms, and the national anthem will be considered as a new iconography created to symbolise the multi-cultural nation. This will be followed by a discussion of how the state has reconfigured the national spatio-temporal sphere to aid its process of political legitimation. In this section the renaming of public holidays celebrated during the apartheid era, the addition

of new public holidays, the creation of new memorials and the changing meanings of old monuments and statues will be addressed. As indicated in chapter 2, memorials and monuments serve as linking objects and store painful memories in a public space where people can mourn and can be seen to be mourning – whether they were personally affected by the event represented or where people can share in a society’s mourning. The memorials and memorial spaces of the post-apartheid state serve two basic functions: to aid national healing and reconciliation so creating a new South African identity based on a shared traumatic past, and to legitimise the post-apartheid political dispensation. Both time and space are reconfigured in the name of a new nationalism. This promotes national reconciliation but it also allows the governing party to legitimise its position as the ruling party of the post-apartheid state by establishing a new moral order through the memorials and monuments it erects and the days it chooses to commemorate. The first section will place mourning in the context of a post-apartheid nationalism as the TRC processes transformed narratives of private and individual mourning into societal mourning through its public media platform. This societal mourning is further enacted through the symbolic reparations of memorials and monuments that were erected to honour those that had lost their lives as a result of their involvement in the struggle for liberation. The careful selection of those cases that featured prominently in national and international media for memorialisation elevated them into a new pantheon of heroes and heroines that would symbolise the moral order of the new post-apartheid state. Thus, this chapter will contend that public displays of mourning and state-endorsed societal mourning became important elements in shaping a new South African nationalism and identity.

## **The TRC**

Shaped by the politics of compromise of the negotiated transition, the TRC, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was established as a commission that would not only construct a comprehensive historical record but would also, through its pursuit of ‘truth’, foster individual and national reconciliation as part of a new nation-building project.<sup>6</sup> Established under the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995 its

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<sup>6</sup> However, as David B. Coplan cynically contends: “If the litres of ink poured into intellectual commentary on every aspect of the TRC have proven anything, it is that the exercise could produce neither certifiable truths nor palpable cross-racial or political reconciliation.” David B. Coplan, “Popular History; Cultural Memory”, *Critical Arts*, 14, 2, 2000, p.138.

objectives were to promote national unity and reconciliation by establishing as complete a picture as possible of gross human rights violations in the period of 1960 to May 1994, the granting of amnesty to political perpetrators of gross human rights violations who would make full disclosures of their actions, establishing local and national patterns of violence and violations, and to produce a report that would serve as a shared national history that was considered integral to nation-building.<sup>7</sup> It would attempt to achieve this ambitious mandate through public hearings where victims could speak and perpetrators confess and operated on the assumption that the catharsis of speaking trauma, confession, and forgiveness would aid reconciliation between victim and perpetrator and by extension, heal the ‘nation’. Focusing on landmark historical events that occurred within its thirty-four year mandate, the Commission hoped to unveil the ‘truth’ about what had happened in the past so debunking the apartheid state’s versions of these events and enabling the ‘nation’ to move forward with a full understanding of why these events had occurred.<sup>8</sup> This disclosure would ensure respect for and the continued protection of human rights in the future. The TRC linked ‘truth’ with ‘reconciliation’ and so established reconciliation as essential for overcoming division and creating a new national identity.

The TRC operated on the assumption that the telling of ‘truth’ of the apartheid past would lead to reconciliation and unity in the ‘new’ South Africa. This assumption has come under severe criticism as the narrating of trauma does not necessarily aid healing – private or societal.<sup>9</sup> The TRC would attempt to aid the processes of nation-building and reconciliation through promoting individual and collective ‘healing’ through the catharsis of exposing the

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<sup>7</sup> Fullard and Rousseau contest that the TRC processes and its outcomes represents an official history. They reject the notion that the TRC processes can be reduced to a single narrow nationalist trajectory. Of course, such a simplistic reduction of the complex discourses of mourning, trauma, violence, and forgiveness that the TRC addressed can never hold. Yet, its enabling legislation, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, as the name suggest, most certainly frames it in that context and the TRC cannot be removed from this context. Furthermore, the TRC certainly promoted the production of a new shared past where previously silenced voices could now stake a claim by becoming an integral part of that past and move towards a common destiny. This is not to say that the TRC produced a seamless or hegemonic version of South Africa’s past but rather that the state has accorded a version of the struggle past (as it emerged from the hearings) a central place in the official canon of the foundation myth of the post-apartheid state. Madeleine Fullard and Nicky Rousseau, “Uncertain Borders: The TRC and the (Un)Making of Public Myths”, *Kronos*, 34, 1, 2008. pp.215-239.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, “Introduction: The Power of Truth: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Context”, in Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, (Witwatersrand University Press: Johannesburg, 2002), p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Stevan Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe: Narrating the Traumas of Political Violence*, (Northwestern University Press: USA, 2006), pp.xii-xxii. The relationship between trauma and testimony has been explored in the seminal works of psychoanalytic theorists such as Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, (The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1995) and *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1996), and Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1994).

truth about human rights violations. The collection and interpretation of testimonies given at the hearings over a five year period has culminated in an aggregated ‘truth’ that is seen “as the basis on which to pass informed, objective judgements on the past, in ways that can help to transcend the legacies of past conflict and prevent their recurrence.”<sup>10</sup> This did not require the creation of detailed individual and community histories, rather a sample of the truth would suffice to exemplify the indignities of the past.<sup>11</sup> This new shared history would navigate South Africa through the transition by acknowledging the violent atrocities of the past and seeking truth and healing for the future. Through testimonies collected from nearly 22 000 victims, an ‘authentic’ version of the past could be constructed and would debunk the distorted version of the past propagated by the apartheid government. The TRC hearings were meant to create a ‘safe space’ for giving voice to the previously silenced victims of the apartheid state where their testimonies would shape the new history of the country.

The general public was confronted with carefully selected hearings on national television. Testimonies of victims and perpetrators entered the living rooms of many South Africans and “coupled as they were with the drama of catharsis and the rhetoric of forgiveness, [they] created neat, emotionally charged ‘sound bites’ of truth... from which an aggregated impression was selectively extracted.”<sup>12</sup> On a symbolic level, the objectification of representative samples of violation of personhood embodied the nation’s suffering, thus, people who were previously excluded from the nation, could now be included.<sup>13</sup> Posel and Simpson argue that the televised hearings tended to extract more general ‘truths’ about the experience of apartheid victimisation, the remorse after confessing to such violations, and eventual reconciliation between victims and perpetrators “which undergirded the TRC as a strongly moral performance.”<sup>14</sup> As Tom Lodge argues, the public hearings had a ritual function, they were more concerned with educating the public as to what happened from the perspective of the victims and attempting to promote communal reconciliation, rather than establishing a comprehensive ‘truth’ about the past.<sup>15</sup> In Tutu’s view, the public hearings became a vehicle for healing and redemption which would morally cement the nation. Cast within a Christian framework, individual narratives of injustice, suffering, and redemption

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<sup>10</sup> Posel and Simpson, “Introduction”, in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Deborah Posel, “The TRC Report: What Kind of History? What Kind of Truth?”, in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.151.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>13</sup> Lars Buur, “Monumental Historical Memory: Managing Truth in Everyday Work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.84.

<sup>14</sup> Posel and Simpson, “Introduction” in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Lodge, *Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*, (David Philip: Cape Town, 2002), p.181.

were extended to the nation in a framework of compassion and forgiveness and were meant to reconstruct the nation from an ethnically divided citizenry. The TRC was one of the earliest sites for the enactment of the ideology of the Rainbow Nation and its recollection of the traumatic past was meant to serve as a vehicle that would allow the new nation to put that past behind it and move on, while rejecting amnesia about this past. Framed by the dominant context of 'rainbowism' this meant that the TRC had,

to demonstrate its sensitivity to divergent viewpoints on the past, its capacity to recognise and affirm diversity, yet produce a moral framework and historical narrative that combined these differences into a harmonious larger whole.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this, the TRC produced a binary version of the past framed in terms of victims and perpetrators, making little allowance for the consideration of 'grey' areas or categories. It attempted to pass moral judgement on the past but in ways that reconciled a divided society. From a nation-building perspective the details of moral ambiguities of the politics of collaboration and complicity had no place to be explored on this platform. All that was important from the TRC's version of the national past was that that the past had to be acknowledged, 'truth' had to be spoken, and that 'good' had prevailed in the end. This implied that the nation could now move forward, assured of the protection of human rights as national amnesia about the violent past had been adequately circumvented by the creation of the TRC archive and the publishing of its reports once the hearings had been completed. It became clear that reconciliation was not only a useful concept applied throughout the hearings, but a priority that rapidly assumed primacy.<sup>17</sup> It used personal memories to construct a national history that tied into a framework of reconciliation and nation-building. As Lars Buur argues, the "making of official history through the telling of personal narratives was orchestrated in order to construct a sense of common destiny."<sup>18</sup> Yet, as Meskell argues,

While the implicit strategy in South Africa is one of incorporation and a willing amnesia, which has effectively ameliorated the threat of violence and revenge in a post-apartheid setting, what has been compromised is the accurate reflection of deep historical events and their ultimate repercussions... In South Africa, political rhetoric in a climate of confession and

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<sup>16</sup> Posel and Simpson, "Introduction" in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Janet Cherry, John Daniel and Madeleine Fullard, "Researching the 'Truth': A View from Inside the Truth and Reconciliation Commission", in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.26.

<sup>18</sup> Buur, "Monumental Historical Memory", in Posel and Simpson, *Commissioning the Past*, p.76.

forgiveness asks that certain pasts are kept alive, others are glossed over, and still others are relegated to the shadows of prehistory.<sup>19</sup>

Despite attempting to avoid the pitfalls of historical amnesia, political resistance to some of the TRC's findings meant that certain aspects of the apartheid past had to necessarily be glossed over, neglected, and forgotten in the name of constructing the nation. Furthermore, by identifying certain people as victims and others as perpetrators, the TRC effectively ignored issues of white complicity and structural violence in sustaining the apartheid system. It placed the blame for human rights violations on a small group of perpetrators and so absolved the white population from responsibility and culpability which allowed them to join the new nation. Narratives of communal suffering and loss can be more powerful than a history of victories in uniting a nation.<sup>20</sup> For Lodge, this has led to the creation of a new South African identity which included the dimensions of suffering and oppression: the 'national victim'.<sup>21</sup> By addressing violence committed across the political spectrum a narrative of victimhood was extended to all South Africans – suffering was the lot of *all* the people of South Africa as a result of an oppressive apartheid system.

Samuelson aptly describes the TRC as a ritual venue for national mourning.<sup>22</sup> Testimonies of victims were filled with narratives of loss and trauma from which the new history of the nation would be constructed. By focusing on trauma, which is event-centered, the TRC relegated suffering to the past and failed to adequately address the everyday violations and violence of the apartheid system and its continued legacy in the present. Samuelson states that “[t]rauma is a form of mediation, connecting past and present through the pain of memory, the material expressions of loss, and is monumentalised through the cultural productions of shared histories.”<sup>23</sup> The ritual enactment of mourning at the TRC hearings was instrumental in the invention of the new South African nation. National narratives of redemption were shaped by individuals sharing their loss on a public platform. The recall of their memories, guided by commissioners, was a return to a traumatic past in search of healing in the present. Trauma and loss, sacrifice and redemption were powerful themes that shaped the creation of an official history for the 'new' South Africa. Trauma, in

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<sup>19</sup> Meskell, “Trauma Culture”, in Bell, *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.164.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Renan referred to in Sabine Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: Commemorative Monuments, Memorials and Public Statuary in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, (Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2010)

<sup>21</sup> Lodge, *Politics in South Africa*, p.184.

<sup>22</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition*, (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: Scottsville, 2007), p.161.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

essence, became a foundation for national identity in South Africa through the “institutionalised remembrance of traumatic experiences and the associated cultural practices of historical mourning.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***Constructing ‘Nation’ from Women’s Testimonies of Trauma and Loss***

*It has been said that a nation that does not accord a human status to its womenfolk is a nation that lacks integrity and that does not belong to a future. Such an assertion can never be more true than in a country such as South Africa where the pain that has been felt by a whole nation has been felt even more by our mothers, our sisters, our aunts, our daughters, our women....*<sup>25</sup>

Maintaining the focus of women’s positions and positioning in a larger nationalist context, it is of significance to address women’s narratives at the HRV hearings. Women’s narratives were shaped by their subjective positionings within South African society and the TRC failed to effectively give voice to women whose human rights had been violated in more numerous ways than the narrowly confined bodily harm that the TRC defined as gross human rights violations. This defines the lack of acknowledgement of gender as a central component of colonial and apartheid oppression and reflects the persistence in women’s continued human rights violations in the present as violent and sexual crimes committed against women continue to be tragically commonplace.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, by constructing women predominantly as victims, women’s active agency in the struggle was constructed in terms of a patriarchal nationalism that could silence women in the post-apartheid state – and, to a certain extent, has subsumed women in a patriarchal social discourse perpetuated in the most senior leadership positions in government in the present. This consideration of a South African nationalism ‘in

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<sup>24</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.86.

<sup>25</sup> Address by Tokyo Sexwale at the Women’s Hearings in Johannesburg, 27 July 1997, quoted in Fiona C. Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*, (Pluto Press: London, 2003), p.73.

<sup>26</sup> Rosemary Jolly identifies the TRC’s inability to recognise women’s testimony of their experiences as crucial in and of itself as a ‘deafness’ on the part of the TRC which requires “acknowledgement and exploration in order for us to assess the status of women within the spectrum of human rights in post-apartheid South Africa.” Rosemary Jolly, “Spectral Presences: Narrating Women in the Context of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 38, 3, 2004, p.622. Elizabeth le Roux also contends that the TRC process might have been helpful to individual women but that it had little impact on how people view women’s role in the struggle in South Africa and failed to challenge perceptions of women as women were predominantly cast in their roles as wives, mothers, or sisters. Elizabeth le Roux, “Unsung Heroines: Media Reflections of the Social Conflict in South Africa”, *African and Asian Studies*, 1, 4, 2002.

the making' through placing women's narratives of loss at the centre of discussion will inform the following chapter as it sets out to define the contexts that shape political and politicised women's state-sanctioned memorialisation and commemorations in the present.

Women's testimonials at the public hearings at the TRC were at the centre of the process of reconstructing the nation. As a result of the TRC's narrow definition of human rights violations, restricting this to bodily harm at the expense of more quotidian harms experienced by men and women on a daily basis, women approached the TRC primarily as mother-witnesses.<sup>27</sup> While women generally suffered more restrictions under apartheid and suffered more in economic terms than men, women predominantly addressed their own experiences of harm and activities of resistance to the apartheid state indirectly, speaking mainly of men's suffering.<sup>28</sup> By assuming what Ilse Olkers has identified as a 'gender neutral truth', the TRC failed to recognise gender as a powerful feature in determining violation.<sup>29</sup> In response, four months after the first of the HRV committee hearings, the TRC announced it would add special hearings for women as it had become clear that, while women testimonies dominated the HRV hearings, they were rarely about their own experience of violations.<sup>30</sup> Mothers, wives, grandmothers, and sisters became the main transmitters of the memory of the traumatic apartheid past.<sup>31</sup> Testifying to the TRC, these women narrated the loss of children and family and informed by a teleological context of Christian sacrifice, produced a national narrative of sacrificial redemption. While such narratives downplayed the roles that women played during the struggle against apartheid, motherhood became the subject position through which women could claim a place in the new official history of the country. The restrictive TRC mandate resulted in the construction of a struggle past that consisted predominantly of male heroics, resistance and the violent repression thereof. Ross importantly states that by focusing too closely on bodily experience,

we run the danger of failing to attend to the experiences of which women speak. A focus solely on the body and its violation fixes experience in time, in an event, and draws attention

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<sup>27</sup> Samuelson applies this term to the positioning of women at the TRC hearings. Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.159.

<sup>28</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p.5.

<sup>29</sup> Ilse Olkers in *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Russell, "A Self-Defining Universe? Case Studies from the 'Special Hearings: Women' of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *African Studies*, 67, 1, 2008, p.49.

<sup>31</sup> Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, "Intersubjectivity and Embodiment: Exploring the Role of the Maternal in the Language of Forgiveness and Reconciliation", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 36, 31, 2011, p.541.

away from ways of understanding that experience as a process that endures across bodies and through time.<sup>32</sup>

The testimonies of women activists were few compared to their male counterparts. The Commission inadvertently equated human rights violations inflicted on women with sexual violations. This often called on women to speak of sexual violations that mitigated women's testimonies on a platform that was incredibly public and discourses of shame, victimhood, and trauma effectively silenced women.<sup>33</sup> Women were expected to testify about sexual violence; men were not. However, very few women testified about rape or sexual violations. Researchers attributed women's 'silence' about sexual violations to a general stigma that attaches to women in a society that regards rape as 'private'. "Yet", Ross argues,

in the context of political violence or detention rape may be deliberately public. What is at stake is not the privacy or otherwise of the act but how society acknowledges it as a form of violence and makes provision for its recognition as injury.<sup>34</sup>

Sexual violence was represented in the hearings as a defining feature of women's experiences of violence and women could and should testify about such experiences. Yet sexual violence was not restricted to women or the apartheid past and was not as commonplace as the TRC reports determine. As Ross shows, rape and sexual violence remain widespread in South Africa and the "focus on women's experiences of sexual violation, while important, precludes a wider understanding of the ways in which power may work in gendered ways."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, some horrors simply cannot be articulated and silence can be a legitimate discourse on pain. For Ross "there is an ethical responsibility to recognise it as such."<sup>36</sup> However, the public platform of the TRC demanded the narration of pain, loss, and trauma for it to be recognised and acknowledged. The silences at the TRC spoke volumes about the gendered nature of silence and pain. Stories that were not primarily about sexual violence were reinterpreted by the Commission in a manner that emphasised sexual violence and, Russell argues, by focusing on sexual violations committed against women their political activism was marginalised, or became secondary to, their sexual violation.<sup>37</sup> Samuelson expands on this when she argues that,

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<sup>32</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p.49.

<sup>33</sup> Fiona Ross shows that some female activists also refused to consider themselves as victims. *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>37</sup> Russell, "A Self-Defining Universe?", *African Studies*, 67, 1, 2008, p.50.

[w]hen rape is spoken in the prevailing discourses of gender and nation during the political transition, women are produced as vulnerable victims in need of male protection, as objects of property and exchange, as reproducers of the future, and as markers of national boundaries.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the violations committed on women's bodies renders them as victims – a shame on the men who failed to protect them. When women's agency, independent subjectivity, and activism displayed and 'tolerated' by men during times of violent political upheaval, are reduced to narratives of victimhood and male shame in the present democratic order, *women are re-subsumed into the patriarchal discourses of the past that are inherited in the present.*

Women's active roles in resistance activities were restricted while many women were specifically targeted by the apartheid state for their maternal status as the mothers of activists. Samuelson states that as these women testified at the TRC,

they bore powerful witness to the nation's traumatic past and played instrumental parts in the revision of national history, challenging the erstwhile dominant narrative with their memories. At the same time, female testifiers also performed gendered subjectivities – overwhelmingly as bereaved mothers and wives.<sup>39</sup>

Ross shows how a mere fourteen per cent of women testified about their own experiences of human rights violations under apartheid while forty per cent testified on behalf of their sons.<sup>40</sup> The TRC did acknowledge that this was problematic but it was their very definition of human rights violations that cast women into the role of mothers and witnesses and tended to depoliticise the 'private' or 'domestic sphere' under apartheid rule rendering violence committed against women as 'private' rather than political. Yet, women's testimonies often detailed their domestic worlds and times and this points to the extent of the state's intrusion in these private spheres.<sup>41</sup>

While women's political mobilisation around discourses of motherhood and the family have been interpreted as conservative and unchallenging of the patriarchal systems that support and construct these discourses in South Africa, "women who opposed apartheid did so specifically through their understanding of the damage caused by apartheid to family

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<sup>38</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.122.

<sup>39</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.161.

<sup>40</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p.17. Furthermore, men rarely testified about violations against women while women were more likely to testify about men. Seventy-nine per cent of women testified about violations committed against men.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

life.”<sup>42</sup> For many women, the destruction of family life was the most grievous crime of apartheid. By reducing women to ‘secondary victims’ and the under-representation of female activist testimonies, it implied that women suffered as victims in their roles as wives, sisters, and mothers, denying the power of the political mobilisation of motherhood and that women also acted as leaders and important sources of strength in their communities and as *perpetrators* of violence.<sup>43</sup> It rendered women safe and passive. Samuelson argues that casting women in this role was both restricting and enabling as,

It presented women with a subject position from which to speak, while that speaking voice was always already produced as that of the suffering mother. At the same time, such gendered patterns consolidated the national narrative of sacrifice and redemption, and underwrote the TRC’s goals of reconciliation and nation building.<sup>44</sup>

Women were portrayed as secondary victims through this process but it was through their role as mothers that they were given a platform to address the nation and narrate their accounts of trauma, loss, and mourning. Ross describes the testimonies given by mother-witnesses as lamentations, forms of sorrowing and grieving. But Ross also indicates that not all women’s testimonies took this format of describing the violent apartheid past. The testimonies of women members of liberation movement and anti-apartheid organisations, while seldom given before the HRV hearings differed as their testimonies “shed light on the Commission’s ideological effects, the sites of cruelty, and cruelty’s effect on the constitution of the self.”<sup>45</sup> According to Ross, “activists tended to speak more directly of pain, its agents and its consequences than did women who were not politically active.”<sup>46</sup> They would speak of detention and torture, some in explicit detail and framed their narratives in terms of an enduring and coherent commitment to political ideologies and resistance to the apartheid state. They would often name those responsible for their torture and that of others and demand answers from perpetrators while speaking powerfully about their encounters with the power of the apartheid state. While this differs from the testimonies given by mother-witnesses, women activists rarely referred (directly) to their political activities. For Ross, this may be the result of women resisting yet another incursion by the state through their silence; despite the state now being benevolent, it remains an incursion.<sup>47</sup> In detention, women’s

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.148.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>44</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.161.

<sup>45</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.59.

bodies became the sites of their humiliation and loss of privacy and self. While detained, mothers would face having the bond that exists between a mother and her child – presumed to shape women’s identities – used against them. Motherhood, then, becomes wholly political as the state wielded its power against women through targeting their reproductive abilities, their bodies, and the dominant societal discourses of motherhood.

Saturated with theological and Christian discourse in particular, women’s testimonies of loss and mourning for their children were subsumed in the imagery of the mourning mother of Christ – the *Mater Dolorosa* or Mother of Sorrows.<sup>48</sup> Samuelson argues that women gained voice through their tears – that the power of women’s voices was inaugurated by their tears. Samuelson elaborates,

Similarly, within the TRC, the tearful act of bearing witness became the mode of performance through which women gained a voice, and female testifiers were conventionally depicted weeping. Subjected to the gender ideal of the *Mater Dolorosa*, women were able to enter and speak within the public realm while being produced as passive, weeping, secondary victims, and producing national history – the narrative of the sacrificial son – as redemptive.<sup>49</sup>

Ross argues that these narratives of loss were recast as narratives of ‘sacrifice’ by the Commission as women testifiers were often thanked for the sacrifice of their kin:

In Commission hearings, the experience of violation was often recast as ‘sacrifice’. Commissioners frequently identified their task as being to alert the populace to the loss, couched as sacrifice, of childhood and youth, life opportunities, and, in some cases, lives, for the struggle. Women testifiers were thanked for the ‘sacrifice’ of their dead or injured kin and testifiers were frequently told that their sacrifices... had redemptive power for the national body. Suffering and sacrifice, heavily predicated on a Christian model, were depicted as constitutive of the foundational order of ‘the new South Africa’.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.163. This imagery has been reproduced recently in news fragments reporting on the Marikana Commission of Inquiry as wives and mothers publically share their grief and tears as they mourn the loss of husbands and sons after the Marikana Massacre on 16 August 2012. At this commission family members were unknowingly confronted with video footage that captured the deaths of striking mine workers at the hands of the South African Police Service. Kwenele Sosibo, “Video Clips of Marikana Shootings Spark Emotional Scenes”, *Mail & Guardian* at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-10-23-video-clips-of-marikana-shootings-sparks-emotional-scenes> accessed 23 October 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.163. However, these narratives are at times rejected. The most notable case of this is the mother of Hector Pieterse, Dorothy Molefe, who rejected the misappropriation of her private memories. Gary Baines, “The Master Narrative of South Africa’s Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40, 2, 2007, pp.283-302.

<sup>50</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p.154.

These stories of sacrifice and the manner in which they were told and interpreted were influenced by the TRC and “thus did it shape both the subjects who bore witness before it and the nation produced during its hearings.”<sup>51</sup> It constructed a national narrative of sacrifice which led to national redemption through testimonies of loss and mourning given by women. Mothers had to bear witness to the nation about the sacrifice of their sons and husbands which would regenerate the nation through testimony and tears. Individual suffering and loss was given meaning by inserting the testimonies of loss given by women “into a teleological narrative of sacrificial national liberation that ‘created heroes and martyrs in a new mythology of the state.’”<sup>52</sup> These narratives would culminate in forgiveness, unity, and reconciliation in order to give meaning to sacrifice.

### **A New Iconography for the Nation**

When a government of national unity came into power in 1994 the country required new, strong symbols to foster nation-building and a new national identity constructed around the notion of a ‘rainbow people’ emerged. The new state had to abandon the symbols of the past order and establish a national iconography that would demonstrate the moral order of the post-apartheid nation. Yet, this new iconography had to symbolise the unity of the South African nation despite the strong divisions that continued to exist. The construction of a post-apartheid iconography of ‘unity in diversity’ was indicative of a preoccupation with nation-building that seemingly superseded a critical engagement with persistent socio-economic inequalities. ‘Unity in diversity’ is a phrase that harks back to the apartheid era; a discursive resource that was refashioned in the post-apartheid era. While this phrase was echoed in the iconography of the new state, conformity was expected with a South African identity that was steeped in invented ‘traditionalism’, patriarchy, and exclusivity. This sought to integrate multiple identities with a single national identity that would be caught up in a utopian nation-building project that has no tenable possibility of completion.

This section will briefly analyse the iconography of post-apartheid South Africa within the context of a new state seeking to affirm and legitimise itself. By addressing the new flag, national anthem, and coat of arms, it will show how these powerful symbols reflect the construction of a South African identity shaped by the national focus on nation-building,

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<sup>51</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.164.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164.

reconciliation, and constructing the Rainbow Nation out of a historically divided society. It is understood that any successful nationalist movement requires potent symbols around which to rally the 'nation' and this discussion does not criticise the construction of this iconography *per se*. Rather, a critical analysis of these symbols will reveal not only their symbolic efficacy as nationalist iconography, it will also show the political context that shaped them into markers of a new, moral order.

'*Ubuntu*', a philosophy which influenced TRC proceedings, became the signifier for the moral order of the post-apartheid state. *Ubuntu* is a shortened version of an isiXhosa proverb, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means 'A human being is a human being only through its relationship to other human beings'.<sup>53</sup> It was intended to signify a uniquely African form of community orientation, a pre-colonial concept of 'traditional' African communalism that was suppressed and contested by Western individualism. Proclaimed to be a special African heritage, "*Ubuntu* was elevated into a central element of a new cultural nationalism."<sup>54</sup> Despite this elevation to a central place within nationalist rhetoric, "no historical evidence has been produced to substantiate this alleged community culture and it appears to be little more than an invented tradition. Instead, general references to 'tradition' are made to suffice."<sup>55</sup> Yet, it became a powerful force in nation-building rhetoric. It can be considered to have impacted on TRC processes as victims of human rights abuses who refused reconciliation would, by extension, refuse nation-building which in turn was purportedly 'un-African'. Simultaneously, social reforms initiated by government that aided desperate communities were considered as reparation and rehabilitation measures made in the spirit of *Ubuntu* and further delayed the individual reparations that the TRC had recommended to government. As the government supposedly received its mandate from *Ubuntu* as the new moral order that had opposed the evil of apartheid, this philosophy was employed to undermine any criticism of government actions. If apartheid was 'evil', the present government that had opposed apartheid and was imbued with the spirit of *Ubuntu*, must therefore be 'good' and 'moral'. The importance of citizens' attitudes, opinions, and convictions were elevated as vital to the project of nation-building and anyone who opposed or criticised nation-building rhetoric or governmental actions was not part of the 'nation' and opposed to reconciliation – an emotional accusation in a country where nation-building is

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<sup>53</sup> Christoph Marx, "Ubu and Ubuntu: On the Dialectic of Apartheid and Nation Building", *Politikon*, 29, 1, 2002, p.52.

<sup>54</sup> Marx, "Ubu and Ubuntu", *Politikon*, 29, 1, 2002, p.52.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

enacted in all public spaces and platforms. Christoph Marx indicates that social problems were [and continue to be] increasingly viewed through a nationalist lens in the ‘new’ South Africa and nation-building has taken precedence “over necessary reforms and the democratisation of society.”<sup>56</sup> This is a clear indication of political and moral legitimisation through the use of the historical mythology of *Ubuntu* and the struggle against apartheid. Marx accedes that it was the “synthesis of reconciliation and nation-building during the TRC process [which] prepared the way for the transformation of *Ubuntu* in the foundational formula for an integral nationalism.”<sup>57</sup> Marx continues to critically explain what an *Ubuntu*-inspired citizen would be:

The *Ubuntu*-inspired African is not just a warm-hearted fellow-human who, through the enigmatic essence of being African, is immunised against violence, capitalism, xenophobia and sexism. He is, first and foremost, a conformist, who renders government and chief what is due to them. If she is unlucky enough to be female, the African personality does not revolt against the traditionally sanctioned power of males, because their power can only be benevolent and beneficent – because of *Ubuntu*, of course.<sup>58</sup>

*Ubuntu* came to lay the foundation for a new national identity based on an imagined ‘traditional’ African egalitarian communality. That this is nothing more than a fallacy becomes increasingly obvious with the powerful Traditional House of Leaders continually resisting homosexuality as ‘un-African’ and continuing to infringe on the constitutional rights of women in (especially rural) South African societies. The position of ‘Chief’ has been removed from its historical context and treated as a timeless African cultural tradition by rebranding the position as ‘traditional leader’. Tradition and culture are repeatedly invoked to legitimise discrimination against women and LBGTI individuals despite having a constitution in place that protects the rights of all citizens. Simultaneously, by according automatic respect for government and political leadership positions – equating them with traditional African leadership – the government places itself above criticism, and as indicated above, criticism becomes defined as un-African.<sup>59</sup> Yet, criticism and conflict are normal occurrences in democratic societies and this is where the connotations of cultural nationalism become clear. Marx significantly argues that while “[c]onflict is a basic principle of democratic

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.54-55.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>59</sup> More recently, the term ‘counter-revolutionary’, imbued with discourses of racism, has been increasingly applied to critics of government which absurdly situates any criticism of government actions in a context of an historical support for apartheid and resistance to anti-apartheid movements.

practice... an African authoritarianism in the guise of *Ubuntu* places emphasis on unity, integration, reconciliation and harmony.”<sup>60</sup> Essentially, “*Ubuntu* is an invented tradition, whose task it is to minimise historical chasms and fractures.”<sup>61</sup> And while this appears harmless on the surface level, it is the undermining of the rights of certain sections of the population through the guise of ‘tradition’ and the intolerance of criticism that renders such cultural nationalism dangerous.

Flags are powerful national symbols for any state, perhaps even more so for countries facing drastic political transitions. It is the function of national flags and anthems to inspire a sense of pride in its citizens.<sup>62</sup> National pride is often displayed through the public display of national flags at sporting events, days of national significance, and various international events. As nation-building was key in the first few years of democracy, the country’s new iconography had to encapsulate all the elements central to this project. One of the first symbols of the new political dispensation was the new flag of South Africa. First used on 27 April 1994, the flag was designed by former state herald, Fred Brownell, after a nation-wide competition for its design failed to produce a suitable replacement for the flag of the ‘old’ South Africa. As a six-coloured flag, it became an appropriate symbol to represent the Rainbow Nation. While the government officially states that the “[i]ndividual colours, or colour combinations represent different meanings for different people and therefore no universal symbolism should be attached to any of the colours”,<sup>63</sup> it does place importance on the central design of the flag:

The central design of the flag, beginning at the flagpost in a 'V' form and flowing into a single horizontal band to the outer edge of the fly, can be interpreted as the convergence of diverse elements within South African society, taking the road ahead in unity. The theme of convergence and unity ties in with the motto *Unity is Strength* of the previous South African Coat of Arms.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, as a whole, the flag is meant to symbolise national unity and, like many national symbols in post-apartheid South Africa, invokes *Ubuntu*. It seeks not to disregard the past, but rather to make it, and the white population, part of a new inclusive nationalism that is inadvertently continuous with the previous nationalist movement. But while the previous

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>62</sup> Valerie Møller, Helga Dickow, and Mari Harris, “South Africa’s ‘Rainbow People’, National Pride and Happiness”, *Social Indicators Research*, 47, 3, 1999, p.272.

<sup>63</sup> “National Flag” at <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/flag.htm>, accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>64</sup> “National Flag” at <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/flag.htm>, accessed 10 October 2012.

nationalist movement was exclusively white and Afrikaans, the new one is meant to unite all South African citizens under the banner of the Rainbow Nation.

Aspects of rainbow nationalism and nation-building can also be found in the national anthem of the post-apartheid state. The national anthem, like the interim government, was the result of compromise. Combining the past and present, the new national anthem would carry the 'new' South Africa into the future. In 1994 it was declared that South Africa would have two national anthems, *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika* and *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* but by 1997 the two anthems had been shortened and combined to form one national anthem of unity. The combination of five of the eleven official languages, including Afrikaans into the new national anthem, indicated the new government's commitment to the Rainbow Nation where everyone, regardless of race or historic power relations, would enjoy equal access to the socio-economic opportunities that the country had to offer.

Despite the powerful symbolism of the national flag and anthem and their prominent presence at international sporting events, a study by Valerie Møller *et al*, shows that most South Africans situate their national pride more prominently in the symbolism of the 'Rainbow Nation' labelling this 'rainbow-ism' a 'civil religion', significantly so in the first few years of the fledgling democracy.<sup>65</sup> The pride in the notion of the Rainbow Nation attests to its symbolic efficacy as an inclusive 'civil religion' and creates a sense of a national identity that purportedly maintains respect for ethnic and cultural identities. The phrase, first coined by Desmond Tutu, was quickly picked up by politicians and then took on a life of its own. Rainbow nationalism has persisted throughout the two decades of democracy but found its potency within the first years after transition as the state sought to define its vision for the future and establish socio-political stability in the country. It was the strong unifying symbol of the Mandela presidency that cemented the transition to democracy but would later take a backseat in political rhetoric to Mbeki's African Renaissance philosophy. The symbol of the rainbow intended to represent the coming together of different cultures and ethnicities within the confines of a whole. It represented a multicultural nationalism that placed 'South Africanism' first as national identity but took pride in and celebrated the diversity of the people that make up South Africa. With no 'colour' having dominant status within this rainbow, it was a symbol that every South African citizen could relate to. Non-racial

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<sup>65</sup> Møller, Dickow, and Harris, "South Africa's 'Rainbow People'", *Social Indicators Research*, 47, 3, 1999, p.273.

citizenship as a popular identity was essential for a stable transitional process.<sup>66</sup> It presented an effort to overcome the racial divisions of the past and create a feeling of common loyalty to the state that ushered in this time of racial equality and equal opportunities. But an all-inclusive dominant South African identity had to contend with ethnic and racial identities that, through apartheid legislation, had become deeply entrenched and were readily available to people as primary identities.<sup>67</sup> However, the focus on issues of race and on rainbow nationalism operates on the very basic assumption that race has been the principal dividing element in South African society. In many ways, by promoting rainbow nationalism and cloaking it in a strong moral patriotic sentiment, government was able to place focus on racial harmony rather than face criticism for slow economic transformation. Thus, while rainbow nationalism aided the creation of a stable democracy and a unique but mythical South African identity, it undermines criticism and public scrutiny of a government that has failed its constituency in many socio-economic respects. Furthermore, while issues of race become irrelevant within a Rainbow Nation, government policies such as affirmative action and a continued focus on racial classification counter the myth of the unified Rainbow Nation. Rainbow nationalism created the myth of the symbolic united nation which evoked feelings of belonging after a violent and exclusive past. In the absence of a shared glorious national past it created an impression of a common destiny towards which all South Africans should strive.

The coat of arms of the 'new' South Africa is imbued with the symbolism of nation-building. Without going into too much detail, the coat of arms displays two figures – an image taken from a famous Khoisan rock painting – in an attitude of greeting, two 'traditional' weapons symbolically lying in repose, and topped by a Protea, diamond, and secretary bird – all important national icons. Underneath all this is the new motto taken from the extinct /Xam language: *!Ke e: /xarra //ke* which, in official translation means 'Diverse people unite'. The new coat of arms was launched on Freedom Day, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2000. Then President Mbeki declared it as evoking the past, the present and the future and paying homage to the past, embracing the indigenous belief systems of 'our people', and demonstrating the "respect for the relationship between people and nature, which for millions

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<sup>66</sup> Rosemary Nagy, "After the TRC: Citizenship, Memory and Reconciliation" in Alan Jeeves & Greg Cuthbertson (eds), *Fragile Freedom: South African Democracy 1994-2004*, (Unisa Press: Pretoria, 2008), p.95.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Blaser, "A New South African Imaginary: Nation-Building and Afrikaners in Post-Apartheid South Africa", in Jeeves & Cuthbertson (eds), *Fragile Freedom*, p.126.

of years has been fundamental to our self-understanding of our African condition.”<sup>68</sup> Mbeki invokes *Ubuntu* when he states of the figures: “They are depicted in an attitude of greeting, demonstrating the transformation of the individual into a social being who belongs to a collective and interdependent humanity.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, according to the South African government website, the spiritual act in which the figure (in duplicate) is engaging, allowed for the healing of divisions within society.<sup>70</sup> The focus on the Khoisan, officially acknowledged as First Nation People of South Africa, is meant as a unifying symbol. The official government description echoes Mbeki’s words and states:

The Khoisan, the oldest known inhabitants of our land and most probably of the Earth, testify to our common humanity and heritage as South Africans and as humanity in general. The figures are depicted in an attitude of greeting, symbolising unity. This also represents the beginning of the individual’s transformation into the greater sense of belonging to the nation and by extension, collective humanity.<sup>71</sup>

As South Africa had no recent harmonious or ‘golden age’ to reach back to and on which to build a new society, the often romanticised and purported egalitarian society of the ‘Khoisan’<sup>72</sup> would form the basis of a ‘golden age’: a common humanity established in South Africa as “one of the birthplaces of humanity itself.”<sup>73</sup> Despite many claiming Khoisan ancestry, the ‘Khoisan’ no longer exist (in fact, have never existed) in South Africa as a homogeneous group that continues to live in this romanticised manner.<sup>74</sup> Alan Barnard claims that it is perhaps because of this status that the Khoisan were chosen to “embody the mythical charter of the new South African multicultural nation.”<sup>75</sup> They are, as it were, a neutral territory on which the new nation could be constructed. Those claiming Khoisan ancestry in South Africa have little political clout to contest or benefit from such symbolic capital and

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<sup>68</sup> Thabo Mbeki, “Address by President Thabo Mbeki at the Unveiling of the Coat of Arms, Kwaggafontein, 27 April 2000” at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2000/000502438p1001.htm> accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Mbeki, “Address by President” at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2000/000502438p1001.htm> accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Alan Barnard, “Coat of Arms and the Body Politic: Khoisan Imagery and South African National Identity”, *Ethnos*, 69, 1, 2004, p.8.

<sup>71</sup> “National Coat of Arms” at [http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/coa/index.htm#The\\_symbols\\_of\\_the\\_coat\\_of\\_arms](http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/coa/index.htm#The_symbols_of_the_coat_of_arms) accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Khoisan is an invented term that combines the San and Khoi groups of South Africa into one category. While these groups no longer exist, some of their descendants are now identified as ‘coloured’.

<sup>73</sup> Mbeki, “Address by President” at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2000/000502438p1001.htm> accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>74</sup> In fact, the term ‘Khoisan’, first coined by German physical anthropologist Leonard Schultze, has only been in use for the last century and serves as a collective terminology for the different hunter-gatherer-herding societies that inhabited South Africa.

<sup>75</sup> Barnard, “Coat of Arms and the Body Politic”, *Ethnos*, 69, 1, 2004, p.19.

the historic Khoisan people thus become a neutral community with no history in recent apartheid conflict. Rather, the history of Khoisan genocide is downplayed<sup>76</sup> and situated in the distant past – a past far enough removed for any living South African to recall. As Barnard states:

The images evoked are of antiquity without the stigma of the primeval, and of autochthony without the practical problem of large-scale land restitution. Khoisan people are ‘good to think with’ and in South Africa...safe to think with.<sup>77</sup>

The motto itself, written in an extinct language and calling on diverse people to unite, promotes a commitment to “value life, to respect all languages and cultures, and to oppose racism, sexism, chauvinism, and genocide.”<sup>78</sup> This is all contained within an idealised *Ubuntu*, but this commitment remains severely lacking in practice.

### **Reconfiguring National Time and Space: Public holidays and Memorials**

The significance of burying dead bodies to the nationalist reconfiguration of time and space will be addressed in the following chapters. What will be discussed here is a brief overview of how the physical presence of memorials and monuments – a material culture of historic trauma – in the public landscape reconfigure both the nationalist time and space. Moreover, it will show how the celebration of public holidays that remember and commemorate carefully selected events adds to this shift in perception and meaning as histories are overwritten, created, and altered. As indicated in Chapter 2, monuments and memorials function as important linking objects, or can be seen as “material storehouses for an archive of feeling.”<sup>79</sup> They play a special role in societal mourning after collective losses. Their physical presence

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<sup>76</sup> The genocide of the Khoisan people is acknowledged and memorialised at Freedom Park, yet, as political currency, it currently holds little value for the present government and official focus remains on highlighting the struggle credentials of the ruling party in the public space and the media. This was recently demonstrated in a Khoisan confrontation with the National Heritage Council whose newly planned Struggle Heritage Route makes no reference to South Africa’s Khoisan heritage as it was assumed that the Khoisan did not contribute to the struggle against oppression and domination. Priscilla de Wet, “Update 2011 – South Africa” at *International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs* at <http://www.iwgia.org/regions/africa/south-africa/894-update-2011-south-africa> accessed 29 April 2013.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>78</sup> Mbeki, “Address by President” at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2000/000502438p1001.htm> accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Meskell, “Trauma Culture”, in Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.161.

in the landscape and assumed indestructibility signifies them as psychological touchstones that can be accessed at any time.<sup>80</sup> For Marschall,

They mediate between the daily reality of the present and the memories and internal worlds of those who directly experienced apartheid violence. For the younger generation, such memorials constitute a link with the past and assist in vicariously sharing the experience of those directly affected. Beyond the immediately affected communities, such memorials are offered to the general public, the nation, and even the international community, as objects and sites of contemplation and identification in a collective process of historical mourning.<sup>81</sup>

Within the context of national reconciliation and nation-building, such memorials are important as they are believed to assist in the process of reconciliation after violent conflict. They serve as symbolic markers of the official recognition of pain and suffering that was experienced in the past. The legacy of the inequalities of the past is still strongly present in South Africa today and the philosophies of rainbow nationalism and ‘Unity in Diversity’ are merely a thin veneer that attempts to promote reconciliation despite deeply ingrained economic and social divisions. Meskell argues that the materiality of memorials and monuments “provides the bedrock for psychological healing, proffers a form of recognition, represents social values, and consolidates the role of victims within the new nation.”<sup>82</sup> But government’s increased focus on symbolic gestures rather than service delivery, and the continued reluctance to pay financial reparations for victims who testified at the TRC,<sup>83</sup> “suggests a certain unwillingness or inability to take more substantive steps in the socio-economic transformation of the country and to address the material needs of its populace in general and victims specifically.”<sup>84</sup> In an environment where the inequalities generated in the past persist, the enthusiasm for erecting memorials and other symbolic gestures of acknowledgement might not be sufficient in restoring a sense of justice and dignity for those who were affected by apartheid and continue to suffer socio-economic inequalities as a result of its legacy.

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<sup>80</sup> Vamik D. Volkan, “Not Letting Go: From Individual Perennial Mourners to Societies with Entitlement Ideologies”, in Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski, and Sergio Lewkowicz (eds), *On Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia*, (Karnac Books: London, 2009).

<sup>81</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.81-82.

<sup>82</sup> Meskell, “Trauma Culture”, in Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.170.

<sup>83</sup> Recently concern has arisen in civil society about proposed plans to spend funds allocated for community reparations for municipal infrastructure programmes. Simon Allison, “The President’s Fund: Where is This Money for Apartheid Victims Actually Going?”, *Daily Maverick*, 14 October 2014, at <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-10-14-the-presidents-fund-where-is-the-money-for-apartheid-victims-actually-going/#.VFb1PRYsenC> accessed 10 November 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.96.

Claiming the national time and space is an important element not only for the creation and dissemination of nationalist sentiment but also serves as a tool for political legitimation. This reconfiguration allows an officially-sanctioned history to be propagated in public spaces and national time. This official history is not uncontested but “it is considered to be official until someone from within its own domain contests it.”<sup>85</sup> As such, this official history, steeped in the mythology of the struggle against apartheid, seeks to legitimise the current order whilst encouraging nation-building as an essential tool in achieving the common destiny envisioned by rainbow nationalism. Following on the work of the TRC, this official history presents a narrative of a common destiny and community for the nation, sanctioned by the state, in public spaces and time. This collective identity within the parameters of the nation is significant in establishing a shared sense of nationhood. Larry Ray, employing Eviatar Zerubavel’s formulation of mnemonic communities,<sup>86</sup> argues that “[t]he nation is a mnemonic community whose *raison d’être* derives from both remembering and forgetting, especially where the past poses a threat to the unity of the nation.”<sup>87</sup> The ritualised performances of such identities in calendar time and nationalised spatial coordinates is what creates a sense of nationhood amongst previous divided communities. Buur states,

When the experiences of different individuals are related to calendar time and nationalised spatial coordinates, they are reduced to the same formula. Temporal and spatial *simultaneity* is a precondition for the birth of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation-state.<sup>88</sup>

While not everyone has experienced the past in the same way, it is possible to invoke and imagine a common past. By placing the officially sanctioned version of history within a new temporal frame and imposing it on public space the ‘nation’ can relate to a past that is shared. Essentially, the significance of space is altered while history is re-written. The TRC processes were essential in establishing a sense of a shared past through narratives of victimhood. Furthermore the recommendations by the TRC for symbolic reparations to victims of apartheid made significant headway for creating a public space for the officially sanctioned history to be enacted. New memorials remembering and commemorating anti-apartheid heroes, heroines, victims, and events, erected in public spaces served as important linking

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<sup>85</sup> Buur, “Monumental Historical Memory”, in Posel and Simpson (eds), *Commissioning the Past*, p.67.

<sup>86</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2004).

<sup>87</sup> Larry Ray, “Mourning, Melancholia and Violence”, in Duncan Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke & New York, 2006), p.138.

<sup>88</sup> Buur, “Monumental Historical Memory”, in Posel and Simpson (eds), *Commissioning the Past*, p.82.

objects in the process of the societal mourning of a traumatic past. By acknowledging those who died as a result of their opposition to apartheid, claiming them as sons, daughters and mothers of the nation, a tie of kinship is extended to them as being part of the national family. The victims of and significant events in the struggle against apartheid commemorated by public memorials and public holidays are a new moral order, contrasting sharply with the old one. Often, these genealogies of the political and politicised dead (often enshrined in a trope of individual suffering that is extended to the nation) are so efficiently integrated into public space, time, and historical consciousness that they come to be considered as ‘ours’. Furthermore, it meant that this version of the past, a history of good versus evil, was to be one from which the future nation would be built. The particular meanings ascribed to physical monuments and memorials, and symbolic public holidays by political elites and cultural brokers saturate national time and space with powerful emotions and have the ability to bind people to their national territory through the nationalisation and sacralisation of time and space.<sup>89</sup> Blame is appropriately situated in a removed and – as a result of TRC processes – apartheid past marked by individual perpetrators. New public holidays celebrating and commemorating events considered to be essential for the formation of the new state were instituted. Some of the public holidays of the apartheid state were significantly renamed and inscribed with new meanings of reconciliation in a form of temporal iconoclasm in the name of nation-building. This rendered the old order immoral and legitimated the new state in its historic opposition to apartheid. The public holidays of the post-apartheid state commemorate and glorify specific events that become historical markers for the foundational mythology of the new nation. Sharpeville, the Soweto Uprisings, the 1956 Women’s March, the first democratic elections, the contributions of trade unions to the struggle, the importance of the heritage sector all form part of a reconfigured temporal nationalist space. Moreover, 16 December, previously celebrated as Dingaan’s Day by the apartheid state, was given a new meaning when it was renamed ‘Day of Reconciliation’ and recalls both the old – the Battle of Blood River – and the ‘new’ – the formation of MK, the military wing of the ANC. In a spirit of reconciliation it is meant to honour the ‘struggle traditions’ of both the Afrikaners and the liberation movement.<sup>90</sup> Heritage Day, celebrated on 24 September, was an invented public holiday and has informally become known as ‘Braai Day’, celebrating a popular South African ‘tradition’, commonly shared across ethnic and racial lines, of the outdoor barbeque.

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<sup>89</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1999), p.110.

<sup>90</sup> “Freedom Day”, <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/holidays.htm#27april> accessed 30 October 2012.

Despite this reduction of a common, shared heritage to something as trivial as outdoor cooking, it is a day where all South African ethnicities and cultures are celebrated through an extraordinary array of events. But the significance of a shared heritage of 'Braai Day' seems to be growing in importance and has the potential to become a significant marker of some type of shared tradition that all South Africans can claim relation to, so establishing itself as a central part of a new foundational mythology and post-apartheid identity marker.

The TRC recommended that memorials be built as a form of symbolic reparation for the victims of apartheid violence and their families and to promote nation building. Besides being a symbolic gesture that allows individual families to mourn their loss (significantly so if the bodies of loved ones could not be recovered), the physical presence of memorials in the public landscape means that they are "addressed to a wider audience and become interwoven with larger, public processes of commemoration and societal discourses about the past and its relationship to the present."<sup>91</sup> This wealth of new memorials and monuments would stand side by side with those of previous regimes; South Africa saw no forced removal of statues or the iconoclastic moments seen in Iraq or the former Eastern Bloc countries. The erection of new memorials commemorating previously silenced histories was, in many ways, South Africa trying to reinvent itself and rewriting its history.<sup>92</sup> Drawing on Marschall's discussion of considering "memorials as a public acknowledgement of suffering and loss, which can restore a sense of personal dignity and lead to societal healing",<sup>93</sup> it becomes evident that the state-sanctioned memorials of the post-apartheid state inscribe a new, previously silenced history onto the public landscape which is grounded in a societal mourning process in the present. Inspired by testimony given at the TRC hearings, the memorials "give a public voice and lasting representation in the official memory landscape to people who have been marginalised and humiliated for most of their lives."<sup>94</sup> Moreover, monuments and memorials have the ability to restore dignity through allowing victims of apartheid to 'assert mastery' over their traumatic pasts as their trauma is recognised and cast into lasting objects. Monuments and memorials can also celebrate achievements and leadership, and validate cultural practices and values so encouraging reconciliation.<sup>95</sup> Despite this, the political legitimisation project involved in the plurality of meanings inscribed on such monuments and memorials cannot be ignored. As Meskell states, "these sites enshrine sanctioned memory,

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<sup>91</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.61.

<sup>92</sup> Meskell, "Trauma Culture", in Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.160.

<sup>93</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.61.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84-85.

they are cultural edifices that sediment certain versions of the past and serve as an anchor for specific memory practices.”<sup>96</sup> The foundational mythology of the nation can be deployed by the political elite to preserve its power by ensuring that its actions cannot be challenged as the power of the myth enshrines it in a guise of uncontested moral worth.<sup>97</sup> Marschall continues her line of argument that “the state supported process of memorialising the victims of apartheid violence is also propelled by an ideologically-driven political dynamic that involves a hierarchical ranking of victims, and the convenient forgetting of others.”<sup>98</sup> For Marschall then, this is the result “of the ‘necessity’ to celebrate heroes and recount inspiring narratives in support of the nation’s myth of origin and newly defined identity discourses.”<sup>99</sup> What is essential to the project of nation-building is not necessarily what happened in the past, but how the past is interpreted and presented to the ‘nation’. State sanctioned memorials are always skewed, politically motivated representations of the past and governments hold a political stake in maintaining certain mythological accounts of the past that have the ability to legitimate their rule.<sup>100</sup> Of course, the official narratives inscribed on state-sanctioned memorials do not go uncontested. Often family members of those commemorated or participants of celebrated historical events will contest the meanings assigned to them or oppose government rhetoric that claims such heroes, heroines, or events as its own. Despite this, official rhetoric tends to determine the meanings that such memorials signify in public discourse and subaltern histories are inclined to remain silenced in cases where public memorials commemorate significant events and/or people that are vital to legitimisation politics. As Marschall indicates, public memorials have the ability to promote societal and individual healing after a traumatic past but it is vital that these memorials are designed in consultation with the victims of this violent history.<sup>101</sup> Yet, officially sanctioned narratives of the past are often represented in public memorials, etching their existence into the physical landscape. Marschall illustrates that,

Officially endorsed public memory, moulded and interpreted by the forces of political necessity, always withholds recognition from alternative narratives and can contradict private memories, thereby de-authenticating and invalidating them.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Meskell, “Trauma Culture”, in Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.170.

<sup>97</sup> Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths” in Hosking and Schöpflin (eds), *Myths*, p.26.

<sup>98</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.62.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

More unpleasant aspects of the past, such as the ‘necklacing’<sup>103</sup> of suspected apartheid government informants and the torture and murder of other victims by the liberation movement or in the name of the struggle for freedom are not officially acknowledged in the physical landscape of memorials and monuments as it is “considered counter-productive to the government’s goals of attaining reconciliation, unity and nation-building on the basis of pride in a shared history of resistance.”<sup>104</sup> Despite the government drawing on the mandate from the TRC process in its efforts to memorialise and honour the victims, heroes, and heroines of the liberation movement, it clearly falls short in acknowledging all victims who were affected by the struggle between apartheid government and anti-government forces. As Marschall indicates,

...the government-supported practice of memorialisation is implicitly based on a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ victims, a hierarchical ranking of casualties in terms of their symbolic significance or ‘usefulness’ to support specific value systems and governmental agendas.<sup>105</sup>

In South Africa it has become clear that dominant political narratives of the past subsume local or individual narratives and often sideline stakeholders in commemorative processes in order to promote one official narrative that legitimates the current political dispensation.

### ***Exempla Virtutis: A New Pantheon of National Heroes and Heroines***

The creation of a new pantheon of national heroes and heroines is an essential aspect of nation-building – especially following drastic political transitions. Heroes and heroines of the past are effective tools in ‘moral education’ as their stories often display a strong affective aspect of values. They are set apart from average citizens through relentless self-sacrifice and heroic deeds in the face of extreme hardships and persecution. The myths of heroes and heroines and the ‘heroic past’ have the ability to become powerful narratives that are employed by cultural entrepreneurs, political elites, and governments in the service of nation-building.<sup>106</sup> The heroes and heroines that are honoured and commemorated by the new nation

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<sup>103</sup> A cruel form of execution that was used by some liberation movements to kill suspected apartheid government informants. A tyre was forced around a victim’s chest and arms and set alight. This was a practice controversially supported by the one-time ‘mother of the nation’, Winnie Mandela.

<sup>104</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.91.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>106</sup> One of the most popular examples of this is the mythical Irish hero Cúchulainn who has been an important icon for Irish nationalists.

come to exemplify all that is moral and good and come to personify the positive qualities that should be emulated and nurtured by the nation in order for the nation to be successful – their lives are the compass that points to the future. The post-apartheid state, with its foundation mythology firmly placed in the years of the struggle against apartheid, has no shortage of national icons. The names of these heroes and heroines are commemorated as street names, public squares, hospitals, schools, universities, clinics, ships, informal settlements, metropolises and a variety of other public buildings and spaces. Their lives and sacrifices are recounted in school textbooks – inspiring a sense of patriotism in a new generation – and they are immortalised through statuary and memorials that occupy visible public space. The average South African is confronted with the icons of the nation on a daily basis. When a living hero or heroine dies, depending on their public stature and value as political currency, large state-funded public official funerals are held where politicians, struggle comrades, and family members have a public (and sometimes televised) platform where the deceased’s moral values and achievements are praised, often within the constricted political context of the present. It is at this point, when their voices are silenced in death, that their entry into a pantheon of national icons is truly established.<sup>107</sup> While South Africa has several ‘living legends’ that are steeped in struggle mythology these icons retain the ability to speak for themselves. When these heroes and heroines die, their silences allow their bodies and legacies to be inscribed with new and continuously shifting politicised meaning while their status as national icons will either grow, fade, or be called upon when social, political, or economic contexts require their legacies to inspire, motivate, and legitimate.

The post-apartheid nation needed new common heroes and heroines to establish the moral compass of the post-apartheid state. These individuals had to be able to represent reconciliation and be recognised by the entire nation as heroes and heroines. After all, the main goal of the new state was to promote reconciliation in the wake of a divisive past and negotiated transition. Therefore, the new national icons that would promote reconciliation while simultaneously legitimating the new regime had to be carefully considered. Reaching back into the ‘heroic age’ of the struggle against apartheid would prepare the modern South African nation for its future. The qualities of its heroes and heroines intended to recreate the

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<sup>107</sup> It is significant to note that former president Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu were notable exceptions to this. Their status in South African society is akin to that of the ‘founding fathers’ of the USA and they are likewise enshrined in grand mythologies. Mandela, in life, became the central ‘founding father’ of the South African post-apartheid nation which is now further sacralised by his passing while Tutu’s iconic status has not waned despite his increasing condemnation of the ANC as the ruling party in government.

glory of the past in the present. But this does not mean a return to that past or a longing for it, merely the recreation of its reconstructed (sometimes invented) heroic qualities in the present.

An interesting aspect of constructing a new pantheon of national heroes and heroines is the selection process. These icons had to be symbolically and emotionally accessible to a heterogeneous population while simultaneously legitimating the new state and its government. With South Africa's divisive and violent colonial and apartheid past common heroes and heroines were difficult to identify. However, with the new foundational mythology situated in the struggle against apartheid and the old regime represented as an historical evil, it was apparent that the nation's new icons would have strong struggle credentials or legacies of resistance to oppression. Simultaneously, these icons had to be heroic, not violent; martyrs, not aggressors; symbols of national unity, not the divisive past. More difficult aspects of the lives of these icons are glossed over, altered and forgotten in an attempt to present them as archetypal heroes and heroines to the nation. Meskell argues that a trend in South Africa exists that rather than "addressing the harsh specificities of the past, there is a strong seam of reworked and re-imagined pasts that run through these new narratives of nationalism."<sup>108</sup> This is not only the case for historic events, but, as will become increasingly clear in the following chapters, with post-apartheid icons too. Women often feature predominantly in national pantheons as mothers, or are constructed as mothers. The uneasy parts of their stories are edited, ignored, and forgotten while constructions of motherhood (even if they were not mothers in life) domesticates women who acted outside of the traditional gender roles and motherhood is presented as a patriarchal institution and national emblem.<sup>109</sup> Samuelson indicates that "[r]epresented as maternal figures, these women reflect back to the nation its imaginary wholeness and unity."<sup>110</sup> Around these national mothers, a family of icons is amassed as sons and daughters of our soil, and as fathers of the nation. Chris Hani has frequently been referred to as a son of the soil while Nelson Mandela is affectionately and popularly referred to as 'Tata' (father).

One of the first icons of the new nation was not a struggle heroine but a figure situated in the distant past of the first Dutch settlement of the Cape. Eva/Krotoa was a Khoikhoi woman who served as a translator between the early Dutch settlers and the Khoi people of the Cape region. She married a Danish surgeon who was employed by the Dutch East India

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<sup>108</sup> Meskell, "Trauma Culture", in Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.160.

<sup>109</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.232.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.232.

Company (DEIC) and their children grew up as part of Cape Dutch society.<sup>111</sup> Despite the tragic end to Eva/Krotoa's life, her story became part of the foundational mythology of the new nation. During the transition, the story of Eva/Krotoa has been the subject of a vast amount of historical revisionist writing, genealogical claims, and fictional reconstructions.<sup>112</sup> Reduced to and cast as a 'founding mother', our 'rainbow mother', Eva/Krotoa represents the first meeting and coming together of the colonists and the colonised – an icon of unity. As Samuelson argues, "Krotoa-Eva is the most evocative emblem of this cross-cultural contact."<sup>113</sup> During this period, the cultural texts produced by white South Africans claiming identification with Eva/Krotoa indicated a claim to belong to the new Rainbow Nation and carving out a "sense of national belonging as 'pale natives'..."<sup>114</sup> Essentially, claiming Eva/Krotoa as a 'foremother' legitimated the entry of white South Africans into the Rainbow family. Samuelson argues that,

The positing of the 'foundational subject', in this case Eva-Krotoa as rainbow Mother, asserts the naturalness of the current nation, and of white South Africans' place therein, and denies their contingency. Krotoa-Eva's story is inserted into a narrative that... sees all past events as events in the becoming of the [South African rainbow] nation.<sup>115</sup>

The more difficult aspects of Eva/Krotoa's narratives are carefully neglected and forgotten and her role as a mother of the nation emphasised reducing her to her womb as a representation of the crucible in which Europe and Africa first met.<sup>116</sup> However, as Coetzee argues, rewriting a South African history that situates itself in the history of early Dutch settlement perpetuates the myth of 1652 as the founding moment of South Africa.<sup>117</sup> Meskell also identifies a point of contention and argues that the "desire to fabricate and reinterpret colonial history, whether in the name of racial harmony or the creation of a more progressive future, can lead to the tendency to forget or embellish past atrocities, retaining the spectre of potential slippage."<sup>118</sup> Yet it is the ability to shape the biography of Eva/Krotoa into a

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<sup>111</sup> Carli Coetzee, "Krotoa Remembered: A Mother of Unity, A Mother of Sorrows?", in Sarah Nuttall & Carli Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, (Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1998), p.112.

<sup>112</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.15. Furthermore, by placing a positive spin on the past, Mandela, in the spirit of rainbow nationalism, even identified Jan van Riebeeck as founder of a component of the South African nation, embracing a white presence in South Africa as part of the new foundational mythology and selectively and temporarily forgetting the trauma and conflict that the colonial encounter brought.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>117</sup> Coetzee, "Krotoa Remembered", in Nuttall & Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past*, p.115.

<sup>118</sup> Meskell, "Trauma Culture", in Bell (ed), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, p.160.

narrative of unity and reconciliation between races and cultures that drives her symbolic efficacy.

While finding popularity in the years immediately following 1994, the narrative of Eva/Krotoa has been subsumed by a greater official focus on struggle heroes and heroines. While the biographies of women such as Sara Baartman found political currency during Mbeki's presidency and his focus on African Renaissance philosophy, in recent years the importance of (predominantly) ANC-affiliated struggle icons has been emphasised. This can possibly be attributed to the ANC government coming under increased criticism for its lack of service delivery and accusations of corrupt activities within the highest ranks of government. The need to publicly recognise the heroes and heroines of its struggle past symbolically legitimates the ANC government's position as the moral compass of South Africa as it ensures the public recognition of its 'glorious past'.<sup>119</sup> By honouring the moral and glorious past of its organisation and its iconic members in a public context the ANC is creating an official history that situates the organisation at the centre of the struggle against apartheid – often at the expense of other liberation organisations. Furthermore, it legitimates the ANC despite its failing record of service delivery in the present. Although not all the icons of the post-apartheid state were card-carrying ANC members, their state-funded commemoration enfolded them into a larger ANC-dominated narrative of the past. Important icons such as Hector Pieterse and Steve Biko were not affiliated to the ANC yet they are part of the upper echelons of the newly constructed pantheon of heroes and heroines and form an essential part of the new foundational myths. Often, surviving family members or descendants of important individuals that are selected by government for public commemoration complain that the government has, in fact, 'hijacked' the memory of the commemorated individual.<sup>120</sup> This is not unusual but speaks to the fact that the state claims ownership of the legacies of iconic individuals at the expense of personal histories and memories. However, the official history and foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state serves as a "sticking plaster for the social order, and as such it reinforces social cohesion and functional unity by presenting and justifying the traditional order."<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the medium of the heroic narrative becomes an essential tool in identity transfer in South Africa.

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<sup>119</sup> This was at the forefront of ANC rhetoric in 2012 as it celebrated the centenary of its organisation through a year-long celebration where every month was declared in honour of one of the previous ANC presidents while important ANC-related sites were located for preservation by being declared national heritage sites.

<sup>120</sup> This was a significant point of contention around the remains of Sara Baartman but has come up with the families of Hector Pieterse, Steve Biko, and Chris Hani (to name but a few) as well.

<sup>121</sup> Joanna Overing, "The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective", in Hosking and Schöpflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, p.7.

It allows a new South African identity to be superimposed on existing ethnic and cultural identities. While difficult, it is possible for myths of citizenship to transcend ethnicity.<sup>122</sup> The official narratives endorsed by the state about these national icons attributes special qualities not only to the heroes and heroines themselves, but by extension, the nation. After all, those heroes and heroines were part of and fought for the nation – their qualities are embodied in the nation that produced them. Their tales and sacrifices construct a narrative about what is unique and special about the nation as a whole and so, in turn, construct the boundaries of the nation.

## **Conclusion**

Expressions of nationalism can invoke a deeply emotional response. Perhaps even more so in a country such as South Africa where violence and trauma have been relatively recent experiences. Yet, a tentative South African identity has been moulded out of a divisive past that has the potential to (temporarily) ‘unite’ South African citizens. This was observable during the 2010 FIFA World Cup which was hosted in South Africa, and, more tragically, the public mourning of Nelson Mandela. However, there is little doubt that the construction of a comprehensive nationalist movement has been an instrumental aspect of promoting a stable transitional process in South Africa. While this has been the result of a concerted ‘top to bottom’ effort in creating a new South African identity, its success – while not completely measurable – tends to be displayed at a variety of events where the national flag, national anthem, or celebrating aspects of a South African identity feature prominently. Furthermore, a brief glance at national internet forums and comments on national news websites often sees discussions of emigration or negative attitudes towards any aspect of South African society reduced to accusations of unpatriotic or ‘un-South African sentiment’ – a sentiment echoed in government’s response to its critics. Logos such as ‘Proudly South African’ display a sense of national pride in South Africa’s achievements as government rhetoric has constructed the nation as unique in its ability to move forward despite its apartheid past.

In order to achieve a peaceful transition, South Africa had to confront its past and the TRC processes, despite its many shortcomings, aided this project by presenting the nation with an official history of trauma followed by moral redemption. Women’s testimonies

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<sup>122</sup> Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths”, in Hosking and Schöpflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, p.24. Schöpflin uses the Swiss identity as a successful example of this.

played a significant role in constructing 'nation' out of trauma and violence but the format of their testimonies, guided by the TRC, also displayed the powerful gender discourses at play that were informed by the past, but would, and do, continue to be exhibited in the present as nationalist ideologies continue to employ women and their bodies in the projects of nation-building and political legitimization processes.

Once a usable past has been presented as official history, this is bolstered by the construction of a new national iconography, the political reconfiguration of national time and space, and the construction of a pantheon of national heroes and heroines. The extensive symbolic iconography created by the post-apartheid state established a foundational mythology that simultaneously reached back to an imagined golden age of pre-colonialism, a history of colonial contact cast as a founding moment, and the heroic age of the struggle against apartheid. All the events of the past, despite their traumatic legacies, were cast as events that led to the creation of the South African 'nation' in the present. In South Africa, the fragile nature of this mythology requires its constant reinforcement through its enactment in public space and time. Building a future on a past of trauma through a present of mourning is achieved by forging a shared history of suffering – however tentative the invention of this 'shared' past may be – which especially finds resonance in a white population that was complicit in maintaining the apartheid order. Of course, the nation-building project allowed for a sense of hope in the future during times of socio-political uncertainty amongst citizens. It allowed people to grasp on to a valid identity as a citizen of a 'new' South Africa, regardless of race and the atrocities of the past. While it cannot be denied that there are politicians and government officials (and, of course, citizens) who continue to feel a genuine and passionate connection to the nation-building project and have a yearning interest in seeing the fulfilment of a truly non-racial, unified South Africa, it is impossible to separate the current functionalist approach of government to the struggle past from official commemorative efforts that are becoming increasingly factional. With the initial euphoria, positivity and hope that accompanied the 1994 elections and the Mandela presidency having long since waned and a growing sense of frustration at unchanging socio-economic inequalities amongst citizens is emerging, the official nation-building effort has seen a decrease in genuinely altruistic motives as it necessarily becomes more utilitarian.

## Chapter 6

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### **Remembering, (Re)creating, and Commemorating the ‘Midwives of Political Emancipation’: State Sanctioned Histories and SAHRA’s Women’s Legacy Project**

*Heritage is sometimes equated with reliving the past; more often, it improves the past to suit present needs... We dwell on mythic fables rather than specifics, consolidate history into a generalised past, and revamp a legacy in line with what we think the present is or want it to be.<sup>1</sup>*

- David Lowenthal

*Heritage is... seen by its critics as ‘a project’, if not a conspiracy or plot then at the very least a strategy, ‘a complex and purposely selective process of historical recollection.’ It is ‘a bid for hegemony’, a way of using knowledge in the service of power. It shores up national identity at a time when it is beset by uncertainties on all sides.<sup>2</sup>*

- Raphael Samuel

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapters have established the context for a discussion of the many ways in which political and politicised women and their legacies are moulded to form part of the post-apartheid nation’s foundational mythology. This chapter will form the bridge between a discussion of general methods of commemorating women considered important to the post-apartheid state to the case studies that will follow in subsequent chapters. Prompted by the recent effort of the South African Heritage Association (SAHRA), this chapter will consider

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<sup>1</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, 1998), pp. 142-143.

<sup>2</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Volume 1. Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (Verso: London and New York, 1994), p.243.

the framework of an ambitious project titled ‘Honouring and Celebrating Women’s Sacrifices and Roles as Midwives of Political Emancipation’. This project seeks to honour and commemorate South African women spanning the colonial and apartheid eras and who have in some way contributed to resistance to oppression whether through political activism, art and culture, or through subversion of the old order. Three of the women discussed in the following chapters are a significant part of this project and the commemorative efforts planned for their graves have already commenced.<sup>3</sup> Despite a recent restructuring within SAHRA and a reported ‘lack of capacity’ which placed the proposed legacy project on the backburner, a renewed effort has been made to realise this ambitious venture with a significant portion of the funding having been approved by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC).<sup>4</sup> The proposal of this project counters the current predominant commemoration of male struggle heroes and male politicians in the South African public commemorative landscape yet still inadvertently domesticates women within a post-apartheid hegemonic patriarchal social system.

This chapter will briefly address the strong top-down state approach to the heritage industry in South Africa to indicate the importance of SAHRA’s new legacy project within the public space. It will place special focus on the ways in which women, deemed important enough to be honoured and celebrated in post-apartheid South Africa, are commemorated in public spaces and the ways in which their legacies are interpreted, shaped, and eventually displayed in a way that informs and supports the foundation myth of the nation. The discussion will move on to outline the SAHRA project and focus on its selection of the women who are to be commemorated and especially its focus on the declaration of graves as national heritage sites. Through the (re)construction of the martyrdom, sacrifice, and domesticity of women across time and race this project becomes a significant part of government attempts at fostering a sense of national unity and envisioning a unified South African identity of which respect for gender equality is a purportedly significant component. Yet, it has become clear in the two decades of democracy that political equality does not ensure the establishment of women as “full, free and rights-bearing members of a democratic

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<sup>3</sup> However, the graves of all four women are Grade I National Heritage sites and fall under the protection of SAHRA.

<sup>4</sup> Troy Phili, personal communication via email 19 October 2010. The few projects that have received attention since the restructuring within SAHRA (declaration of the grave of Rahima Moosa and Adelaide Tambo as national heritage sites) are, however, firmly situated in struggle history which is indicative of the continued official focus on this recent history as the central foundation myth.

polity.”<sup>5</sup> The broad variety of women selected for this project allows identification with anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists and their efforts across the historic racial divide. Furthermore, the language used in the title of the project strongly resonates with the previous political dispensations’ language of sacrifice, motherhood, and domesticity when commemorating women in public spaces. The declaration of the graves of Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, and Charlotte Maxeke as national heritage sites in 2010 launched this legacy project. The more recent 2012 declarations of the graves of Rahima Moosa and Adelaide Tambo (as part and parcel of the declaration of her husband, Oliver Tambo’s grave as a national heritage site), thus far indicate continued government focus on struggle history as the bedrock for the foundation myth of the post-apartheid state. Furthermore, government rhetoric and predominant government funding for these projects and the media attention given to such declarations ensures the creation of a government-sanctioned official history enacted in the public space and serves to legitimate the current political dispensation while also defining national identity through a newly envisioned heritage.

### **Post-Apartheid Heritage**

Ingrid de Kok observes of the South African transition that “[s]ince the past had to meet the present through settlement, not revolution, it needed an accompanying rhetoric about how to process the future: and that process was divined as the act of nation building.”<sup>6</sup> The advent of the first democratic election saw a renewed interest in the heritage industry amongst the public as, reportedly, the Presidency and the Minister of Arts and Culture were flooded with letters from organisations and individuals requesting official tribute to those who had made sacrifices for the struggle against apartheid and the recognition of important sites and previously marginalised communities.<sup>7</sup> It is not uncommon in post-colonial societies for heritage and cultural tourism to be considered by governments as a “magic bullet”<sup>8</sup> to

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<sup>5</sup> Helen Moffett, “‘These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them’: Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 1, 2006, p.144.

<sup>6</sup> Ingrid de Kok, “Cracked Heirlooms: Memory on Exhibition”, in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York, 1998), p.57.

<sup>7</sup> Sabine Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: Commemorative Monuments, Memorials and Public Statuary in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, (Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2010), p.175. Although Marschall’s research in the DACTS archives revealed no evidence of the existence of these letters.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, “Introduction: Memory, Race, and the Nation in Public Spaces”, in Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (eds), *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2009), p.5.

revitalise sluggish economies and lead to economic development in impoverished and undeveloped rural and urbanised areas. The South African government understood the need to recognise and present the histories of such communities, individuals, and the significant events that occurred during the years of resistance in the public space to counter the official commemorative markers of the colonial and apartheid eras that dominated the public landscape.<sup>9</sup> As Marschall indicates, heritage “emerged as a prominent discourse in the political and public arena, one of the principal sites for negotiating issues of culture, identity, and citizenship.”<sup>10</sup> Official representations of what would come to represent a new post-apartheid South African heritage would form an important part of nation-building, showcasing the country’s racial and ethnic diversity, creating employment opportunities in undeveloped communities, and lead to social reconstruction.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that for the post-apartheid government, heritage served a very specific social and political function of redressing the past, building the ‘nation’ socially and economically in the present, and creating a new official iconography and social repository for the future. Government initially launched the National Legacy Project which identified several high-priority, and indeed, high-profile heritage development sites which would form the cornerstones for the grand narrative of the foundation myth of the post-apartheid nation.<sup>12</sup> Nine high-priority sites were selected and included the commemoration of the Zulu warriors at the battlefield of Blood River, a monument for the women of South Africa at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, an inclusive commemoration of the Centenary of the South African Anglo-Boer War, Constitution Hill, the commemoration of sites identified with Nelson Mandela and his youth in Qunu in the Eastern Cape, a memorial for Samora Machel, the former Mozambican president, on the site where his plane had crashed, the restoration of the home of Albert Luthuli in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the establishment of a Khoi/San heritage route, and the creation of the ambitious Freedom Park complex near Pretoria.<sup>13</sup> Marschall shows that, although these projects were seemingly legitimised from ‘above’ and ‘below’ (through the ‘floods of requests’ from grass-roots level and its official endorsement from government), the requests

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<sup>9</sup> In the current heritage landscape, the rural areas and histories of rural resistance to colonialism and apartheid remain under-represented. Often, they form part of larger but lesser-known ‘Heritage Routes’ but the small towns and villages that are part of such routes are often unequipped to provide adequately for any tourist accommodation and tend to gain little from rare visits by tourists to the sites.

<sup>10</sup> Sabine Marschall, “How to Honour a Woman: Gendered Memorialisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa”, *Critical Arts*, 24, 2, 2010, p.261.

<sup>11</sup> Amareswar Galla, “The Tshwane Declaration: Setting Standards for Heritage Tourism in South Africa”, *Museum International*, 200, 50, 4, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> This included a Monument for the Women of South Africa at the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

<sup>13</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.175.

received from civil society were condensed and channelled into a few high-profile projects. History and its representations are invariably contested terrains and certain voices are privileged in the public space. Walkowitz and Knauer show that “local and national participants in these struggles have not only divergent agendas but also unequal reserves of financial, political, and cultural capital with which to advance those agendas.”<sup>14</sup> Building upon this observation, Marschall argues that rather than being the result of critical debate, consultation and engagement, the memorial landscape that emerged was not a reflection of what ‘the people’ valued about the past or how they would like to see their heroes and heroines celebrated, but a “highly institutionalised form of commemoration sponsored by the national government in pursuit of specific aims and intentions.”<sup>15</sup> The sites identified for development would embody narratives of resistance against apartheid, colonialism, racism, and oppression which were morally superior qualities with which the post-apartheid South African nation was imbued. These narratives of resistance and trauma which lie at the heart of South African official history would be institutionalised and preserved through officially sanctioned forms of remembrance in monuments and public statuary. This intended to inspire a new national identity while congruently legitimating the new political order through the selection of official accounts of the past that tend to privilege ANC activists and sites of memory associated with the struggle. This indicates the need for institutional authority for firm and reliable accreditation. Paul Connerton argues that institutional authority needs such accreditation retrospectively and prospectively: “Retrospectively, authority needs to be able to point to a proper descent... it must be able to justify its existence by reference to legitimate ancestors... Prospectively, authority needs to be remembered appropriately...”<sup>16</sup> It was expected that the state-funded public commemoration of certain events, locations and individuals would allow official narratives of the past to constitute some form of ‘public’<sup>17</sup> memory in years to come as their presence in the public landscape would infiltrate the historical consciousness of the ‘nation’. For Assman, it is the framework provided by the foundation myth within which selected narratives and their associated heroes, artefacts, and

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<sup>14</sup> Walkowitz and Knauer, “Introduction”, in Walkowitz and Knauer, *Contested Histories*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.176.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Connerton, *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body*, (Cambridge University Press: New York; 2011), pp.3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Rather than treating the term ‘public’ as a homogenous entity, the singular term is used somewhat guardedly here. It is important to note that heritage in South Africa is, as in most countries, a contentious and divisive issue and not everyone responds or relates to public heritage sites in the same manner. Rather, there are various ‘publics’ with different sets of values and divergent and, often, competing interests that interact with or ignore specific heritage sites. Walkowitz and Knauer, “Introduction”, in Walkowitz and Knauer, *Contested Histories*, p.3.

places are embedded and from which they derive their meaning.<sup>18</sup> Following Barthes' definition of myth as a form of depoliticised speech, the foundation myth simplifies, clarifies, and orders an unruly multivocality of political narratives to produce a single moral and political story that defines the post-apartheid nation. Marschall has identified four interrelated 'foundational pillars' on which the foundation myth of the post-apartheid nation rests: the meta-narrative of the struggle for liberation; resistance against all forms of domination and the disenfranchisement of the marginalised, the notion of triumph over oppression, and *Ubuntu*.<sup>19</sup> The identification and official celebration of political and politicised individuals and sites in the post-apartheid state are driven by these four 'pillars'. Although most narratives of resistance are stories of collective loss and mourning, each one becomes a narrative of triumph and celebration in the context of the post-apartheid state. Moreover, it is the superior moral qualities that developed as a result of centuries of loss and suffering that are celebrated in the new heritage landscape, or what Lowenthal, in the context of the 'heritage of victims', has referred to as national "traits forged in the crucible of loss."<sup>20</sup> In their entirety, these commemorative objects, spaces, and events establish a single, larger foundational myth that attempts to obfuscate oppositional and ambiguous narratives.<sup>21</sup> For Walkowitz and Knauer complicated and untidy histories are unjustifiably simplified to serve state policy, and "complexity is sacrificed for the sake of soundbites."<sup>22</sup> Speaking within the context of post-9/11 USA their argument that any critical examination of deconstruction of the past is equated with being anti-patriotic rings true of South Africa in the present where the term 'counter-revolutionary' is frequently heard being uttered by politicians on news reports when referring to critics of ANC policies. However, with reconciliation as the initial focus of the post-apartheid state, the establishment of commemorative objects and events that

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<sup>18</sup> Assman, quoted in Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.178.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179. What will become clear in the following chapters is that certain of these 'pillars' are highlighted during different presidencies as each tried to push a new agenda for the 'nation'.

<sup>20</sup> Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, p.75.

<sup>21</sup> What the new heritage sites represent is a simplified, uncomplicated representation of the past that has, in recent years, quite effectively silenced the compromised narratives of struggle heroes and resistance efforts that resulted from the TRC processes and presented a morally unambiguous narrative of the past for the 'public' and visiting tourists. Robins discusses a case where the brutal necklacing and sexual violation by an angry crowd of a woman believed to have been an informer is recounted to the TRC by the victim's sister. The commissioner overhearing the case called for a minute's silence to honour the victim's heroism and martyrdom. Robins argues that this is effectively a silencing of the witness by transforming the victim into a heroine and martyr of the struggle whose body has been sacrificed in the name of the new nation. This effectively 'sanitised' a piece of struggle history that did not fit neatly into a new grand narrative of reconciliation. Although the TRC complicated resistance narratives by bringing such atrocities into the media spotlight, this illustrates "how the TRC and the media [were] manufacturing a new nationalism from painful personal memories and shattered and mutilated bodies." Steven Robins, "Silence in My Father's House: Memory, Nationalism, and Narratives of the Body" in Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past*, p.138.

<sup>22</sup> Walkowitz and Knauer, "Introduction" in Walkowitz and Knauer, *Contested Histories*, p.6.

celebrated the new democratic order had to avoid being perceived as divisive. Within a spirit of reconciliation, the meta-narrative of the struggle against oppression and its celebration is represented as benefitting the nation, conceived as a homogeneous entity, in its entirety. As Marschall shows,

[m]embers of the white minority, it is intimated, can also celebrate the advent of freedom and the achievement of the new democratic order, as they have been liberated from the moral burden of benefitting from racial injustice; from the constraints of living in an environment controlled by principles of social engineering; and from the stigma of belonging to a nation of white oppressors.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, nation-building and reconciliation is facilitated by presenting and reconstructing the struggle as a shared national history – however constructed, or invented, this version of the past may be. Robins argues that such collective narratives of trauma and suffering tend to serve nationalist agendas and this will become increasingly apparent for the South African case in the following chapters.<sup>24</sup> Essentially, each officially-sanctioned heritage project “celebrates a foundational element or symbolically expresses integral, constituting values of the new nation as conceptualised by the government.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as Marschall asserts, government’s decision to invest in the Legacy Project, has “turned the state into the main promulgator and interpreter of history.”<sup>26</sup> This is demonstrated by “[t]he increased involvement of the state in the shaping of ‘public history’ and the government’s encroachment and restructuring of public space through symbolic interventions and the strategic usage of heritage for the purpose of political and societal policy goals...”<sup>27</sup> Since the initiation of the development of the nine high-priority sites, a significant number of smaller (although not necessarily less valuable or costly) commemorative efforts have sprung up in the heritage landscape. By 2002, six further sites or projects of importance had been identified which included the Sara Baartman memorial. What has become increasingly clear is the focus on commemorating extraordinary leaders or individuals as opposed to collective

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<sup>23</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.181. However, Marschall argues elsewhere that the lack of government funding for new memorials that might celebrate a ‘white’ heritage of resistance to apartheid in the post-apartheid state and the accompanying lack of iconoclasm that earmarked the South African transition might have left the white population with a reactionary representation in the public space of their place in the post-apartheid nation and they are *de facto* confined to and defined by the public statuary of the colonial and apartheid past. Sabine Marschall, “Articulating Cultural Pluralism through Public Art as Heritage in South Africa”, *Visual Anthropology*, 23, 2010, p.84.

<sup>24</sup> Robins, “Silence in My Father’s House” in Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past*, p.122.

<sup>25</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.182.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

experiences. The “notion of identifying heroes and celebrating implicit ‘founders of the nation’”, argues Marschall, “plays an increasingly prominent role not only in the Legacy Project, but also in the wider post-apartheid commemorative effort as it has been unfolding over the past years.”<sup>28</sup> Marschall has shown that the individuals celebrated and commemorated in official heritage projects are overwhelmingly male while women’s contribution to freedom and democracy tends to be commemorated symbolically and, more often than not, women are commemorated as a group rather than as individuals. “Moreover”, Marschall argues, “patriarchal attitudes that diminish the contributions of women and prevailing criteria for defining heroic action and ‘worthiness’ tend to work against paying public tribute to women.”<sup>29</sup> Marschall continues,

The concern for women’s equality has historically been marginalised and subsumed under the discourse of national liberation, and even feminist art-making in South Africa... was only acceptable if it overlapped with socio-political commentary. Today, the new landscape of memory enshrined by the democratic order is foremost concerned with the representation of liberation heroes and invariably male-dominated episodes of resistance history in which women are not considered, because they usually do not ‘make the grade’ according to the parameters of this discourse.<sup>30</sup>

The *Sunday Times* Heritage Project, a private-sector initiative, resulted in seven public memorials in honour of women – all with their attending problematic representations of womanhood. However, the recent proposal of a five-year legacy project by SAHRA and funded by DAC focuses exclusively on commemorating specific women and their resistance to colonial and apartheid oppression through politics, art, literature, and education.

Since 1999, the management of South Africa’s national heritage sites has mainly fallen to SAHRA. The establishment of this agency in 1999 would allow for the effective identification, declaration, protection, and management of heritage sites and objects at local and national levels. It would set the norms and standards for heritage management in the country in close collaboration with the local communities and, of course, DAC by whom many new heritage projects are initiated and funded. SAHRA was established with a strong drive to harness the power of heritage to promote unity and reconciliation and to create a new South African identity while – idealistically and somewhat ironically – guarding against the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.205.

<sup>29</sup> Marschall, “How to Honour a Woman”, *Critical Arts*, p.277.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.277.

use of heritage for “sectarian purposes or political gain.”<sup>31</sup> SAHRA itself would be responsible for the management of Grade I heritage sites – those deemed to be of national importance, while local bodies would maintain heritage sites of lower grade stature indicating a clear heritage hierarchy in identifying what is most important to remember and present to the nation and tourists. Burial grounds and graves form an important aspect of SAHRA’s mission and within the National Heritage Resources Act (1999) that established the agency, it is indicated that within the first five years of its existence, SAHRA had to present a list of graves of individuals associated with the liberation struggle and those who died in exile to the Minister of Arts and Culture for approval for their protection as national heritage sites.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, for those struggle heroes who died outside of South Africa, the act makes provision for their re-internment in a place of prominence in the capital.<sup>33</sup> The importance of the graves of struggle heroines that are considered to be of national significance is reflected in the Women’s Legacy Project as all identifiable graves of women nominated for commemoration have been recommended for declaration as Grade I National Heritage Sites.

### **The Legacy Project**

Honouring the roles that women played in the struggle against apartheid has become increasingly prominent in recent years. The official focus on women’s activism appears to have gone hand in hand with an increase in the media attention given to the ever-rising level of sexual and physical violence against women.<sup>34</sup> This violence is especially highlighted during Women’s Month events where female icons are honoured and commemorated. Furthermore, the ANC as the current ruling party has become under increased criticism for its lavish spending of state resources on non-essential services and the extravagant lifestyles enjoyed by some of the organisation’s top ranks in a country where poverty remains a central social issue.<sup>35</sup> The ANC has countered this criticism in official commemorative efforts such

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<sup>31</sup> “National Heritage Resources Act, no.25, 1999”, *Government Gazette*, 406, 19974, 5(1)(d).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘Burial Grounds and Graves’, (36)(7)(a).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, (36)(9). Which capital city this might be is not indicated. However, as many struggle heroes and heroines have living relatives in South Africa and their specific communities recognise the political and economic value of the creation of a heritage site within their specific locations this declaration has been contested.

<sup>34</sup> While levels of sexual violence committed against men, women, and children have risen in South Africa, women and girls continue to be at the forefront of media attention given to sexual violence in society and for the purposes of this chapter the focus will remain on violence inflicted on women.

<sup>35</sup> Grundlingh is more direct and condemning in his criticism of the “new elite” and its preoccupation with the contemporary material world and its rewards when he argues that “[u]nless invocations of the legacies of

as Sisulu's funeral and its recent year-long centenary celebrations by focusing on discourses of sacrifice and martyrdom as embodied by the ANC and its members as a struggle and liberation party. Both notions of sacrifice and martyrdom tend to be discourses encountered in nationalist narratives of female political activism and female anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists have become 'safe' icons to commemorate in the current political context. Conceivably, it could also be an attempt to counter the negative patriarchal and misogynist perceptions that arose from the influential supporters of then deputy-president, Jacob Zuma, during his rape trial (at which he was found not guilty). Furthermore, President Zuma's 'traditional' and conservative values seem to ideologically counter government rhetoric and legislation promoting gender equality in South Africa. Whatever the motivation for the increased efforts for commemorating South Africa's past struggle heroines might have been, it is a positive move that has the ability to put women being subjected to violence the forefront of government legislation that could change the lives and living circumstances for many. However, rather than seeing a marked improvement in government funding for essential services for initiatives such as rape crisis centres and places of safety for women who have suffered violence and displacement (and by extension – often their children), it has been the present political capital gain that can be achieved by promoting and honouring certain struggle heroines that has been at the forefront of most commemorative efforts. Davison articulated this, albeit in a different context, when she wrote that “[f]unding is a powerful agent of change, and it has been made clear that financial support will be awarded to those heritage projects that contribute to transforming national consciousness.”<sup>36</sup> Very few of the recent commemorations for struggle heroines, or National Women's Day celebrations for that matter, have been accompanied by the unveiling of government programmes to help and improve the lived experiences of South African women and girls. Rather, lavish state-funded parties attended by the upper echelons of government are given to mark the occasions.<sup>37</sup> What has become clear is that the political usefulness and gain of commemorated struggle heroines is at the forefront of efforts to 'honour' them as the

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apartheid can serve a material purpose in the present, they do not on their own appear to have much historical cultural purchase.” Albert Grundlingh, “A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes: The Voortrekker Monument as Symbol of Afrikaner Power in a Postapartheid South Africa”, in Walkowitz and Knauer, *Contested Histories*, p.170.

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Davison, “Museums and the Reshaping of Memory”, in Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past*, p.148.

<sup>37</sup> Helen Moffett has written a scathing attack on the heavily politicised nature of Women's Day and recognises that, far from celebrating women's activism, it is a public holiday celebrated for the value of its political currency in present day political power struggles. Helen Moffett, “Take Your Women's Day and Shove It” at <http://helenmoffett.bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/08/08/take-your-women%E2%80%99s-day-and-shove-it/>

government is seen to be failing to adequately protect its women citizens in the present. While the lives, legacies, and efforts of many of these women serve as markers of value systems that should be supported and remembered in the present it is lamentable that this does not necessarily translate into government activism to change women's lives for the better – which is, after all, what many of these iconic women fought for in their lifetimes.

The previous chapters have established how women's bodies come to signify 'nation' within a general theoretical and historical context and in the performative context of women's TRC testimonies. In the case of South Africa's traumatic history, this embodiment of the long-suffering nation has produced a very specific category of 'woman' which is performed in the public official mourning rituals of iconic post-apartheid heroines. Samuelson argues that nations are imagined through gendered tropes and argues that in post-apartheid South Africa, "women bear the symbolic weight of nationalism; their bodies are contested sites on which national identities are erected and national unity is forged."<sup>38</sup> The political efficacy of dead bodies in ideology production can be attributed to their inability to contest the narratives that are inscribed on their remains. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the heroic female dead body, often defined by discourses of sacrifice, martyrdom, and motherhood, becomes the ideal vehicle for nationalist ideology production. Samuelson indicates that,

In search of tractable symbols with which to express their ideals of homogeneous unity, national and ethnic claims commandeer women's bodies and deny the more messy aspects of their legacies that cannot be neatly enfolded with the nationalist script. Through acts of amnesia and foreclosure, or 'disrememberings', women are shaped into the ideal forms that *reflect the desired national body* – usually that of Mother, or simply Womb.<sup>39</sup>

If the nation-state, then, is a "repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege"<sup>40</sup> and female reproductive discourses reflect the desired national body which is ideologically produced by men, women necessarily remain trapped in discourses of normative domestic femininity. This leaves little space for the production of a foundational mythology in which women operate as actors rather than as subjects.

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<sup>38</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition*, (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: Scottsville, 2007), p.2.

<sup>39</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p.2. Italics my own.

<sup>40</sup> Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa", *Transition*, 51, 1991, p.122.

## *Representing Struggle Heroines*

In recent years some effort has been made towards presenting the role of women in the struggle to the public. Freedom Park, the most ambitious, grand, and extensive post-apartheid memorial and museum in South Africa, unveiled its plans for a Gallery of Leaders, carefully refraining from using the terminology of the heroic. Established with the vision of emerging as an international icon for freedom and human rights, the mission of Freedom Park is

To provide a pioneering and empowering heritage destination in order to mobilise for reconciliation and nation building in our country; to reflect upon our past, improving our present and building our future as a united nation; and to contribute continentally and internationally to the formation of better human understanding among nations and peoples.<sup>41</sup>

While its core function,

...is the creation of a memorial that will narrate the story of South Africa's pre-colonial, colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid history and heritage, spanning a period of 3.6 billion years of humanity, to acknowledge those that contributed to the freedom of the country and managing the Freedom Park as a cultural institution.<sup>42</sup>

The Gallery of Leaders meant to include national, continental, and international icons that embodied the values described in the mission statement of Freedom Park. A part of the larger S'khumbuto<sup>43</sup> memorial that commemorates the major conflicts that shaped South Africa and those that sacrificed their lives for humanity and freedom,

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<sup>41</sup> "Freedom Park: A Heritage Destination", at [http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2](http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2) accessed 2 February 2013.

<sup>42</sup> "Freedom Park: A Heritage Destination", at [http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2](http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2) accessed 2 February 2013.

<sup>43</sup> "The concept of S'khumbuto is drawn from siSwati nomenclature and signifies a place of remembrance for those who have died and also a place for invoking their assistance in current and future affairs. S'khumbuto would not be a place of grief and mourning but of celebration, a tribute to African and human dignity, and a place for the renewal of the human spirit." Furthermore, S'khumbuto also consists of the imposing Wall of Names memorial, an amphitheatre for events, The Sanctuary which "is a serene environment conducive to the outpouring of emotion. Visitors are invited to conduct a ceremony or light a candle in remembrance of the victims in our struggles for freedom or simply to celebrate the life of a loved one", a symbolic Eternal Flame commemorating the unknown soldiers, and the sculpture of the Reeds, which "signify the rebirth of the South African nation as well as a nation embracing the future.", "Freedom Park: A Heritage Destination", at [http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=31&phpMyAdmin=17b790ef730b81da09a13c43c12692b2](http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=31&phpMyAdmin=17b790ef730b81da09a13c43c12692b2) accessed 2 February 2013.

The Gallery of Leaders pays tribute to some of the many people whose leadership qualities and achievements have been pivotal in the struggle for humanity and freedom nationally, continentally and internationally. These leaders have been selected because of the way in which they have brought about change and development and influenced the course of history. They are in the Gallery of Leaders to serve as exemplary role models who are worthy of being emulated.<sup>44</sup>

A list of twenty-four names was presented with fourteen iconic South African anti-colonial and anti-apartheid resistance leaders, a further seven African leaders, and three international icons of resistance to oppression. The display is situated in a large hall with images of the leaders selected for inclusion printed on banners hanging from the ceilings in a larger-than-life display that instils a sense of sacred heroism in the observer. What seems somewhat of an afterthought is the inclusion of only two women into this list, Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi. These two exceptional women stand as giants in the post-apartheid pantheon of heroes and heroines and their iconic status as struggle heroines is uncontested. While the Gallery of Leaders is international in its approach to honouring icons of resistance to oppression, the complete lack of inclusion of prominent women leaders from outside of South Africa is conspicuous. Arguably, the inclusion of Joseph and Ngoyi in this male-dominated list feels like a necessary token gesture to acknowledge women's involvement in the struggle in South Africa. An acknowledgement of the contribution of prominent women to international struggles for human rights is completely lacking. Furthermore, the reference to martyrdom through the association with S'khumbuto and its reverence towards those who sacrificed their lives for freedom lends a sense of the sacred to the leaders commemorated in the gallery.

A year-long exhibition at the Red Location Museum in Port Elizabeth funded by the National Heritage Council reflects a more direct attempt at honouring the roles of women in the struggle. Honouring prominent Eastern Cape women activists, the focus of the exhibition, titled 'Yesterday's Heroines, Today's Inspiration', appears to have been the propagation of the glorified values of the past in the present as indicated on the museum's flyer for the exhibition:

The work done by these women should inspire today's women as the battle is not over, though the issues may have changed. Contemporary women are facing, amongst other things

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., at [http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=31&phpMyAdmin=17b790ef730b81da09a13c43c12692b2](http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=31&phpMyAdmin=17b790ef730b81da09a13c43c12692b2) accessed 2 February 2013.

– HIV/AIDS, unemployment and drug abuse. Through the likes of women who contributed their all for a better life for others, today's women are encouraged to be inspired and to take the noble baton from 'Yesterday's Heroines' and to be actively engaged in present day issues.

Once again, women's roles are phrased in terms of noble sacrifice for a cause. Marschall also touches on official remembering of women's political activism and contributions to democracy as often being framed in the discourse of sacrifice – a traditional female role.<sup>45</sup> The accompanying article to the exhibition in the local regional newspaper, *The Herald*, reinforces the domesticity noted in the leaflet by emphasising how women sacrificed and forfeited the comfort of their homes and the difficulties faced by women as single mothers as husbands were more actively involved in resistance activities.<sup>46</sup> This is not to deny the importance of the politicised nature of the domestic sphere during apartheid or to fail to acknowledge that for many women in the twentieth century (and, indeed, today), the care of household and family were and still are primary tasks. It is, however, problematic that women's active contributions remain phrased in a discourse of the domestic in as it serves to reinforce discourses of femininity and womanhood in notions of domestic passivity and sacrifice.

The exhibition ran from 29 November 2011 until 30 November 2012 and commemorates five struggle heroines from the Eastern Cape region; Florence Matomela, Nontuthuzelo Mabala, Zodwa Sobukwe, Nosipho Dastile, and Lillian Diedericks. Matomela was known for her involvement in the ANCWL and FEDSAW and died under banning orders. Mabala and Diedericks were also involved in the ANCWL and participants in the 1956 Women's March. Sobukwe was known for her 'behind the scenes' work during the struggle years and staying out of the public eye. Her experience was typical of the wives of prominent political anti-apartheid activists and she and her children faced repeated police harassment despite her husband's absence in the home. Dastile was a founder of the UDF in Uitenhage, the first president of the Uitenhage Women's Organisation, chairwoman of the ANCWL in Uitenhage after the organisation's unbanning in 1990, and served as one of the first councillors in Uitenhage's transitional local council from 1994-1999. Sobukwe and Diedericks are the only surviving women honoured by this exhibition. While the museum's official explanatory statement fails to acknowledge violence against women as one of the greatest struggles faced by women in the present, Diedericks recognises this as the new battle

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<sup>45</sup> Marschall, "How to Honour a Woman", *Critical Arts*, p.263.

<sup>46</sup> Nomahlubi Jordaan, "Honouring Five Struggle Heroines: Women Who Fought Against Apartheid Headline Display", *The Herald*, Thursday 24 November, 2011.

when she states, “At the time, women were fighting against atrocities of the apartheid government, today’s women are fighting a different cause. They are fighting against women trafficking, rape, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse.”<sup>47</sup> Despite a workshop organised for young women by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to educate them about the contributions of these five women to the advent of democracy, no other community outreach programmes accompanied the exhibition. Furthermore, the exhibition itself is a simple display of digitally printed images of the women accompanied by their brief biographies and some artefacts associated with their lives. The simplicity of the exhibition echoes official and also private commemorative efforts to honour women which often embody notions of humility and understatement, perhaps to counter traditional statuary and monuments which tend towards grandeur and the monolithic. While simple, the informative effort made to educate the public about the activism of several local women and its attempt to promulgate these values into present day activism stands in contrast to the more traditional pantheonic heroism presented by the Freedom Park display in its Gallery of Leaders.

### ***Honouring the ‘Midwives of Political Emancipation’***

A more concerted and comprehensive effort to commemorate several remarkable women deemed heroines in the present has emerged in recent years. The project, envisioned by SAHRA and approved and largely funded by DAC, proposes a five-year Legacy Project plan entitled ‘Honouring and Celebrating Women’s Sacrifices and Roles as Midwives of Political Emancipation’. It followed the 2010 declaration by the Minister of Arts and Culture of the graves of Charlotte Maxeke, Helen Joseph, and Lilian Ngoyi as national heritage sites. The initial declaration would only involve the declaration of the graves of Joseph and Ngoyi, yet a special interest and push from within SAHRA would allow for the inclusion of the less publically known Maxeke’s grave.<sup>48</sup> The project plan projected a five-year span from 2010-2015, but due to “internal re-structuring” within SAHRA very little happened after the initial

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Jordaan, “Honouring Five Struggle Heroines”, *The Herald*, Thursday 24 November, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Maxeke, as an ANC-affiliated individual and as a driving force of the 1913 Women’s March, fitted neatly into the narrative of women’s resistance.

declarations.<sup>49</sup> The recent 2012 declaration of Rahima Moosa's grave as a national heritage site indicates a revival of the project and a renewed effort towards its completion.

The scope of the project is extremely large and it remains to be seen if every aspect of the project will be addressed. Ranging across a time-period spanning the colonial and apartheid eras and identifying women in roles as diverse as queens, activists, artists, and writers, their works and sites and objects associated with women's resistance to oppression, its full and timely completion appears ambitious at best. The guiding principle for identifying individuals for this project is determined by their "cultural significance due to a strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in South Africa."<sup>50</sup> Whilst referred to as 'unsung heroines', many of the women identified for this project are well-known personas within the new foundational mythology and their names, and indeed statues and memorials to them, are present in the public domain. Others are women famous for their contribution to South African literature and art and are certainly not 'unsung'. The project aims to embrace "national transformation imperatives...to promote reconciliation, understanding and respect, and contribute to the development of a unifying South African identity."<sup>51</sup> Moreover, it aims to ensure that the women it has selected to commemorate become part of the national heroic canon. The project identifies its central role as the "mobilisation of content challenging the silences in the general education band of the role of women as midwives of political emancipation in the different areas of life."<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, at the "heart of the project" is the "promotion of governmental imperatives such as – social cohesion, nation building, rural development, job creation, and the promotion of reconciliation etc."<sup>53</sup> In addition to the palpable employment of women's legacies of resistance to oppression for nationalist ideology and political power struggles, the strong gendered language of the project title which identifies women as 'midwives' of political emancipation reflects the dominant gendered nature of post-apartheid nationalism. This continues to assign women and their political roles maternal or feminine title-roles. This confines their 'unnatural' activism and militancy to the safe domestic sphere, rendering them, ultimately, harmless. Women's activism in the struggle is often phrased in terms of sacrifice

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<sup>49</sup> The ANC centenary celebrations in 2012 might also have drawn a great deal of financial and human resources from SAHRA as these involved declarations as national heritage sites of many historical ANC-affiliated locations.

<sup>50</sup> NHRA, S3(i), quoted in SAHRA, "Honouring and Celebrating Women's Sacrifices and Roles as Midwives of Political Emancipation", SAHRA project document (draft).

<sup>51</sup> NHRA, S(5)(1)(d), quoted in SAHRA, "Honouring and Celebrating".

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

and martyrdom, more so than men's roles in the struggle which is enshrined in the narrowly, often male-dominated, definition of the heroic. This renders women's activism nearly passive while men are presented as active participants. This is especially poignant when the continued influence of the House of Traditional Leaders, the lack of true parliamentary engagement with horrendous levels of violence against women, and a lack of leadership and role-models within government that pay more than lip-service to gender equality, are taken into consideration. The continued public confinement of women to traditional constructs of gender roles within post-apartheid nationalism shackles public perception of women to their roles within a domestic sphere. Women who are seen as acting outside of the accepted gender roles become vulnerable to gender driven violence. Furthermore, a complete lack of (or perhaps unwillingness in the face of strong traditional and patriarchal concepts of masculinity being valued within the highest ranks of government) governmental engagement with constructions of masculinities in South African society stunts any true progress in addressing and fighting the increasingly sadistic nature of attacks on women.

Helen Moffett addresses the rising levels of sexual violence, and more specifically, rape, in the post-apartheid state in her sagacious article that attempts to discern the rationale for this rise in sexual violence committed against women in the democratic state.<sup>54</sup> Linking a rise of cases of sexual violence during times of more benign political change, Moffett suggests that a case can be made

for arguing that during periods of overt nationalist fervour, political regeneration, emancipation, and other arguably more laudable forms of political restructuring, the rates of sexual violence against women and children also rise alarmingly, often for reasons that have to do with the immediate past.<sup>55</sup>

The inadvertent 'racing' of rape in post-apartheid South Africa occurs by causally placing discourses of rape in a context of apartheid oppression. This means that any official discussions about rape are subsumed in narratives of race and class. These assumptions about rape, held at the highest political levels, ensure that gender and the aetiology of rape are "almost never directly addressed."<sup>56</sup> Yet, the current focus on apartheid as a justificatory narrative for rape in the post-apartheid state inadvertently lays the blame for rape solely at the feet of those oppressed, dominated and emasculated by the apartheid regime: black men.

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<sup>54</sup> Moffett, "'These Women'", *JSAS*, 32, 1, 2006. pp.129-144.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.135.

This, while continuing to hijack the current debates on rape, also, argues Moffett, “serves as a counter-transformative narrative, one that maintains and nurtures fear and suspicion in communities that are already historically or culturally divided, or prompts a return to conservative values and traditions.”<sup>57</sup> This, in turn, may lead to a re-embracing of ‘traditional’ values which advocate the subordination of women. Moffett locates the cause of sexual violence in the construction of dominant masculinities found in all patriarchal social systems. She shows that apartheid’s legacy of dominating and controlling the powerful and dangerous Other through extreme and punitive violence has led to a social anxiety in the present where women have become the Other – a powerful unstable subclass that must be kept in place. She unequivocally states that “[t]here is indeed a link between South Africa’s recent history, and the failure of its citizens under democracy to respect women’s rights to bodily autonomy and integrity.”<sup>58</sup> In the public and political spheres, as has already been shown, South Africa has one of the most progressive affirmative action programmes in favour of women. Women’s active roles as guerrilla fighters, leaders, and political strategists in the struggle smoothed the way for their participation in a democratic order. Yet,

these rights were crafted in a country contending not only with a legacy of racism, but one of manifest sexism, homophobia and xenophobia... It can thus be argued that political space (on all sides of the spectrum) for women in South Africa has invariably been carved out in ways that do not undermine the variety of interlocking patriarchies in society.<sup>59</sup>

Women’s equality in the public space clearly does not translate into equality within the realm of the domestic which remains, for the greater part, hierarchical and stratified. The transition to democracy has readily absorbed the entrenched forms of patriarchy that flourished under apartheid, and given that much of this patriarchal heritage has remained intact “the newly democratic South African state can be suspected of trying to site women as holding equality only some of the time and in certain spaces.”<sup>60</sup> Moffet concludes,

So a devil’s bargain has been struck; women are widely accepted as having equal political status, even within structures like parliament, as long as they remain subordinate in the private and domestic realms.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.135.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.137.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.142.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.143.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.143.

The domesticating language encountered in the project document seems to reinforce the notion of political equality yet subsumes women, once again, in discourses of acceptable gender norms. It is clear that during the transition from apartheid to democracy the “rhetoric of equality and rights tend[ed] to mask the reconstruction of patriarchal power.”<sup>62</sup> Women were militant activists, acted outside of the domestic domain, displayed independent subjectivity, it seems to say, yet they did so within a context of womanly sacrifice, as mothers, as wives, as sisters for the good of the ‘nation’ whose ‘birth’ they aided through the sacrifice of their safe domestic havens. But now that democracy has been safely delivered, women must return to that domestic haven and nurture it through passing on the values of the new democratic order to their offspring.

While the project genuinely attempts to highlight the significant and often under-represented contributions of women to the achievement of democracy in South Africa, it frames these contributions within a context of nation-building and reconciliation. It situates women’s resistance within a simplified context of resistance to political oppression and unjust government. It fails to acknowledge that many women who partook in resistance activities often did so from a platform of women’s emancipation and gender equality. Significantly, the project subsumes women’s activism for women’s rights within the larger narrative of the struggle as it extends this canonical history over four centuries.<sup>63</sup>

As already indicated above, the project plan is extensive in its attempt to encapsulate four centuries of women’s resistance to colonialism and apartheid. The objectives the project plan outlines are broad but tend to focus on identifying sites, buildings, individuals and objects and honouring them through erecting statuary and declarations of national heritage sites – somewhat empty tokens for the communities from which many of the women came. This speaks to a wider context of monumental heritage, where the icons, martyrs, heroes, and now too, heroines, of the new political dispensation are physically commemorated in the public landscape with statues and monuments, leaving behind a monumental legacy, that, for many, are the true markers of heroic commemoration. Marschall argues that the representations of humility and understatement often present in post-apartheid memorials erected to women could be misconstrued by a public whose concept of the importance of a

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>63</sup> While women’s struggles did take a backseat to national liberation, women were often encouraged to unite and mobilise against the colonial and apartheid governments through the commonality of the daily struggles they faced as a result of their biological sex and gender.

monument is measured by its monumentality and grandeur.<sup>64</sup> The project objectives are outlined as follows:

To honour the forgotten and unsung heroines on the formation and consolidation of earlier South African states through the declaration of buildings, sites and/or graves associated with them.

To honour and celebrate heroines of anti-colonial resistance campaigns by declaring buildings/sites or graves associated with them as national heritage sites.

To honour iconic leaders of Women's resistance campaigns and political formations through serial nominations and declarations of their burial sites as National Heritage Sites;

To develop project plans to incrementally identify a beacon of sites associated with women's struggles at different regional locations and leaders in different provinces.

Develop an integrated participatory approach that engages provincial and local authorities in identifying sites associated with individual leaders and the collective Women's movement.

To incorporate women of different generational and periods of resistance politics across the broad spectrum of cultural, anti-colonial, anti-apartheid resistance inclusive of the arts, literary writing, performing arts, education and social upliftment transcending across racial and political associations.

To declare heritage objects and collections of national significance associated with the women's liberation struggle.

Identification of other icons across the broad cultural/ urban –rural divide focusing on those who contributed to the struggle in different periods of the liberation struggle and forms of resistance such as political banishments, in combat and in detention deaths and extra judiciary executions.

Identification of ordinary women who played an active role in mobilisation of women's participation in defiance of unjust laws and struggles at local level such as beer riots, rent and consumer boycotts.

The project is intended to culminate in 2013 with a launch in Bloemfontein on 6 June with a march to the Mayor's office marking Maxeke's march "in her footsteps", where the first

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<sup>64</sup> Marschall, "How to Honour a Woman", *Critical Arts*, p.269.

Women's monument will be unveiled. On International women's day 8 March 2014 a monument of the 1956 march will be unveiled at the Union Buildings.<sup>65</sup>

While these objectives appear standard with most other large-scale legacy projects in the post-apartheid state, the apparent proposal of another monument for the 1956 Women's March at the Union Buildings in Pretoria are puzzling as a 'monument', albeit problematic, neglected and somewhat inaccessible, already exists at the Union Buildings. Yet, on further clarification SAHRA wishes to "enhance" the current presentation of the monument at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1956 Women's March after it has drawn criticism from "different formations."<sup>66</sup> This will be attended by the declaration of the Union Buildings as a national heritage site. However, as indicated above, women's activism is situated within the larger official narrative of resistance to colonial and apartheid oppression and unjust laws. The brief attention given to ensuring that women across racial and political associations are recognised falls with reconciliation ideologies and ensures broad-spectrum identification. Yet, it is clear that the central focus of this project is an extension of all women's resistance history into the official narrative of 'The Struggle'. The process by which this project is to be achieved involves the issuing of public calls for the identification of "sites of collective of [sic] Painful Memory of Women's struggle... for interpretation and representation of individual struggles."<sup>67</sup> This involves traumatic histories associated with prisons, labour bureaus, and demonstrations in general which were addressed during the TRC hearings. SAHRA also hopes to complement their declaration of graves as national heritage sites with a "serial nomination of other sites."<sup>68</sup> 'Supportive' memory projects proposed by SAHRA involve memorial lectures, documentation, and exhibitions which "will assist in the mobilisation of critical research content for educational initiatives."<sup>69</sup> What is suggested here is to enter the data collected in the wider process of this project into publically accessible mediums. To expand on this, SAHRA suggests the

Identification of a permanent Memorial space for a scroll of names, repositories of archival materials, display of heritage objects (Women's charter, photographic material, women's

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<sup>65</sup> SAHRA, "Honouring and Celebrating".

<sup>66</sup> Troy Phili, personal communication via email 20 October 2010.

<sup>67</sup> SAHRA, "Honouring and Celebrating".

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

organisations) and sustainable supportive programmes for women's socio-economic development projects through other institutions of government.<sup>70</sup>

Reminiscent of heritage projects across the world, the suggestion for a scroll of names is not unique and, more surprisingly, a Wall of Names already exists at Freedom Park. However, the suggestion here appears to call for a memorial site exclusively dedicated to women's resistance in order to counter a currently male-dominated narrative of the struggle. Unfortunately, it seems to wash its hands of any effort towards truly engaging in projects that would be able to change the lives of South African women who face violence, abuse, exploitation, and poverty every day. The vague suggestion of "supportive programmes for women's socio-economic development" echoes the empty condemnations of the staggering levels of violence committed against women in South Africa issued from parliament and offers no concrete plans or suggestions. However, if such a memorial site were to be erected the hope remains that programmes that can affect and change the lives of women and girls in its surroundings will be instituted. Finally, the project process suggests the development of a "three way approach for the Women's Project... through incorporation of Women into other heritage projects relating to the specific areas of their historical and cultural contribution at national and international level (Women's month, international Women's day and heritage month)."<sup>71</sup> This would suggest a more general focus on women's historical resistance during nationally and internationally recognised time periods set aside for honouring women and their contributions to society and promoting global gender equality. While Women's Month is celebrated in South Africa in August as an extension of the 9 August Women's Day celebrations, no mention is made of how this project could also attach itself to the Sixteen Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children Campaign. For this project to have a truly lasting legacy and to make changes in the lives of citizens today, rather than focusing on, and creating political capital out of past achievements, it needs to build on the legacies of the women who made significant changes in their lifetimes and emulate these achievements in the present.

The draft programme of action suggests seven categories that the project hopes to address. While including women from the more distant colonial past, the majority of women selected for commemoration are situated in the resistance politics of the twentieth century. While the project refers to these women as 'unsung heroines', many have been honoured with

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

some type of memorialisation in the public space in the last two decades. Yet, it must be acknowledged that while some names are well known (especially those featuring in recent struggle history), other, relatively unknown women can be considered somewhat obscure and publically acknowledged to a lesser extent as their political capital is minimal. The first category is labelled “Royal Women” and includes Chieftainess Madinoge and Hoho and intends to declare their graves as national heritage sites. Queen Mother Lobatsheni is included in order to acknowledge her contribution to the founding of the SANNC in 1912. The graves and royal palace sites of Princess Mkabayi, Queen Mother Nandi, and Princess Magogo (mother to current IFP leader Manghosutho Buthelezi) are to be declared national heritage sites. And finally, the graves and “associated sites” of the Rain Queens Krotoa, Mantsopa and Manthatisi (who has a submarine named in her honour) are to be declared national heritage sites. In addition, perhaps the focus on women’s traditional leadership in rural areas and their support of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid uprisings counters the silences that place rural struggles in the shadow of the larger and better officially acknowledged urban uprisings.

The category for artists includes Bessie Head (who has a post-apartheid mosaic memorial in her honour at a Durban school), Irma Stern (the Irma Stern Museum already exists in Cape Town), Jane Alexander (who is still alive and active as an artist), Gladys Nomfanekiso Mgudlandlu, Olive Schreiner, and Ingrid Jonker and intends to declare their works as heritage collections and will republish their “significant writings” through DAC institutions. A general category for heritage objects and collections and their declaration as national heritage collections includes “significant heritage objects belonging to women, associations and groupings such as photographs etc.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, a category for heritage buildings and sites seems to focus on women’s prisons and intends to declare Kroonstad, Lock Street and Fort Johannesburg Women’s Prison as national heritage sites through their connection with struggle heroines identified in a section that will be discussed below. As sites that embody both personal and collective narratives of violence and trauma that were the result of encounters with colonialism and apartheid their inclusion within a larger heritage project situates them within comprehensive nationalist narratives that effectively silences and reconfigures any personal and fragmented accounts of experiences of violence and subsumes them within a disembodied discourse of triumph.

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<sup>72</sup> SAHRA, “Honouring and Celebrating”.

The following three categories contain the names of women that are well-known icons of apartheid resistance. The category named “International Icons” contains only four names of female anti-apartheid activists of the twentieth century: Cissie Gool (who has a memorial in her honour in central Cape Town), Madie Hall, Amy Biehl, and Dulcie September. While Hall and Biehl were U.S. citizens, and September an ANC representative in Paris, their labelling as ‘international icons’ is somewhat unclear. Moreover, the ‘difficult’ narrative of Biehl’s murder has meant that up until now, no official commemorative efforts have been made. Biehl was murdered in the turbulent years preceding the 1994 elections by four attackers aligned to the PAC who would later seek amnesty from the TRC. A white Fulbright scholar working at the University of the Western Cape Community Law Centre in preparation for the 1994 elections, Biehl was beaten and stabbed to death in Gugulethu township in 1993 when driving home black friends in her car. Her violent death resulted in a great deal of negative publicity about the ‘new’ South Africa in U.S. and foreign media.<sup>73</sup> Casting a negative shadow on the morality of resistance to oppression, Biehl’s death has, thus far, received very little official recognition or commemorative attention. In Gugulethu, two memorials have been erected on the same street. One, a small, privately sponsored memorial to Biehl, the other the grand, official memorial commemorating the Gugulethu Seven.<sup>74</sup> In comparison to the large Gugulethu Seven memorial, Biehl was initially commemorated by a small stone cross inscribed with the words “Amy Biehl Memorium” situated at the entrance to a petrol station.<sup>75</sup> Reinforcing the notion of an un-usable past, Marschall states in relation to Biehl’s initial private memorial marker,

The lack of any further explanation, the informality of the marker, as well as its undignified placement, all reinforce the unofficial nature of this memorial tribute to an extraordinary young woman whose tragic death cannot be officially acknowledged in the emergent memory landscape, because it casts a shadow over the inspiring grand-narrative of the liberation struggle endorsed by the state... But the government-supported practice of memorialisation is implicitly based on a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ victims, a hierarchical ranking of casualties in terms of their symbolic significance or ‘usefulness’ to support specific value systems and governmental agendas.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.70.

<sup>74</sup> Initially a modest memorial was erected in commemoration of the Gugulethu Seven, but after community pressure a more imposing memorial was erected in 2005. Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p.89.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

While the Amy Biehl Foundation<sup>77</sup> (founded by Biehl's parents) can be considered to be the living memorial to Biehl, the lack of official commemoration thus far fails the TRC mandate of acknowledging all victims of apartheid and its associated struggles and violence. It is clear that the 'uncomfortable' narrative of Biehl's murder holds no political capital in the current political landscape and it will be interesting to follow the developments around the proposed memorialisation of Biehl which includes the declaration of sites associated with her memory. Biehl is the only woman within this project whose story is truly problematic to the grand narrative of the struggle that is being concretised in the present memorial landscape and is part and parcel of the mandate of this project. Thus far, no concrete plans have been announced and, while at this point being merely speculative, it remains to be seen if her memorialisation will be cast in terms of the notion of reconciliation so strongly associated with her family's forgiveness and granting of amnesty to her murderers or if her story will be 'sanitised' through a self-serving process of denial, dis-remembering and manipulation. In 2010, a new memorial was erected and funded by the US Embassy in Pretoria and the Fulbright Foundation, which attributes her death to political violence and honours her as a "tireless human rights activist".<sup>78</sup> However, no official efforts to commemorate Biehl have, yet, been made.

The penultimate category contains the names of "Combatants, Detainees, Banned Activists". This list is extensive and contains the names of women that are hardly 'unsung' in the current political dispensation. Ranging from a variety of anti-apartheid political affiliations these women have their roots in trade unionism, women's rights, and anti-apartheid activism, several of whom, like Dulcie September, died as the result of politically motivated assassinations. This category includes women who, often, stepped outside of accepted domesticity and gender norms and took part in militant resistance to apartheid. Furthermore, most of these women have been commemorated in some form through the naming of streets, hospitals, clinics, naval vessels, schools, municipalities, or university residences or the erection of physical memorials in their honour. Rahima Moosa, Josie (Mpama) Palmer, Ruth (Slovo) First, Victoria Mxenge, Frances Baard (who has a municipal district named in her honour), Coline Williams (who has a memorial dedicated to her in Athlone), Florence Matomela, Sonia Bunting, Molly Fischer, Ray Alexander, Ntsikelelo

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<sup>77</sup> A non-profit organisation that empowers youth in the vulnerable communities of the Western Cape through the provision of educational and cultural activities. "Amy Biehl Foundation" at <http://www.amybiehl.co.za/>

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication via email with Afiefa Behardien (Chief Operations Officer Amy Biehl Foundation), 10 November 2014.

Cothoza, Lindiwe Mthembu, Nonkosi Mini, Phila Ndwandwe, Makhosazana Nyoka, Dorothy Nyembe, Molly Blackburn, Anne Silinga, Mantwa Kwape, Helen Suzman, Nokuthula Simelane (who has a life-size statue erected in her honour), Linda Dlodlo, and Bozwana Notemba are the women whose graves will be identified for declaration as national heritage sites and their names for inclusion in the proposed Memorial Centre. Furthermore, the women's prisons associated with the detention of several of these women (Kroonstad, East London and Fort-Johannesburg Women's Prison) will also be declared national heritage sites. The selection of names contains several women who were murdered by the state as a result of their anti-apartheid activism. Moreover, these women and their status as martyrs make a powerful contribution to the sacralisation of the narrative of the struggle and its canonisation in the present. Martyrdom appears to be a strong, reoccurring theme in officially-sanctioned commemorations that honour struggle heroines, whether it was the sacrifice of lives, or of their time, homes, and families and attests to the point made above that women's activism in South Africa and struggle history is often enshrined in terms of sacrifice. While notions of 'sacrifice' lend a strong sense of the sacred and virtuous, it also restricts women's activism within these almost passive terms while male activism is often regarded as heroic, brave, and active – a male, patriotic duty rather than an unusual stepping out of the regular boundaries of family life.

The final category focuses on the centenary celebration of the 1913 Women's March led by Charlotte Maxeke. It intended to declare Wilberforce College a national heritage site, re-enact the 1913 March to Bloemfontein culminating in the unveiling of a Women's Monument and the erection of 'markers' in Winburg and Bloemfontein. While this was intended to take place in 2013, the 'internal restructuring' of SAHRA that resulted in a two-year long hold being placed on the project has meant that this date was no longer feasible. In addition, with the head of the Burial and Graves department, Troy Phili, who was instrumental in the inclusion of Maxeke in this project, having since left SAHRA it is unclear to what extent this phase of the project will be carried out. Maxeke fits the prominent profile of having been instrumental in women's mobilisation within the ANC that stands at the forefront of current politicised commemorative selection.

This new project represents a welcome effort to commemorate women's roles in the founding of South Africa's democratic order in the public space and, undoubtedly, there are officials and politicians who are genuinely committed to this project and its dedication to honouring women's political activism. Yet, there appears to be a tendency within the Legacy

Project to rewrite and reconfigure women's personal narratives of resistance, trauma, and suffering into a collective experience in the aid of a grand narrative that serves both the state as it confronts challenging social issues in the present and the continued effort for the creation of a foundational mythology for the new nation. Following a common nationalist trend of equating violence inflicted on women's bodies (as in the cases of women imprisoned, tortured, and assassinated for their resistance) with violence inflicted on the nation,<sup>79</sup> personal narratives of violence and trauma become little more than metaphors of nationalist ideology informed by discourses of sacrifice and martyrdom. Furthermore, the violent histories of women's prisons and the state-sanctioned torture and assassination of women which form a central part of this project indicate how women's 'dis(re)membered' bodies are readily appropriated for the collective project of nation building that is currently deeply embedded in discourses of sacrifice and martyrdom. Inevitably, women's activism and militancy is reduced to women's victimisation by speaking the violence that has been inflicted on their bodies. By focusing on traumatic histories, women are effectively silenced and domesticated, reduced to victims rather than survivors; resigned to the domestic despite their active roles in resistance to oppressive regimes.

## **Conclusion**

While the interest and drive that initiated the Women's Legacy project seems to have waned in recent years the current political and media climate appears to be fertile ground for a renewed impetus towards its resurrection and completion. Although the project is a welcome change in the largely male hero worship-dominated heritage landscape, creating an awareness of women's activism in the past and encouraging its emulation in the present, it remains framed within a context of normative domestic femininity and recasts women's personal, and often violent, encounters with colonialism and apartheid as nationalist rhetoric that could erase the fragmented nature and silences of embodied experiences of violence.<sup>80</sup> The immense scale of the project and its significant government support indicates its centrality to the development of a South African nationalism founded on the pillar of resistance to all

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<sup>79</sup> It is interesting to note that while such associations between sexual violence inflicted on women with violence inflicted on the nation are often made within a historical context, this comparison is not extended into a post-apartheid context. Not only would such an association undermine the project of nation-building and the illusion of a unified South African collectivity, it also reflects that, indeed, it is easier to construct a racialised Other than a sexualised Other.

<sup>80</sup> Robins, "Silence in My Father's House", in Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past*, p.123.

forms of oppression, racism, inequality, and subjugation. Addressing the lack of representation of women in the public heritage landscape through official government funded projects will invariably result in a heavily politicised message being attached to any public memorial, commemorative building or object. While this message will be grounded by the meta-narrative of 'The Struggle' and post-apartheid unity, it is also likely to be informed by present day socio-political issues. Women's lives and lived experiences will be moulded and shifted in such memorialisations to fit contemporary socio-political contexts and will continue to endure the writing of new socio-political narratives on their legacies as anniversary celebrations recall their historic contributions into the present. The state's functionalist approach in its selection of who and what to remember and commemorate is indicative of a deliberate effort towards constructing a new foundational mythology for the post-apartheid state that had to contest the grand narrative of the previous regime whose often monumental statuary has remained a part of the public heritage landscape. The chapters that follow will be indicative of how shifting socio-political narratives are inscribed on the bodies, legacies, and commemorations of prominent post-apartheid heroines who no longer have the ability to speak for themselves. Some, like Sara Baartman, are completely silent. All that remains is a tragic legacy whose narrative was fitting not only for an emerging post-colonial, post-apartheid nation, but also for ethnic claims and agendas, and presidential philosophies. Maxeke, Joseph, Ngoyi, and Sisulu all left a remarkable vocal legacy, yet their activism and legacies have more recently been employed at commemorative events and, in the case of Sisulu, at her funeral, to address certain socio-political issues within South Africa and represent government's need to find more 'silent' role models whose contributions can be shaped for short-term political gains.

## Chapter 7

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### **Witnessing Death: Burying “Our Mother, Our Leader”, Albertina Sisulu**

*We are each required to walk our own road...and then stop, assess what we have learned and share it with others... It is only in this way that the next generation can learn from those who have walked before them, so that they can take the journey forward after we can no longer continue. We can do no more than tell them our story – it is then up to them to make of it what they will.<sup>1</sup>*

- Albertina Sisulu

#### **Introduction**

Albertina Sisulu has long been representative of the iconic image of the powerful mother/struggle heroine of the ‘golden years’ of the history of resistance to apartheid. Always represented as ‘Mother/Activist’, she had become a living legend in the pantheon of South African post-apartheid foundational heroes and heroines. Her sudden but quiet death at the age of ninety-two in June 2011 in her home, surrounded by some of her children and grandchildren, seemed a fitting and peaceful end to the life of a woman who has long been hailed as the ‘Mother of the Nation’ and as an icon of humility and dedication in a country where the political elite is often portrayed as having very little of these admirable qualities. On 11 June 2011, Sisulu was laid to rest next to her husband, famous ANC anti-apartheid activist, Walter Sisulu. The day long official funeral was televised on state-owned national broadcaster SABC2. News correspondents at select locations delivered short informational segments on Sisulu’s life and presented interviews with the ‘ordinary’ people and well-known South African political figures present at her official funeral service at Orlando

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<sup>1</sup> Albertina Sisulu, quoted in Elinor Sisulu, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, (David Philip Publishers: Claremont, 2002), p.19.

Stadium whose lives were touched by the revered anti-apartheid activist affectionately known as ‘MaSisulu’.

A short week before, the nation was informed of her sudden passing through a variety of media resources and leading public figures paid tribute to the legacy that Sisulu left behind and which was thrust back into the spotlight as the nation mourned the loss of one of its great women struggle icons. As the funeral progressed, a romantic narrative unfolded about the sacrifices of the heroes and heroines of the struggle years, Albertina Sisulu’s dedication, loyalty, discipline, her family life and marriage, and above all, her maternal influence on many of today’s leading political figures. Sisulu was cast as the archetypal ‘Mother’ – both in a political and familial sense. Sisulu’s life was delineated as one to be emulated above all; her legacy untainted by the accusations of corruption and self-enrichment facing several ANC leaders today. Throughout the official funeral it became clear that political commentary, tributes, and even funerary eulogies linked the legacy of Albertina Sisulu to contemporary political and socio-economic issues. Sisulu passed on during a period that saw a sharp rise in violent service delivery protests in many under-developed communities and strong political discord between the ANC main body and its ‘ill-disciplined’ Youth League. What emerged at the funeral services was a strong emphasis on Sisulu’s dedication to the ANC, her family, community and the nation, her unwavering discipline, and the many sacrifices she made to further the cause of the struggle – in short, her selflessness.

This chapter will focus on Albertina Sisulu and the public mourning rituals that were imparted with nation-building rhetoric. This reflected the establishment and reinforcement of an ANC-immersed foundational mythology as the reputation of the ruling party and some of its leaders came under scrutiny due to slow socio-economic transformation processes. As an ANC stalwart whose reputation of dedication and service was above reproach and, indeed, as a figure who has been hailed as the ‘Mother of the Nation’ for three decades, Sisulu’s legacy was an ideal narrative through which the ‘golden years’ of the struggle could be recalled into the present, emphasised, and employed in contesting criticism levelled against the ANC. This chapter will first give a brief outline of Sisulu’s biography as it establishes the historical framework for her iconicity in the present. It will contextualise the time period of Sisulu’s death against a backdrop of service-delivery protests in South Africa, accusations of corruption and self-enrichment levelled at the ANC, and the internal discord within ANC structures which determined the tone of her funeral. The chapter will then continue to analyse the oration given by President Jacob Zuma at Sisulu’s funeral while also briefly considering

the tributes delivered by prominent political figures in order to indicate how Albertina Sisulu's legacy as a 'Mother of the Nation' has already permeated post-apartheid foundational mythology and continues to be (re)invented to remain a frequent point of reference for confronting prominent social issues in present South Africa. This, in turn, will allow for an examination of the positioning of the official representation of Albertina Sisulu as a foundational figure for the post-apartheid state.

### **“A History Worth Emulating”<sup>2</sup>**

While Sara Baartman's death and politicised constructions of martyrdom determined her iconic status as a national heroine, Albertina Sisulu's<sup>3</sup> long life of dedication to the struggle and to the ANC ensured her proclamation as 'Mother of the Nation'. It is for this reason that Sisulu's biography will be addressed more extensively in this chapter. Furthermore, Sisulu's life has been well documented and forms an intrinsic part of the 'golden era' of the struggle that is so celebrated and revered in present South Africa. She has also been a 'living legend' in the post-apartheid state and an icon that has graced the nation with her living presence and who is still remembered as a politically active individual by the generations of the nation born before the advent of democracy. Sisulu's biographer, daughter-in-law, Elinor Sisulu, noted that the lives of Albertina and Walter Sisulu are a biographer's dream; an epic saga of “persecution, bitter struggle, and painful separation. It is also one of patience, hope, enduring love, and ultimate triumph.”<sup>4</sup> At the time of Albertina Sisulu's death it became clear that this narrative of the 'epic saga' and the prominent themes that feature in many of the world's heroic epic sagas, would determine the official representation of her legacy in the post-apartheid state.

Albertina's political life began when she decided to take up nursing and she was accepted as a trainee-nurse at Johannesburg Non-European Hospital at the end of 1939. She

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<sup>2</sup> Thandi Modise, Premier of the North West Province, “Albertina Sisulu – Always a Mother”, <http://www.citypress.co.za/you-say/albertina-sisulu-always-a-mother-20110610/> accessed 6 October 2013. The biographical account of Albertina Sisulu is extensive. For the purposes of this thesis I have chosen to select and focus on the events in Sisulu's life that have shaped and represent the qualities that have been so lauded by politicians and government and were constructed as attributes to be emulated by the nation. While Sisulu's life is inextricably linked with the history of apartheid resistance movements, it is not in the scope of this thesis to elaborate extensively on this history within this section.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this section, Albertina Sisulu will be referred to as 'Albertina' while her biographer will be referred to as 'Sisulu' to avoid confusion. This is not to claim familiarity with or show disrespect for Albertina Sisulu.

<sup>4</sup> Sisulu, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu*, p.17.

left her hometown Xolobe for Johannesburg in January 1940. Sisulu details how Albertina took to nursing “like a duck to water. Her upbringing, which had inculcated high standards of cleanliness, discipline, and a strong work ethic, stood her in good stead. Her compassionate and empathetic nature made it easy for her to relate to patients.”<sup>5</sup> Albertina’s dedication to her career as a nurse and its associated values of care giving and nurturing would also influence the shaping of her iconicity in post-apartheid South Africa and inform the discourses of motherhood that determined her ‘Mother of the Nation’ status. It was during her training that Albertina had her first real confrontation with institutionalised racism. Although aware of the reality of a segregated society, Albertina and her family had always been treated with respect in Xolobe. At the hospital, Albertina tried to tolerate racism as par for the course in a segregated society. Yet, a horrific accident at Park Station in 1940 would change this. As the hospital’s non-European ward was swamped with critically injured patients, some had to sleep on the floor while beds in the ‘European’ section of the hospital stood empty as only few of the injured were white. When senior black medical staff requested that black patients be allowed into the ‘European’ section of the hospital their pleas were ignored. Sisulu shows that this incident,

had a profound effect on Albertina. To deny patients the best possible medical care because of the colour of their skin, in her eyes, was a violation of the sacred duty of the medical practitioner to do everything possible to preserve life.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, Albertina settled into her life in Johannesburg and she met Walter Sisulu in 1941 through a mutual acquaintance. According to Sisulu it was during their courtship that Albertina developed an interest in politics as Walter was already deeply involved in the ANC. Sisulu shows that “the couple spent much of their time together discussing political issues and attending meetings... At that time, the burning issue for Walter was the formation of a Youth League.”<sup>7</sup> From this point onwards, Albertina’s life is inextricably linked to the life of Walter Sisulu.<sup>8</sup> Albertina was the only woman present at the inaugural meeting of the Congress Youth League in 1944 but she attended in a supportive role for Walter, and never considered becoming a member herself as the Youth League was very much considered to be a ‘young men’s organisation’. Ellen Kuzwayo, the only woman who would become active in

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>8</sup> Albertina Sisulu proclaimed in an interview that it was her marriage that had given her freedom. Indeed, Walter had introduced her to resistance politics and drew her into the struggle for liberation. Ibid., p.622.

the Youth League, remembers Albertina as the “smiling and pleasant wife of Walter Sisulu, a kind hostess who served the committee members of the Congress with tea after long and intense meetings.”<sup>9</sup> This was not an unusual observation as most women were perceived as fulfilling supportive roles within the ANC, even after 1943 when they could gain full membership to the party.

Albertina and Walter Sisulu were married on 15 July 1944. Anton Lembede made a speech at the wedding celebrations and in his famous warning to Albertina he cautioned her that she was marrying a man who was already married to the nation.<sup>10</sup> This established the long tradition of Albertina and Walter being constructed as the archetypal ‘parents of the nation’ – a perception they would cultivate over the following five decades. By the end of 1944, Albertina and Walter had become foster-parents to Walter’s sister’s child, Gerald, and in 1945 their first child, Max, was born. Albertina transferred to Orlando Clinic in order to work close to her home allowing her more time with her family. In 1948, a second son, Mlungisi, was born, and Albertina’s youngest sibling, Flora, had also come to live with the family in Johannesburg.<sup>11</sup> In 1947, Walter had decided to fully dedicate himself to ANC work. Albertina and Walter had discussed this and Albertina was happy to take over as sole breadwinner for the family. Walter was elected to the position of Secretary General of the ANC and one of the fierce supporters for the proposed Programme of Action. He realised that the burden of mobilising the movement would fall on him and that this would be a fulltime commitment. Despite criticism from Professor ZK Matthews who asked Walter: “How do you aspire to lead the nation if you cannot even provide for your own family?”<sup>12</sup> Walter would become the first full-time Secretary General of the ANC. Matthews’ criticism of Walter’s choice partly reflects the strong familial structure of nationalism and the nation and its concomitant constructions of masculinities and patriarchy but the mutual decision made by Albertina and Walter is indicative of their famous and inspiring partnership and equality in marriage which was still considered fairly unusual for this time period. In 1950, at the ANC

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>10</sup> A. Lembede quoted in *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>11</sup> The Sisulu home was always crowded with extended family members or foster children. Priscilla Jana, who would later become the Sisulu family’s lawyer, had been amazed at how so many people managed to live in one house. “In the early days I used to find it quite difficult to work out who was part of the actual Sisulu family and who wasn’t. For many years I did not really know how many children MaSisulu had and I was too embarrassed to ask!” Priscilla Jana, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.427. Quotes such as these are indicative of the construction of the archetypal image of motherhood that would shape Albertina Sisulu’s legacy in the post-apartheid state. She was not only a mother to her own children or the children that grew up in her house, but also a mother figure in the lives of anti-apartheid activists, her local community, and the nation.

<sup>12</sup> Z.K Matthews quoted in *Ibid.*, p.118.

annual conference greater emphasis was placed on the accountability of leadership and collective decision-making, a view very much in keeping with that of Walter and Albertina and which would re-emerge during the days following Albertina's death and funeral in 2011 in a wholly different context. Walter's obligations to his political work meant that he would spend long periods of time away from his family. For Albertina this was a small price to pay for the elimination of unjust and oppressive laws.<sup>13</sup> The Sisulu home became a safe haven for political activists so even when Walter was at home there was little time for a quiet and peaceful moment with the family. However, Walter, like Albertina, never felt a sense of conflict and knew that the path he had decided to take was the only one to ensure a decent future for his children in South Africa.

1952 marked the beginning of the Defiance Campaign. Around this time Mandela was banned for six months and the police were looking for Walter Sisulu in order to serve him his banning orders. The Working Committee felt it was important for the Secretary General to be present at the ANC's annual conference in December of that year and urged Walter to go underground to avoid being banned. Even Albertina did not know where Walter would be hiding. After the intense months of the Defiance Campaign there was a lull in Congress activities and Walter was served a six-month banning order which prohibited him from attending any gatherings and confined him to the magisterial district of Johannesburg. In May 1954 the first daughter, Lindiwe, was born. Sisulu makes a point of showing that "like many children with parents in the Congress Alliance, the Sisulu children grew up seeing their parents interact constantly with people of all races. Their home was a non-racial island in a segregated society and they all mixed freely on equal terms with children of other races."<sup>14</sup>

In September 1955 the police raided the Sisulu home in one of the most sweeping police raids in the country's history. This marked the beginning of a series of house raids for the Sisulu family. A significant invasion of their privacy, lives, and feelings of security, these raids would intensely affect all the members of the Sisulu family. The later years of the 1950s also marked Albertina's increasing involvement in political activities within ANC structures. Throughout the 1940s her involvement in politics had been in a supportive capacity as her salary had been the family's main source of income. Albertina would develop a sense of dedication to liberation as unshakable as that of Walter. She combined her home visits to patients with distributing leaflets about the Congress of the People and encouraging women

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.185.

to join the newly-launched Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). With her unwavering belief in the importance of education, Albertina threw herself into the 1955 campaign to boycott the Bantu education system. Sisulu shows that “Albertina Sisulu certainly felt anger and revulsion to the depths of her being at the idea of a system of education deliberately designed to emphasise ethnic differences among black children, and to train them to occupy an inferior position in life.”<sup>15</sup> There was immense support for the campaign and the ANCWL and FEDSAW played a large role in organising alternative schools for children. Albertina also became involved and the Sisulu home became the venue for one of the alternative schools and the Sisulu children were also withdrawn from school to attend home schooling. However, the home schools were unsustainable in the long run with frequent police raids and harassment and were compelled to close. When the government threatened to close all boycotting schools, the boycott campaign collapsed. Many church schools refused to hand over control of their schools to the Bantu Education Department and some continued to run as private institutions. The Sisulu children were sent to one of the privately-run church schools despite the heavy financial burden this placed on Albertina.

In 1956 the historic Women’s March on parliament took place. Protesting the extension of pass laws to black women, twenty thousand women marched on the parliamentary buildings in Pretoria. Albertina Sisulu was one of the leaders at Phefeni station buying train tickets to distribute to women travelling to Pretoria by train to attend the march after it became known that the police intended to stop women in groups of ten or more in buses from travelling to Pretoria. In December 1956 the security police carried out large scale raids and Walter was arrested again on 12 December and charged with treason. On 21 October Albertina was part of a women’s protest against the ongoing removals from Sophiatown. After three days of demonstrations 2000 women had been imprisoned, including Albertina Sisulu. During her incarceration, Walter ensured that he brought food to the prison every day. Mandela and Tambo arranged for bail for the women and eventually they were all released. Women’s organised resistance had earned them increased respect within the ANC and led to a resolution for men to get rid of their passes and link up to the women’s campaign.

Political repression mounted in South Africa following the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960 and police harassment took its toll on activists and their families. As it became

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.186-187.

clear that Walter was likely to face a lengthy prison sentence, he decided to go underground as full-time leader of MK and he took leave of his family in April 1963. On 1 May 1963, government intensified its repressive laws and passed the General Laws Amendment Act which allowed the state to hold suspects for ninety days without charge. Albertina became the first female victim of this law and was arrested at work on 19 June 1963. Her imprisonment was a harsh and lonely time. Police interrogated her to discover Walter's whereabouts, but when it became clear that they would not obtain any information from Albertina, she was placed on spare rations of porridge and locked in a small, bare room. The police continued to play on her anxieties about the welfare of her younger children by threatening their removal from the Sisulu home and giving false reports of illness and hospitalisation. Yet, Albertina remained silent and refused to betray the struggle.<sup>16</sup> While Albertina was in detention, one of the defining moments of the Sisulus' lives occurred when Walter was arrested in the Rivonia raid on 11 July 1963. Albertina was only informed of the arrests three weeks later. Her refusal to make a statement to the police despite her husband's arrest cost her another week in detention. She was eventually released, without warning, on 6 August. As the Rivonia trial commenced, Albertina ensured that she worked night shifts so that she could attend the trial and see Walter during the two visits per week that she was permitted.<sup>17</sup> As the trial continued into 1964, Sisulu reveals that Albertina spent many nights agonising about the future:

Albertina had always dealt with emotional trauma by immersing herself in practical action. She was the strong one and people relied on her. When her parents died, she had focused her energy on taking care of her siblings. When Barbie [Walter's sister] died, she focused on the practical arrangements for Beryl's [Barbie's daughter and Gerald's sister] future. During the trial, her lifeline was the Women's League. She may have spent her nights worrying, but during the day she had little time to reflect and agonise. She threw her energies into activities surrounding the trial. There was the need to give moral and practical support to the families of the accused.<sup>18</sup>

It was this work ethic and care for those around her that would become central points of reference for political rhetoric in the weeks after her death. Her belief in displaying strength despite deep personal turmoil also extended to Walter. She was incredibly proud of his performance in the witness box during the trial, but on her last visit to him before sentencing after the guilty verdict was issued, she "asked him to be strong and to not show any emotion

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.228.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.241.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.258.

if the death sentence was passed: ‘Please, do not disgrace us.’”<sup>19</sup> The evening before sentencing, ANCWL members gathered at the Sisulu home to prepare banners for display outside the courts the following day where a sentence of life imprisonment would be passed on the six accused. Walter was taken to Robben Island and this marked the beginning of Walter and Albertina’s many years of separation.

On 5 August 1964, Albertina received her first five-year banning order. The banning order listed several of Albertina’s political activities as justification for the banning and it was believed that placing Albertina under banning orders would deal a heavy blow to the ANC.<sup>20</sup> Albertina was placed under Group B restrictions which meant that she was confined to the magisterial district of Johannesburg. The banning order severely restricted her movements and communications as she was not allowed to attend any social or political gathering (any venue with more than three people present), and she had to report to the Commanding Officer of Orlando Police Station every Wednesday. However, Albertina – with much effort – obtained permission to visit Walter on Robben Island for one brief thirty minute visit.

Financial troubles continued to worry Albertina and she took on small sewing jobs and sold eggs to supplement her income which had to support four children in boarding school. She was able to get by with the support of neighbours and relied heavily on credit to buy groceries. “‘Those were bad times’, Albertina would later recall, ‘but the community did a lot to help me. The importance of community, of belonging and of caring for one another was again reinforced in me.’”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the children all managed to get bursaries for their schooling, greatly relieving the financial pressure on Albertina. In addition to financial and familial troubles, Albertina also continued to suffer repeated police harassment as one of the few remaining activists within the country. Despite the constant police surveillance and the uneasy balance between keeping a low political profile while maintaining some semblance of ANC underground machinery, Albertina still managed to continue her political work through innovative methods and the help of her neighbours.<sup>22</sup> She managed to set up an underground cell and develop a formal working committee with the help of John Nkadimeng, one of Walter’s long-time political associates and ex-political prisoner also under banning orders. Their main activity was to facilitate the passage of ANC members attempting to leave the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.258.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.277.

<sup>21</sup> Albertina Sisulu, quoted in Ibid., p.280.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.302.

country for education or military training.<sup>23</sup> Despite some setbacks, Albertina felt that they had made some headway in rebuilding the underground structures of the movement.<sup>24</sup>

As the 1960s drew to a close, Albertina was informed that her banning orders had been renewed for another five years and she was placed under partial house arrest. Despite the pressures of family, politics, and work taking a toll on her health, Albertina continued to immerse herself in all activities. Albertina's daughter-in-law, Sheila, observed of her mother-in-law:

She just never seemed to rest. She would spend her weekends doing laundry and constantly cleaning the house. She was fussy about the cooking and cleaning and feeding of people. The house had to be spotless and everyone who visited had to be served tea. At that time things were not easy financially, so the amount of food we cooked, especially meat, was just enough for the family. Then someone would come to visit, obviously about political business and MaSisulu would shout from the lounge, 'Aren't we eating?' and all of us in the kitchen would groan 'Oh no!' because there just was not enough to feed an extra mouth. When we would ask her later how she could put us in that position, she would say 'Awu, so the food was not enough? You should have told me, then I could have done without.'<sup>25</sup>

This observation about Albertina's selflessness summarises several of the themes that characterised the statements made about Albertina Sisulu in the media and by politicians shortly after her death.

The events of June 16 1976 would cause significant turmoil and tragedy in Soweto and the youth's militancy and anti-white sentiments were a constant source of anxiety for Albertina.<sup>26</sup> The post-1976 period saw Albertina become involved in facilitating the departure of many young activists from South Africa while the women's movement had grown significantly after many black mothers had witnessed and suffered the abuse and death of their children at the hands of the police force during the uprisings. In 1979 Albertina's banning orders were renewed a fourth time for another two years.

In 1981, Albertina's banning orders came to an end and she was able to enjoy freedom of movement and association for the first time since 1964. She had been banned for eighteen

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.303.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.304.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.330.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.369.

years, longer than any other person in South Africa.<sup>27</sup> Albertina was inundated with requests to speak at meetings and gatherings. Always actively involved in rebuilding the women's movement she was now able to work more openly. Working together with other veteran activists she recruited young female activists to organise women in the ANC underground.<sup>28</sup> She would also become a political mentor to many young women from different communities and her intentions, according to Jessie Duarte who at that time was involved in the student movement in the coloured community, were to "develop what she termed a 'petticoat' layer of women leaders that would take over when the older women were not there."<sup>29</sup> Albertina became actively involved in many aspects of resistance politics and was considered to be an ANC veteran who embodied the principles of the Freedom Charter.<sup>30</sup> However, as Sisulu shows, many of the gatherings that Albertina addressed were the funerals or memorial services of slain activists as the government became increasingly ferocious in response to the resurgence of ANC activity in South Africa.

Walter had to undergo minor surgery in 1982 and Albertina travelled to Cape Town to support him through his hospitalisation. This was the first time since Walter's imprisonment that the couple was not separated by a glass barrier and the moment was overwhelming for both. The strength of their marriage and Albertina were lauded in messages sent to congratulate Walter on his seventieth birthday later that year. Several months before her assassination, Ruth First wrote of Walter:

He is committed to the liberation of all people. He is committed to the liberation of the African women. In his family Albertina is a fine leader in her own right, but her capacity to lead and her political strength is also the product of a good marriage, a good political marriage that is based on genuine equality and on shared commitment.<sup>31</sup>

Walter and Albertina's marriage would be continuously commented upon throughout the decades as a great source of inspiration and emblem of gender equality within marriage. At a time when families were torn apart through death, detention, exile, and banishment, the connection between Albertina and Walter remained strong despite their separation. Their prison letters, often quoted by Sisulu in her biographical account of Walter and Albertina, are indicative of their continued support for, pride in, and love of one another. In the weeks after

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.412.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.413.

<sup>29</sup> Jessie Duarte, quoted in Ibid., p.413.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.414.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth First, quoted in Ibid., p.423

Albertina's death, her marriage to Walter was described as "the great South African love story",<sup>32</sup> reinforcing the romantic imagery of the epic heroine. A public artwork created by Marina Walsh depicting Albertina and Walter was unveiled in 2009 in the Johannesburg CBD. Its inscription attests to their status as the archetypal parents of the nation: "Walter and Albertina Sisulu married in 1944. Through their enduring love and dedication they became parents to the nation."<sup>33</sup>

As political assassinations by the state intensified, Albertina, together with the other mourners, was again arrested at a memorial service for victims of covert state violence. However, no one was charged and they were fingerprinted and photographed and released at midnight. Shortly after this incident, Albertina was served with a two-year banning order after a year-long respite. In May 1982, the President's Council submitted its proposal for a new constitution, at the heart of which was the creation of a tri-cameral parliament which included the existing all-white parliament and suggested the creation of separate coloured and Indian parliaments which would all sit separately but whose executives would sit on the President's Council. The deliberate exclusion of black South Africans was intended as a method of creating a racial divide within the resistance movements; instead, it created a greater sense of unity and there was united resistance and low voter turnout at the election for the coloured and Indian parliaments. The call to oppose the new constitution created support amongst the plethora of resistance organisations to create a united front. Albertina was approached to drive the organisation of such a united front. The United Democratic Front (UDF), consisting of regional executives, was nationally launched in 1983. Albertina's banning order had unexpectedly expired by the introduction of the new Internal Security Act and she was able to be actively involved in the movement. Although the Ministry of Justice immediately wanted to place new banning orders on Albertina, it was decided to monitor her activities. Her activities in the UDF were, however, considered to be a threat to state security and Albertina was arrested on 5 August 1983. While in police custody, Albertina was elected as President of the Transvaal UDF executive and outrage at the arrest of the 'Mother of the Nation' was expressed at the meeting.<sup>34</sup> Albertina was sentenced to four years imprisonment pending appeal and released on bail.

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<sup>32</sup> SABC2, Funeral of Albertina Sisulu, 11 June 2011, 0hr21min.

<sup>33</sup> "See the Sisulus in Downtown Jo'burg", at [http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4470](http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4470) accessed 13 October 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. RAM Saloojee, quoted in an article by Anton Harber, in Sisulu, *Albertina & Walter Sisulu*, p.433.

Albertina started working as a nurse in the clinic of Abu Asvat, the health-secretary for AZAPO. Despite the animosity between the UDF and AZAPO, Albertina and Asvat had an excellent relationship and understood the need to work together to aid the plight of the poor and homeless in their community. Albertina also continued to work on the revival of FEDSAW and, despite her initial resistance to the organisational tactics of a younger generation of women activists, she came to see the benefits of a new approach to reviving the women's movement. Her change of heart was considered to be a sign of her strength and willingness to accept new methods and embrace them if it meant it would benefit the resistance movement.<sup>35</sup> This ability to accept when she was wrong and to work with the collective to ensure progress is another characteristic that would be lauded at her funeral and employed in political rhetoric surrounding ANC internal discord in 2011.

During this period Albertina continued to be in great demand as a speaker at meetings and other political events and rallies. She would especially call on the powerful metaphor of motherhood to strongly denounce the apartheid government and its constitution and to inspire unity amongst women of all races. With a jail sentence already hanging over her head, Albertina was arrested on treason charges in 1985. She was released on bail with her co-accused, but due to the restrictions placed on her bail conditions, she was unable to continue her political work. However, the state's case crumbled and after a short trial the charges were withdrawn against twelve of the sixteen accused, including Albertina Sisulu. Albertina returned home during a period of increasingly violent state repression. A State of Emergency had been declared in 1985 and the youth had become more militant and attempted to render South Africa ungovernable and apartheid unworkable.<sup>36</sup> Albertina had always been concerned about the double-edged sword of 'ungovernability' and the potential of such a policy to encourage criminal behaviour in young activists. She had also always been openly critical of the slogan 'Liberation before Education' and was concerned about the disrupted education of some of her grandchildren. Albertina continued to work at the surgery during the day, and in the evenings would meet with activists and journalists. Sisulu identifies Albertina's ability to calmly work through any situation without complaint as one of her admirable qualities.<sup>37</sup> However, with the extension of the State of Emergency and the restrictions placed on the UDF and nearly all of its leaders, it became nearly impossible for

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.444.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.508.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.511.

the UDF to operate despite Albertina's exhortations.<sup>38</sup> Yet, she remained optimistic and stated in an interview in 1987 that she believed freedom was attainable in the next five years.<sup>39</sup>

As the 1980s drew to a close, Albertina had gained wide national and international acclaim. She was a respected struggle veteran and admired for her integrity, stability, courage, and commitment to the progress of her community, equal education, the struggle against all forms of injustice and inequality and she was widely regarded and hailed as the 'Mother of the Nation'.<sup>40</sup> In 1989 Albertina received invitations from U.S. President G.W. Bush to discuss the situation in South Africa and from Danielle Mitterrand (human rights activist and wife of French President Francois Mitterrand) as she had been selected by the International Federation of Human Rights as one of ten women to be honoured for their fight for human rights.<sup>41</sup> Albertina was able to obtain a passport and left for Europe on 16 June 1989 accompanied by several FEDSAW colleagues and friends and she would be joined for the American leg of the trip by other UDF leaders. Throughout her international travels Albertina addressed several conferences and meetings and met with a variety of international leaders, politicians, dignitaries, and journalists. After her successful visits to Europe and the US, Albertina travelled to Lusaka to touch base with the ANC, and especially the ANCWL, in exile. After her return to South Africa, she arranged to visit Walter in Pollsmoor prison on 10 October 1989 – the same day that President F.W. de Klerk would announce the release of several prominent political prisoners, including Walter.

Walter returned home on 15 October 1989. While the reunion was a happy one, the couple would commence a whirlwind journey of meetings across the country and internationally as the government entered into negotiations with the liberation movement. The ANC, PAC, and SACP were unbanned in 1990, and the government announced the imminent release of Nelson Mandela. Albertina also continued to be active within the ANCWL and focused on issues of gender equality in South Africa and the future South African parliament. After the negotiations, political violence and assassinations, danger and loss that marked the first years of the 1990s, the 1994 democratic elections were a momentous occasion for Albertina for whom the years of sacrifice, loss, and hardship had finally come to gain great significance. 1994 also marked Albertina and Walter's fiftieth

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.516.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.516.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.559.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.574.

wedding anniversary and they celebrated by renewing their wedding vows. Furthermore, Albertina was elected to South Africa's first democratically elected parliament. Sisulu observes that for veterans like Albertina, parliamentary work was particularly taxing. In a democratic dispensation she would have served in parliament at a significantly younger age.<sup>42</sup> Yet, Sisulu indicates that Albertina Sisulu was extremely diligent about her parliamentary work and, for fear of being accused of 'getting on the gravy train', waived many of the parliamentary benefits to which she was entitled. Besides her parliamentary duties, Albertina was also elected as the President of the World Peace Council and hosted the assembly of the World Peace Council in 1995. Walter retired from his post as ANC Deputy President in 1994 but continued to work on organisational issues and policies within the ANC. His health went into decline from 1998 and Albertina officially retired from politics in 1999. She dedicated much of her time to family and charity work. Walter passed away at home in 2003 and was accorded a special official funeral. Albertina resumed a quiet life at home after Walter's death but the political legacy of the family was continued by their children and grandchildren. On 3 June 2011, Albertina passed away quietly in her home in Johannesburg.

While often the result of an unrelenting romanticisation of the 'golden years' of the struggle and the deeply admired generation of ANC activists that inspired it, Albertina Sisulu's biography as constructed in the public domain reads as the narrative of a life lived in dedication and devotion to her family and the nation. Albertina Sisulu's life is inextricably entwined with the political life of Walter Sisulu and her politicised children rendering it nearly impossible to present her biography without the connections that ultimately resulted in her being presented as the archetypal 'Mother'. As a result, no biography of Albertina Sisulu herself exists, with the exception of the biography written of her and Walter by daughter-in-law, Elinor Sisulu. Albertina Sisulu, like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, became part of the pantheon of living legends and founding figures of the South African nation. A generation that was already well past the age of when politicians would normally assume strenuous and demanding positions in parliament, Albertina Sisulu was part of a political dispensation during a period filled with the heady hope represented by the rainbow nationalism of the Mandela presidency while her retirement came just as that celebratory mood was starting to be replaced by the sobering social experiences of slow socio-economic transformation. Thus,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.625.

despite the small hiccup that occurred during the TRC processes,<sup>43</sup> Sisulu retired from political life with an unblemished reputation of service, discipline, dedication and sacrifice.

The events and themes that this short rendition of Albertina Sisulu's life has addressed were selected to reflect the central themes that dominated the statements made by prominent politicians, the media, social activists and ordinary South African internet users after the announcement of Sisulu's death. Elinor Sisulu's biographical work also remains a deeply romantic and epic narrative of the lives of her mother and father-in-law. This illustrates how effectively the construction of the heroic imagery of the founding 'Mother' of Albertina Sisulu's legacy has permeated the foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state. The following discussion will illustrate how this powerful and popular imagery was reinforced and re-written to address political and socio-economic issues in the present.

### **Contextualising 2011: Service Delivery Protests and ANC Internal Discord<sup>44</sup>**

Throughout 2011, South Africans had been confronted in the media with images of violent service delivery protests, accusations of corruption within governmental structures, self-enrichment, and nepotism against municipal councillors and high level politicians, faced with the (often outrageous) public statements made by ANCYL president, Julius Malema, a pending high-profile election for the ANC-presidency, local municipal elections, and debates around the 'Green Paper on Families'<sup>45</sup> which would be released to the public for commentary in October 2011. All of these themes would be directly and indirectly touched upon in the official speech and tributes delivered at the funeral of Albertina Sisulu on 11 June

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<sup>43</sup> Albertina Sisulu would be accused in the media of protecting Winnie Mandela from the charges brought against her for the death of Stompie Sepei. According to Elinor Sisulu, however, this was merely the result of a grave mistake Albertina made in a television interview and eventually disproven. This was the only time that Albertina Sisulu's integrity had come to be questioned and is described as having been an incredibly traumatic experience for her. *Ibid.*, pp.628-631.

<sup>44</sup> It does not fall within the scope of this thesis to extensively address the background, reasons, and impact of service delivery protest in South Africa. The outline given here contextualises the manner in which Albertina Sisulu's legacy has been employed for regime legitimisation at a time when blind loyalty to the governing party has become more contested through its continued failure to deliver on basic services and the perception of self-enrichment of elected officials responsible for engaging between the state and their constituencies on such matters. For further reading consult Anne Mc Lennan, "Unmasking Delivery: Revealing the Politics", *Progress in Development Studies*, 7, 1, 2007. Peter Alexander, "Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests – A Preliminary Analysis", *Review of African Political Economy*, 37, 123, 2010. Susan Booyesen, "With the Ballot and the Brick: The Politics of Attaining Service Delivery", *Progress in Development Studies*, 7, 1, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> "Green Paper on Families: Promoting Family Life and Strengthening Families in South Africa" at <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/MediaLib/Downloads/Home/Profiles/PresidentJacobZuma/PressStatements/2012/Green%20Paper%20on%20Families.pdf> accessed 20 November 2013.

2011. It was clear that, although the nation was in mourning at the loss of its ‘Mother’, the platform that her official funeral presented would be employed to address issues around perceived and real failures by government, elected officials, and government policies. Albertina Sisulu’s long life of dedication to the ANC and the struggle for democracy held an epic and heroic narrative on which new (official) meanings could be inscribed that could legitimise and breath new vigour into the failing image of the ANC and some of its leaders, officials, and policies as it came under increased criticism for its continued failure to address, especially, economic inequality nearly two decades into the democratic dispensation.

The first democratically elected government, led by the ANC, inherited a system of service delivery that, through its deliberate neglect of the majority of the population through racially motivated social development policies, left large communities infrastructurally underdeveloped. The South African government proceeded to attempt to extend delivery of basic services to those previously excluded through apartheid policies. Establishing a ‘culture of delivery’<sup>46</sup> was attempted through three distinct phases and policies. Post-1994 reconstruction through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was instilled with the euphoric optimism of rainbow nationalism and working together to build a ‘better South Africa’. It attempted to institutionalise “the principles of sustainability, people-driven processes, peace and security, nation building, democratisation, and reconstruction and development.”<sup>47</sup> In this manner, the extension of service delivery to previously marginalised sections of the population was a principal part of post-apartheid rainbow nationalism. Mc Lennan identifies equal and universal service delivery in South Africa as a driving factor in nation building while also improving the legitimacy of the new government.<sup>48</sup> However, the “mobilising symbolism” of these policies failed to meet targets and citizens “began to demand the benefits of democratisation.”<sup>49</sup> The Growth, Employment, and Redistribution Policy (GEAR), focused on delivery in order to rapidly build the economy, create employment, redistribute income, and provide social services. The new government elected in 1999, under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki, declared its intentions to put appropriate delivery systems in place. The privatisation of certain services which were the result of an increased focus on professionalism and decentralisation saw the citizen increasingly referred to as a ‘customer’ or ‘client’. However, privatisation, commercialisation and outsourcing did

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<sup>46</sup> Anne Mc Lennan, “Unmasking Delivery: Revealing the Politics”, *Progress in Development Studies*, 7, 1, 2007, p.12.

<sup>47</sup> Mc Lennan, “Unmasking Delivery”, *Progress in Development Studies*, 2007, p.13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

not necessarily lead to better service delivery and frustrations with delivery led to the emergence of social movements and protests around access to water, land, housing, and electricity. The previously marginalised sectors of society remained under-serviced despite the democratic change, and disillusionment with rainbow nationalism quickly emerged. More demands were made on the state to provide basic services to underdeveloped communities, both rural and urban. The government then attempted to contain “the politics of delivery through partnership or decentralisation... In this way, delivery is legitimised through local participation and engagement.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, the state continued to decide what was in the interest of citizens and citizens “[were] not engaged in any significant way in the decisions which affect[ed] their lives and livelihoods.”<sup>51</sup> Richard Pithouse expands on this and argues that “there is a pervasive sense that the state disrespects people by lying to people at election times and by failing to listen to them at other times.”<sup>52</sup> Pithouse indicates that where councillors or official representatives are present in underdeveloped communities they “most often function as a means of top-down social control aiming to subordinate popular politics to the party.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, councillors and other locally elected officials, when present in their constituencies, are often seen to engage in forms of self-enrichment and to lead ‘fat-cat’ lifestyles’ – a charge brought against many ANC officials and which was one of the themes addressed during Albertina Sisulu’s funeral. Locally organised protest action against continued failure of service delivery placed demands on

people who hold or benefit from political power (which includes, but is not limited to, local politicians). These have emanated from poorer neighbourhoods (shack settlements and townships rather than suburbs)... They have included mass meetings, drafting of memoranda, petitions, toyi-toying, processions, stay-aways, election boycotts, blockading of roads, construction of barricades, burning of tyres, looting, destruction of buildings, chasing unpopular individuals out of townships, confrontations with the police, and forced resignations of elected officials.<sup>54</sup>

During Mbeki’s presidency, protest action became a prominent feature of South African political life yet increased significantly once Jacob Zuma was elected President. As Alexander indicates on the basis of figures collected by a private research company

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Pithouse, quoted in Peter Alexander, “Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa’s Service Delivery Protests – A Preliminary Analysis”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 37, 123, 2010, p.29.

<sup>53</sup> Pithouse, quoted in Alexander, “Rebellion of the Poor”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 2010, p.29.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander, “Rebellion of the Poor”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 2010, p.26.

investigating service delivery protests in South Africa, there were more service delivery protests in the first seven months of the Zuma administration than there were in the last three years of the Mbeki administration.<sup>55</sup> Alexander explains this sharp increase in protest action as the result of the public perception of Jacob Zuma as being more representative of and interested in the ‘plight of the poor’ than his predecessor. Zuma’s charisma and connections within the labour movements made him more ‘approachable’ and likeable to the greater ANC support base while Mbeki’s intellectualism and long absences from South Africa created the perception that he was removed from, or even unsympathetic towards the everyday life-experiences of a vast majority of ANC supporters. It was hoped that the timing of the protests would result in pro-active response from a government that was perceived as being ‘pro-poor’.<sup>56</sup>

With protest actions in 2004 in the Free State identified as a watershed moment from which violent service delivery protests snowballed in South Africa,<sup>57</sup> the years following Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy to the South African presidency in 2009 have seen increased protest action around issues such as access to clean water, electricity, housing, sanitation, poor roads, and corruption (real or perceived). Alienation from the institutions of local democracy amongst neglected communities led those affected to turn to protest to supplement their call for improved access to basic services. Moreover, with political parties placing ‘service delivery’ at the top of their political agendas, and the increased visibility and action of public servants and prominent politicians during periods of unrest, the usefulness of (violent) protest was affirmed.<sup>58</sup> Communities incorporated protest into their political participation “given the limitations they discovered in the ability of formal democracy to ensure service delivery.”<sup>59</sup> However, municipal election results have shown that loyalty to the governing party in most of the affected areas, the ANC, has not wavered and voters did not turn to opposition parties to voice their dissatisfaction in these communities.<sup>60</sup> However, voter loyalty to the ANC has assumed a more critical and challenging dimension to ensure better service delivery and protest appears to be seen as a way in which to directly engage with their party. Thus, it becomes clear that “critical and challenging forms of loyalty have taken the place of blind loyalty” which characterised the first few years of democracy. Gillian

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Booysen, “With the Ballot and the Brick: The Politics of Attaining Service Delivery”, *Progress in Development Studies*, 7, 1, 2007, p.24.

<sup>58</sup> Booysen, “With the Ballot and the Brick”, *Progress in Development Studies*, 2007, p.25.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.29.

Hart argues that precisely “because nationalist calls are linked to histories, memories, and meanings of freedom struggles, redress for the wrongs of the past and visions of a new nation, they are vulnerable to counter-claims of betrayal...”<sup>61</sup> As a result of its continued failure to deliver and increased police violence to counter violent service delivery protests, it can be deduced that by focusing on heroic ANC stalwarts like Albertina Sisulu and their superior qualities (real or (re)invented and re-written and reinterpreted), the ANC attempted to remind the nation of its legitimacy as a ruling party due to its prominent role in the struggle, and the morally superior qualities it was imbued with in its historic resistance to apartheid. Thus, despite its failings, it had the moral ‘right’ to rule the country for whose freedom the organisation and its members had sacrificed so much.

While service delivery protests were at the forefront of party politics, accusations of corruption and self-enrichment at the expense of the average South African citizen were also making media headlines in 2011. High profile cases such as that of National Police Commissioner and ANC stalwart, Bheki Cele, who was facing charges of corruption for which he would be dismissed later in the year and the Minister of Public Works who was suspended for accusations in the same scandal were media headlines. Moreover, the often opulent lifestyles and lavish government-funded events were under constant criticism as people were protesting in the streets for access to basic services such as clean water and the dignity of enclosed toilets. Simultaneously, outspoken and controversial ANCYL President, Julius Malema, was facing disciplinary charges for bringing his party into disrepute, and despite having enjoyed a close and supportive relationship with President Jacob Zuma in previous years, had recently fallen out of favour with the older generation of ANC leaders as he had publically insulted several of his party’s political seniors. With the backing of members of the ANCYL, a public standoff between the ANCYL and the ANC NEC ensued and caused a generational divide between the ‘old guard’, and a new generation representing an increasingly militant youth with bleak educational and employment prospects in the democratic state and who demanded ‘economic freedom’. Democracy had been achieved but the economic divide had not yet been conquered and a generation of township youths, many of whom were born post-1994, understood that despite living in a democratic dispensation that had promised extensive change, their economic prospects remained poor at best as government policies tended to favour the few. Moreover, Malema’s political rhetoric, often

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<sup>61</sup> Gillian Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony*, (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: Scottsville, 2013), p.23.

violent and marked by hate speech, invoked a new nationalist struggle that rejected the harmonious symbolism of the Rainbow Nation and reconciliation ideology. His public calls for the nationalisation of South Africa's mines and the seizure of white-owned land and farms without compensation had to be quelled by senior ANC government officials. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the loss of Malema's support for his re-election in the ANC leadership elections the following year, Zuma's eventually successful attempt to have Malema disciplined and expelled from the party, influenced the decision to take control and silence the leadership of the ANCYL. The ANCYL and its leaders have a historic reputation for being 'king-makers', inciting more revolutionary policies, and often clashing with senior ANC leadership. Yet, it appeared that within a democratic dispensation and a somewhat stable economic climate, public displays of disunity within ANC structures and the public 'disrespect' shown by ANCYL leaders towards their political seniors would not be tolerated by the NEC.<sup>62</sup>

#### **Bidding Farewell: The Funeral of Albertina Sisulu**

*You raised your voice when it was dangerous and unfashionable to do so. You unselfishly raised and mothered your children and many other South African children.*

*Your tireless pursuit of freedom and equality in South Africa bore fruit and we are happy that you lived to see the day.*

*Your life was fulfilling, purposeful, and noble.*

*Your life's work will always be a part of South Africa and of those who come after you.*

*You will be remembered for the love of your country, and the sacrifices you made for the liberation of our motherland.*

*You were an honest mother and comrade, who religiously adhered to the constitution and processes of the ANC.*

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<sup>62</sup> Malema would be expelled from the ANC for a period of five years after his disciplinary hearing in November 2011 and he has since led the formation of a new political party, the Economic Freedom Front (EFF).

*Now you are deservedly rested and quiet.*

*But your voice reverberates across South Africa and the world through your good work.*

*Your voice surely serves as a conscience to us who remain behind.*

*Thank you for your sacrifices and love for all of us. A history worth emulating.*

*Your legacy is being kept alive by your children and comrades, and will continue to inspire many for generations to come.*

*You truly were a woman who gave her life to many South Africans. May you rest in eternal peace. You were truly altruistic.*

*Rest in peace, Mama!*<sup>63</sup>

- Thandi Modise, Premier of the North West

This tribute written for Sisulu by Thandi Modise, Premier of the North West Province and member of the ANC NEC, encapsulates the creation and entrenchment of Albertina Sisulu as a central foundational figure for the post-apartheid state within a party-political context. Discourses of motherhood, martyrdom, heroism, and patriotism are invoked to create a powerful, perfect, and romantic image of the ‘Mother of the Nation’, who, in death, becomes infallible and sanctified. The tributes to ‘MaSisulu’ given by politicians, religious and community leaders, members of the public, and famous South Africans all tended to reflect the sentiments expressed in Modise’s words indicating that the establishment of Albertina Sisulu as a founding mother had already occurred in post-apartheid society. However, her death allowed for this legacy to enter the realm of the sacred, while her funeral became the platform where the sacred legacy became entrenched in nation-building and party-political legitimisation processes.

As the news headlines of the first months of 2011 remained a topic of conversation in the public sphere, the funeral of Albertina Sisulu created the space for the official (re)construction of a foundational mother-figure – one whose positive qualities were important to be emulated by the nation to counter the perceived present ‘plagues’ that were damaging the hope and optimism that had accompanied the democratic transition and the

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<sup>63</sup> Thandi Modise, Premier of the North West Province, “Albertina Sisulu – Always a Mother”, <http://www.citypress.co.za/you-say/albertina-sisulu-always-a-mother-20110610/> accessed 10 October 2013.

formation of the Rainbow Nation seventeen years earlier. The oration given by President Jacob Zuma at the funeral of Albertina Sisulu, albeit short, touched on many of the themes that were topics of public outrage and commentary by June 2011 while also reminding the nation of future possibilities. Discipline, humility, human dignity, the importance of the normative family unit, diligence, and service became powerful themes that were not only present in Zuma's oration at the funeral, but were present in the public tributes delivered by all those interviewed by the SABC for the broadcast of the funeral. The construction of an official counter-narrative of optimism emerged to offset the negative media attention given, especially, to failing service delivery and internal discord within the ANC. For opposition parties in South Africa, often known to berate the governing party in the public media, Albertina Sisulu's legacy of selfless service and unrelenting opposition to apartheid during the years pre-dating ANC-rule, allowed them to praise and contribute to the construction of this 'Mother of the Nation', while maintaining an oppositional stance. In certain instances, by acknowledging Sisulu's projected (and clearly, accepted) moral superiority over the younger generation, opposition leaders were able to criticise present ANC shortcomings. Most tributes delivered by politicians became indicative of the employment of the legacy of the 'founding mother' to further party-political agendas. In tributes and statements made by ANC members and leaders it became clear that the legacy of Albertina Sisulu would be inextricably linked to ANC internal politics and regime legitimation in the present. In the official statement of tribute to Albertina Sisulu, the ANC reminded the 'nation' that Sisulu,

inspired a generation of leaders who have since swelled the ranks of the democratic movement and our government... As South Africans we owe it to this pedigree of revolutionaries who defined the course and tempo of our struggle. Indeed we can without equivocation say that as South Africans, we today enjoy the freedom and democracy because of her selfless contribution.<sup>64</sup>

In a special tribute to Albertina Sisulu, *ANC Today*, an online publication of the ANC, the main body reiterates this sentiment and emphasise her ANC membership:

Because she walked this long walk to freedom as one of us, her head held high, holding our hands, her strength made us even more stronger. Mama's death challenges us to return to

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<sup>64</sup> Statement issued by Jackson Mthembu, ANC National Spokesperson, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=239461&sn=Detail&pid=71654> accessed 10 October 2013.

those values of selfless service and humility. In honouring her memory, we re-dedicate ourselves to those values that Mama espoused and embodied.<sup>65</sup>

Although faced with public criticism and internal conflict, the governing party reminds the nation that the values represented in the iconic image of Albertina Sisulu are what inspired the ANC in its struggle against colonial and apartheid oppression and that it will rededicate itself to upholding these values in the present despite the challenges to its public image. Moreover, in its public statements the ANC ensured that the nation was aware that this struggle icon and ‘Mother of the Nation’, to whom the nation owed its freedom, belonged to the ANC and that the values that this national heroine espoused as presented in official rhetoric are an inherent part of the ANC’s legacy and will continue to influence the organisation’s future.

The funeral of Albertina Sisulu was assigned as a category one special official funeral. This meant that she was acknowledged as a distinguished person as designated by the President of South Africa and that Sisulu would be buried with full military honours. The morning of 11 June 2011 commenced with a valedictory ceremony at the Sisulu family home in Orlando West attended by relatives and close friends. From here, Sisulu’s casket, draped in the ANC flag, was transported to Orlando Stadium where the official funeral ceremony was officiated by Minister Jeff Radebe. The streets en route to the stadium were closed off for the event and the hearse carrying Sisulu’s remains was attended by members of the ANCWL. The official funeral was divided into two segments. First a brief ceremony led by the ANC took place where the organisation could bid farewell to one of its most dedicated and iconic leaders. Once this segment was concluded, the state took over proceedings, the South African flag replaced the ANC flag covering Sisulu’s casket, and President Jacob Zuma delivered his oration on behalf of the people of South Africa. Free train transport was provided to the stadium for the general public to attend the funeral ceremony. The ceremony commenced with the national anthem of South Africa and a brief opening prayer. As Sisulu was a member of the Anglican Church the ceremony was conducted following Anglican/Christian scripture according to its funerary rites and officiated by Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba. Once concluded, family and close friends would make their way to Croesus Cemetery in Newclare, Johannesburg where Albertina Sisulu was laid to rest next to Walter Sisulu and her headstone unveiled.

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<sup>65</sup> African National Congress, “Albertina Sisulu – Nation Builder and Selfless Leader”, *ANC Today*, 11, 22, 10-16 June 2011, at <http://www.anc.org.za/docs/ancoday/2011/at22.html> accessed 10 October 2013.

SABC2 televised the day-long funeral proceedings reflecting the importance assigned to the struggle icon in the post-apartheid state. Before the official funeral proceedings commenced, the broadcaster televised the tributes delivered to Sisulu by several of South Africa's most prominent political figures. It is in these interviews that the legacy of Albertina Sisulu as a living legend now elevated to founding figure and national heroine can be discerned. In brief sound bites that preceded the funeral the iconic image of Sisulu as the archetypal mother figure, 'Mother of the Nation', national heroine, and as the embodiment of the founding values of the post-apartheid state was established. Former president Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma praised her as a mother of the struggle while members of the political opposition parties paid tribute to Sisulu's dedication and discipline. For Democratic Alliance leader Helen Zille, Sisulu represented everything that is the best about South Africa,<sup>66</sup> while Joe Mcgluwa from the Independent Democrats stated that Albertina Sisulu did not only give birth to her own children but was also responsible for the birth of a democratic South Africa.<sup>67</sup> Tributes for Albertina Sisulu were issued by all political parties, ANC alliance partners and unions. Tributes from within ANC ranks reiterated her status as ANC member and 'Mother of the Nation' while also reflecting the internal discord within ANC ranks. Thandi Modise in a brief interview with an SABC2 reporter bemoaned the 'younger cadres' of the ANC for not "imbibing the values of the ANC"<sup>68</sup> as they were embodied by ANC leaders such as Walter and Albertina Sisulu in an apparent rebuke of the ANCYL members then at odds with the ANC main body.

During her lifetime, Albertina Sisulu was a living legend whose legacy was built on a lifetime of dedicated resistance to apartheid oppression in all its social aspects. In death this legacy was magnified in official discourse and she became a symbol not only of past struggles but of social and political struggles in the present. Her official funeral became the platform for this symbolic image to be highlighted and then entrenched in post-apartheid foundational mythology.

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<sup>66</sup> SABC2, Funeral of Albertina Sisulu, 1hr16min.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 1hr16min

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 1hr22min

## **“May Her Soul Rest in Peace, but her spirit must live on amongst us!”<sup>69</sup> An Analysis of President Jacob Zuma’s Oration**

President Jacob Zuma’s oration on behalf of South Africa and all its citizens at the funeral of Albertina Sisulu constitutes not only a reflection of the social issues facing South African society and the ANC in 2011, but the terminology employed in the speech exhibits the official discourses of shaping a (ANC) foundational mythology for the nation. Zuma’s speech, as the President of the country that was mourning the loss of a ‘Mother of the Nation’,<sup>70</sup> was a highlight of the funeral ceremony and it was his public tributes to ‘MaSisulu’ that were often emphasised and quoted in media reports in the week leading up to the funeral. As such, it was the official rhetoric issued by the Presidency that shaped representations of Albertina Sisulu in the media and thrust her legacy and life back into the public sphere. The analysis of Zuma’s speech will reflect the sustainment of a foundational myth that has been in the making for the past two decades. Through the public mourning rituals enacted before and at the funeral of Albertina Sisulu, the state was given a platform from which it was able to project Sisulu’s contribution to this foundational mythology in the social symbolism of the sacred state of death and burial lending it a political efficacy that could not be achieved in honouring the living individual. While contributing to and re-enforcing a larger, existing foundational myth, the speech is indicative of regime legitimisation through its indirect, but obvious, references to and reflections of present political and societal discourses. The physical loss of Albertina Sisulu to the nation created an opportunity for the state to produce new meanings for her legacy in the present, and indeed, the future. The analysis below will show an officially-sanctioned foundational mythology creation at work that draws on the nationalist movements of the post-apartheid era while simultaneously legitimising the present regime with a clear indication of a focus on the future and a (re)creation and attainment of a projected ‘golden era’, based on that of the romanticised legacies of the past.

“We have gathered to celebrate the life of an outstanding patriot whose name has become synonymous with our struggle for freedom, justice, human rights, and human

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<sup>69</sup> Jacob Zuma, “Oration by His Excellency President Jacob Zuma at the Funeral of Mrs Albertina Sisulu, Orlando Stadium, Soweto”, 11 June 2011. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=4282> accessed 20 September 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Perhaps it is noteworthy that Albertina Sisulu has eclipsed Winnie Mandela with regard to this title, most importantly, because Mandela has not been a particularly solid role-model for the nation.

dignity.”<sup>71</sup> Jacob Zuma commenced his oration by identifying Sisulu as a shared national icon who embodied the founding principles (or foundational pillars as identified by Marschall)<sup>72</sup> of post-apartheid South Africa. Identifying Albertina Sisulu, as an ANC stalwart, as a champion of human dignity within the context of the founding principles of the post-apartheid state serves to legitimise the ANC, despite its failure to uphold some of the principles on which the organisation attempted to build a new nation as the governing party. Zuma continued:

One of the most steadfast, dignified and disciplined pillars of our struggle has fallen, an era has ended, and the nation is devastated, but we are proud to be associated with Mama Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu.

Albertina Sisulu’s dedication to the ANC was unwavering and Zuma’s reference to her lifetime of service to the ANC and the struggle in terms of her steadfastness, dignity, and discipline is not unfounded. With the death of Sisulu, Zuma intones, an era has ended – an era that saw the rise of the ‘great’ leaders of the struggle for democracy such as the Sisulus, Mandela and Tambos; an era often identified as the ‘golden years’ of the struggle. It was defined by leaders that, in present official discourse, are cast as selfless, fearless, dedicated, and above all, disciplined. These leaders (exclusively male) would also be honoured in 2012 during the ANC’s year-long centenary celebrations which involved honouring its past leaders and the declaration as national heritage sites of locations and sites identified with the ANC and its involvement in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. What stood in stark contrast to the leaders of the past was the media attention given to the failings of the ANC leaders of the present and the allegations of the emergence of a ‘culture’ of self-enrichment, nepotism, corruption, and fraud that is perceived to have developed within all ranks of the governing party. Once again, ensuring that the nation is reminded that such dedicated and selfless individuals as Albertina Sisulu are inextricably linked to the present democratic freedoms enjoyed by its citizens serves to legitimise the current regime. Although the present ruling party is beset by allegations of self-enrichment at the expense of the citizens of the state, it attempts to legitimise its position as governing party by its past contribution, and the contribution of some of its most famous leaders, to the fairly recent advent of democracy in South Africa. Moreover, the deeply sacred nature of death and the sorrowful state of loss and mourning is called upon to render this legitimisation process as being above critical

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<sup>71</sup> Zuma, “Oration”, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=4282>

<sup>72</sup> Marschall, *Landscape*, p.179.

questioning or analysis. If the nation as a whole is devastated by the loss of a mother figure such as ‘Mama Sisulu’, criticising this loss or those associated with her legacy renders those critics as being outside of the ‘nation’ and leaves their criticism, ultimately, invalid.

When Zuma continued, he spoke of Sisulu as a ‘Mother of the Nation’ and ‘national heroine’:

We are laying to rest a stalwart and mother of the nation, who combined resilience and fortitude in fighting colonial oppression and apartheid, with compassion for the poor and the downtrodden. We are bidding farewell to a national heroine who produced many cadres of the liberation movement, and shaped our political thought and action in many ways.<sup>73</sup>

Further asserting Sisulu’s ‘Mother of the Nation’ status by neatly encompassing the assumed feelings of the ‘nation’, Zuma claimed that “Women, workers, youth, the homeless, professionals, the rural poor, the nursing fraternity and ordinary folk – all declare that she was their mother and their leader.”<sup>74</sup> Sisulu is officially elevated to a ‘Mother of the Nation’ within a context of militant motherhood that has become so emblematic of official representations of female ANC activism during the struggle years. Moreover, although Zuma indicated that Sisulu fought oppression, she was still imbued with the feminine qualities of compassion and as a ‘producer’ of the generation of politicians that lead the country today. Despite her activism, she is officially and politically domesticated as ‘Mother’ and is positioned as a woman who ideologically reproduced the collectivity and transmitted a culture of selflessness and compassion to her political offspring – now the political leaders of the state and members of the ANC.<sup>75</sup> Zuma’s reference to the importance of motherhood is a theme apparent throughout his oration. He declared that “Mama Sisulu also viewed motherhood as strength and used it to organise women”<sup>76</sup> and indeed, motherhood was an important aspect of Albertina Sisulu’s life. Cheryl Walker makes a pertinent observation about the respect and authority accorded to women in the public sphere by virtue of their role as mothers:

Men speak admiringly of the role their mothers play in their lives, but the praises of their mothers fall strictly within the boundaries of traditionally defined women's roles. These men appear to be prepared to acknowledge the power of women in a restricted situational and

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<sup>73</sup> Zuma, “Oration”, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?reid=4282>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis (eds), “Introduction” in *Woman*, p.9.

<sup>76</sup> Zuma, “Oration”, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?reid=4282>

locational sense: women are powerful within the home, and in situations involving the nurturing or protection of other people... but there is often little respect for women's power outside of this sphere.<sup>77</sup>

While reminiscent of the powerful role played by discourses of motherhood to unite women across racial boundaries against the apartheid government and its policies, Zuma's emphasis on motherhood can also be interpreted as referring to the personal significance attached by the head of state on the importance of traditional family values, the normative family unit, and equating womanhood with motherhood (with notable little commentary of the importance of fatherhood). This focus on motherhood and his stereotyping of women in the traditional role of 'mother', would become significantly more poignant when, just over a year later (ironically during Women's Month), Zuma declared in a television interview that it is not 'right' for a woman to remain unmarried, that single women are a problem in society and that the bearing and raising of children gives women 'extra training'<sup>78</sup> – reminding the country that, although official policy pushes gender equality, within the home (and especially the home of the 'First Family') this is often not a reality for women in South Africa as the country remains influenced by strong patriarchal values and practices. Moreover, during this time, the government was drafting its Green Paper on Families which would only be officially released to the public in August 2012 despite having been released already in 2011 to allow for consultation with relevant stakeholders. The timing of its re-release was an attempt to defend Zuma's public statements. Yet, once publically released, the paper was criticised for its conservative approach to the term 'family' and lambasted as reproducing the 'myth of the family' as consisting of a nuclear family made up of a mother, father, and children.<sup>79</sup> This finds particular resonance with Zuma's polygamy: a practice deeply entrenched in patriarchy and defended in terms of culture and tradition – terms which all defined the Green Paper on Families. The Green Paper on Families was also indicative of political leaders rarely questioning family patterns that treat women as the primary providers

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<sup>77</sup> Cheryl Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 3, 1995, p.417.

<sup>78</sup> David Smith, "Jacob Zuma Says it is Not Right for Women to Remain Unmarried", *The Guardian*, 22 August 2012, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/22/jacob-zuma-women-unmarried> accessed 1 October 2013. Verashni Pillay, "Zuma: Women Must Have Children", *Mail & Guardian*, 22 August 2012, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-21-zuma-women-must-have-children> accessed 1 October 2013.

<sup>79</sup> "Zuma's New Family Plan Sparks Debate", *City Press*, 25 August 2012, at <http://www.citypress.co.za/politics/zumas-new-family-plan-sparks-debate-20120825/>

of child and family care and housework and of the assumption of male authority within the family.<sup>80</sup>

The positioning of a female icon such as Sisulu as a bearer of culture and ideologies fundamental to the nation within a South African nationalism is reinforced by Zuma's references to the lessons the nation must learn from this national heroine's life and the lessons she had taught:

We must learn from Mama Sisulu the need to continue promoting non-racialism, social cohesion and inclusiveness... She taught us to rise above political differences and focus on the good of the country and its people... She taught us so much about leadership and *Ubuntu*. She upheld many values that we must internalise in our own lives and behaviour.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps this emphasis on social cohesion, *Ubuntu*, and leadership can also be a tempering of the social divisions invoked by Julius Malema. Zuma continued to remind the nation that there are many lessons "this wise and wonderful stalwart has left for us... From her we learned that you can be a leader and still respect others in actions and deeds regardless of their station in life or status."<sup>82</sup> Her undeniable importance to the nation as a valuable member of the ANC is reinforced by Zuma when he stated that it was not only "leaders of opposition parties [who] made the time to sign condolence books to declare their respect for this remarkable leader"<sup>83</sup> but that all these messages "confirm what our father, President Nelson Mandela said about Mama Sisulu. She was 'wise and wonderful'."<sup>84</sup> Invoking the powerful and iconic name of Mandela in the familial terminology of nationalist ideology, not only affirms the importance of Sisulu, but also reminds the nation of Mandela's association with the ANC – not only was the 'Mother of the Nation' a fiercely loyal ANC member, the 'Father of our Nation', Mandela, was too. Mandela's mythology has repeatedly been a commanding tool in regime legitimation for the ANC and is undoubtedly likely to remain so. Zuma continued to promote the ANC as the organisation from which great leaders like Albertina Sisulu emerged:

In just a few months, the liberation movement that was so dear to Mama Sisulu's heart, the ANC, will celebrate its centenary... The celebrations will remind the world of a century of

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<sup>80</sup> Gay W. Seidman, "'No Freedom Without the Women': Mobilisation and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992", *Signs*, Winter 1993, p.296.

<sup>81</sup> Zuma, "Oration", <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=4282>

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

selfless struggle. When we speak of the organisation's selfless struggle, Mama Sisulu's name stands out as a shining example.<sup>85</sup>

The centenary celebrations would be a year-long event that commemorated monthly the most influential male leaders of the organisation and involved the declaration as national heritage sites of the locations associated with them and the ANC itself. Trading on the past glories of the organisation, the celebrations could be considered as a somewhat shameless foundational mythology creation exercise that placed the ANC at the centre of the liberation movement to the exclusion of many other organisations that played a vital role while, controversially, also drawing on public funds to fund certain aspects of the celebration in the name of 'national heritage'.<sup>86</sup> Further reminiscing of the 'golden years' of the ANC, Zuma employed a well-known ANC slogan and states that "[w]hen we say working together we can do more, we are endorsing lessons from leaders such as Mama Sisulu."<sup>87</sup> Zuma continued:

The passing of Mama Sisulu, soon after that of Ntante Henry Makgothi, is a stark reminder than an outstanding, dedicated, committed and illustrious generation is departing. They have played their part and led us to freedom. In their memory and honour we have to realise the vision of building a truly non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

It is the youth, first and foremost, that should take note of the lessons to be learned from these ANC stalwarts, according to Zuma, especially within the context of June as 'Youth Month' and the commemoration of the thirty-five year anniversary of the June 16 Soweto Uprisings. Zuma stated:

The message of the 2011 youth month is that the political freedom that has been achieved must now translate into economic emancipation, so that we can eradicate inequality, poverty and unemployment that continue to afflict our people. In memory of Mama Sisulu, our youth must use the available opportunities to obtain education and skills that will enable them to take forward the struggle for true economic and social emancipation. Our youth must strive for excellence and progress so that they can be rightful beneficiaries of Mama Sisulu's legacy and that of all heroes of the South African revolution. We also urge the youth to learn from Mama Sisulu the values of respect for the next person, selflessness, patriotism and commitment to making this country a better place.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Glynis Underhill, "ANC Taps Government Funds for Centenary", *Mail & Guardian*, 18 November 2011, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-11-18-anc-taps-govt-funds-for-centenary> accessed 23 September 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Zuma, "Oration", <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=4282>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Within the context of ANC-ANCYL internal divisions this message may serve as a rebuke to the ANCYL for its ‘disrespect’ of the organisation’s leaders and its disciplinary structures. More importantly, however, the future of the nation – its youth – are requested to take the teachings of, and values most admired in Albertina Sisulu, a “selfless pillar of our struggle”,<sup>89</sup> and emulate them in order to create a future ‘golden age’ of ‘economic freedom’ and realise the vision of a non-racial and non-sexist society inspired by the generation that had fought for democratic freedoms of the present.

A critical analysis of Jacob Zuma’s oration has shown how Albertina Sisulu’s death and funeral became an occasion not only for nation-building but also to address current and future challenges faced by the ‘nation’ (rather than the state, government, or individual politicians). As Sisulu was an important political icon for the post-apartheid state, her official funeral was typically politicised. As her body was laid to rest, it was her legacy that remained. It is this legacy that was drawn on by politicians such as Zuma to construct a narrative that legitimated the current political order through addressing present societal issues but reminding the ‘nation’ that in the emulation of Sisulu’s legacy lays the possibility of a future golden era. While reconstructing Sisulu’s legacy as a source of inspiration for the future, the foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state is reinforced by the political focus on the contribution of an ANC member who was part of a golden generation of ANC activists whose characters are constructed and often presented as being above reproach. While Sisulu’s ANC membership is made clear, the nation is also ensured that she belonged to all. The continued reference to Sisulu as the ‘Mother of the Nation’ and as a ‘national heroine’, and the reiteration of her dedication, selflessness, humility, loyalty, and patriotism constructs the image of the foundational heroic figure who, although physically lost to the nation, should inspire through her legacy as it is narrated and presented in official discourse. Furthermore, the gendered language of nationalism employed in Zuma’s speech sought to assess and entrench official discourses around domestic femininity, family, and motherhood – discourses for which Sisulu is constructed as the perfect icon. Undoubtedly, Sisulu’s contribution to the creation and formation of a democratic South Africa cannot be dismissed yet it becomes clear that the official discourses that informed and shaped public mourning and the remembrance of her life were mediated by political rhetoric that reconstructed and employed this legacy to endorse the dominant political ideologies of the current political dispensation.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

As ‘The Struggle’ forms the epicentre of the foundation myth of the post-apartheid state, the official rhetoric issued at the time of Albertina Sisulu’s death and funeral elevated her to one of its most prominent heroines and icons. By granting an official funeral with military honours, the state recognised her importance as one of its founding figures while informing the nation that it had lost one of its most virtuous heroines and that this sense of loss should be shared and publically acknowledged. Official rhetoric, informed by mourning and funerary rituals, clearly illustrated how the history of the struggle and its heroes and heroines was being assessed and remembered in the present. Sisulu’s life and legacy were cast as a romantic narrative that encapsulated the foundational values of a democratic South Africa. It was clear that the largely uncontroversial biography and history of Albertina Sisulu, recast and re-interpreted from the present, was a powerful political tool, not just in aid of a larger nationalist project of nation-building, but also in regime legitimation at a time when government was faced with growing criticism. As the officially-sanctioned narrative of Sisulu’s legacy entered the larger foundational mythology, her name would grace a new highway in 2012, while in 2013 a health and leadership programme was launched in her name. While the official narrative of Sisulu’s legacy informed the shaping of a larger foundational mythology, the evident discourses of motherhood which tended to form the core of official rhetoric were indicative of the gendered nature of nationalism and the multitude of ways in which this particular South African nationalist movement positions women. ‘MaSisulu’ was presented to the nation in official rhetoric as the iconic Mother/Activist figure of the struggle and a transmitter of its culture and values – both personally and politically – and represented the experiences of many South African mothers under apartheid rule.<sup>90</sup> This perceived shared experience of motherhood, sacrifice, and suffering leading to ultimate triumph allowed the nation to identify with ‘MaSisulu’ and to perceive that it had lost something valuable and important in the departure of this ‘Mother of the Nation’ from the realm of the living. Yet, now elevated as a ‘national heroine’, her legacy and the physical presence of her remains in the South African landscape renders her, supposedly, eternal. The presence of her name and all its concomitant values in the public landscape serves as a constant reminder of this national heroine’s legacy and honoured place in the country’s pantheon of heroes and heroines.

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<sup>90</sup> Zuma, “Oration”, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=4282>

The death and funeral of Sisulu allowed for a multiplicity of meanings to be inscribed on her remains. While overtly embodying the values of nation-building in South Africa in official discourse, more subtle and specific power struggles were enacted at her funeral and in the many tributes issued by prominent politicians. This demonstrates the political efficacy of the named and famous dead while also indicating the protean meanings that can be assigned to a single deceased and thus silent individual. Laying claim to this legacy, the ANC wielded the political power inherent in dead body politics. The ANC thus indicated its own alleged subscription to the moral values that the image of Albertina Sisulu invoked, bolstered its own public image, and secured its status as a liberation movement whose glorious past legitimated its position as ruling party in the present.

## Chapter 8

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### **Burying the Sacred Remains: Rendering the Victim Triumphant and Sara Baartman's Iconography in Post-Apartheid South Africa<sup>1</sup>**

*Among the Immortals... every act (and every thought) is the echo of others that preceded it in the past, with no visible beginning, or the faithful presage of others that in the future will repeat it to a vertiginous degree.*

- Jorge Luis Borges<sup>2</sup>

*History repeats itself, first as a tragedy, second as a farce.*

- Karl Marx<sup>3</sup>

#### **Introduction**

In the small citrus farming community of Hankey in the Eastern Cape, Sara Baartman's remains rest in a grave situated on the small hill, *Vergaderingskop* (Assembly Hill), overlooking the Gamtoos River Valley. Her remains were returned to South Africa from France on 2 May 2002 after six years of official negotiations between the two governments.<sup>4</sup> The return of Baartman's remains were imbued with great symbolic significance that transcended former presidents Mandela's rainbow nationalism and Mbeki's African Renaissance philosophies. Baartman's physical remains and biography, always symbolic to a vertiginous degree, were meant to serve as a symbolic closure to South Africa's traumatic

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<sup>1</sup> This Chapter will initially draw on the research from my Master's thesis: Simone Kerseboom, "Our Khoi Heroine": Remembering and Re-Creating Sara Baartman in Post-Apartheid South Africa, 1994-2007", (Stellenbosch University, 2007), supervised by Dr. Sandra Swart, and will be enriched by research into the developments that have taken place in the years since the completion of that thesis and a re-contextualisation of the research within the framework of a larger foundational mythology creation.

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Immortal", in *Labyrinths*, (Penguin Modern Classics: London, 1970), p.146.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, translated by Daniel de Leon, (Mondial: Chicago, 1919).

<sup>4</sup> The South African Khoisan communities represented by the Griqua National Conference attempted to secure the repatriation of the remains two years earlier but a failure of negotiations led them to approach the South African government to enter into official negotiations with France.

colonial and apartheid pasts. For both presidencies and their attendant nationalist ideologies, the burial of Baartman's remains in African soil were to form part of the creation of a foundational mythology that spoke of national healing and its resultant nation building. The dead body politics of Baartman's remains were indicative of the transitional politics of the newly created post-apartheid state and its search for tractable symbols. Baartman, always represented as victim and theoretically and physically reduced to 'body', was the perfect silent figure on whose body and legacy the foundational mythology of the 'new' South Africa could be inscribed.

Over the past decade the gravesite has undergone several minor changes but its significance in the current political landscape has waned. Despite this, developments for the site have been in planning phases for the last twelve years occasioned by sporadic high-profile visits by government representatives over this time period to assure the community that the planned developments will, indeed, go ahead. What has become clear is that in the years immediately following South Africa's democratic transition, Baartman featured strongly in the search for new tractable icons that would embody the spirit of first, the Rainbow Nation, and in the years of Mbeki's presidency, also African Renaissance philosophy. The processes engaged in to ensure the return of her remains and her eventual burial in the soil of a country significantly changed since her departure would become strong symbolic moments of transition. Baartman was hailed as the '(grand)mother of the nation', a symbol of unity and reconciliation and of dignity and humanity restored. She was a historic figure with a tragic biography distanced by centuries that did not directly imply the racial violence of the recent apartheid past and allowed South Africans to identify with her life without any sense of immediate guilt.

Despite Baartman's symbolic efficacy for the post-apartheid nation, the overwhelming sense of hope and closure that accompanied her return and burial have faded. Promised developments for the gravesite and its surrounding areas have stalled and Baartman's prominence as an icon of nation-building has taken a backseat as the country faces new challenges which call for a different set of icons. This chapter will briefly outline Baartman's biography and the processes that ensured the return of Baartman's remains to South Africa. This will be followed by a discussion of the creation of Baartman as a foundational icon for the post-apartheid state within a context of the TRC processes and a rendering of a victim (re)turned triumphant and the ambivalent relationship between victim/heroine. This was an essential aspect of the many ways in which Baartman's legacy was re-imagined and re-

written in the narrative of nation-building and African Renaissance ideologies and ensured her position as a powerful symbol in the foundational mythology of a ‘new’ South Africa. This chapter will also address the developments around Baartman’s gravesite in Hankey and will show that it is clear that as Baartman’s symbolic currency has lost value, so has the urgency to initiate and complete proposed plans that have the potential to create employment in an underdeveloped part of the country, lost impetus.

Baartman’s tragic life story and the repetitive casting of her legacy, body, and life as a symbol renders any discussion of her as potentially sensitive. As a woman whose personhood has been denied or glossed over for centuries and whose agency as a KhoeKhoe woman in colonial South Africa must be questioned, any discussion of Baartman necessarily needs to be traversed carefully and heeding Abrahams’ caution that “[e]ven as a symbol of resistance of triumph, she is still a symbol, and even a positive symbol is still a thing, not a person.”<sup>5</sup> This chapter will outline and analyse Baartman’s casting as a symbol and icon within the foundational mythology of post-apartheid South Africa and show how her biography has been subsumed in the socio-political landscape of a transitional South Africa that understood the symbolic efficacy of her life experiences in establishing a new moral order. This chapter does not intend to denigrate the traumatic events that characterised Baartman’s life or to discredit the genuine empathy and sympathy that many officials, Khoisan people, and other stakeholders felt for her plight. Rather this serves as a critique of how her body and legacy were once again subsumed by symbolic imagery that served a variety of political projects and cast Baartman as an iconic foundational figure for the post-apartheid state in the transitional period. Baartman’s original KhoeKhoe name is unknown and it is necessary to refer to her by the Afrikaans name given to her by her employers. The diminutive version of her name, ‘Saartjie’, found popularity amongst Khoisan descendants as a term of endearment for a revered ancestor. Various spellings of Baartman’s name are in use and the official spelling of her name, ‘Sarah Bartmann’, reflects the Anglicised version which appears on her baptismal certificate and represents the period of her life where she would have been on display and will therefore not be used. The choice for spelling in this thesis reflects the name that would have been used by her employers in the Cape.

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<sup>5</sup> Yvette Abrahams, “Gender and Locality: Sarah Bartmann in the Present”, in Andries Oliphant, Peter Delius, Lalou Meltzer (eds), *Democracy X: Marking the Present, Re-presenting the Past*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004), p.152.

## Brief Biography

While this chapter is not meant to serve as a biography of Baartman, her iconic status in post-apartheid South Africa is the result of a politicised re-imagining and re-writing of her life-story to form a supporting pillar in the narrative of nation-building.<sup>6</sup> Thus, to allow for adequate contextualisation a brief outline will be given here. Sara Baartman, a Khoekhoe woman, is believed to have been born in the Gamtoos River Valley in 1789.<sup>7</sup> She was taken to Cape Town and became the indentured ‘servant’ of the Cesars family where she was noticed by Hendrik Cesar’s employer, English staff surgeon and medical superintendant of the Cape Slave Lodge, Alexander Dunlop. Dunlop persuaded Cesars that the exhibition of Baartman in England could be a lucrative prospect and they sailed to England in 1810. In London, Dunlop initially attempted to contract Baartman to naturalist William Bullock who ran the famous Liverpool Museum at 22 Piccadilly. However, Bullock refused and Dunlop and Cesars decided to display Baartman themselves. They secured the location of no.225 Piccadilly and started advertising for the exhibition of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ as an ethnic curiosity. Her dress on stage was contrived to display Baartman’s body in its ‘natural’ state by the use of a tight fitting garment whose seams were concealed by carefully arranged jewellery. Baartman’s garments on stage were meant to represent the dress of her entire ethnic group and for the first time in the history of the display of blacks in England, had sexual connotations.<sup>8</sup> Baartman’s exhibition proved popular and several satirical cartoons and caricatures of Baartman appeared in newspapers. However, concern did arise amongst members of the public who expressed concern about Baartman’s agency and the ‘decency’ of the exhibition in letters to newspapers. Cesars was charged by abolitionist group, the African Institution, for slavery and the use of obscenity in the exhibition of Baartman. Baartman was interviewed during this trial with a translator present. However, Cesars was present and while this is the only time that Baartman’s voice appears on record, this voice is compromised by

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<sup>6</sup> An extensive biography of Baartman has been written by Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2009), and Rachel Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman, Born 1789- Buried 2002*, (Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg & Cape Town, 2007). Despite academic interest in Baartman’s life for nearly eight decades, these two books, published in the last decade, are the only full biographical accounts of Baartman’s life.

<sup>7</sup> Crais and Scully contest this date suggesting firstly that there is evidence to support that Baartman was older than believed on her death in 1815, and secondly that 1789, the year of the French Revolution, is simply a convenient date on which to place Baartman’s birth due to the Revolution’s supposed establishment of equality, liberty, and fraternity, principles which strongly echo the founding of a democratic South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Yvette Abrahams, “Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in Early-Nineteenth-Century Britain”, In Ruth Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (eds), *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicising Gender and Race*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1998), p.226.

the power relations at play in this interview. The charges of slavery were ultimately dismissed and the trial focused on the decency of Baartman's exhibition for which Cesars received a warning. With the exhibition's reputation damaged after the trial, the 'Hottentot Venus' exhibition continued to be on display in the English countryside. Baartman was baptised in Manchester in 1811 but then disappears from public records until she resurfaces in Paris in 1814. In Paris, Cesars sold Baartman's contract to an animal trainer named Reaux who continued to exhibit her in France. Here, she excited the scientific curiosity of famous anatomist George Cuvier. Cuvier struck an agreement with Reaux that Baartman would be subjected to a three day 'observation' by a scientific team led by Cuvier in March 1815 at the *Jardin du Roi*. Baartman, under pressure from Cuvier, was persuaded to pose nude. However, she refused to drop the handkerchief with which she covered her genitals from the gaze of the scientists. During this 'observation', artists employed by the *Musée de l'Homme*, painted portraits of Baartman which would later be published in a volume about the studies of mammals.

Baartman died in December 1815 and her body was given to the *Musée de l'Homme* where it was dissected by Cuvier. The cause of Baartman's death is unknown although it has been attributed to smallpox,<sup>9</sup> syphilis, or tuberculosis.<sup>10</sup> Yet, this is more likely to be part of the imagery of the ailing prostitute in the nineteenth century. The media in South Africa, in the months before the return of her remains, often asserted that Baartman was a prostitute in her last few months in Paris. Although there is no evidence to support this assertion, it is possible that Reaux sold Baartman's sexual services to selected clients in order to provide an income as Baartman was too ill to perform in the first few months of 1815. Cuvier attributed Baartman's death to an 'eruptive illness' and never made any references to syphilis in his study of her remains. Cuvier removed Baartman's skeleton and preserved her brain and genitalia while a complete body cast was created. His study of Baartman was published in 1817 in the *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*. Baartman was the only human represented in this study of mammals. This study marked the beginning of the development of a racialised science that focused on the characteristics of the biological body in order to classify the races. Baartman, as a representative of the Khoekhoe people, was represented as a 'sub-human' by

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1978), p.269.

<sup>10</sup> Steven C. Dubin, *Transforming Museums: Mounting Queen Victoria in a Democratic South Africa*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York and Hampshire, 2006), p.91.

Cuvier's inclusion of her in his study of mammals. Baartman's remains and body cast remained on display at the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris until the 1980s.

### **Returning the Sacred Remains**

Framed by a context of petitions for Khoisan indigenous rights in South Africa, and of course, reconciliation and nation building, genealogist Mansell Upham (who claims to be a direct descendant of Krotoa/Eva), initiated the process to return Baartman's remains – consisting of her skeleton and preserved brains and genitalia – to South Africa. In Baartman's physical remains, Upham perceived “the plight of indigenous people, and a story of dehumanisation and the tragedies befalling black women in colonial societies.”<sup>11</sup> The requests of the Griqua National Conference (GNC) to the *Musée de l'Homme* for the return of the remains were ignored and consequently the GNC approached the South African government to request their direct negotiations with the French government. French law dictated that objects owned by French museums could not be permanently returned to their country of origin and Baartman's remains were French patrimony. The French government was reluctant to make an exception for the repatriation of Baartman's remains as it could result in requests from other countries for the return of historical artefacts or human remains from French museums. However, with pressure from the South African government emphasising Baartman's unique importance as a symbol of oppression and colonisation and the fact that her remains had a known identity and had parts of her life recorded it was considered that her repatriation would not necessarily cause an exponential growth in calls for the return of other historical artefacts.

On 21 February 2002, the French National Assembly unanimously passed the bill for Baartman's return.<sup>12</sup> Baartman's remains were handed over to the South African ambassador to France, Thuthukile E. Skweyiya, after two months and returned to South Africa with a delegation led by then Minister of Arts and Culture, Brigitte Mabandla, on 2 May 2002. Although initiated by the GNC, the necessity for the involvement of the South African

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<sup>11</sup> Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, p.152. The return of Baartman's remains features importantly in Khoisan identity politics in South Africa and the recognition of indigenous rights and political power. However, the scope of this thesis does not allow for a thorough discussion of this topic. For further reading consult Mohammed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*, (Ohio University Press: Athens, 2005), Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, (2009), Kerseboom, “Our Khoi Heroine” (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> “France to bring Hottentot Venus back Home”, *SABC News*, 29 April 2002, accessed 30 August 2007.

government in securing the repatriation of Baartman's remains led to Baartman becoming a South African icon, rather than an exclusive icon for Khoisan rights in South Africa. Over ten million Rand was spent in returning Baartman's remains to South Africa and the South African government, in search of tractable symbols for the post-apartheid state, understood the symbolic significance of the repatriation of Baartman's remains to a democratic South Africa. Baartman had been transformed from a symbol of colonial oppression and scientific racism thoroughly addressed in academic writings, to an icon for Khoisan indigenous rights in post-apartheid South Africa. Her appropriation by the South African government gave her an iconic status of nationalist importance. Eng and Kazanjian indicate that "the return of a lost body to its 'native soil' allegorises nationalism's aspirations to the kind of absolute return by which a foundationalist identity is produced."<sup>13</sup> Baartman's return to African soil, for the South African government, embodied an important aspect of the symbolic closure of colonialism, apartheid, racism, and sexism; a restoration of dignity to the people of South Africa and the dawning of a new era for the country, the 'nation', and the continent.

### **Burying the Sacred Remains**

One and a half months after Baartman's return to South Africa, Mabandla created a 'Reference Group' to consider the burial of Baartman's remains. Several factors such as when, where, and under which religious orders Baartman would be buried had to be addressed by this group. The Reference Group consisted of thirteen members amongst whom there were government representatives, the deputy chairperson of the Human Rights Commission, academics, and Khoisan representatives.<sup>14</sup> Initially, the Company's Gardens in Cape Town was suggested as the site for internment. Not only was this the city in which Sara Baartman lived, it is also a popular tourist destination. However, as some Khoisan beliefs dictate that a person should be interred as near as possible to the place where their umbilical cord is buried, it was decided that Baartman would be laid to rest in the Gamtoos River Valley – the area believed to be the place of her birth.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it was hoped that the

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<sup>13</sup> David Eng & David Kazanjian, "Introduction: Mourning Remains", in David Eng & David Kazanjian (eds) *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2003), p.12.

<sup>14</sup> "Saartjie Baartman Burial Committee Established", *SABC News*, 28 June 2002, accessed 30 August 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Samuelson contests this and suggests that the choice of the Gamtoos River Valley was a symbolic one. As Cape Town was symbolic for the ravages of European invasion and settlement, the Eastern Cape and the fertile Gamtoos River Valley symbolise not only the heart of resistance to colonialism and apartheid but also mirror Baartman's iconography in the post-apartheid state as 'Mother Africa'. Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the*

burial in Hankey of a national icon who had received extensive international media attention, would lead to an influx of tourists into the impoverished area and present employment opportunities and further economic development.

The date for Baartman's internment was decided by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and fixed for 9 August 2002 which coincided with National Women's Day and International Indigenous Peoples' Day. This decision, made by government, was initially met with some Khoisan resistance. Firstly, Khoisan burial practices dictate that Baartman's funeral should take place at the full moon.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, an opinion was expressed that combining the funeral with a national holiday such as National Women's Day was an insult that would create the impression that the government had 'hijacked' Baartman from her individuality and her descendants. The Khoisan representatives felt that Baartman deserved "a day that belongs to her alone... She deserves a day that we will remember as the day that our Great Foremother has been buried."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, they insisted that Baartman was a "Khoisan...icon, as she symbolised to us the abuse that our great foremothers were exposed to... Ms Baartman deserves the peace that was never given to her spirit."<sup>18</sup> Despite Khoisan protests, the South African government continued with its plans to stage the funeral as an international event; especially since it had spent 10,350,000 Rand returning the remains to South Africa and creating the Reference Group.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the government had found in Baartman a figure that could be employed as an important icon for nation building and reconciliation. Crais and Scully, having gained access to an internal document of the Reference Group after a three year long process, show how Baartman became this icon. They quote,

It would be difficult... to over-rate both the national and international importance to South Africa of this event. It was a victory over colonialism, racism and sexism. It very visibly and publicly restored the dignity of a South African woman exploited and humiliated in her lifetime. It brought together and united South Africans of all backgrounds in seeing justice done.<sup>20</sup>

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*Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition*, (University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal Press: Scottsville, 2007), p.90.

<sup>16</sup> Ainsley Moos, "Saartjie Baartman in Oos-Kaap Begrawe", *Die Burger*, 25 July 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Burgess and Margaret Coetzee, quoted in Crais & Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, p.163.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163.

<sup>19</sup> This figure was obtained by Crais and Scully from a budget document from the Department of Arts and Culture. *Ibid.* p.163.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164.

By linking Baartman's return directly to the unification of "South Africans of all backgrounds", she became part of a nationalist agenda rather than an exclusively ethnic agenda. Baartman was returned to the South African nation, not just to Khoisan descendants. Samuelson establishes the important connection between the grand scale of Baartman's funeral and the political funerals of the struggle years and states that Baartman's funeral was an instance in which individual suffering was appropriated by the collective – the nation – to express a redemptive national narrative.<sup>21</sup> This reinforced sentiment amongst several Khoisan leaders that the burial of Baartman had been 'hijacked' by government.<sup>22</sup> It was felt that Khoisan interests in Baartman as an ancestor became tangential in the process of her becoming national 'property' as politicians, rather than the local Khoisan, made the final decisions regarding Baartman's funeral.<sup>23</sup> By deciding on a national holiday for the date of Baartman's funeral, Baartman became synonymous with women's struggles and resistance to oppression. Through the synthesis of Baartman's biography with National Women's Day she was appropriated for a comprehensive nationalist agenda. It placed Baartman in the realm of the 'national' and national commemorative events, such as National Women's Day, that are intrinsically part of nationalist movements and foundational mythology creation. Moreover, the burial of Baartman on National Women's Day, rather than giving her a day of her 'own' reveals the emergence of the constructed political culture of nation building and reconciliation in South Africa. It maintained a particular official version of history that the state wanted to cultivate so to affirm the identity of the 'new' South Africa. Simultaneously, it gave a diversity of meanings to a past of which the legitimacy and pertinence was construed to remain valid in the present.<sup>24</sup>

In an atmosphere of internal Khoisan disagreements and Khoisan discontent over overwhelming government influence in the decision-making processes, it was decided to bury Baartman in a ceremony that recognised both her Christian faith and KhoeKhoen heritage. On 4 August 2002, at the Civic Theatre in Cape Town, a ritual 'enrobement' ceremony of the naked body cast took place to prepare Baartman for burial. Once this ceremony, which symbolically restored the dignity of Baartman by covering the image of her naked body, was completed, her remains were flown to Port Elizabeth from where they would be transported

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<sup>21</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.100.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Captain Hester Booysen, Gamtkwa House, Hankey, 2 April 2007. Philda Essop, "Government Hijacked Saartjie from us", *News 24*, 3 May 2002, at [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com) accessed 24 June 2007.

<sup>23</sup> "Khoi-San Slam Bartmann's Funeral Arrangements", *SABC News*, 5 August 2002, accessed 30 August 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Javier Moreno-Luzon, "Fighting for the National Memory: The Commemoration of the Spanish 'War of Independence' in 1908-1912", *History and Memory*, 19, 1, 2007.

to Hankey.<sup>25</sup> The funeral took place on 9 August 2002. It was a highly publicised event with the SABC televising the day-long event live. The cost of the funeral was 1,132,000 Rand.<sup>26</sup> The occasion comprised cultural displays, a Khoisan traditional<sup>27</sup> internment practice and a church service after the internment to acknowledge Baartman's baptism into Christianity. The speeches at the funeral emphasised that Baartman's burial restored dignity to the African people and to South African women. Furthermore, hope was expressed that Baartman's burial and grave site would bring much needed development through tourism to the area identified as her place of birth.<sup>28</sup>

### **“Our Khoi heroine”: Constructing an Icon for the Post-Apartheid State**

When Nelson Mandela called for the return of Sara Baartman's remains in 1994 a media-hype erupted. Documentary films were produced and national newspapers regularly featured articles concerning the progress of the government in their attempts to return the remains to South Africa from France. This era in South Africa is characterised by a focus on the processes of reconciliation in order to come to terms with a past of gross racial inequality and violence. It is against the background of reconciliation and rainbow nationalism that Sara Baartman gained prominence as a symbol of the new democratic South Africa and the repatriation of her remains became symbolic of several different struggles in this country. Her restitution became a triumph over gender-based violence and oppression, and racism.<sup>29</sup> The official emphasis initially fell on her significance to the restitution of dignity to the women of South Africa once her return was secured by the ANC-led government.<sup>30</sup> The return of

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<sup>25</sup> “Bartmann Enrobed for Final Journey”, *SABC News*, 4 August 2002, accessed 30 August 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Pallo Jordan, “On the Wrong Reasons Why the Department of Arts & Culture is Called the ‘Party Department’ of Government”, 6 November 2006, at [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/index.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/index.html) accessed 24 June 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Although there is no hegemonic Khoisan ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’, the different Khoisan groups in South Africa do share certain practices.

<sup>28</sup> This hope was expressed on the information board initially placed at the grave. This board has since been removed and replaced by a stone grave-marker.

<sup>29</sup> References to this are made in most official government speeches referring to Baartman, Bertha Gxowa, “Statement by Mrs. B. Gxowa, ANC MP, Delivered at the Opening of the National Assembly During the Debate on the State of the Nation Address by President Thabo Mbeki”, 2002. Thabo Mbeki, “Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann”, Hankey, 9 August 2002. Thabo Mbeki, “Address by President Thabo Mbeki, at the Opening of the 51<sup>st</sup> National Conference of the African National Congress”, Stellenbosch, 16 December 2002. Thabo Mbeki, “Address at the Commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 1956 Women’s March, 2006. Ben Ngubane, “Efforts to have remains of Saartjie Baartman returned”, 10 October 2000. B. Sonjica, “Deputy Minister B. Sonjica’s address during the State of the Nation Debate”, 2004. At

<http://www.anc.org.za/list.php?t=Speeches&y=2014>

<sup>30</sup> Gxowa, “Statement by Mrs. Bertha Gxowa”, 2004.

Baartman's remains to South African soil was construed as symbolising an end to the sexual exploitation that she had suffered during her life and after death. Baartman, previously treated as object would now be remembered as subject. However, by emphasising Baartman's 'victory' over abuse and exploitation at a time where violence against women was on the increase there was a consequential downplaying of the experiences of women in the present.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Baartman's return to South Africa was also symbolic of an assumed triumph over slavery, racism, and scientific racism and signified the end of these ideologies within the context of post-1994 South Africa.<sup>32</sup> Baartman's experiences as a black woman from southern Africa, exploited and paraded in Europe as an 'ethnic oddity' and later as a scientific curiosity, became synonymous with the experiences of colonial Africa and its people as a whole; her return, then, was a symbolic triumph over colonialism and apartheid.<sup>33</sup> Mbeki declared this in his speech at Baartman's funeral when he stated that the "story of Sarah Bartmann is the story of the African people of our country in all their echelons."<sup>34</sup>

Baartman's re-casting from victim into triumphant victor in the present has allowed her to become emotionally appropriated heritage that served the emergence of a new post-apartheid nationalism in South Africa. Returning Baartman's remains to South Africa and the assumed accompanied restoration of her dignity had been employed in official discourse as a foundation myth that allows South Africans to come to terms with the country's traumatic past by declarations of 'closure' in the present. Baartman represents the ambivalent relationship between victims and heroes/heroines and triumph/trauma in South African transitional political ideology. The victims of the previous regimes became the heroes of the present democratic order as a "new universalism of mourning patterns the public rituals of national identity."<sup>35</sup> Her position as victim/heroine and the constitution of her ability to shift between these positions in official rhetoric illustrates the transitional years of South Africa's movement between apartheid and democracy and the important work done by the TRC to address the traumas of the past and link them to the victories of the present. Furthermore, it

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<sup>31</sup> However, a more pro-active result of the processes of and attention given to Baartman's return resulted in the founding of the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children in 1999 in the Cape Flats; an area known for its high levels of violence, gangsterism, child abuse, substance abuse, unemployment, and domestic violence. Despite this, the centre was facing closure by 2012 as a result of lack of government funding. The media attention given to this possible closure resulted in the Department for Social Development assigning R1.1 Million for its continued existence and a further funding agreement has been signed.

<http://www.saartjiebaartmancentre.org.za>

<sup>32</sup> Mbeki, "Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann", 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. In the context of Mbeki's famous "I am an African" speech, it is unclear who the 'African people' of South Africa includes, or excludes.

<sup>35</sup> Bernhard Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder & London, 2004), p.3.

delineates the new social construction of boundaries and their continuous reaffirmation through narratives of trauma and triumph and victims and heroes/heroines. Giesen indicates that “[b]oth the hero as well as the victim are presented as ultimate reference points for the *human constitution* and both are located beyond the profane and mundane everyday activities of the regular social reality.”<sup>36</sup> Baartman’s lived experiences are presented and remembered as trauma, and the violence inflicted on her body reminds the nation of its mortality. In contrast, the representation of triumph inserted into the narrative of the return of Baartman’s remains to her ‘native soil’, “represent[s] the feeling of sovereign life, of crisis and transition, of a new beginning, and thereby [it] represent[s] the moment of birth.”<sup>37</sup> Through official rhetoric, Baartman’s trauma and ‘triumph’ is symbolic of the trauma of the colonial and apartheid eras of South Africa and the triumphant birth of the democratic post-apartheid state in 1994.

Baartman’s life experiences were recast and reinvented in order to be linked to South Africa’s transitional period and to women’s historic and present experiences of violation in general. In the initial years after the call for the return of Baartman’s remains was issued this was characterised by a deliberate misremembering and the publishing of a great many assumptions of the final years of Baartman’s life. Historical accuracy was disregarded by the media and in official statements made by government as emphasis was placed on Baartman’s death as a result of syphilis contracted during sex work, despite strong evidence to the contrary.<sup>38</sup> Samuelson attributes this focus on Baartman as a prostitute as a “symbol of the shame of colonial penetration. The ritualistic covering of Bartmann’s body cast re-figures her from icon of national degradation to Mother of the Nation, symbol of the nation redeemed, and of national wholeness.”<sup>39</sup> While the enrobement ceremony in which the cast of her naked body was covered became symbolic of the restoration of her personal dignity, for Baartman the national icon it meant the redemption of the South African nation after the dehumanising effects of colonialism and apartheid. While Giesen argues that national heroes are fragile constructions as it is easy to erode or dismantle their monumentality through the presentation of the profane or mundane details of his or her life, Baartman appears to be an exception to this rule.<sup>40</sup> For Baartman’s construction as a heroine for the post-apartheid state it is these profane and mundane details that make her an icon with which the South African nation can

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<sup>36</sup> Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, p.6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>38</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.95.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>40</sup> Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, p.19.

identify. By presenting Baartman's personal life experiences as symbolic of the history of colonialism and apartheid and the violence enacted upon many women in the past and present, she becomes a heroine that represents an encompassing collectivity. This collective identity symbolised in Baartman as national heroine is founded not simply on her story, it includes the identification of "the storyteller who identifies with the hero's perspective, and, most importantly, it includes the audience – the readers, listeners and spectators, who feel sympathetic with the hero."<sup>41</sup> Government officials representing the official ideological stance through official statements and speeches represent the 'storyteller'; they are the narrators (and creators) of Baartman's story in the post-apartheid state. The 'nation' is the audience to whom this story is presented and constructed for in such a manner that it is an identifiable story with a central actor, Sara Baartman the heroine. Importantly,

the narrative construction of the hero's triumph merges three positions: the hero, the storyteller and the audience. The bond of identification that embraces the three positions is based on the triumph of the hero over mundane regards and earthly matters. It appeals to a particular imagination of the sacred.<sup>42</sup>

Baartman's importance as a symbol for nation building and creating unity amongst South Africans of all backgrounds was voiced repeatedly in official government speeches, statements, and documents.<sup>43</sup> Not only was Baartman a signifier of the historical suppression of black South Africans, she also became a symbol of how the ANC-led government was addressing and correcting this past, and indeed, the violent experiences of many women in the present. Giesen shows that,

The tension between the imperfection of the present and the ideal order located in the future or in the past – or in other words: the sacralisation of the future or the past – can be turned into a strong collective thrust to change the present situation by historical action. Accelerating the present into a utopian future or restoring an ideal past are commonly considered as the prime motives for historical action that transcends the limitations of an individual's life.<sup>44</sup>

At Albertina Sisulu's funeral, discussed in the previous chapter, the sacred 'golden age' of the struggle years and Sisulu's dedication was called upon in order to initiate a 'strong collective thrust' in the context of poor service delivery in the present with an implication

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>43</sup> "Saartjie Baartman to be Enrobed", *SABC News*, 3 August 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, p.9.

that once the nation unites and takes action (that is legal and within the accepted order) an ideal future can be achieved. In the case of Baartman, the return of her remains and their burial in South African soil has been constructed as a symbolic action that brings closure to a traumatic past and addresses present societal obstacles to an ideal future for the nation. Both Mbeki and then Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, B. Sonjica relayed the importance of returning Baartman to South Africa as an opportunity to affirm government's "commitment to non-racism and non-sexism and the restoration of the dignity of all Africans"<sup>45</sup> while also being constructed as a correction of human rights violations in South Africa.<sup>46</sup> Baartman came to represent 'Mother Africa',

the fecund and bountiful Mother, symbol of wholeness and unity, nurture and sustenance, whose re-membered body reflects both the rich land of the Gamtoos River Valley and the unified national body.<sup>47</sup>

Baartman's female black body became 'mother', 'nation', and 'Africa'. Nomathamsanqa Tisani, a member of the ministerial committee for history wrote,

Her return heals us, her children, who have been spiritually deprived of an ancestor. She symbolises all the women who were wrenched from their families and could never provide the warmth and comfort mothers give. We are at peace as she comes home to live, forever, in the embrace of Mother Africa, with the Gamtoos singing her to sleep.<sup>48</sup>

Baartman, firstly as a woman, and secondly as a KhoeKhoe woman was an ideal non-threatening "tragic victim"<sup>49</sup> figure to serve the role as a mother for the new South African nation; she was a strong representative symbol of the colonial abuse of the female black body and, by extension, of the colonial violence inflicted on Africa itself. Her physical body became the site of symbolic closure of racism and racial oppression and violence in South Africa while her ethnicity recalled a past distant enough not to be a cause for further racial division. Her status as 'victim' of an oppressive colonial regime and of the racist scientific discourses of the nineteenth century made her apparent 'triumphant' return to the country of her birth – now supposedly also free of racism, oppression, and sexism – even more significant, especially within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which

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<sup>45</sup> Mbeki, "Address of the President, Thabo Mbeki, at the Opening of the 51<sup>st</sup> National Conference of the African National Congress", Stellenbosch, 16 December 2002.

<sup>46</sup> B. Sonjica, "Deputy Minister B. Sonjica's Address During the State of the Nation Debate", 2004. "Why Saartjie Baartman Matters", *Cape Times*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.101.

<sup>48</sup> Nomathamsanqa Tisani, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>49</sup> Ben Ngubane, "Efforts to Have Remains of Saartjie Baartman Returned", 10 October 2010.

was active at the time of the ongoing negotiations to have Baartman's remains returned. But Baartman's construction as the 'silenced victim', inescapably constrained by her gender and ethnicity, denies her any agency, both in the past and in the present and conclusively renders her as a sanctified female icon of South Africa.

The TRC established an ideology of national healing that was built on the public acknowledgement of narratives of personal traumas. The call for Baartman's return took place during the height of the TRCs highly publicised Human Rights Violations hearings. Accordingly, the story of Baartman was narrated in the language of the TRC hearings in official statements. But Baartman's story was constructed as a narrative of both personal redemption and as national closure, healing, and victory in a manner reminiscent of the trajectory of the televised TRC hearings. Her reburial in the soil of her motherland restored Baartman's dignity and humanity; implied closure to a lifetime of exploitation and violation. With the return of her remains to a democratic South Africa free of a racially oppressive regime, she was a victim no longer. Instead, by completing her two-hundred year journey across time and space to a 'new' South Africa, she returned victorious – as a heroine. Her oppressive experiences of sexual exploitation, exhibition, and scientific racism were rendered a closed chapter as she arrived on South African soil. Sara Baartman could now rest in peace, her dignity and humanity purportedly restored by government's efforts to secure the return of her remains. Baartman's mythography and its purpose in the post-apartheid state was created and established during these initial years of democracy, and the correlations between the trajectory of her life and death and the deeply emotional narratives of personal trauma that emerged at the TRC hearings were drawn. Samuelson also argues that even Baartman's funeral itself, like the TRC, "returns to a traumatic past in search of present healing... [it] was a ritual event through which the transitional narrative of redemption was performed. The ritual gave birth to a nation as it buried Bartmann."<sup>50</sup> As a result, the narrative of Baartman's life, and indeed, Baartman herself, became inextricably linked to the transitional politics of post-apartheid South Africa. As a victim of colonialism, sexism, oppression, and scientific racism, Baartman's story and remains were symbolically 'dug up' from an oppressive past and brought out into the public realm – her trauma was uncovered and became known and acknowledged by the nation while her burial ensured the (re)birth of the nation, cleansed and united. Just as the TRC attempted to restore some form of dignity to apartheid's victims through the official and public acknowledgement of their personal traumas, Baartman's

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<sup>50</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.100.

dignity was purportedly restored by similar processes. She was the quintessential transition icon. Baartman came to symbolise the national body as a whole; her story of trauma was that of South Africa's past, the restoration of her dignity that of the South African nation. Baartman's iconicity claimed her place in the post-apartheid pantheon of heroes and heroines, so the nation was constructed as sharing in her victory over an oppressive past.<sup>51</sup> However, David Lloyd critiques this analogy between individual and societal suffering as he suggests that the period of public commemoration functions as a way to allow the "dead to slip away without the trace of a wake behind them",<sup>52</sup> thus indicating that the emphasis does not necessarily fall on dealing with loss or trauma, but rather on how public mourning can accomplish social healing in the present. By professing closure and victory over colonialism and oppression in order to attain a peaceful transition there exists the danger of reproducing the conditions and attitudes that have supposedly been overcome. For Lloyd this is the ethical failure of national mourning rituals. As South Africa attempts to transcend its traumatic past through public mourning rituals such as the TRC processes and the public state funerals of its heroes and heroines, professing closure on the conditions that produced these narratives can deflect from the continued influence of these discourses in the present and from the ongoing problems besetting the nation.

While the final report of the TRC was completed several years before Baartman's return and burial, its lasting impact on public consciousness remained during much of the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies. While the prominent political ideology shifted from reconciliation and nation building to Mbeki's African Renaissance after he replaced Mandela as president, government focus on reconciliation ideologies never truly disappeared in the initial decade after the advent of democracy. Mbeki, more than any other South African president, focused on Sara Baartman as an icon for both political ideologies as he straddled the watershed moment of following Mandela and rainbow nationalism, with a more Africa-focused ideology that was meant to take the country, and the continent, forward. Yet, South Africa was still a relatively new democratic state that continued to face great racial and economic inequality, and the ideology of reconciliation could never be fully abandoned in this crucial transition period. This amalgamation of reconciliation and African Renaissance

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<sup>51</sup> This sentiment is repeatedly expressed in many official statements made by government and its representatives. Dr. B.S. Ngubane, "Budget Speech of the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology", National Assembly, 24 May 2002.

<sup>52</sup> David Lloyd, "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery", *Interventions*, 2, 2, 2000, p.221.

ideologies was made explicit by Mbeki at the 51<sup>st</sup> National Congress of the ANC when he stated in his address:

The fact that we have gathered here together as compatriots, in conditions of freedom and peace, the descendants of Sarah Bartmann and Simon van der Stel... make[s] the statement that all South Africa has embarked on an unstoppable journey toward its rebirth<sup>53</sup>

Daniel Herwitz argues that the African Renaissance envisioned by Mbeki “eschews a vision of Africa based on race and gender... It forms an entirety of history out of the panoply of shards of the South African...past, thus creating the history of a people...”<sup>54</sup> Mbeki’s famous “I am an African” speech, given in 1996 at the adoption of South Africa’s new constitution, which assigned the status of ‘African’ to all those who lived on the continent, regardless of race or heritage forms the basis of his ability to integrate two ideologies seemingly at odds with one another: one an inclusive ideology attempting to create and bring together a ‘nation’ out of a divisive past, the other a philosophy that reiterates exclusivity and ‘African-ness’.

The address given by then President Mbeki at the funeral of Baartman illustrates the employment of Baartman’s iconic mythography to push the official agendas of reconciliation, nation-building, and his African Renaissance ideologies. He makes it clear that the story of Baartman is the story of the “African people”<sup>55</sup> in South Africa and makes a direct comparison between Baartman’s experiences under colonial rule and apartheid ideologies. He continued to suggest that the restoration of Baartman’s human dignity is inextricably linked to transforming South Africa into a non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous society. Importantly, he presented Baartman as a martyr as the “changing times tell us that she did not suffer and die in vain.”<sup>56</sup> In Judeo-Christian tradition acts of martyrdom function – historically and presently – as vehicles for the inculcation of certain sets of values and it is through the telling and the re-telling of these stories that they become effective narratives for those who share these very same values.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, even in a more secular modern society, it is nearly impossible to dispense with the “heroic sacrifices of individuals in order to construct a sacred

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<sup>53</sup> Mbeki, “Address of the President, Thabo Mbeki, at the Opening of the 51<sup>st</sup> National Conference of the African National Congress”, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Herwitz, *Race and Reconciliation: Essays From the New South Africa*, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis and London, 2003), pp.71-72.

<sup>55</sup> Mbeki, “Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann”, 2002.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Nicole Kelley, “Philosophy as Training for Death: Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercise”, *Church History*, 75, 4, 2006.

bond of collective identity.”<sup>58</sup> While her death and dissection gave testimony to the dehumanising effects of scientific racism, Baartman never sacrificed herself for any greater cause and the construction of her death as such not only echoes the celebration of the iconic martyrs of the anti-apartheid struggle popularly celebrated and commemorated in South Africa, but elevates her legacy to that of the sacred. Baartman, presented to the nation as an innocent victim of ‘evil’ external forces, is sacralised through her ‘sacrifice’ which is constructed in the present as symbolic for the birth of the new nation; death is transformed into life, trauma into triumph and “the trauma of death can be revealed as the path to triumphant immortality.”<sup>59</sup> At the occasion of the official celebration of Heritage Day on 24 September 2006, several years after Baartman’s burial, Mbeki reiterated Baartman’s assumed agency in her ‘martyrdom’ when he labelled her as “our Khoi heroine.”<sup>60</sup> Baartman’s continued prominence as a shared national historical heroine reinforces her importance to the nationalist movements that marked Mandela’s and Mbeki’s presidencies. Through the continued focus on Baartman’s story and ‘sacrifice’ in the first fourteen years of democracy, the values assigned to her life and death by the post-apartheid ruling party became inculcated into South African society and solidified those values as the building blocks of the foundational mythology of the new state.

Mbeki’s presidency was adversely characterised by his disastrous unwillingness to accept the dominant medical paradigm of the definite link between HIV/AIDS and his challenge of the important use of antiretroviral medications (ARVs) to combat infection rates and treat patients. His questioning of the medical links between HIV and AIDS and sympathy towards a policy of HIV/AIDS denialism was based on the research of a minority of dissident scientists which has been largely discredited by the medical community. This stance appeared to be strongly influenced by his African Renaissance philosophy and the African continent’s history of colonialism and racism and the influence of ‘Western’ medical science and its use in Africa.<sup>61</sup> Baartman’s nineteenth-century experiences of ‘Western’ medical science were invoked by Mbeki in order to berate modern understandings of HIV/AIDS in Africa and to dispute the accepted medical understandings of the disease and its treatment as being influenced by racist ideologies. Crais and Scully, as well as Holmes have addressed Mbeki’s

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<sup>58</sup> Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, p.25.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>60</sup> Thabo Mbeki, “Address by the President, Thabo Mbeki, on the Occasion of Heritage Day” 24 September 2006, Cape Town.

<sup>61</sup> Herwitz expands on Mbeki’s position on anti-retroviral medications within the context of Mbeki’s African Renaissance language which reduces ‘western’ science to any other sort of cultural representation – which it is not. Herwitz, *Race and Reconciliation*, pp.95-101.

deployment of Baartman and her history as part of his diatribe against science and the 'West'.<sup>62</sup> At his speech at the funeral of Baartman Mbeki questioned the validity of modern science as the once accepted racialised science of the nineteenth century has been proven as unfounded. He condemned the prominent Western scientists when he stated:

Among the truly monstrous were the leading scientists of the day, who sought to feed a rabid racism such as the distinguished anatomist, Baron George Cuvier... Sarah Bartmann was sucked into evil purposes pursued by those who defined themselves as a 'man *par excellence*', with a manifest destiny to enlighten and to tame.<sup>63</sup>

Mbeki proceeded to pronounce (in the language of a distinctly 'Western' renaissance) how it was, in fact, Baartman's people who were *enlightened* about the barbarism of these men '*par excellence*'. In the context of Baartman's experiences and the subjection of her remains to racist scientific observation, this scathing criticism of the 'West' and one of its revered historic scientists is justifiable. Although never made explicit in his speech at Baartman's funeral, it is the implied denigration of 'Western' science that was created by a context of Mbeki's African Renaissance philosophy and his hostility towards accepted medical knowledge that was made apparent.

As Baartman was once a symbol for black female sexual alterity, she now became a symbol for the nationalist and political ideologies that shaped South Africa in the years following the first democratic elections. The attending depersonalisation of Baartman in the democratic era has been criticised extensively in academic writing.<sup>64</sup> Abrahams argues that "[t]he lives of black women are still determined by their race and gender, to the detriment of their humanity. There is a sense in which the iconisation of Sarah Baartman, post-2001, obscured her true self."<sup>65</sup> Although the agendas of Baartman's symbolisation differ vastly from the nineteenth century colonialism of her lived experience to post-apartheid South Africa, she perpetually remains a symbol. Hailed as the (grand)mother<sup>66</sup> of the South African nation, Baartman engenders the nation-building, reconciliation, and African Renaissance

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<sup>62</sup> Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, (2009). Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus*, (2007).

<sup>63</sup> Mbeki, "Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann", 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Abrahams, "Gender and Locality", in Oliphant, Delius, Meltzer (eds), *Democracy X*, (2004). Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, (2009). Kerseboom, "'Our Khoi Heroine'" (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2007). Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Abrahams, "Sarah Bartmann in the Present", in Oliphant, Delius, Meltzer (eds), *Democracy X*, p.152. Extensive biographies of Baartman, chronicling her life only appeared after 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Mbeki, "Address of the President, Thabo Mbeki, at the Opening of the 51<sup>st</sup> National Conference of the African National Congress", 2002. Nealroy Swarts quoted in Abrahams, "Gender and Locality", in Oliphant, Delius, Meltzer (eds), *Democracy X*, p.177.

ideologies that marked her as a national icon and assigned her the respectful status of a shared (grand)mother and shaped her as a symbol of unity and victory over a traumatic and divisive past.

Baartman's declaration as the (grand)mother of the South African nation can be attributed to her Khoekhoe ancestry. Officially assigned First Nation Status in South Africa, as a Khoekhoe woman, Baartman represents an idealised 'shared' ancestor of a unified nation. Moreover, the title of grandmother, which tends to be employed more frequently than the term 'mother' in Baartman's case, could be postulated as desexualising Baartman's historically and overtly sexualised legacy, ultimately rendering it as harmless and past. As colonialism uncovered and sexualised Baartman's body, post-apartheid nationalism has covered and domesticated and cast her as the maternal icon. Samuelson argues that by returning to the maternal discourses reminiscent of empire and apartheid, "the nation finds itself entrapped within the discourses to which it responds, as the desire for national unity and authenticity is expressed through the figure of the domesticated Mother."<sup>67</sup> As the colonial endeavour presented the image of the pure, covered, domesticated European woman in opposition to the 'savage', naked sexuality of the female black body, so the post-apartheid government has through its covering ceremony of the body-cast, in a manner, 'recovered' Baartman's body and 'civilised' and 'domesticated' her legacy. For Samuelson rather than deconstructing the binary of "domesticated (white) versus sexualised (black) femininity...current discourse has focused instead on the task of shifting Baartman from one category to the other, without destabilising the terms themselves."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the covering of Baartman's body-cast "re-figures her from icon of national degradation to Mother of the Nation, symbol of the nation redeemed, and of national wholeness."<sup>69</sup> Thus, the shame of the colonial violence inflicted on Baartman's body, symbolic of the colonial violation of the African continent, is covered and dignity restored to Baartman and the nation. As Samuelson argues, the gender implications around the restoration of Baartman's 'decency' and the discourses of domesticity that were inscribed on her body (and body-cast) are striking. Domesticity and 'respectability' were the terms of struggle for women and their access to political rights in the colonial era. The rhetoric of Baartman's return to post-apartheid South Africa implies that women's rights continue to be "marshalled around claims of respectability

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<sup>67</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, p.97.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

and decency (and, by extension, domesticity)”<sup>70</sup> rather than rejecting these terms of struggle that were established by the colonial encounter. Moreover, it appears to ‘cover’ “over continuities between past and present violations of female bodies”<sup>71</sup> which are essential to understanding gender relations in South Africa in the present. Samuelson also indicates the importance of the continued emphasis in official rhetoric on bringing Baartman back *home*. The first concern noted is the naturalisation of the nation as a domestic, familial unit. As shown in previous chapters, the “rhetoric of the nation as family legitimates gendered hierarchical structures and casts women as Mothers, who reflect national unity.”<sup>72</sup> Another important correlation that Samuelson establishes is that the narrative of a return home,

shapes Bartmann’s story in accordance with one of the defining narratives of the movement from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa: exile and the return home. This is the redemptive story of the political elite, whose loss of home during the years of resistance was repaid with the political victory of 1994.<sup>73</sup>

As has been argued in previous chapters, the struggle has become the central foundational mythology for the post-apartheid state. Here, this is reinforced through its symbolic correlation with the narrative of a highly emotive homecoming and the sacred nature of the funeral rites for the remains of an iconic female figure who was hailed as the grandmother of the nation.

### **Dignity Restored? Baartman’s Grave as National Heritage Site**

While Baartman carried immeasurable political value in the years between the call for her return to South Africa and her eventual burial in Hankey, her political significance has notably dwindled after Mbeki’s resignation as President of South Africa in 2008. While vast amounts were spent ensuring the return of her remains and arranging the funeral, the grave itself, twelve years after the actual internment, has been neglected. Consisting of large cement and pebbled square, Baartman’s grave lies at the edge of the small hill and overlooks the lush Gamtoos River Valley (figures 1 & 2). Surrounded by indigenous flora, the grave itself is covered in small stones, some (still) bearing faded, worn and torn black and white printed

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.90.

images of Baartman's face (figures 3 & 4).<sup>74</sup> Grave-markers and information boards have come and gone, each bearing different inscriptions and vandalised at different points and all bronze plaques removed within a few days of placement (figures 5 & 6). Undoubtedly problematic, the only constant over the years has been the large "temporary"<sup>75</sup> metal fencing surrounding the grave placed there in order to protect the grave from vandals. The imposing green fence is eerily reminiscent of Baartman's display as the 'Hottentot Venus' in Piccadilly but appears to be the most cost-effective way of protecting the grave while further development of the site is pending. Goats roam the littered area surrounding the site which has been set aside for the largest sundial in South Africa. What is immediately apparent is that Baartman's ideological political capital superseded the need to maintain her dignity once it had purportedly been 'restored'. A 'display' of Baartman, even interred, will always remain an ethically problematic terrain to traverse. However, plans for development of the site into a larger Khoisan cultural and educational centre have been in place for many years but have, as yet, failed to become a reality.

Commemoration and representation is displayed in rituals of remembrance enacted at times and spaces that are identified as significant by the local and national community. "There are no private heroes", Giesen states.

As lonely as they might be in their moment of heroism, they are carried by a community that defines them, tries to follow their example and commemorates their lives. Even if not all heroes are dead, their heroism lives only in the community's acts to represent them.<sup>76</sup>

In Baartman's case, the physical presence of her remains in the landscape renders that space as sacred and identifies her grave as a significant site at which to stage commemorative events. At the funeral of Baartman, President Mbeki announced the intention to have her grave declared as a national heritage site.<sup>77</sup> This was a process that took six years to complete; the declaration was made official on 25 April 2008.<sup>78</sup> Declared as a Grade I heritage site under the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999, the grave was considered to

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<sup>74</sup> This specific image of her face became the official government-sanctioned image of Sara Baartman but was taken from a nude portrait painted by Leon de Wailly in Paris in 1814.

<sup>75</sup> Department of Arts & Culture official statement, "Preserving the Legacy of Sarah Bartmann", 27 November 2002.

<sup>76</sup> Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, p.25.

<sup>77</sup> Mbeki, "Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann", 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Arts and Culture, SAHRA, "Declaration of the Burial Site of Sarah Bartmann as a National Heritage Site", *Government Gazette*, 460, no.30987, 25 April 2008,

have qualities so exceptional that it was of special national significance.<sup>79</sup> The eleventh draft document for the declaration of the grave as a national heritage site issued by SAHRA in 2007 relates the significance of the grave and makes an exorbitant claim of closure:

The return of Sarah Bartmann speaks of healing from oppression, suffering, sadness and loss for her as an individual and the Khoekhoe. The site returned dignity to her and her ancestors. The site is a symbol that redefines our identity as the nation of South Africa, repairs our sense of community and brings back what we as South Africa and the world had lost about our humanity.<sup>80</sup>

The document continues to outline the importance of the site for its ability to contribute to nation building as it embodies South Africa coming to terms with its traumatic past, its potential to contribute to a greater understanding of the country's cultural heritage, and its symbolic encompassing of a "new era" for the nation.<sup>81</sup>

Until its official declaration in 2008, the grave remained under the provisional protection of SAHRA which meant that no developments or changes could be made to the site during this period leading up to the official declaration. With the exception of the placement of the protective fence around the grave and the removal of a Sentech communications tower, very little has been done to alter the site. Despite the remote location of the grave, there has always been intent to develop the site as a potential tourist destination with the objective of much needed socio-economic and infrastructural development in the area. In 2006, before any official declaration of the site had taken place, SAHRA donated three million Rand to the Reference Group in order to initiate a development programme for the grave. This was in response to Mbeki's request that the project should be under way by 2007.<sup>82</sup> With additional funding from SAHRA and the National Lottery the Reference Group purchased a large section of land adjacent to the grave where a 168 million Rand Khoisan cultural centre is planned to be built.<sup>83</sup> A competition was launched on 7 March 2009 for the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance by the Gamtkwa Khoisan House, the Khoisan Reference Group and DAC and overseen by the Department of Architecture at Nelson

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<sup>79</sup> National Heritage Resources Act of 1999, 7(1)(a), *Government Gazette*, 406, no.19974, 28 April 1999.

<sup>80</sup> SAHRA, "Nomination as a National Heritage Site in Terms of Sections 27(3) and 27(5) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999: The Site of Sarah Bartmann's Grave, draft 11, 2, April 2007, p.4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p.5.

<sup>82</sup> Louise Liebenburg, "Groot Planne vir Graf", *Our Times*, 18 August 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Kobus Reichert, Heritage Representative for the Gamtkwa House of Hankey, 1 August 2013.

Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth.<sup>84</sup> The winning design for the centre was unveiled on 22 August 2010 by the Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulama Xingwana. It was also affirmed that a Human Rights Memorial in honour of Sara Baartman would be established in Cape Town as the place that connects her with her European journey.

Connecting the proposed centre with larger heritage projects and themes in South Africa, Xingwana stated:

One of the main objectives of this project is to reaffirm the marginalised history thus redefining the South African heritage landscape. As a cultural institution, the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance will provide interpretive space in the memory of the life of Sarah Bartmann. Importantly, it will serve as a repository of the material and intangible heritage of the Khoi and San Communities. The Centre will strengthen existing initiatives aimed at recognising the rich Khoi and San heritage such as the Xam inscription in our National Coat of Arms and the use of the word Xapo// for the museum at Freedom Park. The word Xapo// means ‘a dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community’. As I see the Centre, it is an important social cohesion project which should bring us together and make us cherish and realise a common dream and vision.<sup>85</sup>

While Khoisan heritage is at the centre of this project, it is recognised that it serves as an important ‘social cohesion’ project that will allow the nation to build a brighter future. Xingwana reiterated Baartman’s importance in present South Africa:

The lessons we have learnt from Sarah Bartmann’s life is that we must not allow gender oppression, de-humanisation, objectification of women, stereotyping or racism to occur. Her history affects us all as women, because of the severe exploitation she underwent. Sarah Bartmann has become an icon of South Africa as representative of many aspects of our nation’s history. The proposed Centre will therefore serve a very important function in our lives as an institution that interrogates all these aspects and provide us with a shared national understanding of how we consciously affirm a human rights culture at all times.

Xingwana concluded with the important pronouncement of the employment opportunities this centre would present for members of the Hankey community:

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<sup>84</sup> Personal email communication with Kobus Reichert, 2 April 2009, and Lulama Xingwana, “Speech by Minister of Arts and Culture, Ms Lulu Xingwana at the unveiling of the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance Architectural Concept Design”, 22 August 2010, Hankey.  
<http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=12374&tid=15718> accessed 10 January 2011.

<sup>85</sup> Xingwana, “Speech by Minister of Arts and Culture”, Hankey, 22 August 2010.

In the construction phase, the Centre will present business and employment opportunities to the Hankey community and its surroundings. After its completion it will be declared a national cultural institution with a Council, Chief Executive Officer, professional and support staff. In this way the centre will provide sustainable job opportunities. Beyond these prospects the Centre will change the face of Hankey through the development of heritage and tourism infrastructure and programmes. In the medium term the Centre is envisaged to form part of the Khoisan Heritage Route. In the long term the Centre's heritage value will be strengthened by exploring the declaration of the site as a World Heritage Site because the story of Sarah Bartmann is the story of the world. The memory of Sarah Bartmann is the memory of the world. I want to take this opportunity to appeal to the community of Hankey to provide safe custody and pay respect to this important cultural property. It is the property which the nation and the whole world have placed in your hands for protection.

The gravesite has already served as a space for communal ritual acts of remembrance. The Gamtkwa Khoisan House annually celebrates Baartman's burial and National Women's Day on 9 August with performances by local Khoisan dance groups and Christian prayers at the grave with an invitation to attend extended to the larger Hankey community.<sup>86</sup> Other acts of remembrance are staged with the ritual planting of trees on National Arbour Day,<sup>87</sup> but National Women's Day remains the most significant date associated with Baartman in the national calendar. The Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance is imagined as a site to enact national (rather than local) rituals of remembrance of Khoisan culture and history, of the historic background of the foundational values of the post-apartheid state as embodied by Baartman, and of Baartman herself. Built around remembering the legacy of the national heroine, this space and the rituals of remembrance it proposes to exhibit, emphasise three elements about Baartman: it marks her place in South African society, it recalls her 'voice' or her story, and it represents her face to both the nation and to outsiders.<sup>88</sup> Baartman's place in the imagined South African community is marked by the veneration of her remains and burial site. While her remains have been treated with great dignity and respect, thus far, the grave itself has not been managed as a venerated site but the proposed development indicates that it

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Captain Hester Booysen, 1 August 2013, Hankey.

<sup>87</sup> The 2007 Arbor Day event was especially problematic as a tree planting ceremony organised by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in honour of Baartman quickly turned into a party political event as ANC supporters refused to allow the Khoisan representative to speak and the event was labelled as an ANC-rally. Nurene Jassiem, "Twis oor boomplanting", *Die Burger*, 6 September 2007. Kobus Reichert, personal email, 5 September 2007. This also speaks of larger issues around identity politics in South Africa for which, unfortunately, there is no scope within this chapter to address thoroughly. For further reading on this topic consult, Kerseboom, Adhikari, and Crais & Scully

<sup>88</sup> Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, p.26.

is intended to be used as such. As Giesen indicates, every community that is centered on a hero/heroine will attempt to mourn the dead hero/heroine in the places most closely associated with them; where they lived, died, or performed extraordinary deeds. As in the case of Baartman, if the remains of the hero/heroine are present within the community, the grave will become the centre of these mourning rituals and the presence of these (im)mortal remains constitutes the site as sacred. The presence of the heroine's remains inspires a sense of piety; her remains, although invisible, are still with 'us', and as the human remains of the heroine are mortal, it renders the spiritual presence more palpable.

Secondly, the centre will narrate Baartman's story to the national community and to outsiders. As Baartman's voice is lost to history and she will always remain 'silent', the centre will narrate the official version and interpretation of her life as it relates to the values of resistance to oppression and the values of the post-apartheid nation as it seeks to speak for one of its heroines. Giesen shows that the community knows the importance of the hero as part of the nation's mythology and therefore this centre will not simply transport information about Baartman's life. "Instead", Giesen suggests,

it brings the myths again to the attention of the public, it modifies and reinterprets it according to the situation of the day, it adds colour and refinements to the basic story, it embodies new elements representing the contemporary challenges to the community, it invents new stories linked to the surroundings of the hero.<sup>89</sup>

It is the constant reification of Baartman's story of trauma and 'triumph' that will ensure her staying-power as a foundational mother of a democratic South Africa.

Giesen also identifies the presentation of the 'face' of the hero as an important element in the rituals of remembering. While for Giesen this face is represented in its most basic form through heraldic signs which symbolise "the collective identity of followers who partake in the charisma of a hero"<sup>90</sup> (whether this is a warrior, saint, or even a sports club), in the case of Sara Baartman, the representation of her *face* is considerably more literal. Defined by her *body* during her lifetime and in most academic literature, the South African government has focused on her face as the official image representing her. Seen on small printed black and white images attached to stones placed on her grave and in official imagery produced for

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.26.

National Women's Day celebrations, it is Baartman's face, as painted by an artist during her exhibition at the *Jardin du Roi*, that has come to represent her in post-apartheid South Africa.

The importance of the establishment of the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance lies in its ability to become a significant institution that forms the building blocks of the basic educational aspect of foundational mythology creation. Children who learn at school about the founding events of the post-apartheid nation and its founding icons, as part of their education as citizens, are often brought to visit the memorial sites of the nation, and, as Giesen argues, images on the internet or school textbooks are no substitute "for the local presence of the sacred as embodied in the remainders of the hero"<sup>91</sup> or its embodiment in particular objects and places. The Apartheid Museum, the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum, and Freedom Park already form part of the itinerary of school tours and tourist visits and are central to how South Africa's past and its vision for the future are presented to its young citizens and outsiders. While the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance will not be located in any of the larger cities or near any significant tourist destinations in South Africa, it could become an important educational site for schools within the Eastern Cape. Furthermore, with plans to promote the nearby Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve Nature Park and the government declaration to make this centre an important part of a Khoisan Heritage Route and its projected declaration as a World Heritage Site,<sup>92</sup> there is potential for this centre to become part of the most influential educational facilities that narrate and build the post-apartheid nation's foundational mythologies.

In early March 2009, the DAC hosted a series of events in honour of Baartman as part of International Women's Day celebrations. These events included an academic colloquium with a focus on gender oppression, the de-humanisation and objectification of women, stereotyping, racism and genocide, the launch of the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance architectural competition and a 'cultural evening'.<sup>93</sup> These events apparently represented a renewed interest in developing Baartman's grave and reviving her legacy in post-apartheid South Africa. Initially, construction for the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance was set to start in 2012. However, DAC commenced the construction of the Centre with a ground breaking ceremony on 2 May 2014 and reiterating the official narratives of trauma and triumph inscribed on Baartman's remains, describes the site as a "place of Memory, Healing,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>92</sup> Xingwana, "Speech by Minister of Arts and Culture", Hankey, 22 August 2010.

<sup>93</sup> Department of Arts and Culture, "A series of activities to honour Sarah Bartmann", 25 February 2009. <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2009/09022609451001.htm>, accessed 5 May 2013.

Hope, and Celebration!’<sup>94</sup> It is projected that the Centre will be completed in the next two years.<sup>95</sup> According to DAC, the Centre will include

the declared gravesite, a museum, archives, story-telling pits, a healing pond, a symbolic and productive garden, a reception building, retail spaces, workshops, restaurant, multipurpose hall, auditorium, classrooms, accommodation, parking, a road underpass and walkways. The museum will consist of two sections, one dedicated to the Khoi-San and the other to Sarah Baartman. Visitors will follow a route depicting a narrative about Khoi-San history in order to contextualise Sarah Baartman's life.<sup>96</sup>

Significantly, the construction phase of the Centre will create 1960 semi-skilled and skilled job opportunities for local Hankey residents while 134 jobs will be created after its completion.<sup>97</sup> This centre and the proposed Sarah Bartmann Human Rights Memorial form part of the Sarah Bartmann Legacy Project, one of nine major projects identified by DAC. Yet, the Reference Group has not met in over a year despite the importance of their input in ongoing plans for construction, while the Gamtkwa representatives of the Hankey Khoisan community appear to have been sidelined in further development of the Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance when a community meeting was called by developers in May 2013 but the Gamtkwa representatives were not informed of this important meeting.<sup>98</sup> There is a stark contrast between the strong move to return Baartman's remains to South Africa and the organising of her grand, public funeral, and the ongoing processes of the developments promised by then president Mbeki which have proverbially 'dragged feet' over the past twelve years. The national heroes and heroines that pre-date the struggle years but were of great political significance to the reconciliation ideologies of transition have slowly faded in importance as party political agendas push their struggle icons to the forefront of current commemorative efforts amidst a growing sense of disillusionment with the post-apartheid socio-economic order.

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<sup>94</sup> Department of Arts and Culture, "Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance Breaking of the Ground Ceremony" at <https://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Sarah-Bartmann.pdf> accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>95</sup> "Construction Starts on R164 million Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance", *Cacadu District Official Website*, 30 July 2014, at <http://www.cacadu.co.za/article/77> accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>96</sup> "Construction Starts", *Cacadu District Official Website*, at <http://www.cacadu.co.za/article/77> accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Kobus Reichert, 1 August 2013, Hankey.

## Conclusion

Sara Baartman's journey through time and space has seen her represented as ethnic oddity, sexualised object, scientific curiosity, victim, heroine, (grand)mother of the nation. Always has she remained as a symbol and a prominent icon of post-apartheid South Africa and she is likely to remain symbolically laden. Her story in the post-apartheid era has seen her elevated to a national icon who embodies a country's traumatic history of colonial violation and apartheid violence and reflects the violence inflicted on women's bodies throughout the past and present. However, her status as a victim of great traumas is mediated by the post-apartheid government's efforts to return her remains to native soil. Her return to the 'motherland' after two-hundred years was constructed as the triumph of the nation over the oppressive apartheid past; a closure of the traumas of the past. Baartman was a victim turned heroine: her return in death gave birth to a new nation free of the traumas that were inflicted on her body and legacy, her sacrifice the ultimate martyr act. Baartman's personal history of trauma and triumph became synonymous with the trauma and triumph of the nation in official rhetoric and was narrated in the language of the TRC, nation-building, reconciliation, and African Renaissance. Ideologically, Sara Baartman was the ideal foundational female figure on which to inscribe notions of the nation in the making of transition politics. She was a symbol of unity and reconciliation; the (grand)mother of the democratic nation. While ideologically celebrated and her remains physically venerated, the current ideational positioning of Baartman in South African society is waning. Pressing socio-economic issues supersede the reconciliation and nation-building rhetoric of the transition years and these new challenges are countenanced with a different set of heroes and heroines whose legacies (as constructed and narrated through official discourse) are more suited to contend with potential societal discord of a different nature than those faced in the years immediately following the 1994 elections. This could serve as an explanation for the figurative 'dragging of feet' in the commencement of the building of the multi-million Rand Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance in Hankey. Promised in 2002 and reaffirmed in 2009, plans have progressed but have yet to be implemented. The gravesite has remained in the same state of neglect for several years apart from the basic upgrade of an information board once held up with metal wiring, to a large boulder bearing an engraved inscription but the bronze plaque was stolen within several days of its unveiling. As Baartman's remains are silent, her mythography in the post-apartheid state has been fuelled by the inscription of nationalist ideologies, philosophical ideals, ethnic claims, and party-political agendas upon them. Once again,

Baartman is subsumed in a myriad of symbolic imageries that have come to represent her. Yet, her immortality is assured by the presence of her sacred remains in the public landscape and those who continue to claim a stake in the development of her gravesite. As a strong foundational icon who featured prominently in the transition years that set South Africa apart from many other nations that underwent drastic socio-political shifts, her continued presence in society is secured; even if not annually celebrated or commemorated, her name is present in discourse and her remains are present in the public landscape. A marine patrol vessel was named in her honour in 2005,<sup>99</sup> the Saartjie Baartman Centre continues to aid women and children who are faced with and have experienced violence, a recent announcement has revealed that the Cacadu District Municipality (the municipality in which Baartman's grave lies), will be renamed to Sarah Baartman District Municipality.<sup>100</sup> This presence appears to remove the burden of continued commemorative efforts in honour of Baartman from the South African nation. She has become an integral part of the dissemination and inculcation of the new moral order of the post-apartheid state through the display of her name in the public landscape and the thoughts and values that her name invokes.

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<sup>99</sup> "SA Takes Delivery of the Good Ship Sarah Baartman", *Mail & Guardian*, 10 January 2005.

<sup>100</sup> "Cacadu District Municipality to Change its Name", *Cacadu District Official Website*, 30 May 2012 <http://www.cacadu.co.za/article/23> accessed 5 May 2013 and "Sarah Baartman Honoured by Name Change of Cacadu Municipality", *St Francis Chronicle*, 24 May 2012.



*Figure 1: The grave in 2007*



*Figure 2: The grave in 2013*



Figure 3: The official image of Sara Baartman.<sup>101</sup>



Figure 4: In the service of nationalist ideology and foundational myth-making.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> 'Femme de race Bochimann', after de Wailly, Geoffrey-Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier, 1824 , coloured lithograph, 290 x 490mm, The British Library, Image taken from <http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2007/between-worlds/exhibition-tour/baartman.php>

<sup>102</sup> Taken from the ANC parliamentary publication *Sephadi*, a socialist inspired quarterly, this image echoes the format of propaganda posters seen in many countries. Image taken from *Sephadi*, Issue 2, September 2002, at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2828>, accessed 22 August 2013.



Figure 5: The grave-marker in 2007



Figure 6: The grave-marker in 2013 with the bronze SAHRA plaque removed.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Photographs 1, 2, 5, 6 taken by author.

## Commemorating Women's Political Activism: Remembering and Recreating the Heroines

*They marched for all of us. They opened the road to a new reality.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

As the heady celebrations of the 2010 FIFA World Cup had come to an end and many South Africans had seemingly found a renewed sense of pride in their national identity, official celebrations held during Women's Month of August that year sought to inspire the nation with a new sense of pride in the heroines of its past. Initiating the "Midwives of Political Emancipation" Women's Legacy Project launched by SAHRA and DAC, the graves of three of South Africa's most prominent female political activists of the twentieth century were declared as national heritage sites. Three women whose names were synonymous with women's resistance to pass-laws in South Africa were honoured: Charlotte Maxeke, Lilian Ngoyi, and Helen Joseph. Perpetuating the official tendency to equate and reduce women's resistance to oppression in South Africa to the anti-pass campaigns, this commemorative event celebrated not only the lives and contributions of these three women, but recalled their active participation in the 1913 and 1956 anti-pass protests into the present as the centenary celebration of the 1913 anti-pass campaign was fast approaching. The 1913 and, even more so, the 1956 campaigns have come to form an integral part of the foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state as both events marked watershed moments in women's political mobilisation against racial oppression.

As the South African government officially attempts to increase the visibility and recognition of women's political activity in the struggle against apartheid the

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<sup>1</sup> Lulama Xingwana, "Speech by Minister Lulu Xingwana Commemorating Charlotte Maxeke, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph at Nancefield Avalon Cemeteries and Kliptown, Walter Sisulu Square, 20 August 2010. At <https://www.dac.gov.za/speech-minister-ms-lulu-xingwana-commemorating-charlotte-maxeke-lillian-ngoyi-and-helen-joseph-0> accessed 25 March 2011.

commemoration of these three ‘giants’ of canonical South African resistance history represented a clear and obvious choice of heroines. Ngoyi and Joseph are well known struggle icons in South Africa and their names can be found in a myriad of public spaces. Their prominent involvement in the 9 August 1956 women’s march is commemorated annually in official Women’s Day celebrations. Maxeke, although not as iconic as Ngoyi and Joseph in official representations as her political activity pre-dates the anti-apartheid movement which forms the grand narrative of South African foundational mythology, holds a prominent place in this mythology as one of the first ANC associated female icons to mobilise women in a mass movement and as the founder of the Bantu Women’s League. While the 1913 women’s anti-pass campaign has not been accorded the same significance as the 1956 campaign in official discourse or in South Africa’s public landscape, its inclusion in 2010 Women’s Month official commemorative celebrations indicated an understanding of the possible political capital that its centenary in 2013 offered.

Firstly, this chapter will give an outline of the 1913 and 1956 anti-pass campaigns to allow for their socio-historical positioning and expound the importance of Maxeke, and Joseph and Ngoyi to their respective movements. Discussion will then proceed to illustrate the importance of women’s anti-pass protest action in the present political dispensation through their public commemorative memorials and celebrations. Some of the individuals associated with these historical events are already considered as foundational icons; established in this position through the official importance accorded to the ‘foundational events’ in which they took part. Once these events and individuals have been contextualised, this chapter will address the declaration of the graves of Maxeke, Joseph and Ngoyi as national heritage sites and position this declaration within the Women’s Legacy Project launched by SAHRA through this event. As a project intended to recognise the ‘unsung heroines’ of political emancipation, it conversely selected three of the most distinguished female foundational figures to launch this campaign.

The political efficacy of witnessing death and burial for foundational mythology creation has been addressed in the previous two chapters. Here, the focus will fall on the use of the past in the present through the power of commemoration and commemorative events. Commemorative events, in this particular case study, serve to combat public indifference or forgetfulness about individuals or events that the government deems to be essential for regime legitimisation and nation-building. Public commemorative events such as the declaration of these graves which are firmly controlled and fashioned by official ideological

agendas, celebrate official concerns rather than public ones and are intended to stimulate loyalty to the existing political structure and to stress the desirability of maintaining the present social order.<sup>2</sup> Official discourse was deployed through the celebration of three foundational heroines during Women's Month which commemorates a founding event – the 1956 Women's March. This chapter will address the commemoration of Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi on 20 August 2010 and the official declaration of their graves as national heritage sites. It will indicate how this commemorative effort attempts to bring women's political resistance to oppression through mass mobilisation into the forefront of public consciousness while simultaneously entrenching these women as important foundational figures. Despite the positive impact such a focus on women's active participation could have on a South African society dominated by strong patriarchal tendencies, women's activism and heroism continues to be framed in discourses of femininity, martyrdom, and motherhood in official narratives of historical women's political participation. Officially selected individual women continue to be presented as representative of all women and their experiences under apartheid just as the anti-pass campaigns continue to form the central narrative of women's resistance in post-apartheid foundational mythology. In this chapter, then, it will be argued that despite the importance of emphasising women's participation in establishing a democratic dispensation in officially sanctioned representations of the struggle, its socio-political salience is negated through re-enforcing popular mythologies which enshrine female political activism in discourses of motherhood and femininity. This ensures the entrenchment and (re)positioning of women's activism in the domestic sphere and fails to challenge the violent gender dynamics currently at play in South Africa.

### **Organising Women: The Anti-Pass Campaigns of 1913 and 1956**

The 1913 anti-pass protest in Bloemfontein and the 1956 women's march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria represent not only defining moments in women's organised resistance in South Africa but also within the broader resistance movement. Pass laws have come to symbolise one of the crucial mechanisms of state control of the black population in South Africa in the colonial and apartheid eras and women have, historically, overcome the divisions of class and race to unite in political resistance to these laws. Although the 1913

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<sup>2</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton and New Jersey, 1992).

anti-pass campaign could be considered more successful in attaining a relaxation of pass laws pertaining to women it continues to be overshadowed – officially and academically – by the official recognition given to the 1956 women’s march. While the 1956 march represents one of the largest gathering of women in protest to passes, another credible explanation for the apparent official neglect of the historic event of 1913 is the acute present day focus on ‘The Struggle’ against apartheid as the foundation myth for the post-apartheid state. While the ANC was formed in 1912 and black resistance to colonialism reaches back to the seventeenth century, the focus remains predominantly on the recent (memorable) and ‘usable’ past that still has several of its living heroes and heroines present to remind the nation of that victorious struggle against an oppressive regime. The declaration of the graves of distinguished struggle heroines Ngoyi and Joseph as national heritage sites was an obvious choice to commence the Women’s Legacy Project and celebrate Women’s Month which, after all, commemorates the 1956 women’s march. Rather than an official promotion by DAC it was Troy Phili (the previous head of Graves and Burials at SAHRA), who had a personal academic interest in Maxeke, who insisted that her grave be included for the declaration in 2010.<sup>3</sup> The narrative of the 1913 campaign and Maxeke as an extraordinary woman and leader, however, slotted in with the commemoration of the 1956 march and it was possible to create a seamless portrayal of women’s organised resistance to pass laws in South Africa to celebrate Women’s Month in 2010.

The 1913 and 1956 resistance campaigns share a theme of organisation against pass laws based around insults to female dignity and motherhood. Both men and women were quick to argue that the extension of pass laws to women in their domestic roles as wives and mothers made it especially repugnant as arbitrary arrests and imprisonments could result in children being left unattended and that families would suffer as a result. Furthermore, passes were also seen as endangering women’s virtue and cases of violent abuse and rape of women by officials under the pretext of checking for passes were reported.<sup>4</sup> The invocation of the emotive slogan of ‘womenandchildren’ as an argument against passes could have been considered a particularly powerful political phrase to brandish. “Nevertheless”, as Walker states, “they were deeply felt by those on whom the burden of the laws rested. The arguments

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Troy Phili, 23 March 2011, Pretoria.

<sup>4</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (Onyx Press: London, 1982), pp.28-29.

attested to the vital role that women did play in the home, as well as the strength of the ideology that kept them there.”<sup>5</sup>

However, as Julia Wells argues in her comparative study of the 1913 Bloemfontein and 1958 Johannesburg campaigns, there was significantly more at stake for some of these women than simply the dignity of womanhood.<sup>6</sup> Wells states that the women’s anti-pass campaigns were “essentially a struggle against full proletarianisation. In both cases the resistance proved to be strongest among those women who had achieved a balance between responsibilities to family and generating income.”<sup>7</sup> The 1913 campaign was marked by the strong determination of its participants illustrated by their eager and voluntary imprisonment.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the 1913 campaign also saw the participation of a wide variety of black and coloured women whose livelihoods had come under threat as a result of a combination of stringent pass laws and a changing economic climate in the Orange Free State (OFS). The OFS was the only province in South Africa in 1913 that required urban residential passes for blacks and ‘coloured’ women.<sup>9</sup> Women had unsuccessfully protested these passes in 1898, but the formation of the SANNC in 1912 inspired new hope. Two months after the formation of the SANNC, OFS women resident in locations had circulated a petition throughout the OFS towns and collected five thousand signatures in protest against women’s passes.<sup>10</sup> They had been inspired by the formation of the SANNC and were motivated and guided by Charlotte Maxeke, the first black South African female university graduate and whose involvement with the SANNC through her husband’s membership dated to its formation. Despite assurances from the Minister of Native Affairs of the government’s sympathy for their case and promises to take action to eliminate pass regulations, a year later no changes had been made in pass law enforcements in the OFS. The women had begun to act independently of the all male black political organisations and would face some criticism from within these organisations. After an escalation in pass arrests in May 1913 following the formation of the South African Police Force (SAP), location women pledged to refuse to carry passes and expressed their willingness to face imprisonment in defiance of the pass

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<sup>5</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.29.

<sup>6</sup> Julia C. Wells, “Why Women Rebel: A Comparative Study of South African Women’s Resistance in Bloemfontein (1913) and Johannesburg (1958)”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 10, 1, 1983, pp.55-70.

<sup>7</sup> Wells, “Why Women Rebel”, *JSAS*, p.69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, *JSAS*, p.55.

<sup>9</sup> Both Wells and Walker expand on the particular socio-economic background of the OFS that led to the extension of passes to black and coloured women.

<sup>10</sup> Wells, “Why Women Rebel”, *JSAS*, p.56.

laws.<sup>11</sup> Following a mass meeting in Waaihoek and commencing the passive resistance campaign, over two hundred women marched into the centre of Bloemfontein to inform the mayor of their campaign. However, the mayor was not present and a smaller delegation confronted him the following day. Insisting that he could not change the laws, women faced the police at the local police station and tore up their passes. Eighty women were charged for not having passes. The following morning saw a march of six hundred women and a violent confrontation with the police.<sup>12</sup> The mayor promised to suspend further arrests for pass violations by women but two weeks later the local police attempted to arrest one woman for being without her pass. A brawl broke out between the police and a crowd of angry women. Thirty-four women were arrested on charges of public violence. They refused to pay fines and were imprisoned for two months with hard labour under appalling conditions.<sup>13</sup> Women persisted in defying the pass laws for the rest of the year but tended to serve shorter jail sentences.<sup>14</sup>

Wells indicates that as the campaign was under way, the women did not rely on the SANNC or other black political organisation for support. Instead, they formed the Orange Free State Native and Coloured Women's Association to raise material aid for resisters and their families and to advocate the cause to the public.<sup>15</sup> Walker theorises that the organisation was likely to have been formed by the wives of leading members of the SANNC and the African People's Organisation (APO).<sup>16</sup> The passive resistance campaign undertaken by the women was largely influenced by an elite stratum of women who were forced into leadership positions in the campaign as a result of strong and direct economic pressure.<sup>17</sup> Wells explains that despite differential pass requirements existing for men holding property or who had acquired a certain level of education, black women were not entitled to such exemptions. The lack of differentiation made between the elite strata of black women and the masses was considered a serious affront to their sense of dignity and social status.<sup>18</sup> As laws limiting black economic activity placed pressure on previously well-to-do families, these women had to seek work previously done exclusively by women of a lower economic stratum. Non-elite

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>12</sup> Julia C. Wells, *We Have Done With Pleading: The Women's 1913 Anti-Pass Campaign*, (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1991), p.21.

<sup>13</sup> Wells, *We Have Done With Pleading*, p.23.

<sup>14</sup> Wells, "Why Women Rebel", *JSAS*, p.57.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>16</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.30.

<sup>17</sup> Wells, "Why Women Rebel", *JSAS*, p.63.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.64.

women provided extra income for their families through informal-sector opportunities. By 1913, however, the townships had seen a substantial population decrease as a result of the labour demands of the mining industry and less stringent pass laws in other provinces. The decline of economic opportunities forced many women into laundry work and full-time or part-time domestic service in white homes. Part-time work was preferred as it allowed women time at home while live-in domestic work often isolated women from family, friends, and community. Simultaneously, as

whites experienced shortages of domestic workers, the black women were no doubt in a stronger position to negotiate terms to their own liking, such as doing take-out laundry and not living in, not to mention better wages and shorter hours.<sup>19</sup>

Wells argues that the “effect of passes undermined the advantages they were gaining on the open market of supply and demand for domestic services” and that this may in part explain why the laundry women, in particular, were the most militant.<sup>20</sup> Persistent police raids on the municipal wash house in the township included the harassment of elite women who had been forced to take on laundry work to supplement the family’s income. The *Bloemfontein Post* reported on 29 May 1913 that it was the police raids on “the better class of native women’ leaving the laundry house which ultimately triggered off the decision to take a course of passive resistance.”<sup>21</sup> The resistance campaign gained significant national media coverage through the OFS Women’s Association and won the sympathy of Union government officials in Cape Town. This resulted in a relaxation of pass law enforcement for women in the OFS “and the eventual exclusion of women from pass laws on a national basis in 1923.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the vigour of women’s political activism was harnessed and led to the formation of the SANNC affiliated Bantu Women’s League by Maxeke in 1918 and is identified by Walker as the most tangible result of the 1913 resistance campaign.<sup>23</sup>

In 1955, the government announced its intention to extend passes to women on a nation-wide basis from January 1956. Wells shows that the “combined pressures of domestic labour shortages, farm labour shortages and black/white competition in urban areas all added up to the demand that the black population be further controlled by bringing women under

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp.65-66.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>23</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.32.

pass regulation.”<sup>24</sup> Aimed at enforcing influx control and regulating the number of blacks allowed to work in the city, an inability to qualify for a pass could mean ejection from the urban areas. The most vulnerable categories were single women and female heads of households “especially if they supported their families through informal sector activities and only casual employment.”<sup>25</sup> Threats against motherhood and the family became a central theme that united women of different races and classes in protest. Wells expounds:

There can be no doubt that all African women dreaded the notion of passes. It implied being stopped and arbitrarily arrested for not having the right document at the right moment, the inconvenience of overnight imprisonment, the risk of being sexually assaulted by the police, the cost of fines, or worse, receiving sentences which included jail or farm labour – all without the knowledge of one’s family left at home, simply wondering and waiting. This fear was particularly emotive and certainly fuelled the enthusiasm for the large anti-pass demonstrations of the mid-1950s.<sup>26</sup>

However, the anti-pass campaign of the mid-1950s, unlike its predecessor in 1913, tended to be spearheaded by women who did not suffer a direct threat from the pass laws and Wells argues that “it must be assumed that their involvement came from a high level of political commitment and maturity in the struggle for national liberation.”<sup>27</sup> But, while the spokeswomen of the movement might have come from a more elite and sometimes more educated class, the mass support that the campaign enjoyed came from diverse women from different economic backgrounds.

M. Bahati Kuumba indicates that in “gender-integrated movements and organisations, patriarchal assumptions are often superimposed on the hierarchical leader-follower conception of leadership.”<sup>28</sup> The formation of FEDSAW allowed women to organise semiautonomously “because of these same types of limitations on the contributions that women were allowed to play in the official anti-apartheid organisation.”<sup>29</sup> FEDSAW had overcome most of its organisational issues by 1955 and as part of the Congress Alliance launched one of the most militant and sustained anti-pass campaigns that would peak between 1955 and 1959. The federation, with Ngoyi as its president and Joseph as national

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<sup>24</sup> Wells, “Why Women Rebel”, *JSAS*, p.62.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.67-68.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>28</sup> M. Bahati Kuumba, “‘You’ve Struck a Rock’: Comparing Gender, Social Movements, and Transformation in the United States and South Africa”, *Gender and Society*, 16, 4, 2002, p.514.

<sup>29</sup> Bahati Kuumba, , “‘You’ve Struck a Rock’”, *Gender and Society*, p.514.

secretary, functioned as a non-racial coordinating body to which different women's organisations affiliated. This national organisation of women was "formed for the purpose of uniting all women in common action for the removal of all political, legal, economic and social disabilities"<sup>30</sup> and adopted a Women's Charter in which it was recognised that true liberation could not be achieved unless women were accorded unqualified equality in practice and in law. Although the Charter's tenets were firmly located in the anti-apartheid struggle, it also sought to address the specifics of women's oppression.<sup>31</sup> It was a progressive document for its time and it staked a claim for "full equality between the sexes and began to search for answers to the questions about how best that could be achieved in a society where gross racial discrimination obscured all other forms of oppression and exploitation."<sup>32</sup>

In response to the government's announcement in 1955 a multi-racial crowd of two-thousand women united by a common political purpose and led by FEDSAW leaders Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa, and Sophie Williams, peacefully protested at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 27 October 1955. This event enhanced the prestige of women's organisations within the Congress Alliance<sup>33</sup> and was a major morale booster for FEDSAW "that firmly established its credentials as a serious political organisation."<sup>34</sup> Walker identifies this period as a new phase in the history of FEDSAW and states that the 1955 announcement of passes for women

gave it a focus of action; the anti-pass campaign that followed, an identity. From late 1955, passes for African women dominated all other issues. For the next four to five years most of [FEDSAW's] energies were directed into the anti-pass campaign. The demands of the campaign were such that there was little time for sustained energy in other spheres, and inevitably many of the [FEDSAW's] more general aims for improving the position of women in South Africa were neglected. Nevertheless, as the [FEDSAW] realised, this was the major issue confronting the majority of South African women and, as such, it took precedence.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.153.

<sup>31</sup> Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority*, (University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin and London, 2006), p.25

<sup>32</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.159.

<sup>33</sup> One direct result of the success of this protest was the election of Lilian Ngoyi to the ANC national executive.

<sup>34</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.187.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189.

In organising against passes for women, the federation recognised that true equality for women could not be achieved unless the apartheid state was dismantled and thus the fight against passes encompassed the entire liberation movement.<sup>36</sup>

Although the government was wary of enforcing the carrying of passes by women in city centres where FEDSAW was well organised and structured, it commenced its extension of pass books to women in rural areas. While Congress Alliance affiliates were slow to commit to any planned action, FEDSAW had organised meetings, local protests, and demonstrations as soon as the government had announced its plans. A huge wave of protests that swept across the country in the first seven months of 1956 created a sense of militant optimism within FEDSAW despite the steady and continued issuing of passes to women in rural towns. In March 1956 the decision was made to once again march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria. However, for this march FEDSAW sponsored four Congress Alliance leaders, including Joseph, to tour the main urban centres of South Africa to ensure nationwide support for the protest march. While the numbers vary,<sup>37</sup> current recollections celebrate the attendance of approximately twenty thousand women on 9 August 1956 at the protest at the Union Buildings and it undoubtedly was a gathering of unprecedented size. Although Prime Minister Strijdom was not present, the women left thousands of individually signed protests on the steps of the Union Buildings and the now famous slogan ‘Strijdom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock’ was composed.<sup>38</sup> After the protests had been delivered, the women stood in silence for half an hour after which the ANC anthem, ‘Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika’, was sung.<sup>39</sup> While it certainly must have been a great spectacle to behold, the significance of the demonstration “challenged stereotyped assumptions about women and their lack of political initiative.”<sup>40</sup> It appears that women had to demonstrate their power of political organisation repeatedly to earn the respect of their organisations despite the historic precedent set in 1913 and women’s reactive and recurring mass protest to laws that affected them. Indeed, as Walker indicates, the very success of the women’s anti-pass campaign heightened some of the ambivalent feelings within the Congress Alliance towards the growing independence of the women’s movement.<sup>41</sup> While the men within the Alliance

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.189.

<sup>37</sup> Walker shows that depending on the sympathetic stance of the reporters, numbers between six thousand and twenty thousand were estimated in national media coverage of the women’s march.

<sup>38</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.195.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.195.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.196.

acknowledged the success of the march, attempts were made to reassert their authority in the further planning of the anti-pass campaign. Walker argues that these

contradictory attitudes towards the women were inevitable in a society as strongly patriarchal as South Africa. Yet although men might grow uneasy at the implications for their own lifestyle if women were acknowledged as equal partners in the political struggle, they could not fail to be impressed by what had been achieved at Pretoria on August 9<sup>th</sup>.<sup>42</sup>

This success of the 1956 march was recognised within the Congress Alliance and 9 August would be henceforth celebrated as Women's Day – now a national holiday. Despite the continued protests of women across the country against the pass laws, they provoked little official response and passes were extended to women on a voluntary basis. As the anti-pass campaign lost its momentum over the years, black women reluctantly accepted the passes.<sup>43</sup> Although this appears anti-climactic, the failure of the anti-pass campaign is not overtly acknowledged in official commemorative events. Official Women's Day celebrations tend to focus on the success of the organisation of the women's march on parliament. As (perhaps ironically) stated in the government notice for the declaration of the graves of Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi about the 1956 women's march on parliament: "The success of the demonstration challenged the stereotypes about women and their lack of political drive."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the focus appears to fall on women's success in organising a mass demonstration against apartheid legislation rather than on the actual failure of the anti-pass campaign to yield the desired results.

Both the 1913 and 1956 campaigns and the type of resistance they offered were shaped by the participation of a small stratum of elite women while the majority of participants tended to be neither highly educated nor skilled. Yet, the motivation in 1913 of economic difficulty and the non-differentiation between elite women and non-elite women, and by a deep political commitment in 1956, these women were able to transcend class

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.197.

<sup>43</sup> Wells, "Why Women Rebel", *JSAS*, p.58.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Arts and Culture and South African Heritage Resources Agency, "Declaration of the graves of Charlotte Maxeke in Nancefield Cemetery, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph in Avalon Cemetery, Johannesburg, as national heritage sites", *Government Gazette*, No.658, 30 July 2010. While the SANNC was partial to the tactics of delegations, negotiations, and petitions, it was women who were quick to organise mass protests as demonstrated by the 1913 women's march.

differences and unite in a broader resistance to passes for women.<sup>45</sup> Most significantly, Wells argues,

only by separating into exclusively women's organisations could the women express their grievances and take the decisions that culminated in actions previously untried by their male counterparts. The pooled expertise of women sharing a common front injected the movements with a strong sense of moral certitude in their cause and their methods... [T]he women had an acute awareness that their struggle was legitimate and therefore worthy of every sacrifice.<sup>46</sup>

Previously, the primary role of women within the liberation struggle was considered to be that of 'nation building'.<sup>47</sup> While women's political mobilisation brought contradictions to the fore, the tone of appeal in 1913 and in 1956 was to women in their traditional roles as 'mothers and wives' and the content of these roles went unquestioned because this is how many women perceived themselves.<sup>48</sup> Mass mobilisation for the campaigns drew on a deep sense of female consciousness which impelled women to political action; while their roles as wives and mother were emphasised and accepted, they also demanded the freedom to act as they felt their obligations entailed.<sup>49</sup> However, this appeal to the common experience of women across racial boundaries to support the anti-pass campaign in 1956 was a revolutionary stand considering the racially divisionary policies of the apartheid state. Moreover, the African nationalist movement in South Africa tended to associate 'motherhood' with immeasurable strength, and indeed, as indicated by the slogan composed for the 1956 march, women saw themselves as "the bedrock of society."<sup>50</sup> Most importantly, the 1956 march provided "some of the richest symbolism associated with women's struggles in South Africa."<sup>51</sup> The powerful slogan composed for the event, the well-known photograph of Joseph, Ngoyi, Moosa, and Williams, four women of different races, locking arms to deliver the petitions, women's dedication to the cause as demonstrated by their willingness to travel great distances to attend the march – some defying their husbands and fathers – and the women's quiet and disciplined defiance have come to define women's resistance to apartheid.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.69.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp.69-70.

<sup>47</sup> Judy Kimble & Elaine Unterhalter, "'We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward': ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982", *Feminist Review*, 12, 1982, p.25.

<sup>48</sup> Kimble & Unterhalter, "'We Opened the Road for You'", *Feminist Review*, p.26.

<sup>49</sup> Hassim, *Women's Organisations*, p.28.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>51</sup> Hassim, *Women's Organisations*, p.26.

## Remembering and Reconstructing Women's Resistance in the Present

While any efforts to commemorate the 1913 women's march in the public landscape are conspicuous by their absence, the 1956 march has been acknowledged with a small but problematic memorial which was unveiled in 2000 by then President Thabo Mbeki and completed in 2002 as part of the greater Legacy Project. In 2012 Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane announced plans to further honour the 1956 women's march with a memorial development including a multi-purpose centre and 'hall of heroes' in Lilian Ngoyi Square in Pretoria. Despite the annual impressive and well-funded Women's Day and Women's Month celebrations, memorial lectures honouring female activists, and the 2013 commemorative march in Bloemfontein to celebrate the centenary of the 1913 women's march, physical tributes in the public landscape commemorating or celebrating women's contributions to the formation of a democratic South Africa are few – especially in comparison to the plethora of statues, monuments, and memorials honouring their male counterparts and their heroic deeds.<sup>52</sup> Women's Day celebrations have repeatedly been under attack in the media and social media platforms criticising the exorbitant amounts of money spent by government to fund official parties for the event while fundamental public services for women lack vital resources and the current levels of violence committed against women leave little to be celebrated. Furthermore, the National Women's Monument has also received criticism for being inaccessible and for simply serving a post-apartheid nationalist agenda that has little positive impact on women's lived experiences in South Africa.

The National Women's Monument at the Union Buildings in Pretoria commemorates the 1956 women's march. The monument was the creation of architect Marcus Holm and sculptor Wilma Cruise whose entry into an open design competition for the monument was selected by a jury nominated by then Minister of Arts and Culture, Bridgette Mabandla. Small and unassuming, the Women's Monument is a grinding stone, associated with women grinding maize in the traditional African homestead and reflects the protest call "Strike a woman, strike a rock", and serves as a metaphor for women's resilience and as a symbol of the 1956 march in post-apartheid foundational mythology. Initially, the display was accompanied by a sound component in which this slogan is repeated in all official languages.

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<sup>52</sup> Sabine Marschall, "Serving Male Agendas: Two National Women's Monuments in South Africa", *Women's Studies*, 33, 2004, pp.1009-1033.

Sabine Marschall has written extensively on the National Women's Monument and her work serves as an important point of departure and grounding for this particular discussion. Marschall argues that while the National Women's Monument appears to pay tribute to the contributions of women to the liberation struggle it reveals "that once again the women's issue has been appropriated to serve a specific political agenda, infused with the values of a patriarchal society."<sup>53</sup> Intended as a true 'Rainbow Nation' monument, the Women's Monument was designed to be inclusive and commemorative of women's contributions to a democratic South Africa irrespective of race, class, culture, or political association. Marschall states that the "objective here was to celebrate the democratic, collaborative, and communal nature of the event and the ordinariness of its actors."<sup>54</sup> In contrast to the older Eurocentric monuments erected to the glorification of Afrikaner nationalist ideology, this monument was humble and unobtrusive while its "anti-heroic stance stresses the ordinariness of the subjects to be honoured here..."<sup>55</sup> Marschall continues to stress this emphasis on the ordinary and on its inclusive symbolism:

Highly symbolic and meaningful to the event, the grinding stone is at the same time easily accessible and anti-elitist by allowing ordinary Africans to relate to and identify with it. Being placed in the vestibule, the very centre of the Union Buildings, this once white, male, political preserve adds to its significance, making a bold statement about women's equality.<sup>56</sup>

Although the monument can be interpreted as inclusive and assumedly dedicated to 'all women', Marschall importantly notes that this necessarily needs to exclude the many conservative white women who supported, approved of, or quietly benefited from apartheid. The term 'all women' then, can only include those women who fought against apartheid.<sup>57</sup> Marschall argues that as a national project,

the Pretoria Women's Monument is intricately linked with the foundation myth of the new South African state, focused on the meta-narrative of resistance and the anti-apartheid 'Struggle for Liberation'. Just as in Bloemfontein [the Vrouemonument], where black women were implicitly excluded, in Pretoria, many white women are equally implicitly excluded.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Marschall, "Serving Male Agendas", *Women's Studies*, p.1009.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1020.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1020-1021.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1021.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1023.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1023.

However, this natural and, perhaps, rightful exclusion is never made overt and official rhetoric surrounding the monument continues to emphasise its inclusiveness. Despite this, the monument remains exclusive and elitist; while claiming to honour ‘all women’, it ultimately represents only those women who attended the march. This becomes especially problematic when the Women’s Monument is considered mere tokenism, as Marschall contends. The post-apartheid public landscape in South Africa is a space dominated by memorials to and statues of male heroes of the struggle for liberation while female activists and women’s contributions remain under represented. Marschall argues that the Pretoria National Women’s Monument, in fact, serves to mute women. As a monument to ‘all women’ it declares that women’s contributions have been officially acknowledged and are effectively ‘covered’. Marschall states that as “a national monument, it conveniently obliterates the need to commemorate women and their contributions elsewhere.”<sup>59</sup> Although this statement rings true for the initial years following the monument’s unveiling, the recent announcement of plans to build yet another, more imposing ‘living memorial’ in honour of the 1956 march, shows renewed impetus toward acknowledging women’s contributions to the struggle. This reiterates the importance of the 1956 march as a foundational event as government seeks to re-commemorate this event with a larger living memorial. However, as already indicated, the state-sanctioned honouring of iconic women in public spaces is fraught with re-establishing and reinforcing discourses of normative domestic femininity and gaining political capital.

The current Women’s Monument in Pretoria/Tshwane commemorates women’s mobilisation against pass laws, now considered a founding event, and entrenches a seemingly growing mythology that equates women’s political resistance to oppression in South Africa with the anti-pass campaign – a campaign that mobilised women through appealing to particular discourses of motherhood and femininity. Moreover, like the Women’s Monument in Bloemfontein, this post-apartheid monument locks women into a discourse created by men serving a new national agenda.<sup>60</sup> While women participated in all aspects (and at times more successfully) of the struggle against apartheid, Marschall shows that it is largely men who continue to determine to what extent female involvement is recognised and which actions and individuals are worthy of receiving public acknowledgement. This is informed by men’s own terms of reference, “notably the traditionally male-dominated spheres of warfare and political

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.1025.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.1026.

activism.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, the actions of women at the Union Buildings in 1956 met men’s criteria of what constitutes a courageous freedom fighter. But, as Marschall argues, women who have contributed in ways that are considered as normative in their supportive roles as women such as nursing the wounded, providing shelter, food, or giving emotional and moral support – are not acknowledged in such a ‘grandiose’ manner.<sup>62</sup> While political rhetoric at commemorative events tends to stress those very roles that are considered feminine and domestic in an attempt to re-domesticate militant female behaviour now that the democratic state has been realised, these roles are not accorded the same importance as deeds that have been defined as admirable by a male dominated discourse of heroism. In this way, monuments dedicated to women are, primarily, *about* women; “they reflect particular discourses around women that circulate in society, which are reinforced and disseminated further through the visual and textual signifiers of such monuments.”<sup>63</sup> While any prominent monument or acknowledgement of women’s contributions to the struggle against apartheid is, as Marschall succinctly states, “better than nothing”,<sup>64</sup> they continue to serve a male-dominated political agenda and are “mediated by their positioning in a patriarchal society.”<sup>65</sup> It could be argued that the decade of the 1950s, known as the ‘golden years’ of the struggle and which produced its most prominent and respected (ANC-affiliated) leaders is enshrined in such a deeply-rooted mythology that mutes women’s voices in the present. The Women’s Monument gives women a voice, but it is a voice that is confined and limited by a broader nationalism that propagates unity and gender equality as defined by the mythology of the decade of the Freedom Charter. In this way, women’s ability to express themselves politically is circumscribed by the boundaries of a post-apartheid nationalism that, in official rhetoric, has declared gender equality as being very nearly achieved.<sup>66</sup> Women who voice dissension are muted by these over-arching mythologies that are enforced by the erection of such monuments and defined by male-dominated discourses of heroism.

More recently, however, a new project has been implemented that attempts to counter the current monument which has proven to be difficult to access as a result of increased security which limits access to the Union Buildings. While the new proposal persists in entrenching women’s anti-pass protests as the only form of female contribution to the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.1026.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.1026-1027.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.1029.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.1030.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.1030.

<sup>66</sup> Currently, women represent 45% of the total make-up of the National Assembly in South Africa. At <http://www.parliament.gov.za/content/Women%20and%20Parliament%20English~1.pdf>

struggle worthy of being honoured in the public space, it also seeks to redress what has been considered as an understated monument that has failed to adequately commemorate the 1956 women's march or contribute to empowering women in the present. As a result, the project to establish a Women's Living Monument on Lilian Ngoyi square in the Pretoria CBD was unveiled by Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane on Women's Day in August 2012. The 'monument' will consist of a double- or triple-storey building with a statue, an auditorium, a narrative centre, a hall of fame listing the names of women who contributed to the struggle, a library and a training facility providing formal and informal training to women and will also serve as a leadership training centre for women in political office.<sup>67</sup> The City of Tshwane set aside eight million Rand for the project with a further one hundred million Rand being provided by provincial government for its development. Further funding was sought from national government and other investors.<sup>68</sup> The official brick laying ceremony was held on 29 September 2014 and commences the construction-phase of the monument.<sup>69</sup> Reportedly, the idea for the multi-purpose site was the result of local government heeding the call from "women organisations that wanted it to be a place of remembrance and reflection of the struggles and diversity of South African women."<sup>70</sup> The announcement was followed by a re-enactment of the 1956 march and an address by President Jacob Zuma who stressed the number of laws enacted in South Africa since 1994 to ensure gender equality and stated that the government was satisfied with the progress made in improving the status and quality of life of women although adding that more needed to be done.<sup>71</sup>

The proposed 'living monument' seemingly attempts to further entrench the prominence of the 1956 campaign in South Africa's foundational mythology by creating a seamless narrative of women's activism in the past and a commitment to female

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<sup>67</sup> "Not just a monument' planned for central Pretoria square", *IOL Property*, [http://www.iolproperty.co.za/roller/news/entry/not\\_just\\_a\\_monument\\_planned](http://www.iolproperty.co.za/roller/news/entry/not_just_a_monument_planned) 15 March 2013, accessed 16 March 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Nozipho Dlamini, "A Fitting Tribute to South Africa's Women", *Gauteng News*, August 2012, [http://www.gautengonline.gov.za/Newsletters/Gauteng%20News%20-%20August%202012.pdf?Mobile=1&Source=%2F\\_layouts%2Fmobile%2Fview.aspx%3FList%3D15ae4875-960d-4a79-bd8e-7ab00f48dd4c%26View%3D614c56a5-d2df-4f96-9a8d-819b0f70e0c9%26CurrentPage%3D1](http://www.gautengonline.gov.za/Newsletters/Gauteng%20News%20-%20August%202012.pdf?Mobile=1&Source=%2F_layouts%2Fmobile%2Fview.aspx%3FList%3D15ae4875-960d-4a79-bd8e-7ab00f48dd4c%26View%3D614c56a5-d2df-4f96-9a8d-819b0f70e0c9%26CurrentPage%3D1) accessed 16 March 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Department of Infrastructure Development, "Lilian Ngoyi Centre to Enter 2<sup>nd</sup> Construction Phase", at <http://www.did.gpg.gov.za/SiteCollectionDocuments/Lilian%20Ngoyi%20centre.pdf> accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Dlamini, "A Fitting Tribute", August 2012 [http://www.gautengonline.gov.za/Newsletters/Gauteng%20News%20-%20August%202012.pdf?Mobile=1&Source=%2F\\_layouts%2Fmobile%2Fview.aspx%3FList%3D15ae4875-960d-4a79-bd8e-7ab00f48dd4c%26View%3D614c56a5-d2df-4f96-9a8d-819b0f70e0c9%26CurrentPage%3D1](http://www.gautengonline.gov.za/Newsletters/Gauteng%20News%20-%20August%202012.pdf?Mobile=1&Source=%2F_layouts%2Fmobile%2Fview.aspx%3FList%3D15ae4875-960d-4a79-bd8e-7ab00f48dd4c%26View%3D614c56a5-d2df-4f96-9a8d-819b0f70e0c9%26CurrentPage%3D1) accessed 16 March 2013. Which 'women's organisations' these might be is not specified.

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

empowerment in the present. The Women's Monument, now difficult to access, neglected and considered inadequate will be replaced by a grandiose Women's *Living* Monument of monumental stature that is intended to remain interactive with the 'nation' while focusing specifically on the perceived needs of women in the present. While enhancing the representation of women in the national commemorative sphere, the newly proposed 'monument' appears to avoid the deeply problematic positioning of women in present day South Africa by adopting a celebratory tone that ostensibly denies that the patriarchal values that dominate South African society continue to shape and affect the lives of many South African women. This is problematic as honouring and commemorating the heroines of the past in no way translates into gender equality in the present. However, this 'living monument' seeks to do just that by proclaiming the 'struggles and diversity of South African women' in the past tense. Although it proposes to function as a centre *for* women, it simultaneously is, once again, *about* women serving a male-dominated nationalist agenda. The grand narrative of the 1956 march is defined by the central tenets of the Freedom Charter and shaped by traditional discourses of motherhood and femininity but represents unity in diversity and gender equality in the present. In a short online piece explaining the historic meaning of Women's Day the South African Government News Agency proclaims this gender equality and explains that,

This historic march was a turning point in the role of women in the struggle for freedom and society at large. Since that eventful day, women from all walks of life became equal partners in the struggle for a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.<sup>72</sup>

This grand narrative of 'equal partnership', 'non-racialism', and 'non-sexism' defines the official rhetoric of Women's Day and Women's Month. However, during 2012 when the plans for the new living monument were announced, both the Saartjie Baartman Centre and Rape Crisis Centre in Cape Town were threatened by imminent closure due to lack of funding. It appears absurd that essential services whose very existence as trauma support centres sends a clear message to society that violence against women is not acceptable are neglected while grandiose projects 'reflecting' on the perceived success of women's struggles of the past receive extensive governmental funding. As a nationalist project it attempts in some way to 'give back' to the nation by ensuring that it appears to empower women through 'training programmes'. This reflects what Shireen Hassim has identified as the rarely

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<sup>72</sup> South African Government News Agency, "Women's Month", <http://www.sanews.gov.za/special-features-archive/womens-month> accessed 16 March 2013.

questioned structural conditions of women's inequality in South Africa and the resulting "tendency towards accommodation with existing institutions, ideologies and powerholders."<sup>73</sup> Yet, its emphasis remains on commemorating a glorious past achievement in the present in order to strengthen that specific event as part of the nation's foundational mythology and to bolster the public perception of the government that lays claim to that past.

### **"Strike a Woman, You Strike a Hollow Memory"<sup>74</sup>: 'Celebrating' Women's Day**

First celebrated as a national holiday in 1995, Women's Day was intended to celebrate, commemorate and honour the 1956 women's march and all of its participants. Moreover, commemorative efforts purportedly focus on 'empowering' South African women in the present while reflecting on and reminding the nation of the historic 1956 march. The extension of Women's Day into annually 'celebrating' August as Women's Month incorporates the commemoration of other "pioneers of the women's movement"<sup>75</sup> which allows for the commemoration of a larger group of national heroines who have made historic contributions to the nation. Annually, the month of August tends to see the 'plight' of many women in South Africa highlighted in the media while retailers offer discounts on certain products and services to women on the public holiday. Women's Day itself is a fairly grand affair with celebrations, lectures, and events taking place across the country, and the unveilings of new projects aimed to empower women and public addresses by prominent Ministers and the President are the highlight of 9 August. While any attempt made to enhance the social and economic positioning of women in society and to improve the lives of so many disempowered and marginalised women is a laudable effort it remains a symptomatic treatment that reflects the lack of any clear plan of action by government institutes to address the deeply ingrained gender inequalities that exist in South Africa. Official rhetoric continues to cast a spotlight on the past political prowess of women's activism in the face of an oppressive and violent state. However, its celebratory tone and focus on the constitutional and legislative progress made towards women's empowerment deflects from the real and deplorable state of gender relations and women's positioning in society in the present.

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<sup>73</sup> Shireen Hassim, "Voices, Hierarchies and Spaces: Reconfiguring the Women's Movement in Democratic South Africa", *Politikon*, 32, 2, 2005, p.178.

<sup>74</sup> Verashni Pillay, "Strike a Woman, You Strike a Hollow Memory", *Mail & Guardian*, 7 August 2012, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-06-41-verashni-pillay-you-strike-a-woman-you-strike-a-hollow-memory> accessed 11 January 2014.

<sup>75</sup> South African Government News Agency, "Women's Month", <http://www.sanews.gov.za/special-features-archive/womens-month> accessed 11 January 2014.

Indeed, Hassim argues that the “constitutional protections were essentially a bargain struck at the elite level between national women’s organisations and the male political leadership; they are not deeply rooted in civil society.”<sup>76</sup>

The government has faced criticism for annually directing a considerable amount of resources into commemorating the 1956 march; Women’s Day/Month events, street renaming ceremonies, and unveilings (all considered as hollow gestures) rather than investing these resources in the basic services that could make real changes in women’s lives.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, highlighting the violence experienced by so many South African women for one month a year appears to be tokenism considering that women live with this violence or the possibility of violence every day, every month, ‘year in year out’. This focus on the commemoration of past achievements which – tragically – have had very little impact on the lived experiences of women in the present have drawn criticism of journalists, academics, and activists and highlighted in insight pieces in the media. Feminist scholar/activist and writer Helen Moffett wrote two articles concerning Women’s Day/Month, one in 2012 and the second in 2013; both articles went viral on social media sites. Her first article, ‘Take Your Women’s Day and Shove It’, addressed to the South African government, is an aggressive and enraged attack on what Moffett calls the “pathetic, meaningless, mind-blowingly expensive and stomach-churningly patronising Women’s Day” and continues to call on government to ‘cancel’ it thereby questioning the point of its celebration. Lambasting the spending of “obscene piles and piles” of money on Women’s Day/Month events which are described as wasteful, Moffett suggests that a better use of this money would be to fund Rape Crisis Centre and the Saartjie Baartman Centre and other NGOs performing invaluable social, educational, and health-care services whose international funding has been cut as a result of the global economic crisis. Rather than an opportunity for celebrating the 1956 Women’s March, Moffett sees the current state of affairs as an insult to its memory:

What you have reduced the 1956 Women’s March to is a travesty. That was an occasion of extraordinary dignity and power, and we’d like to remember and honour it without having to use sickbags, please. Lilian Ngoyi and Albertina Sisulu and the thousands of brave women who took part that day are squirming in their graves at your appalling, ongoing, almost

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<sup>76</sup> Hassim, “Voices, Hierarchies and Spaces”, *Politikon*, p.180.

<sup>77</sup> Verashni Pillay, “Strike a Woman, You Strike a Hollow Memory”, *Mail & Guardian*, 7 August 2012, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-06-41-verashni-pillay-you-strike-a-woman-you-strike-a-hollow-memory> accessed 11 January 2014.

CASUAL abandonment of this country's women, especially the poorest ones. The public spectacle of hypocrisy that is Women's Day is just rubbing salt into their wounds.<sup>78</sup>

Here, the national heroines of the past are employed to criticise government's lack of effective gender policies and dedication to truly improving the lives of its female citizens rather than to celebrate and applaud them as evident in official rhetoric of the 1956 march. This frustration is once again shown in another popular article written by Moffett in 2013, 'Fuck Women's Day. FUCK IT.' Here Moffett's rage has turned into despair:

Don't ask me to celebrate Women's Day. Don't offer me ten per cent off beauty products or a free glass of cheap bubbly. Don't even ask me to commemorate the historic women's march on the Union buildings – a milestone event whose noble essence has been sold down the river by leaders who are eager to claim some sort of retrospective credit for it, but don't even pretend to honour its values.

The article outlines her frustration with the constant unchanging gender dynamics in South Africa, the persisting myths about rape in South African society, and a government and its departments that seemingly champion and uphold the patriarchal values that undermine the effectiveness of any progressive legislation. Once again this article features a reminder of the political salience of the 1956 march for the ruling party laying claim to this piece of foundational mythology imbued with the narratives of nation building and the struggle for a non-racial and non-sexist society; trading on past glories rather than making a commitment to changing the present. Verashni Pillay reflected on this on Women's Day 2012:

As we're reminded every year, all of this is in commemoration of the 1956 pass laws march... Dignified yet resolute, they lay down petitions bearing more than 100 000 signatures protesting laws that would further restrict their movement, and stood in silence for 30 minutes in one of our country's most poignant displays of resistance. You'd imagine that subsequent renditions would fight similar battles, if not reach similar proportions. Start anywhere: rape, low literacy rates, infant mortality, an education system in crisis: we have a bevy of issues affecting the most vulnerable women in our country. But something bizarre happened when the party of resistance became the party of government: the level of organisation, money, capacity and sheer bureaucracy directed at the memory of the march increased, while its

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<sup>78</sup> Helen Moffett, "Take Your Women's Day and Shove It", at <http://helenmoffett.bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/08/08/take-your-women%E2%80%99s-day-and-shove-it/> accessed 12 January 2014.

motive diminished till we were left with mostly hollow gestures and empty words in a country where the cause of women is routinely betrayed.<sup>79</sup>

The anger of the writers of these articles is palpable and understandable. The government has betrayed the women's movement yet continues to exploit the remarkable and inspiring women's march of 1956, shaped and recast into a fitting and usable narrative for the post-apartheid state, to redirect the focus of its failure to take on persisting patriarchal and misogynist sentiments and practices in the present. Moffett's 2012 article logged over 10 000 'shares' on social networking site Facebook<sup>80</sup> indicating that over 10 000 people had shared this article on their personal Facebook profiles with the potential of reaching an even wider audience. The article published online by Moffett for Women's Day 2013, 'Fuck Women's Day. FUCK IT.', racked up approximately 7700 'shares' through Facebook.<sup>81</sup> While these articles do not necessarily reflect the views of all South African women,<sup>82</sup> and such a quantitative study could yield illuminating results, their popularity on social media and a wealth of news articles sharing similar themes released every year does reflect a deeper understanding that the gestures towards 'empowering women' made by government each year are often (but not always) little more than empty gestures.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Verashni Pillay, "Strike a Woman, You Strike a Hollow Memory", *Mail & Guardian*, 7 August 2012, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-06-41-verashni-pillay-you-strike-a-woman-you-strike-a-hollow-memory> accessed 11 January 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Helen Moffett, "Take Your Women's Day and Shove It", at <http://helenmoffett.bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/08/08/take-your-women%E2%80%99s-day-and-shove-it/> accessed 12 January 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Helen Moffett, "Fuck Women's Day. FUCK IT. 8 August 2013, <http://helenmoffett.bookslive.co.za/blog/2013/08/08/fuck-womens-day-fuck-it/> accessed 12 January 2014.

<sup>82</sup> It only reflects the opinions of those on the 'right' side of the digital divide, those with access to social media and the wherewithal to engage therewith.

<sup>83</sup> The Ministry of Women in the Presidency is once again facing criticism from feminist and women's rights groups and has been accused of colluding with patriarchy. The recent announcement of government's action plan for the 16 days of activism for no violence against women and children was undermined by its overwhelming anti-feminist rhetoric. Attempting to draw men into the campaign under the banner of 'Count Me In', Minister Susan Shabangu labelled men as 'protectors of society, women, and families'. Other podium speakers labelled feminism un-African, that government funding to rape crisis centres should be stopped as such issues should be dealt with at home, and that women should be submissive to their husbands. Besides the obvious problematic gender-power discourses invoked here, it also establishes normative families as consisting of a father, mother, and children and effectively excludes LBGTI individuals. Raymond Suttner, "Op-Ed: 16 days of no violence against women and children – Women's Ministry colludes with patriarchy", *Daily Maverick*, 10 November 2014, <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-11-10-op-ed-16-days-of-no-violence-against-women-and-children-womens-ministry-colludes-with-patriarchy/#.VGRPPMksenB> accessed 11 November 2014. Media release, "Patriarchy Revisited: Alarming Anti-Feminist Rhetoric Expressed at Ministry of Women Meeting", 7 November 2014, <http://feministssa.com/2014/11/07/patriarchy-revisited-alarming-anti-feminist-rhetoric-expressed-at-ministry-of-women-meeting/> accessed 7 November 2014.

## Honouring the ‘Unsung’ Heroines: Claiming Remains

The declaration of the graves of Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph as national heritage sites during Women’s Month marked the launch of SAHRA’s Women’s Legacy Project.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the day-long live televised funerals of Sara Baartman and Albertina Sisulu, this event received remarkably little media coverage despite honouring women who are regarded to be amongst the most prominent icons of the post-apartheid state. This could, perhaps, be attributed to the lack of immediacy of these women’s deaths and the fact that for the past two decades their political salience did not lie in their physical remains, but rather in harnessing their legacies in official nationalist rhetoric. The burial of Sara Baartman who was re-imagined as ‘Grandmother of the Nation’ in her native soil was symbolic of the end of a long history of oppression and inequality culminating in the birth of the post-apartheid state; the death of Albertina Sisulu, a living and present archetypal ‘Mother of the Nation’, was witnessed by the post-apartheid nation and mourning her loss while honouring her lifetime of dedication and sacrifice was extant. Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph passed away before 1994 and while all three were considered to be pillars of a post-apartheid pantheon, their physical remains had already been honoured with appropriate funerary rites at the time of their deaths. In the immediate years following the first democratic elections it appears that their legacies and names alone would serve in establishing a foundational mythology. However, as the hopeful optimism of the founding of the Rainbow Nation has waned, the power of official state-sanctioned commemoration and commemorative events has been increasingly harnessed to remind the ‘nation’ of the sacrifices made in the past in order to (re)legitimise the government in the present by honouring those heroines who worked and fought tirelessly for a democratic state but did not live to see the fruits of their labours. By claiming the legacies, lives, and now the bodies of the dead heroines their multivocality as once living individuals becomes subsumed within an official grand narrative that harnesses these women to serve a nationalist agenda. Their very bodies now belong to the national estate and can be called to national service whenever socio-political conditions demand the official versions of their legacies for regime legitimation or to stress exemplary citizenship and patriotism.

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<sup>84</sup> SAHRA, “Honouring and Celebrating Women’s Sacrifices and Roles as Midwives of Political Emancipation”, SAHRA project document (draft). Department of Arts and Culture and South African Heritage Resources Agency, “Declaration of the graves of Charlotte Maxeke in Nancefield Cemetery, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph in Avalon Cemetery, Johannesburg, as national heritage sites”, *Government Gazette*, No.658, 30 July 2010.

The focus of the celebrations that accompanied the declarations was clearly on the communities in Soweto where the graves are situated. Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi's names are already honoured extensively in the national public space and Joseph and Ngoyi feature in the Hall of Heroes in Freedom Park. The schedule for declaration of the graves of Ngoyi and Joseph was announced by the Minister of Arts and Culture in 2009 with the deadline for completion set for August 2010. SAHRA consulted with various stakeholders including the Ngoyi<sup>85</sup> and Manye<sup>86</sup> families, and, most prominently, the ANCWL, who, according to Troy Phili, partly 'own' the legacies of these women.<sup>87</sup> The special consideration given to the input by the ANCWL is noteworthy. If the ANCWL 'owns' the political legacy of these women as a result of their affiliation with the organisation and proclaims them as *their* heroines it certainly supports accusations of the ANC reaping political gain from such commemorative efforts. Of course, honoured as iconic anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists official rhetoric will emphasise the political legacies (reconstructed and re-imagined) these women have left behind. Yet, the clear division made by SAHRA and DAC between the personal lives (by consulting with families) and the political lives (by involving the ANCWL) of these women indicates an official government preoccupation with only the political aspects of these women's lives to which they claim uncontested 'ownership'.<sup>88</sup>

This claim of 'ownership' also illustrates the conflation of state and party symptomatic of the ANC one party dominance in government. The state, governed by the dominant ANC employs state institutions and state funding to publically acknowledge the political legacies of individuals historically affiliated to the ANC. The ANC, as the dominant party in South Africa, provided the platform for the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. This bolsters its claim that its rule is necessary for social progress and democracy.<sup>89</sup> Of course, the mass support that the ANC enjoys is determined by its century of resistance to oppression and its ability to appear as a party that represents often conflicting class and ethnic interests

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<sup>85</sup> The Ngoyi family would also represent Helen Joseph. Despite attempts made by SAHRA, no relatives of Helen Joseph were located.

<sup>86</sup> Charlotte's Maxeke's family. Maxeke had no living direct descendants to consult with.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Troy Phili, 23 March 2011, Pretoria.

<sup>88</sup> Uncontested because the few remaining relatives of Maxeke and Ngoyi are not prominent figures and have little political clout to raise any contestations if they wished to do so. Interviews and communication with SAHRA representatives has not indicated any concerns being raised with family members, however, and the ANCWL remained the main stakeholder in the commemorative event.

<sup>89</sup> Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, "The Dominant Party Regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A Comparative Assessment" in Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins (eds), *The Awkward Embrace: One Party Domination and Democracy*, (Harwood Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, 1999), p.3.

which is a study in its own right.<sup>90</sup> What is of importance here is that this conflation is being entrenched by the ANC laying claim to political legacies and presenting these narratives of ANC-driven resistance to the public as national heritage. In this manner, the ANC becomes the sole founding party of the post-apartheid nation through its creation and dissemination (through state institutions) of an ANC-dominated meta-narrative of ‘The Struggle’ and retains the power to silence counter-narratives that might emerge in the public landscape.

The declaration of the graves as national heritage sites meant that they would form part of the national estate. The combined grave of Ngoyi and Joseph already form part of a ‘Heroes Acre’ in Avalon Cemetery. While the respective families and the ANCWL had placed grave markers and headstones at the grave, SAHRA, in consultation with the various stakeholders, dismantled these to replace them with a new combined headstone acknowledging both women and their association with the ANC – whose flag features prominently on the headstone – and their dedication to found a non-racial South Africa. Phili had been working for approximately seven years on ensuring the declaration of Maxeke’s grave and, within the context of a larger Women’s Legacy Project, was able to push for the inclusion of this declaration in 2010.<sup>91</sup>

As already indicated, Maxeke does not enjoy the same level of official prominence as Ngoyi and Joseph; perhaps attributable to her pre-apartheid era activism. Despite this, Maxeke was a significant ‘glass ceiling’ breaker of her time. Hailed as the ‘Mother of African Freedom’,<sup>92</sup> Maxeke, born in 1874, became the first South African black woman to complete a B.Sc. degree at Wilberforce University. On her return to South Africa, Maxeke and her husband were also responsible for the launch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa. Her involvement in the SANNC through her husband and serving as a strong organisational force in the 1913 women’s march, Maxeke founded and served as the first president of the Bantu Women’s League in 1918. Maxeke also set up an employment bureau after her husband’s death and was later employed as a probation officer attached to the courts. Her continued focus on social work saw Maxeke as a frequently invited speaker at church conferences and public meetings concerned with social issues. Walker indicates that while biographical details of Maxeke’s life are scant her “life experience was far removed from that

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<sup>90</sup> For further reading consult Giliomee and Simkins, “The Dominant Party Regimes” in Giliomee and Simkins (eds), *The Awkward Embrace*, (1999).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Hailed as such by Dr A.B Xuma, president of the ANC, at the All-African Convention in 1935, *Umsebenzi*, quoted in Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.36.

of the average black woman at the time. Her career was remarkably similar to that of contemporary male leaders in the ANC.”<sup>93</sup> Of course, Maxeke did not enjoy equal status within the SANNK leadership as women were considered as auxiliary ‘members’. Despite her own life representing a radical break with the gender norms of the time, Maxeke did not reject conventional attitudes about women and did not question “the assumption that women’s primary function was a domestic one.”<sup>94</sup> She was also clear that a women’s organisation’s primary function was to work alongside the men in order to achieve a multiracial society free from oppression by a white minority government.<sup>95</sup>

Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi were similarly remarkable women for their times. Ngoyi was born in 1911 and following her impressive involvement and rise within the ranks of the Garment Workers Union (GWU), joined the ANC during their Defiance Campaign in the 1950s. With her powerful oratory skills she was quickly elected as president of the ANCWL and served as the president of FEDSAW in 1956. Moreover, she was the first woman to be elected to the ANC NEC. She was arrested in December 1956 and stood trial for high treason until she was acquitted in 1961. In 1962 she was served her first banning orders which, barring a short termination, would last until her death in 1980. Ngoyi was buried in Avalon Cemetery in Soweto. Helen Joseph, born in London in 1905, completed an English degree at London University and moved to South Africa in 1931 after teaching in India. Joseph joined the GWU after serving as an information and welfare officer in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force during the war. She was a founder member of the Congress of Democrats and, like Ngoyi, played a pivotal part in FEDSAW as its national secretary and in the organising of the 1956 march. Joseph carries the tragic distinction as being the first person to be placed under house arrest in 1962 after being charged with high treason in 1956 and also survived several assassination attempts. Her last ban was lifted in 1985. Joseph died in 1992 at the age of 87 and, reflecting a changing South African political landscape, was buried in a shared grave with Ngoyi. Joseph was the first white individual to be buried at Avalon Cemetery. Ngoyi and Joseph had a deep friendship despite their vastly different backgrounds. Joseph had come into the anti-apartheid movement from a position of privilege but soon realised that the privileges that she took for granted as a white woman in South Africa were based on the exploitation of black labour and the suppression of black liberties.<sup>96</sup> Ngoyi, the

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<sup>93</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p.38.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163.

daughter of a washerwoman, came from an impoverished background and no longer being able to find solace from apartheid and its oppressive legislation in religion, entered into politics and excelled in every organisation she joined. As leading figures within FEDSAW, both women were instrumental in the organisation of the 1956 march and other FEDSAW activities. Moreover, they were the only women to be singled out and brought up on charges of treason in 1956 along with twenty-eight male colleagues. As the deeply dedicated leaders of the 1956 anti-pass campaign, as treason trialists, as ANC-affiliated heroines, and sharing a friendship that defied apartheid legislation, Joseph and Ngoyi are considered in official discourse as embodying the spirit of the Rainbow Nation and have been considered as foundational icons since the advent of democracy in South Africa.<sup>97</sup>

The celebrations for the declaration of the graves of these three iconic women as national heritage sites took place at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown, Soweto, between the Ten Pillars representing the ten clauses of the Freedom Charter. The event commenced early on 20 August 2010. Then Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulama Xingwana<sup>98</sup> was accompanied by a high profile delegation including Winnie Mandela and representatives of the ANCWL, who visited the Ngoyi and Manye families (identified as the main stakeholders despite the ANCWL seemingly taking charge of the day's events) for tea. The delegation then moved to Regina Mundi Church for an interfaith ceremony which represented the different religious denominations of Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi and for which buses were provided to commute members of the public and the ANCWL to attend. From here, the families, official government delegation, and attendees visited the grave of Maxeke at Nancefield Cemetery, followed by a visit to the combined grave of Ngoyi and Joseph at Avalon Cemetery to announce the declarations and unveil the new headstones.

The short speech given by Minister Xingwana for the occasion of the declaration outlines the achievements of the three women honoured at this event and their ANC affiliation is emphasised. She firstly placed their activism in a context of the struggle for national liberation and emphasises that their extraordinary contribution was made for all South Africans:

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<sup>97</sup> Lilian Ngoyi Square, Lilian Ngoyi Street, Lilian Ngoyi Community Clinic, Lilian Ngoyi Sports Centre, Lilian Ngoyi Hall, Lilian Ngoyi patrol vessel, Helen Joseph Hospital, Helen Joseph Street, Helen Joseph House are amongst several of the public spaces named or renamed in honour of these women. Both women have memorial lectures held annually in their honour, while Ngoyi also has a memorial dedicated to her at her home. Charlotte Maxeke has an academic hospital, several streets and a memorial lecture named her honour.

<sup>98</sup> Now Minister of the Department of Women, Children, and People with Disabilities.

They acted within a collective and a common struggle for a free country. They marched for all of us. They opened the road to a new reality. Through their heroic and fearless actions, they paved the way for a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.<sup>99</sup>

Reminiscent of the language of the transition, Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi were contextualised as foundational figures whose actions contributed to the founding of the democratic state. Xingwana framed women's contribution in terms of sacrifice: "They were courageous and outspoken. They could not be silenced. They were willing to sacrifice their lives for their convictions."<sup>100</sup> This was echoed in Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoane-Mashabane's speech in Limpopo for National Women's Day in 2010. Addressing a gathering, she stated: "We are assembled to pay tribute to the heroism displayed by the martyr generation of Charlotte Maxeke, Sophie de Bruyn, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Amina Cachalia, Frances Baard and many other heroines of our country in the quest to build a just society."<sup>101</sup> Women's activism is subsumed by an ideology of martyrdom in such a statement. It effectively states that women can be acceptably and recognisably heroic if such actions are driven by a sacrifice of homes and families for the good of the 'nation'. However, for Xingwana, the great sacrifices made by these women have ensured the freedom of the nation in the present:

Today we remember the words of these women. We remember the words of Helen Joseph who declared: "*I OPENED THE ROAD FOR YOU, YOU MUST GO FORWARD.*" Today these words have even more meaning as each generation builds on the achievements of the previous one... Today we have travelled so much further on this journey that began at the beginning of the last century and took us through the popular struggles of the 1950s into the 1980s and 1990s until the present. Through the decades women have made great strides and helped to lay the foundations for our democracy. Let us remain true to the struggles of the women. Let us pledge that we too "We shall not rest" until we have won for our children their

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<sup>99</sup> Xingwana, "Speech by Minister Lulu Xingwana", 20 August 2010. At <https://www.dac.gov.za/speech-minister-ms-lulu-xingwana-commemorating-charlotte-maxeke-lillian-ngoyi-and-helen-joseph-0> accessed 25 March 2011.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Maite Nkoane-Mashabane, "Speech by Minister Maite Nkoane-Mashabane, on National Women's Day, 8 August 2010, Limpopo", at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2010/mash0810.html> accessed 25 March 2011.

fundamental rights of freedom, justice, and security”. While we have won these rights, we need to do more to ensure the full realisation of freedom, justice and security.<sup>102</sup>

She urged the nation to build upon the legacies left behind by Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph and to emulate their tireless activism to fully realise the rights for which these women sacrificed so much in the present. While Xingwana indicated that these rights have been won, she acknowledged that they have not been realised. While short, the Minister’s speech emphasised the central themes that define official representations of women’s contribution to ‘The Struggle’: martyrdom, sacrifice, and motherhood. These themes were placed in the framework of an ANC-dominated foundational mythology creation that affirms the organisation and its heroes’ and heroines’ historic dedication to freedom, non-sexism, and the creation of a non-racial South Africa. Once again, the nation was called upon to espouse the qualities of its heroines in order to realise the future ‘golden age’ in which all the historic struggles have reached their fruitful completion.

The event culminated in a ‘picnic’ for the ‘community’ under the Ten Pillars of the Freedom Charter. According to Berri Samuels, SAHRA’s public relations officer, the focus on the local communities as stakeholders in this declaration was defined by the location of the graves within these communities; the people should benefit from, be aware of, and take care of these graves in the years to come.<sup>103</sup> By encouraging the communities to take an informal form of ‘ownership’ over these graves it is hoped that a lasting sense of awareness of these women’s legacies will be created and that this will inspire a sense of historic consciousness of women’s contributions to political emancipation on a ground level. After all, in the post-apartheid state heritage is seen as an inclusive notion and embraces “things and ideas that give us *collective* identity”<sup>104</sup> and these women and their actions and sacrifices are constructed in official discourse as an aspect of the shared heritage of all South Africans. On a more functional level, the focus of SAHRA to identify and declare sites associated with liberation heroes and heroines is also an attempt to create a comprehensive heritage tourism network that could economically benefit the smaller or rural communities that many of these

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<sup>102</sup> Xingwana, “Speech by Minister Lulu Xingwana”, 20 August 2010. At <https://www.dac.gov.za/speech-minister-ms-lulu-xingwana-commemorating-charlotte-maxeke-lillian-ngoyi-and-helen-joseph-0> accessed 25 March 2011.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Berri Samuels, 16 September 2010, Johannesburg.

<sup>104</sup> David Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage, and History”, in John R. Gillis (ed), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton and New Jersey, 1994), p.43.

heroes and heroines came from.<sup>105</sup> However, the continued focus on identifying sites associated with ‘liberation heroes and heroines’ is intrinsically linked to the entrenchment of a post-apartheid foundational mythology rooted in the history of ‘The Struggle’. Commemorating these individuals and events is also an attempt to maintain a specific version of this past that adheres to the official narrative. This does not mean that no contesting or alternative versions of these histories exist, but rather that these are suppressed by the official funding, celebration, and organisation of commemorative events.

According to Samuels, the picnic concept for the celebration of the declaration was the result of a well known conversation between Joseph and Ngoyi. Both women spent several years under house arrest and Ngoyi passed away while still serving banning orders. Samuels relates that it was a dream of Joseph and Ngoyi to one day sit under a tree and enjoy a picnic together. This served as the point of departure to develop the event concept. It was significant to include Maxeke who also formed part of this declaration and had to be ensured equal status in this event. Due to Maxeke’s historical precedence – chronologically and as a pioneer of the women’s movement – and the location of the picnic, it was decided that the height of the pillars of Freedom Square would represent both the trees that Joseph and Ngoyi dreamed of and the historic precedence set by Maxeke. Metaphorically, Maxeke would represent the tree under which Ngoyi and Joseph wished to one day sit together. To further develop the Maxeke/tree analogy, SAHRA requested children at local schools to write short messages to Maxeke on laminated green paper leaves. These leaves were temporarily attached to the pillars to render them more tree-like. Samuels stressed the involvement of mainly women in this event. For Samuels, it was meant to serve as a rewarding event for the women participants in that it stripped away the anonymity of the seemingly empty names that grace street signs and buildings, and give renewed meaning and contexts to the legacies of these honoured icons whose lives and actions have the power to inspire the women and young girls of today and in the future.<sup>106</sup> This reflects the somewhat patronising official rhetoric that seemingly encapsulates all Women’s Day and Women’s Month events. Although commemorative events such as these might ideologically inspire a new generation, they carry no practical impact to change socio-economic conditions. They serve to ideologically inspire a sense of patriotism, national identity, responsible and exemplary citizenship, and a

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Troy Phili, 23 March 2011, Pretoria.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Berri Samuels, 16 September 2010, Johannesburg.

celebration of the current political order (and, indeed, ruling party) for which these women sacrificed so much.

## **Conclusion**

The annual commemoration of the 9 August 1956 anti-pass march implies a national reflection in honour of a mass mobilisation of women in resistance to an extension of oppressive apartheid laws. With commemorative events taking place in a post-apartheid setting they assume a celebratory tone while official rhetoric declares that the goals that these women united for across racial and class boundaries have been achieved. Although it is necessary to officially commemorate women's contributions to the achievement of a democratic South Africa in order to allow it to become part of a shared heritage that acknowledges women's extraordinary political activism in all its aspects, commemorative events are being increasingly employed to applaud a present day government on its legislative achievements in policies ensuring gender equality. This seemingly denies the fundamental harm that gender-based violence does to democratic principles as women are unable to fully assume the rights and responsibilities of citizenship as this threat undermines the constitutional recognition of women's equality. Moreover, the focus on a single founding event to 'cover' all women's contributions constructs a singular narrative of women's resistance to apartheid as being confined to resistance to pass-laws based on a shared experience of motherhood and womanhood that transcended race and class. In this way, commemoration serves to establish the women's anti-pass campaign as the central narrative of women's resistance in post-apartheid foundational mythology and its heroines as domestic, maternal, and matriarchal foundational figures. 9 August 1956 serves as the central myth of women's political resistance and has come to represent all female contribution to 'The Struggle'.

For the particular commemorative event addressed, the inclusion of Charlotte Maxeke was not in conflict with the grand narrative of women's resistance to pass laws which is rooted in the foundational mythology of 9 August 1956. Maxeke's inclusion allowed her to serve as a founding figure for the women's movement itself; an inspirational figure who pioneered the way forward for the women of 1956 but always operating from the assumed domestic responsibilities of women as mothers to their families. The declaration of these three graves as national heritage sites is symbolic of the 'nation' taking complete possession

of these founding figures; their lives reflect the values of the post-apartheid state and as shared heritage these unique women belong to the nation. Their sacrifices for and dedication to the founding of a non-racial South Africa stresses citizen duties over claiming citizen rights and as the ANC-led government claims ownership of their legacies it is implied that the South African citizen has a duty towards the regime of liberation as they purportedly embody the values that these women's lives have been assigned in post-apartheid official discourse.

## Conclusion

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### **Pitied Plumage: Recalling Iconic Women's Legacies in the Present**

*We pity the plumage but forget the dying bird.*<sup>1</sup>

- Percy Bysshe Shelley

Shelley's title for his address to the British people on the occasion of the death of Princess Charlotte finds resonance in the dead body politics of female icons in post-apartheid South Africa. The public and official mourning of female founding figures is defined by expressions of loss; significantly the loss of the values that these women embodied and an encouragement for the nation to emulate these lost lives. These women become part of a nationalist pantheon of heroes and heroines which reduces lived lives to symbolic legacies carefully constructed and narrated to ostensibly inspire national consciousness and pride. South Africa has a deeply traumatic past from which to draw inspiration for political mourning and commemoration in the present. The eventual 'victory' of 'The Struggle' which resulted in the democratic state has cast such deaths into a narrative of martyrdom, unrelenting dedication to freedom, and eventual victorious commemoration – all which are powerful contributors to the creation of a post-apartheid foundation myth. At the time of their death, burial, and commemoration the women whose lives and legacies have been the focus of this thesis were briefly cast (back) into the national spotlight and they were honoured in official rhetoric as heroines of resistance, (grand)mothers of the nation, and sisters in the struggle for a democratic South Africa. Certain nations attempt to recall a 'golden age' that is located in the distant past into the present with its heroes and heroines often mythical or shrouded in nationalist mythologies. The South African heroines are present; their physical remains in their resting places have become national heritage sites and thus, form part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "We Pity the Plumage But Forget the Dying Bird: "An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte" in David Lee Clark, (ed), *Shelley's Prose*, (Fourth Estate: New York, 1988), p.164.

national estate. However, despite their presence in South African history and the fact that (with the exception of Baartman) these women have left behind their words in recorded speeches and autobiographical works, this does not render them exempt from becoming enveloped in state sanctioned (re)constructed nationalist mythologies.

Andrew Nash makes a poignant statement concerning the current ANC government's reliance on the invocation of heroes, sacrifices, and symbols when he asserts that this "is a struggle only for the recovery of the past, never for its critical interrogation; it seeks inspiration, and never self-knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Rather, the invocation of these elements which make up the nation's foundational mythology, serve to deflect from the persistent failure to deliver the socio-economic change which a successful liberation struggle was believed to entail. While the ANC government has a wealth of iconic and well-known historic male leaders to call upon in order to establish itself at the epicentre of South Africa's post-apartheid foundational mythology, honouring female icons plays an important gendered role within this mythology creation. While the promotion of women's rights has traditionally taken a backseat to the project of national liberation, the strong presence of women leaders within the ranks of the ANC and the organisation of mass protest action has meant that the call for equal treatment was never truly silenced and was enshrined in the new constitution of the post-apartheid state. Tragically, however, constitutional protection never translated into social equalities and South Africa remains a country tormented by high levels of violence committed against women. National Women's Day and Women's Month events attempt to highlight the unconscionable levels of violence perpetrated against women and children in South African society. Yet, official 'celebrations' around these events fail to address the deeply complicated and varied constructions of gender and gender relations in society. Official rhetoric at such events tends to centre around declarations of 'empowering' South African women through education and government programmes focusing on economic empowerment. Often, the iconic women leaders of the past are called upon to remind the nation of the 'strong' women that fought for liberation and gender equality and it is often during Women's Month that special commemorative events celebrating specific heroines of the past take place. The burial of Baartman and the declaration of Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph's graves as national heritage sites were deliberately planned for Women's Day and Women's Month. This ultimately defined them as important foundational figures by

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Nash, "The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 19, 1, 1999, p.75.

associating their legacies and remains with this foundational event which is now celebrated as a national holiday. Simultaneously, the rituals of mourning, burial, and commemoration are employed at such events in official rhetoric to render their legacies as sacred to the nation. It declared that these women were martyrs and icons whose sacrifices and struggles contributed to the democratic freedoms enjoyed by South African citizens today and it is imperative that the nation emulate the qualities that made these women iconic. While Ngoyi and Maxeke are the only women that can truly be considered as emerging leaders within the ranks of the ANC, Joseph's close association with the ANC and the Women's League as an anti-apartheid activist and close friend of Ngoyi have seen her become part of ANC heritage. Baartman predates the organised African nationalist struggle but with the ANC government spearheading and funding the repatriation processes of her remains she has been drawn into an ANC legacy of resistance to oppression. In this way, all four women have become foundational icons for ANC regime legitimation in the present. This thesis has shown through the application of feminist CDA that official rhetoric has employed, and indeed, exploited their legacies to counter criticism, opposition, and civil unrest which arose in response to perceived poor government performance in terms of service delivery, socio-economic transformation, and in adequately addressing high levels of gender based violence.

The examination and analysis in this thesis of this official rhetoric within a context of public/official mourning and remembrance has identified how the dead body politics of these iconic women have contributed to a new foundational mythology for the post-apartheid state. It has also demonstrated the official appropriation of their remains and legacies for the purposes of regime legitimation – especially in times of social unrest. The case studies examined in this thesis have illustrated several salient points about the importance of a continued study of expressions of nationalism in the post-apartheid state. It is clear that official articulations of nationalism issued within a context of dead body politics tend to be accorded a deep sense of respect through the sacredness ascribed to death, burial, and dead bodies. The deaths, burial, and commemoration of women who are considered as having contributed to the advent of the democratic state presented an opportunity for expressions of state-sanctioned narratives of the 'nation'. Criticism of the current regime is intentionally silenced by such narratives for the purpose of regime legitimation and sanctification, foundational mythology creation, and the specific constructions of normative standards of womanhood in South Africa. The invocation of the heroines of the past attempts to silence opposing voices to official rhetoric and the ANC has, indeed, labelled such opposition as

‘counter-revolutionary’ and as being outside of, or even opposed to the South African nation and the existence of a democratic state. This effectively attempts to create a state-sanctioned meta-narrative of the ANC’s past struggle credentials which is consolidated by the creation of the post-apartheid ‘nation’ in order to validate ANC rule in the present in an attempt to ensure a hold on power in the future.

The rhetoric of the South African government suggests a commitment to the empowerment of women. Yet, the language employed in official gender discourse conversely continues to situate women primarily as mothers and wives and represents women as performing roles and occupations traditionally associated with domestic femininity. This fails to challenge, indeed, even supports, persisting patriarchal structures in South Africa with dire consequences for public perceptions of constructions of gender and gender roles. By examining the three central events that inspire public mourning, namely death, burial, and commemoration, and by shifting the focus away from male to female iconic figures, this thesis has demonstrated that post-apartheid nationalisms seek to re-establish a discourse of normative domestic femininity in South Africa. Successive post-apartheid nationalist ideologies have created official meta-narratives of heroic, iconic, and foundational female figures that deny them true historical agency and re-domesticates and reduces these women to subjects of a foundational mythology of resistance to oppression and ‘The Struggle’. Baartman found prominence as a national heroine during the transitional period. Her repatriation and burial became significant events in the creation of a foundational mythology of the post-apartheid state initially constructed as the ‘Rainbow Nation’. Historically distant and utterly silent, Baartman was a blank canvas on which narratives of the nation could be written. The study of Baartman has demonstrated that foundational figures are not static identities – their meanings shift and alter with present day socio-political changes. Baartman, initially a foundational mother, also became a representative of Mbeki’s African Renaissance philosophy and HIV/AIDS denialist policies while her ‘fame’ as transitional icon was also employed in the promotion of Khoisan rights.

The death of Sisulu occurred at a time where service delivery protests and internal conflict between the ANC and members of the ANCYL featured prominently in the media and public awareness. This socio-political atmosphere was reflected in the official rhetoric issued about Sisulu’s death and at her funeral. Sisulu, a living foundational figure of the post-apartheid state, became a symbol for the nation in death. The emphasis on her specific qualities was a clear attempt to reassure the nation that the ANC had a long track record of

dedication and servitude that is ingrained in the party's character and which trumped any failures in the present. In other words, the ANC's claim to be *the* liberation party provides an alibi for its failures to deliver its promises of a better life for all. Moreover, her status as 'mother of the nation', her celebrated marriage to Walter Sisulu and her unrelenting dedication to family was employed as symbolic of the importance of the normative family unit and domestic femininity; female activism was (re)cast as remaining solely concerned with women's roles as wives and mothers in official rhetoric. This sentiment was echoed in the commemorative celebrations of the declaration of the graves of Maxeke, Joseph, and Ngoyi as national heritage sites. Women's political activism was almost exclusively framed in terms of the anti-pass campaigns which attempted to bring together women across the racial and class divides through shared experiences such as motherhood. By emphasising this specific element of the campaign normative standards of domestic femininity are reinforced. This assertion is supported by the terminology employed in the project document of the Women's Legacy project which was launched by these declarations and which labelled the women it had selected to honour as 'midwives of political emancipation'.

While this thesis has firstly identified and subsequently demonstrated two significant trends within post-apartheid official discourses of nationalism within a context of the deliberate construction of 'suitable' gender discourses and increasingly aggressive regime legitimisation, it has not been able to measure the effectiveness of this rhetoric in expressions of public consciousness. This could be a valuable resource in establishing the efficacy of expressions of gendered nationalism and foundation myths amongst citizens and serve as a marker as to how such official rhetoric is internalised and expressed in public discourse and social relations. Thus, this thesis opens up the possibility for two separate but detailed practical studies that might investigate the lived results of nationalist ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa. Qualitative research, possibly supported by quantitative data, could perhaps reflect how the public school history syllabus influences understandings of resistance politics amongst South Africa's future voters, while an examination of internet forums, blogs, and reader responses to news articles both on online media and print media might yield interesting demographic reflections of public responses to official nationalist rhetoric. On the surface level it may be suggested that South Africans, in general, are fairly politically aware but it might be prudent to investigate how public awareness of history and historical events influences this interest in present day socio-economic politics and general political knowledge and its expression.

Nationalist motivated dead body politics are not unique to post-apartheid South Africa. An opportunity exists for a broader global comparative study of post-colonial nations and the roles played by the dead body politics of female foundational figures or female liberation activists in foundational mythology creation and regime legitimation. While each 'nation' is unique with a specific history that resulted in its construction, most human societies afford a sacred quality to their dead – even more so when the deceased was an important founding figure. Post-colonial female resistance/liberation icons such as the Jamaican national heroine Nanny, Elma Francois of Trinidad & Tobago, and Cuban national icon Mariana Grajales Coello ('The Mother of Cuba') could provide interesting parallels with female South African anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists within a comparative study of female dead body politics. The celebration of famous female Indian independence activists in the post-colonial era could also provide a rich source for a post-colonial comparative study of female dead body politics within a nationalist and foundational mythology construction context and the high levels of violence committed against women in both countries. Margaret Jolly briefly examined comparisons between India's and South Africa's 'Mothers of the Nation' in her 1994 article "Motherlands? Some Notes on Women and Nationalism in India and Africa"<sup>3</sup> and could serve as a point of departure for such a study. As two decades have passed since the publication of this article and South Africa since became a democratic state new parallels could be drawn between two countries that honour – even revere – iconic women in their post-colonial nationalist heroic pantheons but continue to experience high levels of gender violence.

Within a local context, if the SAHRA and DAC Women's Legacy Project gains greater impetus and is completed over the following years it would allow for a more focused study of foundational mythology creation and regime legitimation through female dead body politics in South Africa. As the project is further developed it would be of interest to observe which sub-projects receive funding and from whom and which of these will be first in line for initiation and completion and to subsequently address this through a pertinent questioning of why certain projects involving specific women receive greater official attention than others. Moreover, as such projects are revealed in their completed forms how will they be represented in official rhetoric? What narratives of the nation will be ascribed to these women's legacies and inscribed on their remains and what do such narratives reflect about

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Jolly, "Motherlands? Some Notes on Women and Nationalism in India and Africa", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 5, 1&2, 1994.

the present? Moreover, the development of the Women's Living Monument will provide the opportunity for a new study of the 1956 women's march as foundational event and the official attention this historic event continues to receive in the present.

As South Africa embarks on its third decade as a democratic state under the political leadership of the ANC it has become clear that, despite a deeply divided history, government remains focused on the past in order to legitimate its rule in the present with a clear focus on retaining this power in the future. Whether it chooses to recall the oppression of the past or the glorious leaders of its (increasingly constructed) illustrious history as the party of liberation, in situating the ANC at the centre of post-apartheid foundational mythology it is employing reconstructed narratives of the nation for the purposes of regime legitimation. With the population of South Africa being highly aware of high levels of crime in society, especially gender violence, the dead body politics of iconic women currently play an important part in this regime legitimation. By demonstrating, displaying, parading, and exploiting the ANC's historic line-up of powerful female leaders or incorporating the legacies of influential women who had no official relationship with the ANC into an ANC dominated foundational mythology, the ANC-dominated government reassures the 'nation' of its 'continued dedication' to ideologies of gender equality – despite the deep historic contradictions that are conveniently forgotten and erased from official narratives of the past. This thesis has shown through its discussion of the interstices of public/official mourning and the dead body politics of women cast as 'foundational' that nationalism remains a powerful and influential force in the post-apartheid state. Despite the country's long and uneasy relationship with nationalist movements in the past, post-apartheid nationalisms continue to be wielded as a weapon that silences criticism and constructs narratives of the past and of nation that are politically salient for the ruling party. Initially employed as a force to forge 'nation' out of a divided country in order to enable swift and relatively peaceful socio-political transition, nationalist ideologies have been systematically employed for regime legitimation through the construction of a foundational mythology that favours the ruling party.

This thesis has been an investigation of more recent post-apartheid articulations of nationalism – so neglected in the past decade – and aims to start a dialogue on how official expressions of nationalist ideology require in-depth analysis in order to consider the social and political stakes for South Africa as rainbow nationalism has seemingly run its course and official declarations of the attainment of gender equality are clearly flawed. While official

articulations of nationalism may appear exhausted and inconsequential this thesis has shown that it would be unwise to dismiss the continuing popular appeal of nationalist sentiment as it is a powerful expression of societal opinion and party-political agendas which is reflected in the continued popularity and rise of nationalist movements globally. Indeed, globalisation has not resulted in the demise of nationalisms. If anything, it has given them extra traction in certain countries.<sup>4</sup>

The physical remains of the women selected for this study have become national property much in the same way that their legacies – continuously re-cast, re-imagined, re-interpreted – have become part of the nation’s founding myth. A temporary official silence has since cast their narratives into a national historic repository: they are ‘present’ but not necessarily actively utilised by official rhetoric. Yet, these women’s status as founding figures and national heroines and the physical presence of their remains and graves in the public landscape implies that their particular legacies can be called upon at any time to remind the ‘nation’ of the sacrifices that were made for it by the ruling ANC in the struggle for a democratic South Africa. Their remains and legacies can be employed as inspiration when the nation appears to require it. Yet, their physical presence in the public space is also a permanent reminder – however empty of meaning the display of their names on government buildings and road signs might initially appear – of a past now re-imagined as a meta-narrative, a foundation myth of struggle, martyrdom, and sacrifice by the ruling party of the present for the nation. A succession of presents with an ever-changing variety of political agendas continues to define the meaning and significance of these iconic women in South African society as official articulations of nationalism envision a future golden age. This assertion of a future golden age, ultimately, is what binds the nation together; it is the conceptualisation of a common destiny forged from a history of tragedy in which Baartman, Sisulu, Maxeke, Ngoyi, and Joseph played a central role. As foundational mothers, grandmothers, and sisters these women have become the inspiration for a future generation of national citizens. Yet, their iconisation in the present is, tragically, a reflection of a nationalism that seeks to silence oppositional voices in favour of a grandiose canon of struggle history. Building on a lengthy history of nationalist movements that have employed male-dominated constructions of ideal womanhood in furthering male nationalist aspirations, these women have come to represent all South African women. The *Volksmoeders* of Afrikaner nationalism and the mothers of the nation of African nationalism have made way

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Kaldor, “Nationalism and Globalisation”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1, 1/2, 2004.

for a new generation of struggle heroines who serve as the heroines of the post-apartheid nation. Yet, a continuity clearly persists; iconic foundational women remain symbols – the ‘pitied plumage’ of the nation – and no matter how positive that symbol might be, they are still symbols – not people.

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