"So Often There's Been People To Speak, But No-one to Listen:" Gender, Memory, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa

Brian August Bobb

Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara
Senior Honors Thesis
June 16, 2000

"SO OFTEN THERE'S BEEN PEOPLE TO SPEAK, BUT NO ONE TO LISTEN": GENDER, MEMORY, AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

B. A. Bobb and S. F. Miescher, Department of History

In late July 1997, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, originally established to investigate the experiences of those who suffered human rights violations under the apartheid government, convened a special Gender Hearing. The Gender Hearing provided an opportunity for sixteen women to come forward and speak about experiences that were representative of the experience of hundreds of South African women. Through an exploration of their testimonies, this paper demonstrates that gender is a critical but often overlooked factor in understanding the historical experience of Africans living under apartheid. Gender was a determining factor in the positions they occupied and power they held in South African society as well a factor which guided the actions of the apartheid state which inflicted the violations of human rights the women suffered. Secondly, this paper analyzes the ways in which the collective and private memories of the apartheid past are deployed in the arena of the public hearing to create new social spaces and identities for women as part of the process of state formation in contemporary South Africa.

Contents

"So Often There's Been People to Speak, But No One to Listen:"
Gender, Memory, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa

by
Brian Bobb

The Aftermath of Apartheid: Introduction and Thesis

On the morning of July 28, 1997, in Johannesburg, South Africa, a group of women met before a Commission of government-appointed researchers and investigators to speak, some of them for the first time, about their experiences living under the recently defunct apartheid state. Some of these women who knew each other embraced in the hall outside the room where the hearings were held, remembering and briefly reliving moments of pain they had experienced. Some of these women were coming to speak publicly about their private suffering for the first time, and waited with relatives for their moment behind the microphone, some fearful, some with determination. Inside the room where the hearings were held observers, reporters, and cameramen took their seats and focused their attention on the empty chairs, the silent microphones placed at the center of the room. The setting and atmosphere of that morning recalled a courtroom on the first day of a trial, except that in this case there was no prosecution or defense in the traditional sense. That day there were only witnesses who came forward to testify about their memories of the past.

In 1995, the Parliament of the newly democratic South Africa passed the National Unity and Reconciliation Act[1] which charged the newly formed Truth and Reconciliation Commission

---

[1]Desmond Tutu, et al. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa,* vol. 1 ch. 2:1. Full text of the National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995 is available at [illegible] or through Unwembe's index of government-related internet sites and

(TRC) with the task of investigating gross violations carried out by the government or its agents between the years of 1960 and 1994. After its establishment, the TRC quickly divided its duties among three separate committees. The Human Rights Violations Committee (HRV) was charged with investigating those gross violations of human rights specified in the Act, the Amnesty Committee (AC) heard applications from individuals seeking amnesty from prosecution for committing such crimes, and the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee (R&R) determined to what extent victims should receive reparations for their suffering, and recommended legal and policy changes to the government based on the findings of the other committees. Sub-committees were also formed; the Gender Committee is one example of a sub-committee formed as a branch of the HRV.

During duration of its investigation, the TRC heard statements from 20,000 South Africans reporting human rights violations and over 7,000 applicants seeking amnesty. As of this writing, the Amnesty Committee continues to hear applications on a regular basis, though the bulk of its work is now finished.[2] In 1998 the Final Report of the TRC was presented to Nelson Mandela, who was South Africa's president at the time. Shortly thereafter the Final Report was made available in five printed volumes and a CD-ROM. One should think of this document as a summary of the TRC's activities, and not a detailed report in terms of individual witness statements, which are referenced but not included in the Final Report. Supplementary materials, such as the submissions made by various groups under investigation, hearing transcripts, press

---

documents at www.polity.org.za.

[2]See the Truth and Reconciliation Commission website at [redacted] for a list of current and upcoming Amnesty hearings.

releases, and the text of the legislative acts which established and governed the TRC are available in the United States via the TRC's website at www.truth.org.za. For example, the Women's Hearing is the subject of a single chapter in volume four of the Final Report, but the submission from the Center for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) and the transcripts of the hearing are available online.

The special committee concerned with gender issues, established by the newly democratic South African government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), convened the Women's Hearing for two days in late July 1997. These hearings were intended to build upon the work already begun a year earlier by the Human Rights Violations Committee, which in the Transvaal regions held a series of public hearings in approximately eight-week cycles, to allow people who had suffered "gross violations of human rights" under the directive of the apartheid state between 1960 and 1994. The Johannesburg office of the TRC also held other Special Event Hearings in addition to the Women's Hearing, including a Children and Youth Hearing, a National Hearing which investigated violations by individuals and groups working within the legal system, and, perhaps most famously, the Mandela United Football Club hearings, which investigated the actions of a group of African men who were alleged to have committed human rights violations, including the death of ANC activist Stompie Seipei.

At the beginning of the Hearing, on the morning of July 28, the Chairperson presiding over the day's hearings called Reverend Vanessa Mackenzie forward to lead the participants in a brief prayer. Part of her prayer went as follows:

> "We give You thanks today for women without whom we would not be at this place where we are today. And so we ask, Lord, that You enable all of us today to weep with them, to share with them their pain, so that we can move together to wholeness and to freedom and to liberty in the truest sense of the word. Thank you for Your presence with us. Thank you

> for Your love for us. And just enable us to move forward today in Your strength. Be with those who will speak. Be with those who will listen. And we give You thanks Lord that You have called people to listen, because so often there's been people to speak, but no-one to listen."[3]

Reverend Mackenzie's prayer encapsulates many of the issues that were on the minds of the witnesses and Commission members at the hearing. The prayer called attention to the fact that women had been integral to the struggle for national liberation, that recognition on a national level, in the public space of a government sanctioned investigation was important for the situation of women in South Africa. The prayer also highlighted the importance of recognizing women's voices at the national level. Many women had come forward at Human Rights Violations hearings in the year leading up to the Women's Hearing, but it was noted in the CALS submission and in the TRC's Final Report that the majority of these women spoke as the wives, daughters, and sisters of men who had suffered human rights violations.[4] In establishing the procedures and rules by which the Commission operated, the Commissioners had intended a gender neutral approach; in doing so, they neglected to consider the persuasive argument that men and women experienced apartheid in fundamentally different ways.[5]

The Women's Hearing was a project which originally was not proposed by the TRC's Johannesburg office, but which arose out of a year-long series of conferences at the University of Witwatersrand's CALS, entitled, "Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." In

---

[3]Rev. Vanessa Mackenzie, 28 July 1997.

[4]Desmond Tutu, et al. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, vol. 4, ch. 10:

[5]Ibid, ch. 4:

May 1996 the CALS made a formal submission to the TRC[6] which proposed that gender was an integral part of social analysis, that the oppression and subordination of women was grounded in socially constructed differences between men and women, and that the TRC was unable to present "as complete a picture as possible" by failing to consider gender as a category of analysis in the investigation of human rights violations.

Sixteen women came forward to testify at the Women's Hearing, which was held over a period of two days in late July of 1997. The hearings were open to the public and the media – both print journalists and a television crew were present to record the day's events. Witnesses who came forward took either an oath or an affirmation, and had their testimonies recorded for later transcription. The Commissioners' role in the hearings was not to question or cross-examine the witnesses, rather, they "guided" the testimony of the witnesses by maintaining an atmosphere at the hearing which focused on the witnesses themselves, and by providing cues which helped direct testimonies along the lines of gender issues raised by the CALS submission.

One of this paper's principal objectives is to contribute to the growing body of secondary scholarship on the relationship between gender and the state through an examination of the experiences of women who were oppressed and violated at the hands of their society. Rather than think about the state as a body which governs historical subjects, it is useful to think about the relationship between the state and subjects as that of a set of institutions and agencies which creates and reinforces gendered categories of "men" and "women," that is, that the fundamental

---

[6]Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjies, "Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," May 1996. Available at www.truth.org.za.

structures of the state, such as law, are shot through with notions of gender.[7] This relationship is also founded upon the specific notions of power as conceived by Michel Foucault, that the perception of the state as a monolithic and unitary tool of domination is an illusion. Rather, we should think about power as an omnipresent force, which comes not only from above but also from below, as a multiplicity of force relations deployed in a strategic situation in a society.[8] Accumulations of these force relations along certain lines, such as gender, ethnicity, or class, contribute to the creation of hegemonies, but these hegemonies should be understood as an accumulation of force relations rather than the seizure of state power as a tool or weapon of the ruling class.

This conception of power can also inform definitions of sexuality which go beyond the essentialist or naturalist approaches of sex-role theory and treat sexuality as an appropriation of the body by an ideological discourse, that is, that sexuality, like gender, is a socially constructed phenomenon.[9] Further, I point out, through a periodization of the experiences of these women, that categories such as "women" or "men" are useful insofar as we think of their definitions as dynamic and constantly changing[10], or that these categories may be expanded to encompass

---

[7]See Linzi Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History," *Journal of African History,* 33 (1992), 441-465 for a discussion of gender as one of the basic organizing principles of the state.

[8]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction,* vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1990), 92.

[9]David Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?" *History and Theory,* 28:3 (1989), 257-275.

[10]Manicom, 454. See also Sandra Greene, *Ethnicity and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe.* (Heinemann, 1996) introduction for a discussion of the advantage of adopting dynamic categorical definitions in relation to both gender and ethnicity.

multiple and sometimes competing definitions of masculinity or femininity.[11] Mapping patterns in these changing categories and relationships can help us identify the relationship between gender and state formation in twentieth century South African history.

This definition of the relationship between women and the state in South Africa runs counter to previous definitions or theoretical systems established in secondary material.

The second objective of this paper is the analysis of the ways these experiences are remembered, privately and collectively. Maurice Halbwachs, in his seminal work on collective memory, put forth the idea that human beings remember best as a part of a group, that memories are deeply influenced by the values and perceptions of the society we live in.[12] Other scholars of collective memory have taken his ideas further in case studies of memory projects in contemporary society, one of the most notable being Iwona Irwin-Zarecka's exploration of memory using the Holocaust as a starting point.[13] Both authors emphasize that an individual's memory of past events is strongly influenced by the collective group to which one belongs; Irwin-Zarecka also puts forth the idea that collective memories are most completely located within a set of texts, monuments, and interactions which are shared by the group. She also

---

[11]Examples of multiple and competing forms of masculinity can be found in Luise White, "Separating the Men From the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-1959," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23:1 (1990), 1-25, and in Stephan Miescher, "The Making of Presbyterian Teachers: Masculinities, Subjectivity, and Programs of Education in Colonial Ghana," forthcoming.

[12]Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) trans. Lewis Coser.

[13]Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994). See also Dennis Laumann, "Remembering and Forgetting the German Occupation of the Central Volta Region of Ghana," Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999.

argues that collective memories are imbued with moral imperatives for the group. This paper seeks to identify through the examination of witness testimonies a collective memory specific to women which also carries a set of imperatives which guide both the "pragmatic" and "strategic" gender concerns of South African women.[14] It also sets out to map the often indistinct border which exists between the private and collective perception of the past; people do not always remember as a part of a larger group, and their attitudes toward a shared experience are not always shaped by the weight of the moral imperatives embedded in a collective memory. Individual women who came forward to testify at the the Women's Hearings found themselves evaluating their individual memories alongside a collective experience quickly becoming monumentalized by the TRC.

In the following chapter I will seek out patterns in the testimonies of the sixteen women who testified at the Women's Hearing, finding commonalities in their backgrounds and memories of their experiences. Particularly, I will identify the experiences of violence and other violations of human rights which were integral to male attempts to reinforce the subordination of women who over time were slowly upsetting the dominance of South African patriarchies in the political sphere.

Women and Apartheid Society

The experience of women who suffered human rights violations under apartheid has been

---

[14]See Gay Seidman, "'No Freedom Without the Women': Mobilization and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992," *Signs*, 18,2 (1993) 291-320 for a discussion of pragmatic and strategic gender concerns among women's groups in South Africa during apartheid. I believe these concerns are informed and shaped by the collective memories of women.

characterized by those who underwent the experience and by the TRC as a fundamentally different experience from those of men. What, then, characterizes the experiences of the women who spoke at the Gender Commission hearing? The testimonies at the Johannesburg hearing were provided by women who represented a cross-section of African women living in the Transvaal area in terms of age, wealth, education, social status, and their level of political activism. By the same token, and due to those aforementioned factors, their experiences also varied widely. After reviewing the available material, the difficulty of uniting their experiences with the framework of a single, unifying theory of gender oppression and violence becomes apparent. This is because even among African women, conventions of gender identity and gender position can vary depending on certain social factors. So too can systems of belief, and fundamental perceptions of the world vary depending upon the education, economic status, age, and even language of the subject. All of these factors impact the way in which these women regarded their world. They affect the way in which the individual filters or mediates the raw experience into an understandable frame of reference. Ultimately, these characteristics also influence the way in which the lived experience is encoded in the fabric of the mind, and the way in which it is recalled and reconstructed as memory. This paper will demonstrate through an analysis of the Women's Hearing testimonies and the CALS Submission on Gender that the TRC's evidence foregrounds the experience of a group of African women whose experiences are characterized by the urban environment they lived in, and the high degree of political participation among the majority of them.

The Women's Hearing shows that these women held different perceptions of the violence and abuses leveled against them, its causes, and its effects. The image which we can draw out of

these testimonies after study and reflection is that the experiences of the women who testified make up a fragmentary web of perception whose component pieces both intersect with and diverge from one another. The complete story surrounding the relationship of women with the apartheid state is not easily established within the boundaries of the working models of oppression and resistance presented in the CALS Submission on Gender, or in the findings of the TRC.

However, I do not wish to press too hard upon the idea that these testimonies are insignificant because they represent the point of view of a small proportion of the total population of South African women. Because the South African economy was driven by a system of migrant labor an individual was able to move easily from an urban environment to a rural one; the system was designed to allow this movement. However, it should be pointed out that in the process of moving from one environment to another, it was also possible for an individual to adopt a different values or beliefs which suited the individual according to the social pressures and forces of the new environment.[15] This analysis also relates the experiences of these women to broader theories about the relationship of gender and sexuality to notions of social, economic, and political power. For the TRC, the common events, emotions, and recollections of this group of women served as the foundation against which other testimonies are measured, and according to which the TRC composed its findings which it submitted to the President's office in volume five of the Final Report. Paying close attention to these issues help us understand the role that collective experiences and memories serve in creating group identities and ideologies.

---

[15]Stephan Miescher argues for the active adoption of different identities according to specific social contexts in his article, "The Making of Presbyterian Teachers: Masculinities, Subjectivity, and Programs of Education in Colonial Ghana," (forthcoming).

Toward the end of this understanding, we should seek out a categorization of these women and their experiences.

For the purpose of historical inquiry, the common thread serves to verify the accuracy of theoretical models. For the purposes of this paper common patterns in the evidence at hand not only help to qualify models but they also provide the basis for what I will identify as "collective memory," the concept of a shared experience. Common threads running through the testimonies will help establish this as a counterpoint to what I have suggested are widely varying experiences. The relationship between the collective and individual, between the common and the specific, will help me develop my argument that the collective memory is a convenient and tendentially fictive account of lived events that has a significant impact on the present construction of identity in South Africa. These patterns will be traced in the following section of this paper.

The Landscape of the Urban Transvaal

A View of Soweto

With the exception of one, all of the women who testified at the gender hearing came from townships located on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Of those townships, perhaps the most well-known is Soweto, which earned a prominent place in twentieth century South African history after a student protest against Bantu education ended in the fatal shooting of over a hundred

Africans.[16] Soweto was located to the southwest of Johannesburg,[17] a sprawling community of Africans covering 85 square kilometers and over one hundred thousand houses which has been described as "the largest single modern ghetto Africa."[18] Soweto was created in the late 1950s and early 1960s as part of a consolidation of a number of communities exisiting to the southwest of Johannesburg. Prior to this time, some Africans lived within the boundaries of the city in the small suburb of Sophiatown, one of the few communities where Africans were allowed to own their houses and land.[19] A large number of Africans participating in the migrant labor system who traveled to the city to meet rising labor demands in the 1960s formed large shantytowns – one notable example was the thirty-thousand person settlement called Orlando Station.[20] As part of the systematic removal and relocation of Africans into government established homelands and townships in the 1960s, Sophiatown and the shantytowns were demolished and their inhabitants relocated into the 26 planned locations which comprised Soweto.

Because Soweto served to contain a variety of former communities, the township was

---

[16]For a detailed exploration of the Soweto riots, see Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm,* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980).

[17]This paper drew heavily on information about Soweto from the point of view of two African women who lived there: Joyce Sikakane's *A Window On Soweto* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977) and Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1985). Alan Brooks' and Jeremy Brickhill's *Whirlwind Before the Storm* also provided a picture of Soweto in the context of the 1976 student uprising. Stephan Miescher also showed me slides from his trip to the township in the early 1990s.

[18]Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto,* 8.

[19]Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto,* 13.

[20]Ibid, 12.

diverse in terms of class and ethnicity. Dwellings in Soweto ranged from comfortable, attractive suburban-style homes in the select Dube Township leased by the former residents of Sophiatown[21] to small four-room concrete buildings in the 1970s and 1980s and reincarnations of the shantytowns on open lands in recent years. During most of Soweto's history, the great majority of the population lived in houses of less than five rooms with no or limited electricity, no indoor plumbing, and small yards with outdoor toilets.[22] An average of six to seven people, four of them adults, lived in houses of four rooms or less.[23] There are also some hostels in Soweto, designed to contain as many single workers as possible – there is one women's hostel in Mzimhlope.[24] Only residents in the Dube Township were allowed to even attempt to purchase their housing, on the basis of ninety year leases.[25] In order to live in a house the residents were each required to hold housing permits in addition to the area passes which allowed them to remain in the township.

The majority of Sowetans used public transportation or walked or rode bicycles to work; very few families or individuals had private cars. Most of the public roads in the township were not paved, with the exception of wide roads that evenly divide the township locations as they run

---

[21]Siakakane, *A Window on Soweto*, 9. Those who lived in Dube Township were generally referred to as "Situations" by ghetto dwellers because of their choice situation. Sikakane points out that foreign visitors to Soweto were brought to Dube by the apartheid government in order to show how comfortably "Bantus" could live.

[22]Ibid, 8-9.

[23]Sikakane, 9.

[24]Sikakane, 10.

[25]Sikakane, 25.

from outside the greater Johannesburg area toward the city. These roads also served a tactical function: in the event of an uprising or riot among the township dwellers, the government could quickly dispatch security forces to any location in the township.[26]

There was one hospital serving the township during the 1970s and 1980s.[27] There were six police stations, and one stadium for sporting events. None of these facilities are adequate for the township's population. The hospital does not have adequate facilities, the police were suppresses the high crime and murder rates which persisted during the rule of the apartheid state, and the stadium was consistently overcrowded.

Soweto's diverse array of housing contained a diverse population of Africans. A minority of high-paid, highly-educated Africans living in the who worked as doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, and white collar workers and businessmen.[28] During the 1970s and 1980s, the period of time during which most of the women who testified spoke about, the vast majority of Africans living in townships like Soweto worked in wage labor jobs involving physical labor in Johannesburg's factories and mines. High labor demands, especially during the late 1960s and early 1970s, drew Africans from communities all over the Transvaal; thus, Soweto served as a consolidation of many various cultures and ethnicities.

This survey of the urban environment of Soweto is representative of the other townships which existed at the periphery of Johannesburg, such as Vereenigeng and Vosloorus. While Soweto was the largest of the townships, its image served as the backdrop for the memories of

---

[26]This fact was pointed out by my mentor, Dr. Stephan Miescher.

[27]Baragwanath Hospital.

[28]Sikakane, 9.

many of the women who testified at the women's hearing. The experience of living within the space of the townships outside Johannesburg was one in which the individual lived in overcrowded, substandard living conditions and had inadequate access to public services. South Africa's black population lived in conditions similar to these all over the country, conditions which were inferior to those whites lived in. The women who spoke about their experiences at the Women's Hearing lived in this environment.

Witness Profiles

Political Participation

The sixteen individual statements made before the TRC's Gender Commission over two days in July 1997 make up the main sample of my evidence. The Center for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) submission on gender was based on research from statements and face to face interviews with over two hundred subjects. Those subjects came into contact with the CALS project through FEDTRAW (Federation of Transvaal Women), or through the counseling center which FEDTRAW helped establish at the University of Witwatersrand. Many of the women who participated in the CALS project testified in private sessions, and were reluctant to come forward at a public hearing. Because the sixteen public statements make up a fraction of the total data collected by the CALS and an even smaller fraction of the total population of African women who lived under the apartheid system, we should pay close attention to the background and experiences of those who chose to come forward in order to relate them to the experience of the greater population of African women. It should also be pointed out that in the course of its gathering research data for its submission, the CALS privately interviewed more than two

hundred women from the Transvaal region; due to time and budget constraints, however, the number of speakers at the public hearing, which lasted only two days, was limited.

The witnesses were all from the Transvaal region of South Africa, from urban centers and larger townships such as Soweto, Thokoza, Vosloorus, or Vereenigeng. One woman, Kedenobi Dube, came from her home in Swanieville in the Northwestern Transvaal, further away from Johannesburg. There were relatively few statements taken from women who lived in rural areas or small towns. This shortcoming may be explained by the fact that after the CALS Gender Submission, the TRC did not revise its definition of a "gross violation of human rights" to include a broader scope of violations beyond torture, kidnapping, and severe ill-treatment, which were suffered mostly by politically active Africans. Political and resistance groups, with some exceptions, were most active in towns and cities, where there were larger numbers of institutionally educated Africans and larger numbers of wage-laborers; thus there was a more significant base for group membership and a stronger support structure for activism and resistance.

The ages of the women who testified spanned generations which were politically active during all three decades of the 1960-1994 period of investigation. Sheila Masote, who was 52 years old at the time she testified in 1997, spoke about being born into a family, "that's been through the struggle."[29] Her father was involved in ANC politics in the 1950s and 1960s, during the period of forced removals and the banning of the ANC and the PAC. At the other end of the age spectrum Winnie Makhubela spoke about being raped in a hostel in Thokoza when she was fourteen years old, in 1993. In between these two extremes the Commission heard testimony

[29]Testimony of Sheila Masote, 28 July, 1997.

from women who were also active in the 1970s and the 1980s.

A high proportion of the women who testified were politically or active in organizations affiliated with political or resistance groups. Ten of the women who testified were affiliated with groups such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), the ANC Youth League, the ANC Women's League, or the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), all of which were large, trans-regional organizations. Four of those ten women were also primarily active in smaller groups, such as FEDTRAW (an affiliate of the United Democratic Front), the Vosloorus Crisis Committee, the Namagatle Congress, or FAWU (Food Allied Workers Union, a division of COSATU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions). Beyond those ten women it is difficult to find specific evidence of affiliation with a political group in the Women's Hearing testimonies, though it is possible that the other women at least held membership in a group. Most of the specifics of the individual political affiliations and relationships are perhaps not as important as recognizing that these women were affiliated with a wide variety of political groups, and were also deeply involved in many of the group activities.

African women have been involved in the political realm for much of this century. Scholars find the involvement of women in political organizations as early as 1913, with the formation of the ANC Bantu Women's League. Women were active in unions as early as the 1920s, primarily in the baking, laundry, and textile industries. The Federation of South African Women (FSAW), with claimed to represent 230,000 women, was formed in 1954. The FSAW began the first major movement toward the inclusion of women in politics since the institution of apartheid in 1948. Women have been present at every crucial moment in apartheid history. In the 1950s women organized anti-pass law campaigns on a large scale, and many were arrested

for burning passes at public demonstrations. The protest at Sharpeville in 1960 was formed in large part because the pass laws were extended to women, and forty women were among the injured or killed after police opened fire on the protesters. In the 1960s women fulfilled support roles for children affected by apartheid by organizing daycare and food programs for African children. In June 1976 women participated in the protests against Bantu education, a series of laws which regulated the education of African students, in Soweto, and were also victims of police killings due to their involvement.[30] We can see from this short survey that at important stages in the history of resistance, women have been active participants in the struggle. However, the degree of power or control they held within various groups might be a matter of some debate.

The women who testified held varying positions of power within these different political groups. Deborah Matshoba, at the time of her arrest in 1976 was an executive member of SASO (South African Student's Organization). Alli Maziya was elected Chairperson of the Vosloorus Crisis Committee, which was formed to protest the actions of councillors in Vosloorus. In March 1986, Joyce Marubini was elected as the organiser of the ANC Youth League in Namagatle and Phalaborwa. These three women held positions of relative power within their organizations, they organized meetings, coordinated group activities, and maintained formal contacts with other groups. On the other hand, Deborah Vuyelwa Jokazi, a member of FAWU in 1992, said that women were not allowed to occupy leadership positions in the Union:

---

[30]Secretariat for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, *The Role of Women in the Struggle Against Apartheid, 1980* (Copenhagen: July 1980) from

"...[T]hey (male FAWU members) didn't want to put women in the leadership positions."[31] There is no apparent correlation between an increase in the relative power women held with any period of time in apartheid history. We should also be cautious when attempting to quantify the power women had relative to men both within the realm of political activism and in society as a whole. The highest and most influential leadership positions of the larger political parties, such as the ANC and the PAC, were held by men, and this should be kept in mind when considering the power the majority of women wielded in political parties. When Ms. Jokazi was asked how she could be "happy"[32] with the discriminatory situation she did say that she worried about it, but that she was happy with the situation, "...because even if you are a woman, you know your rights. But they would listen to us when we were raising our views."[33] It is significant that some women did hold positions of power in political and resistance groups, and many other women had access to the political realm, but we should also consider the power of those and other women in relation to the social power women held outside the political realm. Ms. Jokazi's statement is important, because it points to the fact that her status in the union was affected by gender relations outside the union.

The evidence hints at another possible trend, that as time went by more women began to hold memberships in organizations previously dominated by men. The testimonies which recalled recent events, especially in the 80s and early 90s, related stories, such as Ms. Jokazi's, of women acting alongside men. The direct participation of women in para-military operations is a good

---

[31]Testimony of Deborah Vuyelwa Jokazi, 28 July 1997

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

example of this. One of the women who came forward said that she was affiliated with the para-military operations of a political organization. Thandi Shezi testified that she was part of an "Umdane," an operational unit which was a part of the ANC Youth League in 1988 in and around Soweto.[34] "We used to have missions of attacking soft targets like Rand offices and places we knew that there were government figures and like the government places during that time. So my task was to transport the material, the ammunition, and also to check out the place and give information and take this information to Silver (an ANC officer)."[35] Ms. Shezi told the Comission she felt as though her male comrades trusted her. "Maybe they saw bravery in me...They were not even too alarmed when they heard that I'd been arrested and detained, because they knew I was a strong person, I could withstand difficulties."[36] The direct involvement of women in such operations is significant; historically, women did not actively participate in these types of activities.

Two of the women at the Women's Hearing were journalists. Jubie Mayet, who since 1957 worked as a journalist for *Voice* and *Drum* Magazine in the 1970s in Johannesburg. Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken was arrested in 1969 because she worked as an investigative journalist for a daily newspaper in Johannesburg.[37] "They said I was a terrorist, because...I endeavoured to inform the world about the brutal effects of apartheid on the Black South African communities,"

---

[34]Testimony of Thandi Shezi, 28 July 1997

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Testimony of Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken, 29 July 1997

she said at the hearing.[38] Ms. Mayet was banned by the government to practice journalism, and Ms. Ranken was detained and tortured for a period of 17 months.

As we can see from this survey of the available evidence, the majority of women who testified at the Women's Hearing varied in age and were targeted by the government during all three decades of the TRC's investigative period. A significant number of the women who testified were also educated, particularly those who were journalists or who held high positions in resistance groups or political organizations. A majority of the women had access in varying degrees to the political realm. At least one woman was also involved in para-military operations with the ANC. The majority of those women who were not politically active were closely associated with people who were; these women had husbands and fathers who were involved in politics. All of these women lived in towns; the majority of them lived near large urban centers. My profiles of the women who made statements at the Women's Hearing show that they represent a specific minority of the African women who lived under apartheid. The reason why their memories are used to represent the shared experiences and reconciliation of the majority of African women is one of the important issues this paper investigates.

Secondary scholarship supports this characterization of the witnesses. Fatima Meer, in April 1985 wrote that despite increasing African unionization totaling one and a half million people in 1985, representing 15 percent of the total economically active population, women remained "outside the fold of registration."[39] Meer points out that domestic and agricultural

---

[38]Ibid.

[39]Fatima Meer, "Women in Apartheid Society," *Notes and Documents*, no. 4/85, ANC Women's League, April 1985. See also Gay Seidman, "'No Freedom Without the Women': Mobilization and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992," *Signs* Winter 1993, 291-320.

workers, most of whom were women, were significantly under-represented in union membership. She also characterizes the 1980s as a decade of "increasing repression, increasing underdevelopment, and increasing unemployment,"[40] for all Africans in South Africa, among whom women were directly and perhaps most severely affected. In the increasing underdeveloped and impoverished rural areas many women became increasingly isolated from the industrializing urban centers. The attempt of the Nationalist government to slow the admittance of women into urban areas using the system of pass laws helped achieved this isolation. Land allocation policies which gave only thirteen percent of the nation's total land mass to the African majority also helped create the atmosphere of rural poverty; agriculture was an inadequate means of subsistence for Africans living in rural areas. As a result, African women living on the reserves were forced to subsist on money sent home from male relatives working in urban centers, and were left to care for sick or aged members of the community no longer able to work in the cities. Thus, there was a large population of women who lived in the countryside, who at the time of the TRC hearings no doubt continued to lead a rural existence, but who were under-represented at Commission hearings, perhaps because they were not directly involved in the political struggles.

On the other hand, despite the under-representation of rural women or women who worked in agriculture, as domestic servants, or who lived on reservations, we can begin to develop at least in part a theory of gender relations and social and political power in apartheid South Africa. From the evidence, there appears to be a trend of increasing access to the political sphere for women throughout the twentieth century up until the present day. At the same time,

[40]Ibid.

however, social institutions which have repressed women and made them subordinate to men remained a fixture of apartheid society. The increasing presence of women in the public sphere of political activism conflicted social assumptions which were deeply ingrained in African society. What went on at the public meeting was at odds with what went on within the household; this conflict may help us better understand the perceived uses of sexual violence and repression in apartheid South Africa, and the current politics of victimhood.

Social, Economic and Legal Status

A minority of South African women were directly involved in political struggles before and during apartheid. Greater political access and involvement, however, did not reflect or lead to greater social, economic, or legal benefits. This is because other institutions in South African society did not make women equal to men. Historically, South Africa was composed of patriarchal communities. Historians such as Jeff Guy have pointed out that one of the primary social features of pre-capitalist South African society was the subordination of women to men, and the male appropriation of women's labor in the homestead, which contributed significantly to the household economy. Historically, economic and political roles divided the worlds of men and women; women were the primary growers of food for the homestead, while men raised cattle, hunted, and engaged in warfare. [41] Scholars have attempted to find connections between this economic relationship other social phenomena. Isabel Hofmeyr built upon Guy's model in

[41]Jeff Guy, "Gender Opression in Southern Africa's Pre-Capitalist Societies," *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945,* ed. Cherryl Walker (London: J. Currey, 1990), 33-47.

her analysis of the South African homestead as a place in which the worlds of women and men were divided by the shape of private and public space. Hofmeyr's research on oral histories in aTransvaal location near Johannesburg shows that women, confined to the private spaces, developed a tradition of story-telling rather than history-making, which was primarily a male activity conducted in the public space of the courtyard.[42] These models argue for a strict division of social benefits according to gender roles. In the later twentieth century, this social division has been persistent if not dominant in certain sectors of South African society, in part appropriated and perpetuated by the apartheid government.

The secondary scholarship has generally focused on the relationship between women and the formations of various conceptions of "the state" in South Africa, whether it is indigenous, colonial, or settler. Belinda Bozzoli's use of gender as a critique of Marxist readings of South African history, particularly on the issue of a material explanation for female oppression.[43] Bozzoli located the sexual division of labor and the formation of a variety of patriarchies in South African societies within the domestic sphere.[44] Bozzoli posits that a "patchwork"[45] of

---

[42]Isabel Hofmeyr, "Stories Go Hand in Glove With Making a Man and Woman," *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told,* (Heinemann: Portsmouth NH, 1994).

[43]Bozzoli responds to one of the major articles written on a structural explanation for the oppression of women according to the formation of the migrant labor system in South Africa: Harold Wolpe's "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," *Economy and Society,* 1:4, 1972. Wolpe's analysis suggests men were drawn to capitalist production while women remained home to attend to reproduction and maintaing the family. This is referred to as the "cheap labour thesis" in later historiography. (See Linzi Manicom's survey of gender historiography)

[44]Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 9:2, 1983.

[45]Bozzoli, 149.

indigenous patriarchies carried this division of labor in the domestic sphere from pre-capitalist South African into the modern period.

In her critique of the structuralist explanation of capitalist oppression, Bozzoli's tendency, in her critique of structuralist readings which suggested the oppression of women was the result of the introduction of capitalism, was to locate that oppression entirely within the domestic sphere. Thinking about this model in the context of the later twentieth century, it is difficult to believe that gender oppression as the exclusive domain of these various patriarchies were carried from pre-capitalist to modern capitalist society intact, just as it is persuasive to argue that the economic structures of the state are entirely responsible for a gendered division of labor. Further, I think that these readings of history fail to recognize that the unity of domination of a structure or institution is only a terminal state that exists as the result of a multiplicity of force relations or a strategical situation in a society.[46] The systematic repression of one group by another is the result of unending struggles – "major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations.[47]

Rather than considering either the state or various patriarchies as unified, dominating forces with single objectives, then, we should focus on specific institutions and structures which are implicated in the formation of gender identities and determine the relationship of gender to the state. Everyday patterns and routines of ruling establish subjective gender identities.[48] These

---

[46]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* 92-93.

[47]Michecl Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* 94.

[48]Linzi Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Re-thinking State and Gender in South African History," *Journal of African History,* 33, 1992, 456.

patterns and routines include the formulation of legal rights to property, the regulation of labor, the regulation of movement within the confines of the state[49], and the regulation of institutions such as marriage and education. Historically, African women in the official discourse of the state – in the discourse of all of the institutions which regulate the processes I have mentioned – have been subordinate to men. This is particularly true of the urban environment.[50]

I should be careful to point out, however, that no model or system when applied to a historical situation is completely free of illusion. All interpretations to some extent apply subjectivities and create categories which can conceal or obscure truth. Rather, I argue that the diffuse model of power in society I present here is more effective for studying the topic of gender and power in a given society when compared to other theoretical models.

Women in the late twentieth century era of apartheid in urban townships did not have the same access to economic or property rights that men have. In the second half of the twentieth century African women had the least access to property in South African society; their property rights were placed by law in the custody of the male head of their household. In Soweto, where the vast majority of Africans did not own their own housing, the death of the male head of a household meant that his wife, his children, or any women who lived with him no longer retained the right to continue living in the home.[51] Up until 1983, legal marriages made men and women

---

[49]The pass system, which required that all Africans carry pass books when traveling, is an excellent example of this. There are times when women were specifically singled out by pass laws as well – the protest at Sharpeville in 1960 which ended in a terrible massacre originally found its impetus in the extension of pass laws to women. (See TRC Report, vol. 3 ch. 5)

[50]Manicom, 456.

[51]Sikakane, 10.

joint owners in an estate, but administration of the estate was given to the husband; the wife's position was reduced to minor status.[52] Thus, it was difficult for a woman to be economically independent. This made it difficult for an African woman to be socially independent. Divorce in apartheid society was an expensive undertaking, and few women could afford to divorce their husbands.[53]

It was also difficult for a single woman to find employment, particularly in urban areas, because a woman's ability to even enter a city was contingent upon her husband's ability to do the same. The strict control of the urbanization of women led to an imbalance in the distribution of gender in rural and urban African populations, with men outnumbering women in urban areas and women outnumbering men in rural areas. This imbalance was most severe earlier this century, when men in urban areas outnumbered women 3 to 1, but by the 1980s had leveled somewhat so that by 1981 forty-six percent of African males versus forty-three percent of African females resided outside the homelands designated by the government. Equal access to urban areas did not mean equal access to higher-paying jobs. The 1981 Government Manpower Survey recorded that out of the 1.3 million women employed in industry, 30.7 percent were African, and this group was most concentrated in the lowest paying and most menial jobs in the clothing, textiles, and footwear industry. And this group made up only 10.7 percent of all employed African women, the majority of whom continued to work in agriculture or as domestic servants, two of the most unprotected job categories in South Africa. The concentration of women into the lowest paying jobs is partly due to government and industry preference for men

---

[52]Meer, *Notes and Documents,* 4/85, and Sikakane, 25.

[53]Sikakane, 35.

in heavy production industries and the already high competition among males for these jobs. It was also partly due to the realization of the apartheid government that African women restricted to homelands could continue to produce and raise a cheap source of labor, which was attractive to foreign and local capital investment in the South African economy. In a way, Meer argues, the foundation of the apartheid system and it success rested on the subjugation of women.[54] It is important to note, however, that there were opportunities for women to earn more money than they would in typical wage labor, and occasionally could earn more than men, albeit illegally. Prostitution and beer brewing were two entrepreneurial, but illegal, occupations women could earn a great deal of money doing. This was particularly true of women in urban areas.[55]

The movement of African women within the township was also regulated by the government pass system. The pass was a book which contained a picture of the book's owner, and a series of pages which recorded his or her movements and the areas in which he or she was allowed to live, work, or travel for designated periods of time. Pass laws were extended to men and women, and were used as a way of controlling the movement of populations in the Transvaal, and historically of controlling the differential movement of populations of men and

---

[54]Meer, *Notes and Documents*, 4/85.

[55]Sikakane, 26-27. For an analysis of the origins of beer-brewing and prostitution in the township of Vereenigeng (also near Johannesburg) see Philip Bonner, "Desirable and Undesirable Basotho Women?: Liquor, Prostitution, and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945," in C. Walker, ed. *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Ravan, 1997), 221-250. See also T. Maloka, "Khomo Lia Oela: Canteens, Brothels, and Labour Migrancy in Colonial Lesotho, 1900-40," *Journal of African History* 38 (1997), 101-122, for a discussion of the same phenomenon in rural Lesotho.

women from rural to urban areas.[56] Africans in the township could be stopped by police at any time and be forced to show his pass; Africans with invalid passes were arrested and tried. Joyce Sikakane noted that during the 1970s, it was illegal for a person to inquire of a police officer the reason for an arrest.[57]

Police units also were occupied with cracking down on the illegal liquor trade during our entire period of inquiry, from as early as 1960 to the late 1980s. While Africans during this time were allowed to consume alcohol, it had to be done within designated municipal beer halls. However, women established *shebeens* in private homes where men could come and drink after hours. Ms. Sikakane noted that when the police raided shebeens, the women sometimes be escorted to police vans carrying babies on their backs.[58]

The lack of legal recognition of unmarried African women also made them especially vulnerable to victimization by the men in their lives. Fatima Meer points out that there was a high incidence of pregnancy among unmarried women, many of whom were ill-prepared to support a family. Further confounding the plight of the unmarried woman was the fact that it was very difficult for a woman to legally prove the paternity of man, and thus a woman was unable to make a man pay maintenance for children he fathered outside of marriage. Some of these women may have been customarily married, as in some African societies where polygamy is allowed, but are not legally married, since South African law only recognizes one marriage.

---

[56]See Elizabeth Schmidt, "Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe," *Signs*, 16,4 (1991), 732-756 for a discussion of state strategies, including pass laws, used to control the movement of women from rural to urban areas.

[57]Sikakane, 26.

[58]Sikakane, 27.

Thus, second wives were also occasionally deprived of the limited benefits allowed a first wife. Additionally, unmarried, pregnant women were also socially disgraced. The higher legal status of men also made women vulnerable to sexual assault and made it difficult for them to seek justice if they were the victims of abuse or rape. At the time that Joyce Sikakane wrote her account of life in Soweto in 1977, she noted that the illegitimacy rate for children born in Soweto was sixty percent.[59]

Women were also victims of urban crime, which was exceptionally high in the urban townships during the apartheid era and continues to be high today. During the 1960s and 1970s youth gangs established themselves around closely guarded territories in Soweto. In her account Joyce Sikakane pointed out that these gangs were responsible for a great deal of the crime in Soweto during this period.[60] As a former crime reporter for the *Rand Daily Mail,* Sikakane recorded 701 murders from the period of July 1, 1974 to June 1975.[61] She also pointed out the fact that the police were unwilling or reluctant to investigate gang activity or crimes among Africans, preferring instead to concentrate on raiding Africans in violation of apartheid laws.[62] These gangs, or *tsotsis,* also competed for sexual access to women – while there are no reliable figures for rape for this period, one can be assured it was high. This problem continues today: Sheila Meintjies, in her submission to the TRC, spoke about the SARA, or South African Rapists

---

[59]Sikakane, 30.

[60]See Clive Glaser, "Swines, Hazels, and the Dirty Dozen: Masculinity, Territoriality and the Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1960-1976," *Journal of South African Studies,* 24, 4 (1998) 719-736.

[61]Sikakane, 27.

[62]Sikakane, 29.

Association, a group of young men who "roam the streets, disciplining young women whom they see as snobs...the discipline is rape."[63]

It is against this social backdrop that we should place the women who came forward to testify at the Women's Hearing, because it is within this world of inequalities in which they lived, and their statements hint at the social condition which made them subordinate to men. I return again to the example of Deborah Vuyelwa Jokazi, who worked at the Escort bacon factory in Heidelberg in 1992. Ms. Jokazi was a member of the Food Allied Workers Union. When the Commission questioned her about women in the union, she said that more women than men were in the union, but that women were restricted from holding leadership positions within the union. In the course of her testimony, it was only through the prodding of the Commission member leading her testimony that she admitted this inequality bothered her, but that at the time she was not concerned.[64] Ms. Jokazi's situation reflects the subordinate position many African women accepted.

Women who were victims of sexual assault also stated that they felt as though something were wrong with them personally to have been the target of sexual violence. Kedenobi Dube, who was raped in 1992 and was subsequently unable to conceive because she had contracted an illness from her rapist, said that she was abandoned by her boyfriend because of this. As a result, she was reluctant to tell anyone about her experience. "I think even now I feel very ashamed and I feel very disgraced that even the new boyfriend I have now will hear I've got syphyilis and other guys will run away from me," she said. Ms. Dube stated that doctors who treated her for

---

[63]Testimony of Sheila Meintjies, 29 July, 1997.

[64]Testimony of Deborah Vuyelwa Jokazi, 28 July 1997.

her illness connected her disease with being "naughty," and that she felt as though she were unable to take her case to the police or seek justice within her community because, "he (her rapist) was quite a popular guy."[65] Ms. Dube's statements reflects the emotional and physical dependence African women had upon men, and the particularly tenuous legal status unmarried women had. Ms. Dube also hints at another aspect of the social subordination of women in African society, that is, the activation of sexuality as a means of inducing feelings of guilt and shame. This is an issue we will explore further in my discussion of sexual violence.

Although all of the women who testified at the Women's Hearing were subject to the social conditioning which made them subordinate to men that was pervasive in African society, the majority of them are also exceptional. Those who were politically active were exceptional because in their political commitment they overlooked their oppression as women in their attempt to gain African liberation from the apartheid state. And I think that these politically active women are exceptional also because they are aware of the actual or potential power of women in South African society. As Sheila Meintjies said, "Women may not have the authority, but they considerable power."[66] Despite the subjective formulation of gender identities created by the state, women were integral to the struggle against apartheid, and they suffered equally with men.

Violence and Torture

Sexual Violence

[65]Testimony of Kedenobi Dube 29 July, 1997.

[66]Testimony of Sheila Meintjies, 29 July, 1997.

The number of instances of sexual abuse or violence reported to the TRC by women was considerably higher than similar instances reported by men; it should, in fact, be noted that men were silent regarding the possibility that they may have suffered sexual violations in other hearings. The violations reported by women fall into a wide range of acts which constitute sexual abuse. From the humiliation of having to be naked in front of strange men or in a public space to the violence of rape, sexual violence committed by men against women was used in a variety of ways to achieve the same ultimate goal. That is, a woman's body, her dignity, and her modesty were attacked or used by men in order to achieve a variety of objectives. The type and site of this violence is important to understanding these objectives. It is important to note here that sexual violence was committed against African women both by white men and by African men, and so the objective was not always the same. The site of violence was not always the same, either. Sexual abuses took place in government police stations and prisons, but they also happened in hostels and other meeting places which housed resistance movements. The statements made at the Women's Hearings point to the pervasiveness of sexual violence in South African society under the apartheid system.

Sexual violence which took place in interrogation rooms and prisons was closely aligned with other forms of torture suffered by both men and women. Women were often stripped naked before being beaten with sjamboks, or batons, the women who suffered beatings recalled in particular being beaten on the buttocks. Joyce Marubini recalled being beaten: "They started assaulting us with sjamboks. At the time we were dressed and they started asaulting us on our buttocks up to the time that our panties were torn and our under-garments were exposed."[67] The

[67]Testimony of Joyce Marubini, 28 July 1997

Commission asked her how she felt being beaten in a state of half-nakedness. "I felt very dehumanised...I did not see a need for that."[68] She also said the police told her why they chose to undress her: "...(T)hey said they wanted to show us as to where Mandela is and they would tell us as to where he stays and in which area he stays, because Mandela is Xhosa."[69] Men were beaten in police stations and prisons as well, but the experience of women is different and significant because the officers who beat them were always men. Women wardresses in the prison did not beat women themselves, but called male officers to do it, or allowed male officers into the ward to torture female prisoners.[70] The disparity in the power relationship between prisoner and torturer was also concurrent with a disparity between the power of men and women.

Women who were electrocuted had the electrodes attached to their breasts and genitals. Thandi Shezi testified that she was electrocuted to the point that she tore her tongue from clenching her teeth. Dr. Sheila Meintjes, whose research in preparing the Center For Applied Legal Studies' submission on gender noted that electrocution was a "commonplace" torture which was suffered by men and women.[71] Studies of tortures suffered by men, however, rarely investigate the sexual aspects of political violence.

There were other tortures which were less commonplace, but which were no less, if not more, horrific than beatings and electrocutions. These tortures were also more specific to

---

[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Testimony of Deborah Matshoba, 29 July 1997.

[71]Testimony of Dr. Sheila Meintjies, 29 July 1997

women. Sheila Meintjies, in her statement regarding the CALS Submission before the Women's Hearing, related the experience of Elaine Muhammad, who had rats pushed up her vagina, was fondled by a District Surgeon in prison and was frequently made to be naked in the presence of men. The CALS Submission also detailed the way in which women's sexual organs were specifically targeted for torture. Other foreign objects were pushed into women's vaginas, and prisoners have also reported instances where prisoner's fallopian tubes were flooded with water, which sometimes prevented them from having children later in life.

Rape was another form of sexual violence, and is significant beside other tortures because rapes happened both in the prisons and in the African communities and even among members of resistance group or organization. There is also a silence surrounding rape in South African society; a relative minority of the women who came forward to submit statements to either the researchers at the CALS or at the TRC hearings spoke specifically about rape. There are also only a few cases of rape in the Women's Hearing testimonies; this can be attributed to the fact that the victims of rape run the risk of social stigmatization in South African societies by speaking out about their experience. Some of the victims also lived near the perpetrators, and continued to encounter them after the assaults had happened. It is also possible, as Meintjies suggests, that there was and continues to be a high incidence of rape in many African communities, but many women lack a clear consciousness or definition of the forms which it may take. Some women did speak to the Commission about being raped, however, and their experiences relate to us how deeply this form of gender violence is embedded in South African society.

African women were raped by white and black police officers. Thandi Shezi testified that

she had been raped by four white police officers in an interrogation room in September 1988. Nozibonelo Maria Mxathule related an experience in which a girl she knew in the ANC Youth League was raped by three policemen in a "guest house" (a police house used for interrogations) in March 1986, the same day that she and other girls were stripped naked and beaten. Ms. Mxathule also related an incident from 1991, in which she said an acquaintance, an African who was also a police officer, attempted to rape her in his home. These three examples illustrate the variety of sites where police officers assaulted African women; that is, not only within the confines of police stations and prisons, but also within the community itself. It should also be noted that not all of the police officers or prison guards were white.

Other women were raped by African men from their own communities or within the resistance movements. Kedenobi Dube was raped by a man known to her and her family in 1992 in a house in Swanieville. Ms. Dube said that at that time her rapist was a member of the ANC. Ms. Dube also continued to encounter her rapist after her assault, and did not tell her family about the incident until after the TRC had come to Swanieville in 1996. "He shouldn't just be allowed to roam around freely, because whenever I see him, my heart is sore...my cousin asked me but why do you react like this to this boy...I don't relate to them what actually happened," she said.[72] In 1993 Winnie Makhubela and two friends were invited by a man to a "meeting" in Thokoza and upon arriving were brought into a hostel, raped, and then stabbed and shot. Ms. Makhubela, who was twelve at the time, was the only survivor of that incident. There are also reports of gender violence within para-military groups such as the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Meintjies related in her statement before the Commission the story of Tenjiwe Mtinso, a

[72]Testimony of Kedenobi Dube, 29 July 1997.

senior commander in MK who was threatened with rape by junior members. "Now, what is going on here? It is saying that you may well be my senior commander, but at the end of the day you are merely a woman."[73] Gender violence in South Africa was not a phenomenon restricted to prisons or police interrogation rooms, and within the communities and the resistance movements, this violence speaks directly about gender power relations in South African society.

What is the purpose of sexual violence? What use does it serve for the perpetrator? Sheila Meintjies argues that "sexual assault in the context of political detention and the war are institutionalized acts which make public the private."[74] This is certainly a persuasive explanation when considering the situation inside the prisons, in which the treatment of female inmates was based around a systematic and pervasive invasion of personal space and privacy. One of the commons ways a woman's privacy was invaded was by making her menstruation public. Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken related that during her detention in 1976, "you dreaded the commencement of your menstrual period, because it became so public under the notice of your interrogators, who were all Afrikaner males. You had to ask them for sanitary pads...they made you stand untenably as punishment."[75] Other women who were detained also recalled having to stand for long periods of time during their menstrual period without sanitary pads. Being treated in this way, first by having their privacy violated and then having a bodily function treated as a of transgression which warranted punishment was not only a way of making public the private, but was also way of inducing shame and guilt in the prisoner. The invasion of the body through

---

[73]Testimony of Dr. Sheila Meintjies, 29 July 1997.

[74]Testimony of Sheila Meintjies, 29 July 1997.

[75]Testimony of Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken, 29 July 1997.

penetration is the ultimate expression of this intent. It was also an assertion of power over the prisoner on the part of the interrogators. "And...one of them said, we must just humiliate her and show her that this ANC can't do anything for her, if we do this humiliation act on her, she will speak the truth,"[76] Thandi Shezi said of the men who raped her. Ms. Shezi also said that before receiving counseling, "the whole experience had reduced me into feeling I'm worthless and thinking that I am guilty of something."[77] The activation of sexuality as a means of inducing these feelings of shame and guilt points to the traumatizing nature of sexual violence. In this way, the ultimate goal of sexual violence in the prisons and interrogations was to break down the prisoner's sense of self by seeking out and attacking that which was most personal and private. This was a part of the system of physical and psychological tortures which Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken described as "mind breaking."[78]

Psychological Abuses

Although sexual assaults and tortures inside the prison system and outside in the community at large were psychologically scarring, there were other ways of breaking a woman's mind. These other psychological tortures took the form of a relentless searching and prying into the private life of a prisoner or detainee and then exploiting vulnerabilities. In the case of women, their ties to their family were often probed and exploited. In other instances, interrogators would probe into a woman's personal background as part of a process of

---

[76]Testimony of Thandi Shezi, 28 July 1997.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Testimony of Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken, 29 July 1997.

humiliation.

Police would often tell a woman her children were ill or dying or that they had already died as a means of breaking a prisoner or achieving some other objective. Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken said that while she was in prison, "Being forced to abandon my baby son, Nkosinatie, was untenable torture."[79] During one interrogation session the police brought in a young Afrikaner boy to remind her of her son, in the hope that her longing for her son would make her accept an offer to become a witness for the state. Women were also told that other family members had died; one prisoner whose father died while she was in solitary confinement related that she felt guilty because she was not allowed to attend his funeral. Here again we can see the objective of inducing feelings of guilt in a woman by exploiting her social role as caregiver.

Jenny Schreiner, a middle class white woman who was involved with ANC resistance movements, also described for the CALS researchers the way in which her interrogators sought to undermine her identity as a woman in South African society. Ms. Schreiner was thirty years old at the time of her detention, and had been divorced once. She related to CALS interviewers:

> "...(A)ll the kind of personal pain of a marriage that does not work is brought to the fore and in a context where they were going to send you back to a police cell with nothing other than the emotions that you had scratched upon. You are thirty, you are single, therefore there is something wrong with you as a woman and that is why you get involved with politics. They were attacking your identity with their own particular conception of what a woman is."[80]

Here again we can see how a torture was used to undermine the prisoner's sense of self by first probing at a vulnerability, and then isolating her so that her only social contact is her interrogator. This particular example is worth exploring further also because it shows how

---

[79]Ibid.

[80]Testimony of Sheila Meintjies, 29 July 1997

psychological torture, like sexual torture, was used by males to assert their power and their normative social boundaries over someone who fell outside them.

There are no examples of explicit psychological torture which occurred outside of the state police system in the testimonies I have surveyed. This is perhaps because the success of a psychological torture depends upon the isolation of the victim from social contact beyond his or her interrogators, so that the interrogator has greater control over the emotions he can induce in his victim.

The psychological scarring of physical tortures remained with women after their detention when they returned to society, and many women related at the Women's Hearing the ways in which they suffered from the effects of being tortured. Thandi Shezi, who was tortured and raped, related how her experience made her feel as though something were wrong with her for her to be violated that way. Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken in her testimony said, "...I often find myself back in the dungeons of solitary confinement, ready to take away my life for no explicable reason. This all happens without any conscious though on my part. I hate it when my mind brings those terrifying memories, but my mind just does it for me. It was orchestrated to destroy me."[81] One of the issues the Commissioners of the Women's Hearing and the CALS researchers emphasized for further exploration was the need for more counseling centers for women who suffer from different forms of abuse, and the need to provide more outlets for women to come forward to talk about their experiences. These needs are closely related to present-day concerns about the uses of memory in formulating state policies in the role of reconciliation in South African society, and in the formation of a collective identity through

[81]Testimony of Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken, 29 July 1997

which women's experiences are characterized and defined by their oppression and suffering.

Gender and Collective Memory

On the first morning of the Womens' Hearing in Johannesburg on July 28, 1997, Yasmine Sooka, the chairperson of the TRC's Johannesburg office, called Thenjiwe Mtintso, the head of the Commission on Gender Equality, which had arranged for the Womens' Hearing, to come forward and make a short statement.[82] In her opening remarks Ms. Mtintso said that she was particularly pleased that the hearing was taking place, "because I think it is the beginning of giving the voiceless a chance to speak, giving the excluded a chance to be centered and giving the powerless an opportunity to empower themselves."[83] Her statement encapsulates, beyond the relationship between gender and power, the many issues which lie behind the creation of memories in a society. Unpacking Ms. Mtintso's statement, we can see that her mention allowing the "voiceless" to speak, focusing on the "excluded," and giving the "powerless" the ability to gain power are all intermediary functions which connect the statements of the women who testified at the hearing to the process of recalling the past. Just as the notion of what makes a "man" or a "woman" in a given society is dependent upon the social conventions, ideologies, and structures of that society, so too is the recollection of the past influenced by the social context in which that recollection is formed. An individual's sense of the past, no matter how unique or distinctly constructed, is often profoundly affected by the group to which he belongs or in which he finds himself, and the social pressures placed upon him by the group.

---

[82]TRC Women's Hearing, 28 July, 1997.

[83]Testimony of Thenjiwe Mtintso, 28 July, 1997.

The individual can be said to have inherited the "collective memory"[84] of the group, or contributed to the affirmation or reinforcement of the collective memory through his or her own recall of the past in connection with the interaction of the individual with the group at large. The way a person remembers the past, whether he or she chooses to or is affected by subconscious influences in doing so, is dependent on the person's current situation, and so also is the construction of present events in some way dependent upon the specific recollection of the past. As firmly as the past is connected to the present, memories, even those of recent events, cannot help but inevitably suffer distortions, omissions, or modifications; this truth is well known to any judge or lawyer who has questioned a witness in the courtroom.[85] Also inevitable is the attachment to the collective memory of claims to the truth – truth which often reinforces the values, morals, and ideologies of the collective group.[86] Thus, collective memory plays an important role in determining identities.

The specific content of collective memories and the way they are presented or created is a function of framing devices. The TRC and the Commission on Gender Equality in holding the Women's Hearing provided a new way of framing the collective memory of African women living on the Witwatersrand. The Women's Hearing organized a public, state-sanctioned space

---

[84]*Collective memory* was the term applied to the production of memories by social groups by the French sociologist and scholar Maurice Halbwachs, whose seminal work, *On Collective Memory* (Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis Coser, ed. 1992: University of Chicago Press), has served as the foundation for scholarly works on the social aspects of memory.

[85]Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved.*(1989: Vintage Books, New York), 23-35. — Levi's first chapter, "The Memory of the Offense," explores the topic of memory, especially traumatic memory, as it relates to the experiences of survivors of the Holocaust.

[86]Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory.* (1994: Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey), 145.

for women to speak out and to take an active role in the definition of gender roles within that space beyond those implicated by the state. The women who testified contributed to the creation of a collective memory, and deployed this memory as a part of an ideological platform which sought to change the relationship between women and the state in South Africa. In this light, the accuracy or truth behind the statements of those who testified is less important than understanding how those memories, as distorted as they may be, are being put to use by groups in the present. Specifically, there is discrete set of values, ideologies, and experiences possessed by women who represented an elder generation – women who were actively involved in the struggle for national liberation in the 1970s – who served as intermediaries in order to guide or lead the testimonies of other women who testified. While the content of individual memories may be unique, the message behind them was concrete and unifying. In this way, the commissioners on the TRC who established the Women's Hearing were able to frame the collective memory of the witnesses. The Women's Hearing served the dual purpose of giving the victims the opportunity to have their experiences recognized and promoting an agenda in support of gender equality.

Much of the recent scholarship of memory in relation to the past focused on the formation of collective memories in relation to greater social relationships between different groups in a given society; typically these relationships are explored in terms of power relationships in which the memories of a hegemonic group are contested by a subordinate or oppositional group. For example, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka's *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* explored the marginalization of the collective memories of Polish Jews and the roles assigned to Jews in Poland according to the Polish majority's collective sense of

the past.[87] Further, Zarecka's *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory,* expanded upon her other work by establishing analytical parameters according to which collective memories are "framed" within a given society, again using the Holocaust as a touchstone.[88]

In a recent article in *Positions: East Asia Cultural Critique*, Hyung-Sook Kim analyzed the collective memory of women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese army during the Fifteen Year War in Asia.[89] Kim's analysis recognized that the collective memory of the former comfort women and the collective memory embedded in the history-making of the Japanese state were in conflict at points of contestation. These points of contestation arose because the present-day Japanese government refused to acknowledge that the stations where comfort women were kept were run by the government, and refused to apologize or give reparations to the surviving comfort women This analysis placed these contested memories within the framework of a power relationship. Kim described the collective memory of the state as "hegemonic" in relation to the "subordinate," or "oppositional" memory of the comfort women.[90]

In the instance of African societies in South Africa, I do not think it useful to characterize

---

[87]Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland.* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988)

[88]Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994) This paper borrows from Irwin-Zarecka's terminology

[89]World War II.

[90]See Hyung-Sook Kim, "History and Memory: The Comfort Women Controversy," *Positions: Eas Asia Cultural Critiques,* vol. 5.1, Spring 1997.

the collective memory of women at different moments in history as subordinate to the hegemonic memory of the South African state. This is first because my analysis has not accepted the notion of "the state" as consisting of a monolithic, unitary structure with a single, clearly defined objective. Rather, if we think about the state as a collection of institutions or structures, some of which are implicated in shaping gender roles in African society, we can understand that the collective memories of each group or institution are engaged in numerous points of contestation. Similar to the model of gender and power presented, these points of contestation can occur across the points of resistance of the same multiplicity of force relations which apply to the relationship between women and the state.

Further, the collective memory-making of women and the state in South Africa historically progressed along different lines of evolution. Isabel Hofmeyr explored the collective memory making of men and women in rural South Africa in her book, *We Spend Our Years As a Tale That is Told.*[91] Hofmeyr convincingly traced the development of oral traditions among men and women which were divided according to the public and private spaces of the household. She argued that women, who were excluded from the oral history-making traditions of the men which went on the public spaces of the homestead courtyard, developed their own storytelling traditions in private spaces. In comparison to the history-making of men, the stories of women were distinctly categorized as stories, even though they may have contained historical or factual elements. This categorization, or "framing"[92] of memories was influenced by factors

---

[91]Isabel Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Years As a Tale That is Told,* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994)

[92]The concept of "framing" memories according to social influences in this paper is derived from the analytical parameters established by Halbwachs and Irwin-Zarecka.

such as the division of gender roles in the realms of politics, economic production, and the generational factors such as elder women guiding and introducing younger women into storyelling traditions.[93] Further, she traced the incorporation of history-making elements into the oral traditions of women as the public spaces in which men participated in oral historical traditions were eliminated by the land allocation policies and increasing collisions with the written literate traditions of the colonial and apartheid states.[94] In rural South Africa in both the pre-capitalist and later periods under the institution of the migrant labor system, collective memory formation occurred along socially and culturally mediated lines.

Also in African history, Dennis Laumann, a PhD candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles, recently completed a dissertation on memory and identity in the context of the German colonial occupation of Ghana. Laumann's dissertation points out, as both Irwin-Zarecka and this paper so, the importance of locating specific shared resources and mediators in determining specific collective memories.

In the Transvaal urban culture during the latter half of the twentieth century, these oral storytelling and history-making traditions were far less central to the formation of collective memories. Instead, the experiences of women living in the urban Transvaal were encoded into memories and framed into collective memories by way of textual resources which were shared among women as a group.[95] These texts include personal narratives in the form of published

---

[93]Hofmeyr, ch. 1.

[95]Irwin-Zarecka argues that collective memories are best located in these sorts of shared resources, rather than within the content of individual memories.

memoirs; among the closely-associated women living in the townships outside of Soweto, Ellen Kuzwayo, Joyce Sikakane-Ranken, and Elaine Mohamed have each had their personal experiences published.[96] As journalists, Sikakane-Ranken and Jubie Mayet each contributed to *Drum Magazine*, *True Love* magazine, *Voice*, and daily newspapers such as Johannesburg's *Rand Daily Mail*.[97] The description of prison experiences, the discussion of violence and crime in the townships, and the exploration of gender issues such as rape and motherhood in these texts helped contribute to the collective memory of urban African women who came into contact with these resources.

The submissions and statements presented to the TRC at the Women's Hearing also added a new dimension to the collective memory of African women living in the urban Transvaal by framing the memories of the women who testified within the context of the relationship between gender and the state. The significance of the Women's Hearing in creating a public space for women to come forward to speak about the past corresponds to increasingly strategic demands among South African women in relation to their participation in the new government.[98] In addition to framing the testimony of women in the context of the power relationship between gender and the state, the TRC also framed their testimony as part of a

---

[96]Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman.* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1985); Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto.* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977); Diana Russell, ed., *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa.* (1989: Basic Books, New York.).

[97]Testimony of Joyce Sikakane-Ranken, 29 July, 1997; Testimony of Jubie Mayet, 29 July, 1997.

[98]See Gay Seidman, "No Freedom Without the Women: Mobilization and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992," *Signs* 18, 2 (1992), 291-320 for a discussion of the shift of women's demands from the pragmatic to the strategic during the 1970-1992 period of the struggle for national liberation.

truth long absent from the public discourse.[99]

These truths were framed in this way through the actions of a closely-associated group of African women who prepared the Gender Submission for the TRC and occupied key roles on the Commission for Gender Equality, which formally convened the Women's Hearing in July 1997. It is interesting to note that most of these women were of an elder generation which was most active in the struggle for national liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thenjiwe Mthintso, the chairperson of the Commission on Gender Equality, who was in detention in the early 1970s knew Joyce Sikakane-Ranken from her time there. Sikakane-Ranken, as journalist and member of the ANC in the 1960s and 1970s, knew Winnie Mandela, Ellen Kuzwayo, Joyce Seroke and Steve Biko[100]. All of these individuals were prominent figures in the struggle in and around Johannesburg and Soweto during the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, Seroke and Mthintso held key roles on the TRC: Mthintso as the chairperson of the Commission on Gender Equality and Seroke as one of the regular HRV Committee members in the TRC's Johannesburg office. After surveying the transcripts of testimonies of women who came forward, it becomes clear that this elder group of women, who provided the conceptual framework for the issues addressed during the Women's Hearings, and some of whom sat on the Commission and guided the testimonies of those women who came forward, effectively framed the testimony of these women according to an ideological discourse regarding the nature of the relationship between gender and the state. As Irwin-Zarecka writes, the process of

---

[99]TRC Report, vol 4, ch. 10:2.

[100]Steve Biko was the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement. He died in detention on September 12, 1977.

collective memory formation is not a "discursive free-for-all,"[101] even though the "realities of the past are socially constructed."[102] "The sense that others are making of one's experience, in short, can only fall within a certain range," she argues.[103]

This range was defined by the conceptual framework set down by the CALS Gender Submission and the TRC, as well as submissions made by individuals describing their experience of human rights violations at the hand of the state, such as Joyce Sikakane-Ranken.

Sikakane-Ranken's case is particularly interesting because she related another version of her experiences in 1977, in her book, *A Window on Soweto.*[104] That account, written during the struggle for national liberation, framed Sikakane's experiences within the context of racial and ethnic injustice in Soweto; she emphasized in this account episodes of racial injustice, rather than gender inequality. Her initial chapters focused on defining the unequal status of Africans living in Soweto to whites living in Johannesburg, and the way the apartheid system was engineered through the pass systems and economic controls. Her personal experiences were also framed in this way: she describes an episode in which she and her fiancé, to whom she was

---

[101]Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance,* 17.

[102]Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance,* 17.

[103]Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance,* 17.

[104]Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto,* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977)

secretly engaged,[105] were stopped by white men in a white suburb and harrassed.[106] Her arrest on charges of terrorism, her interrogation and detention were not characterized as attacks on her gender; the more graphic aspects of her prison experiences are not included in favor of her commentary on the political or racial dimensions of her experiences.[107]

In comparison to the 1977 account, Sikakane-Ranken's 1997 submission and testimony before the TRC foreground her experiences of ill treatment and attacks on her gender during her interrogation and imprisonment. Two personal experiences are foregrounded. The first is her separation from her son when she was in Nylstroom prison: before the TRC she recalled a time when her interrogators brought a child the same age as her son into the interrogation room in an attempt to get her to confess and turn state's witness so that she could go home to her son.[108] This episode is absent from the 1977 account. Additionally, she recalled being made to stand during interrogation during her menstrual period without pads: "as a woman you dreaded the commencement of your menstrual period, because it became so public under the notice of your interrogator," she said.[109] This particular observation is also absent from her 1977 account, but it does respond to the conceptual generalization of women's experiences of torture in prison

---

[105]The 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the 1950 Immorality Act (which made sexual relationships across color lines unlawful) forced Sikakane to keep her engagement to Kenneth Ranken, a Scottish doctor, secret.

[106]Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto,* 58-59.

[107]Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto,* 61-63.

[108]Testimony of Joyce Sikakane-Ranken, 29 July, 1997.

[109]Testimony of Joyce Sikakane-Ranken, 29 July, 1997.

according to the CALS Gender Submission.[110] Sikakane-Ranken's 1997 testimony casts her in the role of a mother and woman, thus framing her testimony as a contribution to the collective memory of the women who testified.

It is also interesting to note how the intermediaries working out the ideological framework and making sense of the experiences of the women who testified at certain points in the hearing effectively guided those recalled experiences into that frame of memory. For example, at one point near the end during Jubie Mayet's testimony, Thenjiwe Mthintso said to her,

> "I would just like to encourage you to, really, allow yourself now to be more vulnerable and work on some of your experiences....At that time you had to be resilient, but I should think when you look back it will be important for you to allow yourself to be vulnerable, go through all the healing mechanisms you need..."[111]

In her testimony, Mayet had been spoken in a very matter-of-fact way about her experiences and was resistant to discussing the gender-specific aspects of those experiences, particularly on the issue of her detention. It is interesting to see that in guiding witness testimony, the Commissioners on the TRC served an intermediary role in framing a memory according to a collective experience. In this case, the Commissioner's words emphasized the vulnerability and victimization of women survivors of human rights violations, downplaying Mayet's resilience in favor of characterizing her strength as a refusal to deal with a greater truth. The formation of collective memory is indeed shaped by the values, perceptions, and ideologies of group, and governed by intermediaries who seek to present memories in a specific way.

---

[110]See Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjies, *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commision,* (D, I, 2: "Constructions of Gender in Prison."

[111]Testimony of Jubie Mayet, 29 July, 1997.

The collective memory constructed out of the experiences of the women who came forward to testify at the Women's Hearing in July 1997 contributed to an ideological stance regarding the position of women in relation to the state and society. The thrust of this ideology casts women in the role of victims of both the state and the legacies of indigenous patriarchies, yet at the same time asserts that this experience of victimization was one unique to women, implying an ownership of those experiences and memories that only women could claim, and about which only women could determine the truths of that experience. In doing so, the CALS Gender Submission and the TRC refuted the roles previously relegated to women through the eyes of the state, its agents, and men in South African society. Even in its intended gender-neutral approach[112], the TRC had predominantly recognized women as the wives, sisters, and daughters of men who suffered human rights violations – that is, that the suffering of women was somehow inextricably connected to that of men. One of the major accomplishments of the TRC Women's Hearing was the proof that this was not true – women suffered in ways fundamentally different from men.

Yet the danger of the creation of a collective memory that feeds into a cult of victimhood is the possibility that the identity which comes out of the interaction between the victim and the recall of the past is one which in the present is guided solely by that notion of victimhood. During the Women's Hearing the TRC actively tried to frame the recollections of witnesses as victims, and in doing so perpetuates the conclusion that African women in South African society continue to occupy social positions subordinate to men in their relationship with the state and its

---

[112]Tutu, et al. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, vol. 4 ch. 10:1.

institutions, such as the law. In this sense, the TRC's project of investigating memory as it relates to the truth is only partially finished.

The second necessary aspect of this memory project is that of reconciliation, and I think it is this act which has not been sufficiently addressed in other projects charged with uncovering historical silences or absences. It is this second aspect which also helps situate the recall of the past within my understanding of the power relationship between gender and the state. I have argued previously that even within the extremely repressive social systems of the apartheid state, women were in positions of power or had the potential to power. In the power relationship between victim and victimizer, the act of reconciliation, which can also be read as an act of the deliberate forgetting of the past, has the potential to reverse or equalize power relations between individuals or groups in conflict. The absence of women perpetrators or perpetrators in general and the Women's Hearing prevented this act of reconciliation from happening within the gendered framing of experience. It is, however, a task the Commission on Gender Equality established for itself for the future of the Commission's work.[113]

African women in South Africa, through the process of collective memory formation in the public space provided by the TRC, have taken on an increasingly prominent role in defining the strategic position of women in relationship to the state and its institutions and structures. The commissioners present at the Women's Hearing guided the testimony of other witnesses in order to frame them within an ideology which supported an identity that established a cult of victimhood and gained increasing attention for gender issues in society. Today in South Africa gender issues are being considered alongside those of race and class in the creation of laws

[113]Testimony of Yasmin Sooka, 29 July, 1997.

which reshape the gender roles in the eyes of the state. One notable example is the creation and enforcement of new laws on domestic violence which help ensure that victims of such violence receive justice under the law.

Conclusions

This paper's contribution to current historical writing on South African society and the field of gender history in general has centered on the execution of two major arguments. The first is the argument for a model of gender and power which adopts the Foucauldian notion that power is the "name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."[114] Power is omnipresent in society; it is not seized, acquired, or shared, and it comes from below as well as above. When considering the relationship of women to the state according to this definition of power, agency is returned to women, even in a situation as extremely repressive as South African society under apartheid. This definition of power also leads us to a new understanding of the concept of the state as a collection of structures and institutions rather than as a unitary, monolithic force controlled by the ruling class. These institutions can have different, or occasionally contradictory objectives, but it is important to note which ones are specifically implicated in defining gender roles in a given society.

The second major contribution of this paper is to the growing body of literature and research on the connection of memory to the present construction of events. Every society remembers its past in some way, and an understanding of the way we remember our past helps us understand why we do the things we do. At certain points in history we are given an

[114]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 93.

opportunity to consciously take part in the creation of collective memories or histories. Within this field of inquiry, however, the concept of reconciliation still must be investigated as part of the investigation of the past.

Bibliography

Bonner, Philip. "Desirable and Undesirable Basotho Women?: Liquor, Prostitution, and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945." *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945.* ed C. Walker. Johannesburg: Ravan (1997), 221-250.

Bozzoli, Belinda. "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9.2, (1983).

Brooks, Alan, and Brickhill, Jeremy. *Whirlwind Before the Storm.* London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980.

Delius, Peter. *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press, 1996.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* vol. 1. New York: Random House, 1990.

Glaser, Clive. "Swines, Hazels, and the Dirty Dozen: Masculinity, Territoriality and the Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1960-1976." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24.4 (1998) 719-736.

Goldblatt, Beth, and Meintjies, Sheila. "Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Submission to the Truth and Reonciliation Commission," May 1996. Available at www.truth.org.za

Greene, Sandra. *Ethnicity and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe.* New Hampshire: Heinemann Press, 1996.

Guy, Jeff. "Gender and Oppression in Southern Africa's Pre-Capitalist Societies." *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945,* ed. Cherryl Walker. London: J. Currey, 1990. 33-47

Halbwachs, Maurice, and Coser, Lewis (trans.). *On Collective Memory.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992.

Halperin, David. "Is There a History of Sexuality?" *History and Theory* 28.3 (1989): 257-275.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press, 1994.

Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona. *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994.

Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona. *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland.* New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988.

Kim, Hyung-Sook. "History and Memory: The Comfort Women Controversy." *Positions: East Asia Cultural Critiques* 5.1 Spring 1997.

Kuzwayo, Ellen. *Call Me Woman.* San Francisco: Spinster's Ink, 1985.

Laumann, Dennis H. "Remembering and Forgetting the German Occupation of the Central Volta Region of Ghana." Dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1999.

Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved.* New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Maloka, T. "Khomo Lia Oela: Canteens, Brothels, and Labour Migrancy in Colonial Lesotho, 1900-40." *Journal of African History* 38 (1997), 101-122.

Meer, Fatima. "Women in Apartheid Society." *Notes and Documents* 4/85, ANC Women's League, April 1985.

Miescher, Stephan. "The Making of Presbyterian Teachers: Masculinities, Subjectivity, and Programs of Education in Colonial Ghana." May 2000, forthcoming.

Manicom, Linzi. "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History." *Journal of African History* 33 (1992): 441-465.

Russel, Diana, ed. *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa.* New York: Basic Books, 1989.

Schmidt, Elizabeth. "Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe." *Signs,* 16.4 (1991), 732-756.

Seidman, Gay. ""No Freedom Without the Women:' Mobilization and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992." *Signs* 18.2 (1992), 291-320.

Secretariat for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, *The Role of Women in the Struggle Against Apartheid, 1980* (Copenhagen: July 1980) available at www.anc.org.za

Sikakane, Joyce. *A Window on Soweto.* London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977.

Tutu, Desmond, et al. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa.* vols. 1-5. Oxford: Macmillan Reference, 1999.

White, Luise. "Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-1959." *International Journal of African Historical*

Studies 23.1 (1990):1-25

Wolpe, Harold. "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid." *Economy and Society* 1.4 (1972).

Sources

Dube, Kedeboni. Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Jokazi, Deborah. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Mackenzie, Vanessa. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Mahlope, Gloria. Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Makhubela, Winnie. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Malakoane, Simon. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Marubini, Joyce. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Masote, Sheila. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Matshoba, Deborah. Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Mavuso, Thandi. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Mayet, Jubie, Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Maziya, Alli. Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Mxathule, Deborah. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Sexwale, Tokyo. Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Shezi, Thandi. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Sikakane-Ranken, Joyce. Women's Hearing Testimony. 29 July, 1997.

Thobela, Lephine. Women's Hearing Testimony. 28 July, 1997.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted Professor Stephan Miescher for his guidance and support during entire course of writing this paper. I would also like to thank Professor Jonathon Glickstein for his guidance, particularly on points of theory and structure, and my peer reviewers Colleen Egan and Leah Etling for their insights and advice. Professor Luke Roberts contributed kind and constructive criticisms at the History department undergraduate panel, and I am grateful to him for doing so. In addition, I would also like to thank UCSB's SPUR office for providing funding for materials and travel this past year and for providing a public space to present my work. Finally, Christine Yoon also supported me in this and other accomplishments this year – I will be forever grateful to her.