

WOMEN, ACTIVISM AND APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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WOMEN, ACTIVISM AND APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: USING PLAY TEXTS TO DOCUMENT THE HERSTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Preface

This work is not an analysis of theatre – it is more than that. It is an insightful perspective of how women have been marginalised by patriarchy, politics, economics, social conditions and customs – that, in spite of these restrictive and oppressive interventions into their lives, women have been at the forefront in the struggle for racial equality and political freedom. As a feminist researcher, I have emailed each woman interviewed in my research a copy for their consideration and approval.

I was very fortunate to spend time at the Space Theatre and the start of the Market Theatre working with Barney Simon and Vanessa Cooke. At the University of Cape Town, I worked with Professor Morris on the first production she directed – *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

I wrote and directed a series for South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) television which was filmed in Soweto and spent a wonderful time with the cast and crew, especially the two young lead actresses. I worked on various productions for television which took me to locations in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Johannesburg. I also worked with SABCTV2 staff on *Deaf Story* which won an Astera Award.

Presently, I lecture in Criminology, Gender, Restorative Justice, Visual Sociology and Equality and Diversity at the University of Hull. I am also an Associate Lecturer at the Open University. I am now part of a funding project that is researching the decriminalisation of sex workers in South Africa. For this project we will be starting a theatre group and be presenting many productions, I hope. I look forward to working in South Africa again and linking up with friends and colleagues and to be part of the activist group working strategically to lessen the reign of patriarchy.

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Introduction

This work is not an analysis of theatre – it is more than that. It is an insightful perspective of how women have been marginalised by patriarchy, politics, economics, social conditions and customs. That in spite of these restrictive and oppressive interventions into their lives, women have been at the forefront in the struggle for racial equality and political freedom.

When I began my research, I was unsure of the final focus, but I had a strong desire to intervene into the thoughts and debates about South African women's experiences of apartheid and their role in bringing about political change in South Africa. To research women's experiences of apartheid South Africa, I am using five play texts as case studies. All five play texts have important social and political functions. The play text is uniquely positioned in relation to memory and history as theatre provides the audience with a way of re-remembering and a way of piecing together the social and historical contexts in which the play text was written and performed, respectively. Playwriting is a way of structuring memory for an audience. Reading the playwright's words is a way of remembering and that includes two important moments – the moment when it was written and the moment when it was performed.

In South African history, there is a tendency to overlook women's contribution to political change, political activism and political contributions. Zungu, Manqe, de Vries, Molefe, and Hadebe (2014, p. 2) of the Oral History Unit of the Department of Arts and Culture stated that 'history is told not as it was but as men saw it' and as a result 'Women have largely been absent from the telling of our history, despite their vital contribution made in the struggle for freedom' (p. 2). Their contribution played an important role in the liberation process, and yet there is a propensity that their contribution will remain under-recorded, their voices silenced and their political activism under-recognised for future generations. This view is reflected in Walker's comment about the absence of a *herstorical* record of South African women's voices, particularly of black¹ South African women's voices as 'they simply disappear from our view of the past' (Walker, 1999, p. 3). I use *herstorical* as a term that includes the narratives of women from the past and also as a way to raise issues about women's political marginalisation. *Herstory* alludes to the distinctions of patriarchal and feminist viewpoints of history whilst defining textual,

¹The term 'black' 'as it emerges from the Black Consciousness Movement' (Hutchinson, 2013, p. xi) tended to refer to those classified by the apartheid regime as African, Indian and Coloured. Racial terminology in South Africa is and was complex and 'in the 1970s the black consciousness movement defined black as all those who were excluded from systems of governing in South Africa' (Hassim, 2006, p. 286). For Biko, black was more than a skin pigmentation but also referred to those who were discriminated against in South African society (Ramsamy, 2010, p. 56). For purposes of this monograph, I will be using the term *black* as per the Black Consciousness Movement definition. I use the terms '*black South African*' and '*white South African*' to illustrate the discrimination of races during apartheid.

political, economic and social representations and challenging patriarchal history (Andermahr & Pellicer-Ortin, 2013). The herstory of African women is one of sexualised forms of political violence, which was used by the apartheid government to control women. African women were the ones who suffered the loss of sons, husbands, brothers and fathers, and who had to fend for themselves in the homelands or Bantustans. Yet their suffering is not always recorded, making them the silent victims of war (Merry, 2009, p. 156).

I use the play texts – *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock* (Phyllis Klotz, 1994 in Kani, 1994), *Glass House* (Fatima Dike, 2002, in Banham, Gibbs, & Osofisan (Eds.) 2002), *Born in the RSA* (Barney Simon, 1994 in Kani, 1994), *Have You Seen Zandile?* (Gcina Mhlophe, 1994 in Kani, 1994) and *So What's New?* (Fatima Dike, 1998 in Perkins, 1998) – to inform the writing of the herstory of women in apartheid South Africa through a feminist lens. Yvonne Banning, in her interview with Goodman, talks about how there has been a distortion of history, how ‘there has been such a disruption of peoples’ histories that the children these days very often don’t know their own histories’ (Banning, cited in Goodman, 1999, p. 8). By using specific play texts, I provide a feminist lens into re-remembering women’s contribution to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa between 1975 and 1993, a period which reflects events of major political upheaval and change in apartheid South Africa.

And then very, very slowly black women began to write about their experiences. We have had success like *You Strike the Woman You Strike the Rock*, and then in 1990 I did *So What's New?* Still playing today it is on at the Market Theatre. So you are beginning to hear the voice the woman’s voice – but woman’s voices are not heard as strongly as men’s voices. (Interview with Fatima Dike, 2010)

The herstory of theatre in South Africa is closely aligned to the political history of the country. According to Fatima Dike, theatre director, actress and scriptwriter, theatre can be considered as playing an important role in discovering and telling the truth about the herstory of South Africa. This is instead of the regurgitating biased opinions that Fatima Dike talks about being forced to listen whilst attending school. That theatre had a very important part to play in revealing what was happening in South Africa is very succinctly voiced by Fatima Dike when she says:

I’ll tell you something – I think if we did not do theatre, if we did not do protest theatre the rest of the world would not have known what was happening in South Africa [...] if we tell people ourselves what was happening in South Africa they would not believe us. So South African theatre became a collateral in that we would be taken to countries outside South Africa and tell our stories ourselves ... So imagine the impact that theatre had – what you call it – donated to the struggle – not just outside South Africa – within the borders of South Africa because that’s how people were educated. (Interview with Fatima Dike, 2010)

Perkins (1998), writing in the introduction to *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays*, argues that 'there were few plays that dealt with the role of black women, and even fewer written by black women' (pp. 1–2). The emphasis and recognition has been on men's experiences of the apartheid regime. According to Cooke, theatre director and actress, 'most of the plays were written by men and the experiences of apartheid were mainly from the male point of view' (Interview with Cooke, 2006).

Using the play texts, my objective is finding the feminist voice and listening to women's testimonies, thereby revealing how the herstory of South Africa embraces women who refused to be passive recipients of oppression, patriarchy and apartheid laws, and who organised political opposition movements in the face of violent and abusive opposition. It is in theatre that testimony is given to those lives which 'are not reflected elsewhere in the arts or in the official media' (Gray, 1990, p. 81). The voices within the play texts represent both black and white South African women, and therefore, my readings comment on women's lives from different backgrounds, classes and race, and in this manner provide insight into their diversity of experiences and the censorial and penal repercussions that women were forced to endure for contravening political Afrikaner ideology and statutory law. Zungu et al. (2014) are of the opinion that there is a need to document women in history and that this 'requires revisiting their "lived lives"' (p. 10) and that the silence surrounding 'women's history can only be [corrected] through [their] life histories' (p. 10). Hence, the readings of the play texts revisit 'their lived lives and reveal their life herstories' (Zungu et al., 2014). Throughout the play texts, I draw on feminist historiography, theatre and memory in that I examine how women activists engage with theatre, activism in particular areas (such as the Women's March in Pretoria) and how they invoke memories of these interventions. These interventions evoke a gender-balanced recognition of women's contribution to the political struggle. I also draw on feminist theoretical studies to emphasise the articulation of gender, collective and social memory and memory of trauma.

These play texts are sites of personal, social and political resistance and remembering of the activism of women such as Charlotte Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Albertina Sisulu and organisations such as Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and their campaigns against women being forced to carry passes are included. Each play text represents a microcosm of apartheid society and the impact of oppressive apartheid laws on the characters and members of their families and friends. They highlight how women experienced their herstory of apartheid, and how different their experiences are from that of the men who experienced their history of apartheid. This is achieved through fulfilling a social function by speaking to an audience beyond the theatre as well as providing information about the performance (Graver, 1999, p. 19). I use the five play texts as case studies to reflect the herstory of women's suffering, oppression, political activism and contribution to political change during apartheid in South Africa between 1975 and 1993. They demonstrate socio-political and herstory analyses of the lives of women in apartheid South Africa. Marginalised and struggling to make a living, African women represented the most vulnerable members of the urban and rural communities. The play texts provide a different

insight into the experiences of women in South Africa. They were 'victims of laws to clear the cities' (Berger, 1995, p. 53) and were considered by the apartheid government to be 'superfluous appendages' (Berger, 1995, p. 53).

I begin my readings with *You Strike Woman, You Strike the Rock*, which I feel explicitly outlines the women's protest against the pass, provides a narrative of women's struggle against apartheid, and through consciousness-raising, the play text acts as a vehicle for change and remembering the participation of women in the struggle against apartheid. The second reading *The Glass House* and third reading *Born in the RSA* demonstrate the brutalities of the security police, political manipulation and torture. *The Glass House* is semi-autobiography that provides a process for Dike to deal with the trauma of witnessing the shooting of a young child in Langa, a township near Cape Town, during the 1976 uprising (Flockemann, 1999, p. 47). The fourth reading *Have You Seen Zandile?* is an autobiographical play text about Mhlophe's relationship with her grandmother and her mother. Her relationships in the two locations, one in Natal (Grandmother) and another one in the Transkei (mother), demonstrate differences in attitudes to education and aspirations for women. The final reading *So What's New?* is a domestic comedy that deals with issues such as education, independence and relationships with men.

Throughout the readings of the play texts, I develop a politics of critical engagement with activism, using scholarly resources such as feminist theoretical tools and herstorical /historical experience 'that reach beyond the immediacies of a given local gender relations and struggles to enable reflection and deepen understanding' (Mama, 2011, p. 8). I argue the need to demystify the existing gendered systems of domination and develop a critical understanding and analysis of minutiae aspects of women's everyday lives and gender relations, women's political organisations and their strategies for survival. I argue that women's contribution to the struggle against apartheid has been marginalised in dominant narratives of the past, both in formal histories and theatre. Through an interdisciplinary approach, which weaves together the readings of the play text, interview data, auto/ethnography and sociological analysis, I seek to challenge such dominant perceptions of the past and add to the feminist re-imagining of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa from an intersectional perspective. It advances sociological enquiry into apartheid through the readings of play texts. It seeks to explore how theatre can help write a 'herstory' of apartheid not only acting as a form to document the reality of women's experiences but also a means to imagine different realities.

The five chosen play texts provide an insight into the specificity of women's experiences as a consequence of the apartheid government's repressive and discriminatory laws as well as '[a] tapestry of oppression in South Africa during Apartheid' (Meskin & van der Walt, 2013, p. 132); that the play texts are products of both black and white South African women goes some way to validate my readings by 'telling better stories about gendered lives' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2007, p. 63) which are 'grounded in women's experience' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2007, p. 64) and in which their experiences of political, social and economic conditions vary from those experienced by African men.

My readings include an understanding of feminist theories, social, political and economic perspectives in order to contribute to a theory of feminist theatre that is

concerned about ‘women surviving and creating new and human communities out of the wreckage of the past’ (Natalie 41 cited in Schroeder, 1993, p. 3). This highlights the importance of women playwrights’ contribution to theatre, their ability to communicate the seriousness of the issues and about making their work available to students and scholars (Barnes, 1999, p. 31). Theatre practitioners realise the power of theatre and history (Meskin & van der Walt, 2013, p. 137); however, to recognise the power of herstory there needs to be theatrical interweaving of herstories of truth, memory and activism to enable an unshackling from a patriarchal attitude towards a more inclusive herstory of South Africa (Meskin & van der Walt, 2013, p. 146). In Africa ‘theatre plays an important role in terms of preserving history, disseminating information and education, and also in facilitating participation, all key to the guarantee of freedom of expression’ (Mendel, 2003, p. 2).

Tutu (2008) writes in the introduction to *Theatre as Witness* that ‘Acknowledging the past through sharing one’s personal story is the single most powerful action in the battle against the silence of indifference and fear’ (cited in Farber, 2008, p. 7). Finally, I argue that theatre and play texts can provide the audience with a way of acknowledging the past by way of re-remembering and piecing together the social and herstorical contexts in which the play text was written and performed. This is why I chose these five play texts over other play texts, as I felt that, after much consideration and deliberation, they were able to portray the themes of women’s struggles against apartheid and acknowledge the past specifically from a woman’s perspective.

Context – The Play Texts

The South African apartheid regime was characterised by violence, political upheaval, brutal oppression and violations of human rights. In South Africa, many black women had a dual interest – the struggle for national liberation and the emancipation of women (Walker, 1982, p. xvi). The struggle for emancipation was intricately intertwined with the struggle for liberation and, in part, due to the patriarchal nature of political organisations, the struggle for liberation took precedence over that of women’s emancipation (Ginwala cited in Walker, 1982). This point was stressed by Vanessa Cooke who stated that the feeling during apartheid in South Africa was that African people thought ‘[they] should be liberated first and then we can deal with women’s issues’ (Interview with Cooke, 2006). Kuzwayo (1996), an author and activist, reiterated this particular sentiment when she talked about the commitment of her community, when the women

stand side by side with our menfolk and children in this long struggle to liberate ourselves and to bring about *peace* and *justice* for all in a country we love so dearly. (p. 300)

These statements support the argument of Brigitte Mabandla, the African National Congress constitutional expert and gender activist (Hassim, 2006, p. 220), that even though women have been integral to the struggles against racism, colonialism and fascism, their struggle for emancipation is the struggle that

has been waged for the longest time (Mabandla, 1991 in Bazilli, 1991). 'Traditionally the role of women in the ANC² has been one of assisting the movement rather than being equal partners'³ (cited in Magubane, 2013, p. 1141) argued Barbara Masekela, an ANC representative abroad (Hassim, 2006, p. 100). Hassim is of the opinion that black women who were politically active tended to be involved in political campaigns and trade union movements as opposed to being involved with women's issues (Mabandla, 1991, p. 69). Issues such as women's reproductive rights, control of women's bodies and 'concerns about children and child-care have been regarded in South Africa as "soft political issues"' (Hassim, 1991, p. 69). Women's issues were not overtly visible in the theatre, and there was no space where women could create work that was not dominated by male practitioners. In 1975, Dike became the first African woman to have a play performed at the Space Theatre in Cape Town. *The Sacrifice of Kreli*, a play about the Gcalekas and the Ninth Frontier War which took place in 1885, was followed by the *First South African*. It is in the *First South African* that Dike deals with the fight of a woman for her child. She wrote this play after she read about the rape of a seven-year-old girl in Guguletu, a township in Cape Town. This was the start of her social and political consciousness-raising, and it is in this play that she first includes roles for women (Barrios, 2008, p. 178).

Black South African women suffered four-fold oppression during apartheid: from 'colonialism and imperialism, white racism, class and sexual oppression' (Quanta, 1987 cited in Barrios, 2008, p. 172). Fatima Meer, a political anti-apartheid activist and founding member of the Federation of South African Women who was banned and detained for expressing her outspoken opposition to apartheid, felt strongly that black women's experience of oppression, both within society and the home, has meant that their voices have not always been heard. She felt that their experiences were silenced due to their inferior status, domination by apartheid, victimisation in family structures and by being part of an oppressed and exploited community (Meer cited in Jansen, 1985, p. 79).

Throughout the struggle against apartheid, women were regarded as being the 'silent strength' (Brittan, 2005, p. 6). Yet they were at the forefront of mass action, voluntarily setting aside their fight for gender equality in their fight for racial equality, whilst maintaining their identity as mothers and wives (Brittan, 2005, p. 6). Since 1913, African women had been protesting against apartheid and pass laws, yet nationalist leaders did not acknowledge women's oppression under either colonialism or patriarchy (Giesler, 2004, p. 64) nor their political mobilisation.

The definition of politics is contested in that it does not only include the major events in the South African anti-apartheid struggle but also those events which tend to go unreported and to be forgotten – the daily struggle of women to exist within an oppressive economic situation. The following five play texts express

²African National Congress.

³UWC, O'Malley Archives, Interview with Barbara Masekela conducted by Padraig O'Malley, 18 September 1991.

explicitly, how in different ways, women participated in the struggle against apartheid: *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock*, written in 1986 examines how women took part in the Women's March in 1956, and how it is not remembered; *Glass House*, which premiered in 1979, focusses on the relationship between an African and white young woman and how the student riots impacted their lives; *Born in the RSA*, which was first performed in 1985, demonstrates the claustrophobic network of undercover spies and the treatment of women in detention; *Have You Seen Zandile?*, written in 1986 explores a young woman's break with traditional values and consciousness-raising and *So What's New?*, which premiered in 1991, shows how even independent women's lives are impacted by the apartheid laws.

A Feminist Lens

My feminist research is developed through a politics of critical engagement with activism, using scholarly resources such as feminist theoretical tools and historical experience 'that reach beyond the immediacies of a given local gender relations and struggles to enable reflection and deepen understanding' (Mama, 2011, p. 8). Women's contribution to the struggle against apartheid has been marginalised in dominant narratives of the past, both in formal histories and theatre. Through an interdisciplinary approach, which weaves together a reading of the play text, interview data, auto/ethnography and sociological analysis, I challenge such dominant perceptions of the past and add to the feminist re-imagining of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa from an intersectional perspective. This advances sociological enquiry into apartheid through an analysis of theatre and seeks to explore how theatre as a form can help write a 'herstory' of apartheid. A herstory which not only acts as a form to document the reality of women's experiences but also acts as a means to imagine different realities. Using intersectionality as an analytical lens enables an examination of the situated woman in the centre of domination. I pay particular attention to social divisions existing within apartheid society and the manner in which women experience their daily lives

in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities. Importantly, this includes not only what they think about themselves and their communities but also their attitudes and prejudices towards others. (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198)

Using an intersectional approach which addresses 'the other', who was considered as being racially different but then whose questioning of apartheid policy was seen as negating the white identity, I realise sites of a political antagonism (Mouffe, 2005, p. 3) and the significance of plural/multiple antagonisms for social and political transformations. This highlights multiple oppressions of race, gender and class and reveals a different history (herstory) than the current dominant one of historical writing on South African history. These issues are important as they impinge upon women's involvement in theatre who, although they have been

active in theatre, have not been included in the centres of power, and it is this exclusion that has undermined their contribution to the development of theatre in South Africa (Gray, 1990, p. 75).

The play texts provide a feminist lens into re-remembering women's contribution to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa between 1975 and 1993, a period which reflects events of major political upheaval and change in apartheid South Africa. This period represents a re-awakening of active political resistance and opposition to the restrictions imposed by the apartheid government that used terror to suppress and repress any indications of political unrest and communist activity. It is against this background of escalating violence, terror and oppression that my selected play texts were written. Fatima Dike considers South African theatre to be a male domain, one that denies women a voice and that disregards African women (Blumberg & Walder in Blumberg & Walder, 1999, p. 9). This feeling of disregard of African women is echoed in an interview with Gcina Mhlophe when she talks about the Battle of Blood River, and how there is no mention of women. 'Did those men have no sisters, no mothers who helped them? Our history is very unbalanced' (August 2001 in Gunner, 2001, p. 277). Peterson feels that black theatre has kept women on the periphery and that it has not recognised the suffering of the lower working classes, workers and women (Peterson, 1990, p. 245).

The readings of the play texts draw on feminist historiography, theatre and memory in that I examine how women activists engage with theatre, activism in particular areas (such as the Women's March in Pretoria) and how they invoke memories of these interventions. These interventions evoke a gender-balanced recognition of women's contribution to the political struggle. I also draw on feminist theoretical studies to emphasise the articulation of gender, collective and social memory and memory of trauma.

I provide material for a critical feminist reading of social and political conflict, emphasising the role of theatre in re-remembering the activism of women in the struggle for liberation, affording an insight into the dire effects of pass laws and apartheid laws, stimulating discussion about gender struggle, sexual division of work and knowledge about the suffering of women during apartheid. These play texts are sites of personal, social and political resistance. The readings have the objective of finding the feminist voice and listening to women's testimonies, thereby revealing how the herstory of South Africa embraces women who refused to be passive recipients of oppression, patriarchy and apartheid laws and who organised political opposition movements in the face of violent and abusive opposition. It is in theatre that testimony is given to those lives which 'are not reflected elsewhere in the arts or in the official media' (Gray, 1990, p. 81). The voices within the play texts represent both white and black South African women, and it is here that my readings comment on women's lives from different backgrounds, classes and race, and in this manner provides insight into women's diversity of experiences and the censorial and penal repercussions that women were forced to endure for contravening political Afrikaner ideology and statutory law. Zunga et al. (2014) are of the opinion that there is a need to document women in history and that this 'requires revisiting their "lived lives" (p. 10) and that the silence surrounding 'women's history can only be [corrected] through

[their] life histories' (p. 10). Hence, the readings of the play texts revisit 'their lived lives and reveal their life herstories'. The play texts are about women, their testimonies, they created and performed the plays which focus on their lives and also, most importantly herstoricsises an event that the apartheid government made invisible. By exploring the multiplicity of experiences, the reader and the audience are reintroduced to the 'process of remembrance' (Farber, 2008, p. 10). Through readings and watching the plays, audiences are again made aware of the brutality of the apartheid system and the need to listen to testimonies and acknowledge the suffering of those who were oppressed and discriminated.

By researching the ways in which play texts are able to reflect testimonies of women's suffering, oppression, political activism and contribution to political change during apartheid in South Africa between 1975 and 1993, I focus on uncovering three areas: the plurality of women's experiences, individual women's experiences and the process of remembrance. The play texts provide insight into three characteristics and principles which feminist researchers make use to guide their analyses. The first characteristic is that gender and gender inequality provides the main focus of feminist research. The second characteristic highlights the issue of the power imbalance between of the researcher and the researched. The third characteristic enables the facilitation of the voices of women to be heard and to value the narratives of their experiences (Skinner, Hester, & Malos, 2005, pp. 11–12).

These three areas relate to standpoint theory's 'ability to explain social inequality' (Collins, 1997, p. 376); moreover, 'the adoption of a feminist standpoint is a way of exposing real relations of gender subordination as unjust' (cited in Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2007, p. 70). Social inequality was embedded in institutionalised racial policies and South African women did not experience the apartheid system in the same way, just as they did not experience male power. In the same way, all women do not hold the same views, the same goals or moral values (Stoetzler & Yavul-Davis, 2002, p. 318).

Case Studies

Each play text represents a microcosm of apartheid society and the impact of oppressive apartheid laws on the characters and members of their families and friends. They highlight how women experienced their herstory of apartheid, and how different their experiences are from that of the men who experienced their history of apartheid. Theatre practitioners realise the power of theatre and history (Meskin & van der Walt, 2013, p. 137); however, to recognise the power of theatre and herstory, there needs to be theatrical interweaving of herstories of truth, memory and activism to enable an unshackle from a patriarchal attitude towards a more inclusive herstory of South Africa (Meskin & van der Walt, 2013, p. 146).

According to Reinharz, the case study is a tool of feminist research that is used to document history and generate theory (1992, p. 174). Case studies provide a corrective device in herstorical documentation by addressing the paucity and invisibility of women's struggle against apartheid (Reinharz, 1992, p. 167). Each play text depicts a layered reading of interrelations of race, gender and class against a background of political oppression and white domination. Reading Bozzoli made me

think about her questioning as to why 'the growth of interest in the study of women in South Africa' (1983, p. 139) has ignored the social explanation of feminist issues. By using play texts as case studies, I take cognisance of women's participation and acknowledge gender issues. By utilising the power of the theatre, I provide social, economic and political explanations as to how women reveal their individual lives, to honour their personal stories and to enable the audience access to witness the experiences through the reading and listening to play texts (Farber, 2008). Through my readings, I initiate discussion of 'the character of female oppression in South Africa as well as [restoring] to women both dignity and pride in their heritage of resistance' (Bozzoli, 1983, p. 141). I also include the activism of women such as Charlotte Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Albertina Sisulu and organisations such as Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and their campaigns against women and passes. To reiterate, as Zunga et al. (2014) state, women are essentially non-existent in history which is recorded mainly as men experienced it. Therefore, women have largely been absent from the narratives of the political struggle, despite their vital contribution made in the struggle for freedom.

I am not trying to 'reproduce the limitations of the traditionally male-dominated theatre world within a feminist context, [as then] we disempower feminist playwrights rather than help to make them known' (Schroeder, 1993, p. 2) but to use an understanding of feminist theories, social, political and economic perspectives in order to provide a new theory of feminist theatre that is concerned about 'women *surviving* and creating new and human communities out of the wreckage of the past' (Schroeder, 1993, p. 3). *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock* denies the myth of primitivism and instead presents stories of women's courage and bravery as they challenged the apartheid government about pass laws for African women (Oyewumi, 2005). In *Have You Seen Zandile?* Zandile's mother is shown to be a woman of physical strength as she cuts grass to build her house and courage as she leaves her rural home to go to the city to earn money to provide financially for her family. These experiences are 'anchored in the expression of subordination and resistance of the most marginalised women' (Mohanty, 2013, p. 969).

Although my readings place women at the centre of my research, the case studies do not concentrate on one autonomous woman but consider how the actions of women in the play texts challenge sexual, racial and gender oppression (Schroeder, 1993, p. 105). As the characters discuss their past, their stories are advanced in a manner that incorporates herstorical narrative technique (Peterson, 1990). Through the use of herstorical narrative technique, the stories of life under apartheid and during the struggle unfold as do those of the women's role in the family, workplace and political organisations. As one reads the play texts, the strength of the characters becomes evident. At times, the strong willed characters are unable to control their situation because of the political action taken against them, and it is then that they become victims of the political system. However, although badly affected by torture and detention, they do not succumb to the pain inflicted upon them. Apartheid is realised in the play texts as being an 'intricate gendered and racialised exercise of power' (Mohanty, 2013, p. 968). The play texts provide a connection of women's struggles as an intervention addressing herstorification, politics of difference and normalisation of apartheid practices.

Readings

At the beginning of each reading, I provide information about the play text in regard to where the play was performed, who appeared in it and the political and social contexts within which the play was written. Each play text has a main objective that directly relates to women and the political struggle. Stanislavsky refers to this as being the ‘super-objective’ (Thomas, 2005, p. 147) and contends that his guidelines for discovering the objective, even if minor, are that:

- they come from the goals of the characters;
- they are directed at the goals of the other characters;
- they describe the inner life as opposed to the outer physical life;
- they relate to the main idea of the play;

These guidelines are of particular importance as I argue that the outer physical life is included to raise the political consciousness of the audience and that the use of an infinitive phrase enables an audience to realise the objectives towards which the characters are striving. Each reading of the play texts deals with the issue of conflict between characters, political ideologies, traditional ideas, the environment and social issues. The characters, through working with the tensions caused by conflicting situations, develop their stories with depth and creative portrayals of social, economic and political realities. Thereby exposing survival techniques developed to deal with social, political and economic conditions during the apartheid era (Thomas, 2005, pp. 151–152). By discovering the super-objective within the play text, theatrical herstories voice the realities of women and women’s lives in South Africa during apartheid and deny the acknowledgement of the invisibility of marginalised women. Their physical bodies reflect their narratives and trauma.

I begin my readings with *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock*, as this play text pays particular attention to The Woman’s March in 1956, an important date in the herstory of South African women. The *Glass House* introduces political detention and violence, topics which are expanded upon in *Born in the RSA*. The autobiographical play text *Have You Seen Zandile?* highlights the differences in the lives and aspirations of a mother, a daughter and a granddaughter. *So What’s New?* reveals the lives of three independent women living in the townships and is a play ‘about women and for women’ (Solberg, 1999, p. 121) and

to show people that Black women are ‘funky’ and independent. That they can get on and do things [and that] there is very little known about the things that [black] South African women do. (Cited in Perkins, 1998, p. 24)

My conclusion reiterates how the political agenda of the apartheid government still affects the lives of women in a negative manner. I feel that this is important as Phyllis Klotz, theatre director and playwright, who established the Sibikwa Community Arts Project, so adamantly stated in her interview:

what has changed ... nothing has changed for them ... for poor uneducated women in this country ... especially the rural women. (Interview with Klotz, 2006)

My readings may only represent the tip of the iceberg when using theatre as a feminist lens in re-remembering women's participation in the struggle against apartheid between 1975 and 1993. The women, organisations, actresses and narratives that I mention demonstrate their 'outstanding tenacity against great odds' (Kuzwayo, 1996, p. 300). Their fight for and commitment to community, family, political struggle and liberation is, I hope, clearly evident in my readings. Heilbrun (1988, p. 11) explains in her introduction to *Writing a Woman's Life*, that 'there are four ways to write a woman's life': as an autobiography, as fiction, as a biography or she might decide to write futuristically about her life. I maintain that there is also a fifth way, the play text which incorporates each of these forms of narration and documentation.

Women need spaces to develop their expressions of resistance and affirmation, and this is an area that is still developing. As Gcina Mhlophe says, 'Closing the door, being alone, letting your characters live on paper, hearing their voices, seeing them getting dressed, that's lacking in our theatre' (Mhlophe cited in Gunner, 1990, p. 206). The creation of a space provides women with a location where they can remember the past and the legacy of pain and suffering, as well as the triumphs – not as nostalgia but as the politicisation of memory and tracing of journeys (hooks, 2004, p. 155, in Harding, 2004). In South Africa, many women are unable to speak about their experiences because they were denied the space to speak or to represent themselves. Commissioner Mapule Ramashala⁴ commented that she was disturbed that women witnesses came forward to tell 'stories about other people, and totally removing themselves Are we colluding by not providing space for women to talk?' (Ross, 2003, p. 23).

When Mamphela Ramphele was asked about the lack of material written by or about women in the BCM such as Deborah Matshoba, Nomsisi Kraai, Thenjiwe Mtintso (Yates, Gqola, & Ramphele, 1998, p. 94), she answered very tellingly, saying that very few black women had a platform on which to speak – to air their thoughts and views (Yates et al., 1998, p. 94). This statement made reference to the way women supported men in political organisations – they provided men with space and time within which they could be creative and play an active role in political activities.

Most of the plays were written by men, and the experiences of apartheid were mainly from the male point of view... Barney used to work with the actors ... so a lot of women's issues came out that way ... but it was still a man running the show ... it is very hard, even now, to get people to accept a woman director ... also in the African culture it is a little bit odd that women go out and perform, especially at night. (Interview with Vanessa Cooke, 2006)

⁴A commissioner with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Austin is of the opinion that drama and live performance are areas that remain relatively unexplored and that playwriting requires knowledge of an area that is essentially male dominated (Austin, 1990, p. 2). This applied rather aptly to the situation in South Africa where theatre companies have been managed and owned primarily by white men and which was further complicated by strict censorship laws. The Publications Control Board was the administrative body for the Publications and Entertainment Act 1963. The board had wide powers. Plays were censored, and performances of plays with strong political messages were either banned or were performed in approved venues (Hauptfleisch, 1997, p. 11). As Professor Morris states: 'Apartheid itself was incredibly gendered. The black women were like nowhere. That is why it is so amazing that these women did make it into the theatre' (Interview with Professor Morris, 2010).

Discussions of the play texts tend to 'relate in some way to the main idea of the play' (Thomas, 2005, p. 178). These are women's lives, student protests, political detention, relationships and apartheid laws. The languages of the dialogues are mainly in simple informal language and use English, Zulu and Xhosa. Within the play, texts there are moments when the characters are emotional and use 'highly emotional dialogue (which) is often a free release of feelings stemming from a clash of wills' (Thomas, 2005, p. 231).

Through the use of dialogue and connotations, the mood or atmosphere of the play text is created. In my readings, I have paid attention to the subtexts as it is here that one is made aware of what the character is saying and thinking (Thomas, 2005, p. 235), and it is here that one learns about desires, suffering, pain and fight for survival. By challenging what is accepted behaviour according to the apartheid system of laws, the women 'provide a shift in the general view of the world' (Thomas, 2005, p. 283). Structural and societal constraints have controlled the silence surrounding the herstories of remarkable women in South Africa's past. My readings of the play texts both demonstrate how and pay tribute to the women who 'mobilised against the injustices of the apartheid state, recognising that such injustice touched on all aspects of their lives' (Zunga et al., 2014, p. 9). They deserve to be included in academic and political discourses. It is only through integrating their disregarded and ignored lives, their activities and feelings that we will develop a deeper understanding of South Africa's past and present.

'Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo'.