

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**THEORISING WOMEN: THE INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHARLOTTE
MAXEKE TO THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**



A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor Philosophiae (History) in the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape

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August 2012

KEYWORDS

Archive Fever
Bantu Women's League
Black Atlantic
Charlotte Maxeke
Discourse
Federation of South African Women
Feminism
Gender
Gender Relations
Historiography
Intellectuals
Intellectual Traditions
Liberation Struggle
Nationalism
National Council of Women
Native Question
Resistance
South African Democracy Education Trust
Theorizing Women
Women's Section of the African National Congress



ABSTRACT

The study outlines five areas of intervention in the development of women's studies and politics on the continent. Firstly, it examines the problematic construction and the inclusion of women in the narratives of the liberation struggle in South Africa. Secondly, the study identifies the sphere of intellectual debates as one of the crucial sites in the production of historical knowledge about the legacies of liberation struggles on the continent. Thirdly, it traces the intellectual trajectory of Charlotte Maxeke as an embodiment of the intellectual contributions of women in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. In this regard, the study traces Charlotte Maxeke as she deliberated and engaged on matters pertaining to the welfare of the Africans alongside the prominent intellectuals of the twentieth century. Fourthly, the study inaugurates a theoretical departure from the documentary trends that define contemporary studies on women and liberation movements on the continent. Fifthly, the study examines the incorporation of Maxeke's legacy of active intellectual engagement as an integral part of gender politics in the activities of the Women's Section of the African National Congress. In the areas identified, the study engages with the significance of the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke in South African history.

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DECLARATION

I declare that *Theorising Women: The intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke to the discourse of the Liberation Struggle in South Africa* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.



Full Name: Thozama April

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Signed

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Premesh Lalu, my supervisor, I owe my heartfelt thanks for support creative inspiration and guidance in every phase of this project. The members of staff in the Department of History of the University of the Western Cape have been of great assistance in directing my attention to other scholarly work on women in the continent. In this regard, I thank Patricia Hayes for facilitating conferences and discussions on aspects of my research. This work could not have gained the insights and the depth it has without her motivation and support. Teresa Barnes has also been of great assistance in directing my attention to scholarly work done by women groups in the continent, especially the publications and works of CODESRIA. My gratitude goes to Professor Martin Legassick for his professional and academic support and encouragement in the initial stages of this project. I also want to thank my friends and colleagues in the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar Series of the University of the Western Cape for robust intellectual engagements which nourished this study of Charlotte Maxeke in significant ways.

The South African Democracy Education Trust has offered me the opportunity to interact with seasoned academics, political activists, intellectuals and scholars in South Africa such as Professor Ben Magubane; Greg Houghston; Sifiso Ndlovu, Ma Joyce Sekhakane, Sean Field, Noor Nieftagodien, Jerney Seekings, Lungisile Ntsebeza, Somadoda Fikeni and Xolela Mangcu. I acknowledge most gratefully the financial assistance I received from the Ford Foundation without which this study could not have been possible. My gratitude goes to Mrs. Louise Africa and Ms Tholakele Khumalo, the staff members of the Ford Foundation in South Africa for their kindness, efficiency and the timeous disbursement of funds for the study.

Staff members the Africana section of the University of the Western Cape and the Mayibuye Archives, Zolile Mvubelo, Simphiwe Yako and Graham Gordard and Hester have earned my gratitude for making the necessary arrangements for the acquisition of relevant material. I also thank the following members of the University of Fort Hare: Professor J. Hendricks, Prof. C. Botha, D.S. Yekela, N. Maliza and Sadie Foreman who has since retired from the Howard Pim Library Section as well as Mamooe Mosaguli who has been of great assistance in providing relevant material for the present study. I also express gratitude to Michelle Pickover and the staff members of the William Cullen Library of the University of Witwatersrand for assistance in finding books and papers and affording me the opportunity to broaden my understanding of the themes covered in the study.

I acknowledge the scholarly guidance and motivation I have received from scholars and academics beyond the confines of the geographic boundaries of the continent. Lastly, but not least I thank my family and friends for their support. My gratitude goes to my husband Lawrence Maduma for his consistent support: Jama ka Sjadu! as well as to my sisters Sandy, Sindiswa Nosicelo and to Wendy and my little angel! Emihle.



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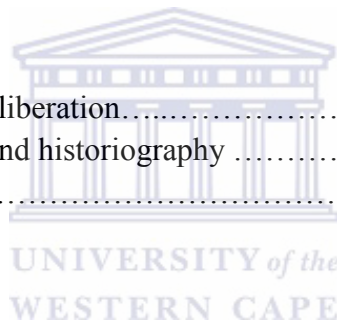
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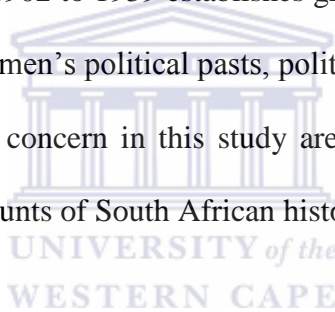
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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC- All African Convention
AME- African Methodist Episcopal Church
ANC- African National Congress
ANCWL- Women's League of the African National Congress
ANC WS- Women's Section of the African National Congress
BWL- Bantu Women's League
COSATU- Congress of South African Trade Unions
FEDSAW- Federation of South African Women
IDAF- International Defense and Aid Fund
JC- Joint Councils
NCW- National Council of African Women
PAWO- Pan African Women Organisation
SACTU- South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAHA- South African History Archives
SAIRR- South African Institute of Race Relations
SPH- Secretary of Public Health
TANU- Tanzanian National Liberation Union
THA- Transvaal Hygiene Association
TCCVD- Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases
UN- United Nations
UDF- United Democratic Front
WMS- Women's Missionary Society
WEAU- Women's Enfranchisement Association
WIDF- Women's International Democratic Federation

INTRODUCTION

A study of the intellectual contribution of Charlotte Maxeke, a major symbolic figure in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa, opens a disturbing fissure in debates about women in History and African scholarship.¹ Maxeke is known in South African history as a “mother of the liberation struggle” but not as an intellectual, a theorist, a feminist or a nationalist. Yet, the period of Maxeke’s political prominence from 1902 to 1939 establishes grounds for understanding the links that bind the state, women’s political pasts, politics (both public and private) and history. Of immediate concern in this study are layers of inequality which have been erased from accounts of South African history.



This study sets out to reflect how Charlotte Maxeke and her contemporaries framed an oppositional discourse to gender inequality at the beginning of the twentieth century and in so doing proposed a different history of nationalism in South Africa.² Here we may discover layers of inequality even as these are challenged and redefined. In this context, Maxeke performed a double edged theorization as an effect and a catalyst in the transition from traditional to modern

¹Desiree Lewis, “African Gender Research and Post-coloniality: Legacies and Challenges” in Oyeronke Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p.383.

² Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984); Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers 1987).

African society. She epitomized women's struggles against deprivation of basic human rights such as dignity, happiness, education, employment opportunities and property ownership. These struggles continued to shape the discourse of the struggle for liberation in South Africa, even long after Maxeke's death.

Maxeke's intellectual legacy refigured post-colonial debates by attending to gender inequalities that were glossed over in the formative years of the African nationalist discourse in the twentieth century. In this context, Maxeke theorized the effects of the traditional gender ideologies of the mid nineteenth century. She highlighted new ways of conceptualizing gender in societies that were in transition from traditional to modern African society.³

The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke expands on a long-standing scholarly debate about women, gender and history. Elaborating on the scholarly erasure of the life of Claudia Jones in the intellectual traditions that document the struggles of the African Americans, Carol Boyce Davies has concluded that "women are not generally assigned importance as intellectual subjects."⁴ Like that of Jones, Maxeke's contributions to the discourse of the

³ For a detailed analysis of the impact of anthropological studies women and gender in Africa See Desiree Lewis, "African Gender Research and Post-coloniality: Legacies and Challenges" in Oyeronke Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p.383-384.

⁴ Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The political life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2008), p. 34.

struggle for liberation establish grounds to explore the gaps caused by the lack of proper theorisation of the intellectual contributions of women in history.

This study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke defines the themes at work in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The legacy of Charlotte Maxeke advanced the argument for gender and pointed to gender as a critical component in the struggle for liberation. Her attention to gender was connected to the breadth of her vision of politics as everyday life, justice, freedom and struggle. These struggles have shaped the discourse about gender in the struggle for liberation, even long after Maxeke's death in 1939. Her ideas about gender and social change formed the base for critical analysis of the changes envisaged in the formative years of the struggle.

Located in the sphere of the everyday, Maxeke's theorisation of the evolution of Native Womanhood set her apart from leading African male figures of her time. Her profile challenges conventional historiographical trends which tend to fix women in a timeless past of tradition and domestication.⁵ Her views on gender inequality are echoed in recent regional studies that challenge the representations of women in African history.⁶

⁵ See Winifred Hoernle 'Social Organisation' in Isaack Shcapera, *Bantu Speaking tribes of South Africa: an ethnographical survey* (London, Routledge, 1937), p.67.

⁶ Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'Gender Biases in African Historiography' in Oyeronke Oyewumi. *African Gender Studies A Reader* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 207-208.

As the historiography of the struggle for liberation emerges in Southern Africa it might seek to conceptualise the struggle against gender inequality in a manner that would not only acknowledge “*the role of women in liberation struggles*” but also enable us to rethink the intellectual history of women which borders nationalist struggles.

A word or two is necessary concerning the structure of the thesis. Unlike many studies on women in liberation struggles the study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke does not follow the conventional biographical approach to leading figures in history, but takes Maxeke’s own theorisation of the everyday as compounding a research problem in a study which seeks to interrogate the selective appropriations of women in struggle biographies. Therefore, the study is not purely chronological in sequence, but alternates narratives and thematic chapters.

The idea to pursue a scholarly investigation on the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke matured during the two years I spent working as a research assistant in a presidential project called the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET).⁷ The project was commissioned by the then president of South

⁷ This research into the intellectual inputs of women in the liberation struggle has been largely influenced by my work as a research assistant for the South African Democracy Education Trust, SADET. This is a presidential project which was commissioned by President, Thabo Mbeki to

Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to examine and analyse the events that led to the negotiated settlement and to democracy in South Africa.

When viewed in the context of state discourse, the writing of the history of the struggle for liberation in SADET constitutes what Adam Ashforth has called *a scheme of legitimization*.⁸ The writing of the history of the struggle for liberation in state initiated projects venerates the principles of freedom, democracy and equality. These concepts align closely with narratives of the state. This locates the study of Maxeke in the broader debates about history in post-apartheid South Africa. Recent studies reveal the ways in which history is used in the building of the new South Africa. Premesh Lalu provides a critical analysis of this process and argues that “appropriations of history to re-envision the nation and identity tend to emphasise rather than displace the disciplinary reason that was the very *modus operandi* of apartheid.”⁹

write the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. Through this project, I have had the benefit of working with scholars, ex political prisoners and political activists in different parts of the county.

⁸ Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990) p. vii; T. F. Mars, [untitled] Review of Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990) in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Jun., 1991) pp369-372.; South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2006) p. (vii).

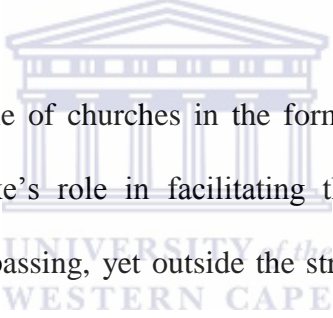
⁹ See Premesh Lalu, *The deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of recurring pasts* (Cape Town, HSRC, 2009) p.8.

Elaborating on Lalu's critique of the uses of history in post-apartheid South Africa, I argue that the struggle for liberation was framed as an oppositional discourse to the state's imagination and as such, any attempt to write the history of the struggle for liberation has to interrogate and elaborate on the positioning of the liberation discourse. When framed in this context the constraints of the orders of the discipline of history and the limit of the disciplinary reason of history are brought to the fore.¹⁰ In what follows I demonstrate how the gendered oral archives of the struggle have failed to account for Maxeke's contributions in the authorship of the narratives of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

While in the employ of SADET I conducted interviews with activists, mainly men, who were active in the underground structures of liberation movements such as the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress in the Western Cape during the 1960s. The interviews highlighted "the supportive role" of the women in organising political events and in various organisations associated with the struggle for liberation from the 1950s to the 1990s. Intrigued by the interviewees' narrations, I soon suspected that the inclusion of women as a support structure was symptomatic of a much larger question about the authorship of the theoretical and political discourse of women in the struggle for liberation.

¹⁰ Premesh Lalu, *The deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of recurring pasts* (Cape Town, HSRC, 2009), p. 245.

Even the secondary literature on the rise of the nationalist struggles of black protest politics fails to include Maxeke's outline of the theoretical and political discourse on women. Instead, the studies reinforce the narratives of the struggle biography constructed around male figures. Instancing this flaw is Andre Odendaal's academically acclaimed book, *Vukani Bantu: The Beginning of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912* of 1984 which traces the origins of black protest politics in South Africa. Odendaal completely overlooks the intellectual project of women in the formative years of modern politics.¹¹



In his discussion of the role of churches in the formative years of the struggle Odendaal mentions Maxeke's role in facilitating the formation of the AME church in South Africa in passing, yet outside the struggle biography, Maxeke's active involvement in clandestine activities that established links between the African American struggle and Africans in South Africa cannot be overlooked.¹²

The absence of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke in the nationalist scholarship of the 1980s can partly be attributed to the gender ideologies that blinded the nationalist record of the nineteenth century. The scholarship on the roots and the evolution of African nationalism in South Africa

¹¹ Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984), pp. 25-26.

¹² James Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

takes the age of war and conquest as an inaugural moment in the awakening of nationalist sentiments in the twentieth century.¹³ In doing so the studies established an indexical link between wars of resistance, land, race and identity. This presented a gendered frame by which the struggle for liberation has been viewed in the nationalist historiography of the 1980s.¹⁴ This aspect of the nationalist historiography is characterised by the gendering of roles in which women are acknowledged for their reproductive abilities.

Gendered renderings of women can also be found in the intellectual traditions of the African luminaries. This trend is evinced in S.E. K Mqhayi's book *Ityala lamawele* which was first published in 1914 which offered a rational investigation into the processes and the procedures of traditional lawsuit. Set in the early twentieth century Cape Colony, the book crafts the entry of women in the public sphere where they are called to testify about the sequence in which the twins were born. The entry of women in Mqhayi's narrative only serves to highlight the women's reproductive role.

¹³ Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984); Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers 1987).

¹⁴ Donovan Williams, "African Nationalism in South Africa: The roots and Problems" in *Journal of African History*, xi 3. (1970), pp. 371-387.

Mqhayi's work participated in discourses that propagated anti-colonial struggles. Taking the nature of pre-colonial society as its starting point, the literary tradition of Mqhayi formulated questions about the features of the African ethical and political thought. This has offered a frame by which the art, craft and the practice of traditional IsiXhosa law and justice were rendered intelligible and compatible to Western thought.¹⁵ The book reflects the difficulty of post-colonial texts as they struggle to interpret the dual operations of their production. By this I mean attempts by these educated elite to retrieve events of the past as they struggled to engage with changes in their immediate issues.

Mqhayi's work is taken up selectively in texts that concentrate on selected themes in languages, religion, politics and culture. Language became another site on which the struggle over the preservation of African languages and the transitions in of society was waged. These early linguists captured the transitions of the nineteenth century by establishing new terms of reference in their comprehension of relations in societies that were in transition. However, the task of negotiating a value system that would in the end capture the form and the content of the modern society proved to be a daunting one. It had brought traditional leaders and the educated elite together in a cultural struggle against the erosion of traditional

¹⁵ Abner Nyamende, 'The pursuit and conception of justice in SEK Mqhayi's ityala lamawele', *Tydskrif vir Litterkunde* vol. 47, No.2 Pretoria, 2010.

values. However, these efforts were characterised by the failure to theorise gender inequality.

Apprehensive about the 'denigration' of traditional values, Mqhayi's work argues aggressively for the preservation of Isi Xhosa against the wave of colonisation.¹⁶ It is precisely this feature of literary texts which helps a historian in deciphering post-colonial texts based on the 'colonial condition.' Mqhayi facilitated the codification and translation of pre-colonial practices of litigation in Western codes and values, thus revealing the hybridity of post-colonial texts.

As a product of these hybrid texts, Charlotte Maxeke offers an opportunity to expose both the contributions and the limitations of the early African nationalist critiques of the colonial condition in South African history. The endeavours of the early women's movement rejected linear progression of gender roles and Maxeke is an exemplary figure in this regard.

To place Maxeke theorizing alongside the canonical texts such as Mqhayi is an exercise in theorising of black women experience of the transitions that defined key moments in South African history. This contributes to volumes of publications on Black Women's experience which are found in Black Women's Writing, African Literature, Cross-cultural Feminist Theory and the African

¹⁶ See Abner Nyamende, 'The pursuit and conception of justice in SEK Mqhayi's ityala lamawele', *Tydskrif vir Litterkunde* vol. 47, No.2 Pretoria, 2010.

Diaspora.¹⁷ Maxeke's life history, like that of Claudia Jones in Carol Boyce Davies book *Left of Karl Marx: The political life of black communist Claudia Jones* sheds light on the activism and the intellectual contributions of women in movements for social change.¹⁸

Charlotte Maxeke articulated gender difference in South Africa during the transition from traditional African ways of life to the modern age. She did not only express the need to consider the ways in which gender difference was being perceived in the public sphere of politics, but she drew the private domestic sphere closer to major debates about the Africans and their place in the politics of the Union of South Africa. Charlotte Maxeke did not embrace essentialist notions of race, class, nationality and gender, but tried to foster ethical relations in understanding complex social relations. She understood that women by virtue of their positions in society were not considered as full citizens.

Maxeke's writings, speeches and her ability to organise are a testimony of the extent of intellectual activities of women across cultural and geographic boundaries. Maxeke's life intersects with the intellectual project and the strands of women's writings in politics and history that bind the links between Africa and the Diaspora.

¹⁷ See Carol Boyce Davies *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 82-88.

¹⁸ See Carol Boyce Davies *Left of Karl Marx: The political life of black communist Claudia Jones* (London, Duke University Press, 2008).

In its infancy the discourse about gender performed a much needed critique of the formulations of the Native Question in South Africa. When read in this context Charlotte Maxeke highlighted the apprehensiveness of ‘post- colonial texts’ in their dealings with gender. Maxeke’s critique of post-colonial texts that emerged after the age of conquest and colonisation drew a link between various forms of colonisation by pointing to the ways in which gender ideologies extended the legacies of inequality that were authenticated through colonial domination. This feature of post-colonial condition is explored in great detail in *Subaltern Studies*, an intervention in South Asian colonial historiography in the 1980s.

Subaltern Studies offered invaluable contribution in refining our understanding of the positioning of the debate about post-colonial texts. Offering a critique of post-colonial texts in the Indian context Gyan Prakash has argued that “post-colonial critique exists long after it had been worked over by colonialism. As such, it inhabits the structures of Western domination that it seeks to undo.”¹⁹ Without overlooking the limits of these texts the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke inhabit the limit of post-colonial texts in South African history by highlighting the gendered nature of the ordering of knowledge about the Africans in the 1920s and 1930s and by extension, the discourse of national liberation.

¹⁹ Gyan Prakash , *Subaltern Studies as postcolonial criticism*, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99. No.5 (December. 1994), 1475-1490.

The emergence of anthropology as a scientific tool to study social organisation among the “Bantu people” of Southern Africa in the 1920s and 1930s marked the development of a scientific study of societies in the aftermath of the age of conquest and confrontation. As a specialised field of study anthropologists studied the social organisation among the Africans. Early anthropological studies authenticated the knowledge economies that participated in the making of the official discourse of the Union of South Africa.²⁰ Patterns of social organisation among the Africans facilitated the packaging of ‘African life’ as a specialised field of knowledge where gender categories and roles were defined.

In her ethnographical surveys of the 1930s Winifred Hoernle has defined social organisation as ‘a permanent framework of relationships between members of a community which manifests itself in an ordered group-life, with reciprocal rights and duties, privileges and obligations, of members, determining behaviour-patterns.’²¹ It is precisely this ordering of knowledge about ‘African life’ that Charlotte Maxeke’s intellectual capabilities excelled. As opposed to the early African intellectual traditions of transmission of the script of traditional African life, Charlotte Maxeke offered an interpretation of unequal gender relations that ordered “Native Life.” Her critical views on the “native question” unearthed the

²⁰Gyan Prakash, Subaltern Studies as postcolonial criticism, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No.5 (December, 1994), 1475-1490.

²¹ See Winifred Hoernle ‘Social Organisation’ in Isaac Schapera, *Bantu Speaking tribes of South Africa: an ethnographical survey* (London, Routledge, 1937), p.67.

factors that informed the patterns of social organisations amongst the Africans in the early twentieth century.²²

As subsequent studies demonstrated, the concepts and the frameworks on which early ethnographic work on the Natives was conducted had produced the texts on which the intellectual debates in the twentieth century have drawn. Maxeke's theorisations provided a critique against which the constellation of the knowledge economies could be read. This offers new ways of comprehending the changes that characterised African society in the twentieth century. When viewed against the transmission and the translation of the scripts of traditional African life, Charlotte Maxeke ushered in a reworking of the categories of gender that operated in the authorship and the authentication of the knowledge about "African Life".²³ She challenged the gendered renderings of the traditional categories of gender in authoritative studies on 'Native Life.' In turn, Maxeke's theorisation of the socio-economic and political status of the Africans participated in the re-ordering of the knowledge economies by incorporating the personal, everyday experiences of the women as a factor to in the making of the Union of South Africa.

²² See Mcebisi Ndletyana, *African intellectuals in the 19th and early 20th century South Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC, 2008), p.5.

²³ Isaac Schapera, *Bantu Speaking tribes of South Africa: an ethnographical survey* (London, Routledge, 1937).

This study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke proposes an alternative to the conceptions of the struggle for liberation in neatly woven historical epochs.²⁴ The contributions of Charlotte Maxeke deviate from the order and event specific narratives of liberation struggles by offering a view of some of the early theoretical and philosophical conceptions of gender in the formative years of the struggles of the twentieth century.

Maxeke's work invigorates the debate about race, class, gender. The debate has been taken up in the scholarship that defines the work of feminist scholars such as Carole Boyce Davies who has offered insights to post-colonial critique by positing that "the concept of post-coloniality rationalizes the numerous colonizing operations still taking place after colonial era."²⁵ It is precisely in this ordering of norms and standards of colonialism that Maxeke's theorisations are viewed. To understand Maxeke's place in history is to engage with the ideas she factored into the development of theories and practices of the struggle for liberation in the twentieth century.

²⁴ As indicated in the anti-colonial texts discussed in this chapter, gender when taken seriously disturbs the linear progression of the narratives of the anti-colonial struggles.

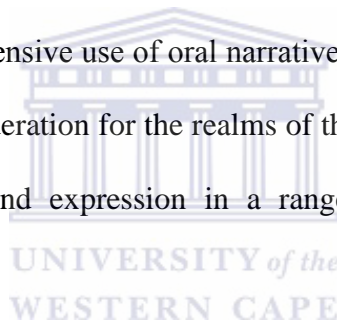
²⁵ See Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London, Routledge 1994) p. 83.

Although she operated within the prescripts of modernity as a civilized, educated and converted African, Maxeke presented an interesting contrast to the prototypical African woman who was constantly called upon to bring the plight of the Africans to the centre of public discourse. She devised the conceptual tools to unpack her critical stance against gender inequality. This aspect of Maxeke's activism only gets inscribed in academic history through case studies of the anti-pass campaigns. The latter has for a long time been used as the framework within which the political participation of women is understood in South Africa.²⁶ At the level of practical politics, the demarcation of the anti-pass campaign might have served as a strategy to grow the nationalist movements that were involved in the struggle for liberation. In subsequent years the involvement of women in anti-pass campaign created a major incentive for the establishment of the women's section in nationalist movements.

However, outside party politics, Maxeke's theorization of native womanhood articulated a critique of the collusion between traditional practices and the state's gendering of Africans in various spheres of 'Native Life in the late nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century.' This is a distinct feature of the intellectual history of women in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Her discussion of

²⁶ Women were deprived of the right to education, to earn salaries and to decisions about their future. See Julia Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), p. 1.

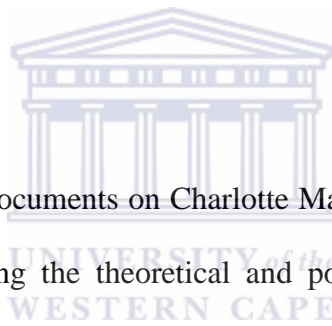
“The Progress of Native Womanhood” problematised perceptions about linear progression of an analysis of “the role of women” in society.²⁷ She understood that the expectation to carry on their traditional role as mothers and homemakers served the interests of the state and male nationalism. Maxeke unfolded a discourse that was in sharp contrast to the documentary trends of the nationalist narrations of the struggle for liberation. Her discourse also contrasted sharply with that of the state. But this fissure has unfortunately been neglected in the historiography of the liberation struggle. The blind spot that I am calling attention to often flows from the extensive use of oral narratives in recording women’s role in history, with little consideration for the realms of thought that engaged women, and which may have found expression in a range of other institutions and practices.



To address this void in the historiography of the liberation struggle, a critical evaluation of archival documentation of the struggle for liberation is essential. The oral narrations of the struggle for liberation tend to limit our understanding of women to the role of support in nationalist movements, nothing more. A simple glance into the archive of the early twentieth century would have encountered, with some difficulty, Charlotte Maxeke’s intellectual pursuits that would disrupt

²⁷ See Charlotte Maxeke, *The progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa*’ *Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A yearbook of South African Missions* compiled and edited by Rev. Dexter Taylor, D.D (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1928).

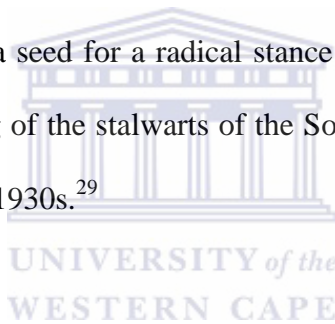
the linear progression of the narrative about the supportive role of women in the struggle. Even nationalist leaders of the early twentieth century acknowledged her significance in debates about the proper place of Africans in the Union of South Africa.²⁸ Her participation in the debate about the Native Question demonstrates a stark difference between women's support and women's political participation in the struggle. This distinction became clearer as my research unearthed the activities of Charlotte Maxeke and her contemporaries which changed the nature and the composition of liberation movements such as the African National Congress.



The research on archived documents on Charlotte Maxeke mirrored the difficulty experienced in disentangling the theoretical and political discourse of women from the meta-narratives of the nationalist struggle in South Africa. The gaps identified in major archival collections on the struggle for liberation reflect an uneasy relationship between the political discourse of women and the nationalist struggle. This became the basis on which the focus on Maxeke's intellectual contributions began.

²⁸ See .A B. Xuma, *What an Educated Native Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930).

As evinced in her papers, Maxeke offers an oppositional discourse to the gendering of roles in black protest politics in South Africa. By gendering of roles I mean the definition and the classification of early political activism along gender lines. Contestation over *gender roles* became the basis on which Maxeke's theorization of the experiences of women, their living conditions and gender relations was anchored. This intellectual tradition constituted a major component of the political discourse of the nationalist struggle in the 1920s and 1930s. Her contributions fostered a theoretical shift in the debate about the Native Question. Charlotte Maxeke planted a seed for a radical stance on gender inequality which began to shape the thinking of the stalwarts of the South African Native National Congress of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁹



This brings us closer to an analysis of the conditions of Maxeke's theorization as well as the period in which the study of her intellectual contributions was conducted. The study takes an interdisciplinary approach to a study of Maxeke's life history. In doing so, it interrogates the knowledge economies that participated in the making of gender categories in the intellectual traditions that dominated the scholarship about Africa and the Africans in the twentieth century.

²⁹ I refer specifically, to A.B.Xuma who as early as the 1930s saw the importance of considerations of the benefits that could be drawn from educating girls.

The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke features the transnational trend which characterizes gender research in Africa.³⁰ The establishment of non- governmental centres such as the (CODESRIA) Council for the Development and Social Science Research in Africa is an example of how gender research for social justice is currently being pursued on the continent. These activities facilitate the use of interdisciplinary approaches to studies on gender in Africa.³¹ The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke contributes to a growing literature on women and gender in Africa.

The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke is not free from the problems observed in the resistance literature of the 1980s. This difficulty reflects the extent to which the intellectual project of women in the struggle has been subsumed by the nationalist frame. The research on the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke began with an evaluation of collections and narratives of the struggle for liberation. Available oral accounts of individual experiences collected and archived in various repositories in South Africa served as evidence of events and processes of the struggle.³² My personal interest in the struggle for liberation was largely influenced by the oral interviews I conducted

³⁰ See Amina Mama & Margo Okazawa Ray Militarism, Conflict and Women's Activism, *Feminist Africa*, Issue 10, August 2008 (Cape Town: Africa Gender Institute), p. 1

³¹ See <http://www.codersia.org>

³² Mayibuye Centre, Oral History of Exile Project, Interview with Hilda Bernstein conducted by Rachidi Molapo, 19 March, 1996, Tape 1 MCA 6- 441.

with political activists while working as a research assistant for SADET, although my new interest soon distracted from the nationalist narrations of the struggle.³³

Outside the confines of the presidential project, my inclination towards the participation of women took on a life of its own, even as I developed an interest in the primary documents related to the active involvement of women in the struggle for liberation.³⁴ While the interviews were based on the 1960s the primary documents that were at my disposal soon led me to the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke and her influence on the social and political lives of Africans in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁵ Maxeke provided a discourse that was in sharp contrast to the documentary trend of the nationalist narrations of the struggle for liberation.

This occurred at an interesting time as I took a junior managerial position in one of the sites of historical significance in the history of the struggle for liberation in South Africa, the Robben Island Museum. While in the employ of the museum, I

³³ Nationalist narrations of the struggle for liberation have established 'women's role' as the norm through which the participation of women is understood.

³⁴ Two years after working in SADET I was appointed as a manager for the visiting scholar's programme of the Robben Island Museum. Also closely associated with the struggle for liberation, my work on the Island exposed me to an even more ranigated story of the struggle for liberation as oral testimonies of ex political prisoners were drawn in to present Robben Island as the nest which has nurtured the development of a narrative about 'the triumph of humankind against adversity'.

³⁵ Women such as Charlotte Maxeke have played a significant part in the social and political spheres of Africans in South Africa. See John Pampallis, *National Struggle, Class Struggle: South Africa Since 1870* (London, Caledonian Press, 1986).

observed the manner in which women featured in the narratives that were being crafted about the incarceration of political prisoners on the island. In these narratives women featured as spouses who provided much needed support to the political prisoners. This trend continues to frame and describe the entry of women into the field of politics as mere supporters.

It was towards the end of my term on Robben Island that I delved into materials on the rise of black politics in South Africa dating back to the early 1900s. With the hope of finding leads concerning the participation of women in the formative years of the recent struggles in South Africa, I embarked on a major archival research which was supplemented by a survey of secondary literature on the formative years of the struggle for liberation.³⁶ During this phase of the research, I spent months ‘digging’ for leads into the life and times of Charlotte Maxeke in two major historical collections, the Mayibuye Archives and the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare, but neither of the two had collections on Charlotte Maxeke.³⁷ Disappointed at this, I turned to the references which have often been

³⁶ Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu : The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984); Frances Meli, *A history of the ANC: South African belongs to Us* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988); Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Donker Ltd, 1987).

³⁷ Women such as Charlotte Maxeke have played a significant part in the social and political spheres of Africans in South Africa. Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, University of the Western Cape, Liberation Archives, University of Fort Hare, Alice.

made to Maxeke's work on the social welfare of the Africans.³⁸ It was in this sphere of public political debates that Maxeke's intellectual work dominated.

The archiving of the struggle for liberation demonstrates the extent to which the intellectual contributions of women such as Charlotte Maxeke have been consumed by the politics of representational politics. Yet her theorisations create a discursive formation which lends itself to the theorisation of the everyday in a way that neither the discipline of history nor nationalist discourse is prepared for.

Accounting for the absence of Charlotte Maxeke in the archives of the struggle does not present an impasse in the scholarly investigation on the intellectual contributions of women. Rather it directs attention to the activities of women that fell outside the comprehension of the nationalist discourse. Carole Boyce Davies elucidates this point in the following:

“as post-coloniality was written in as mainstream discourse the non-western women have produced a different range of textured articulations. Given the tendency of dominant discourses to absorb resistant discourses into their centres, outside may not be a bad place to be. The women who are absent or disappeared from formulations of discussions of post-coloniality are doing something totally different. They participate as pieces in a growing collage of uprising textualities.”³⁹

³⁸ Frene Ginwala, “Charlotte Maxeke, *The Mother of Freedom*,” ANC Today, Vol. 2. No. 31, 2-8 August, 2002.

³⁹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 88.

It is precisely this marginal positioning of Charlotte Maxeke's work which offers invaluable information about the political activities of women in the 1920s and 1930s. This locates Maxeke's intellectual trajectories outside the conventional nationalist narratives of the struggle.

Although emanating from the discourse about the welfare of the Africans, Maxeke's intellectual work had major political and philosophical consequences in the development of a nationalist discourse in the 1920s and 1930s. In his 1993 Reith Lectures, Edward Said defined the task of intellectuals as "an effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication."⁴⁰ These activities were driven by leading intellectuals whose works have been preserved and documented in archival holdings of the struggle.

Although the period is often epitomised by the Rand Strikes of 1922 and the calls for a Black Republic, Maxeke took a keen interest in the plight of young women, the criminalisation of the youth (juveniles) in urban centres, education, unemployment, the lack of proper housing and sanitation. These were the challenges that faced Africans who lived in squalor and abhorring conditions.

⁴⁰ See Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York, Vintage Books, 1994), xi

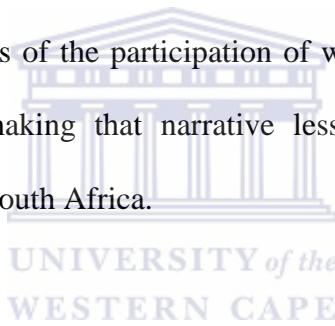
As these struggles are documented in national and regional projects on the continent, one might ask similarly: how do the archives of liberation relate to aspects of the struggle not necessarily waged along the strong nationalist and organisational lines so characteristic of twentieth century nationalist historiography? In this case I argue that the absence of specific collections on Maxeke's contribution to an important debate about Africans in South Africa raises a question about the material and imaginary status of the archives of liberation as far as the intellectual project of women is concerned. In this context the documents of Charlotte Maxeke remain "a piece of data" whose material and imaginary status has not been put into play, not only in the archives of liberation, but also in our understanding of South African history and historiography.



This study focuses on how Maxeke deliberated on matters pertaining to the welfare of African juveniles, women and the provision of decent accommodation and education for the youth in urban centres such as Johannesburg in the 1920s and 1930s. She did not limit herself to the urban centres only but her contributions also condemned the practices that contributed to the deplorable conditions of African women in rural areas. Her ability to defy strict geographical boundaries of the union government and its job reservation policies of the 1920s and 1930s is indexed in her deliberations on various aspects of Native Life, seriously challenges the balkanised history of South African black subjectivity in this

period. In these spheres, Maxeke's contributions demonstrate a deep investment in the ideas of the time, of its changing meanings, and its consequences for the lives of women in urban and rural settings.

Beyond making an intervention in the debate about the history of nationalist discourse and archives, I also tackle the historiography of the liberation struggle beyond the selective appropriations of '*women's roles*'. The intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke delineate a sphere of intellectual debates that helps unearth the intricacies of the participation of women in national liberation struggles in Africa, by making that narrative less predictable than is often assumed in contemporary South Africa.



At the outset of the study, I was often warned that the topic *women and history* is an overwritten area in contemporary history. However, framed at a critical stage of the documentation of histories of liberation struggles in the region, Maxeke's work challenges the archiving of those struggles, the fighting of those struggles and the writing of the history of those struggles. As initiatives are taken to preserve the rich histories of recent struggles on the continent, the participation of women in those struggles still warrants proper conceptualisation. This thesis contributes to the study of Liberation Archives, not only in South Africa but in the SADEC region. Initiatives such as ALUKA are beginning to make inroads in the

documentation of materials related to liberation struggles in Southern Africa, even as they generate their fair share of criticism about reproducing a nationalist orthodoxy.

Research on the activities of Charlotte Maxeke took me to Johannesburg where I spent time at the William Cullen Library of the University of Witwatersrand researching the Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations.⁴¹ The records contained aspects of Maxeke's public political involvement and her discussions about Africans' state of social welfare of the Africans in South Africa between the 1920s and 1930s.

The documents highlighted the extent of Maxeke's involvement in debates and discussions about Africans in South Africa. They contain publications, newspaper articles, official and unofficial reports on the Native Question, and on Education and Training of the Africans. In these documents debates about diseases and social hygiene emerged as the overarching themes in the public discourse of the 1920s.⁴² Bodies such as the Transvaal Hygiene Association called for a compulsory examination of all people entering domestic service.

⁴¹William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Records of the African National Congress, AD 2186.

⁴²William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Social Hygiene, 1925-1926, AD 314, file B 22.7.1.

The records also reflect on the activities of the missionaries, the Women's Missionary Society and its debates about the role of women missionaries and their responsibility towards 'the Native women and girls' in South Africa. ⁴³This forged a way of talking about the work of white women missionaries and African women.

Alongside the narratives about missionary activities, the debate about the Native Question highlighted the state's concern about the proper place of the African. Coupled with the sanitation syndrome of the early 1900s, the Native Question as it was discussed in official and unofficial spheres, placed women under severe strain. It classified, graded and labelled African women as the main causes of social ills such as 'lawlessness', illicit beer brewing, prostitution, overcrowding and diseases in urban centres. ⁴⁴

State officials in urban centres such as Johannesburg used the availability of miners as a measure to facilitate the classification of the city's urban population. Throughout the 1920s records of the SAIRR contain voluminous reports on the safety of mine labourers. As the official discourse focused on the safety of a gendered category, (mine labourers, who were mainly men) the presence of African women in urban areas was problematised and used to justify the

⁴³ Ibid. AB 226, AB 932.

⁴⁴ Ibid. AD 384, file B. 55.2.

introduction of major preventive and control measures.⁴⁵ To facilitate the state's engineering programme, the union government called on specialists to offer their services to facilitate the administration of the Africans in urban areas. One of the key areas of specialised knowledge about Africans was in the area of education.⁴⁶ The state's engineering project of the 1920s and 1930s did not provide solutions to the urban problems, but tended to problematize them.

In contrast to the state's discourse on the African urban population, Maxeke disrupted the state's discourse of the Native Question. Her participation in various conferences held on various aspects of the Native Question did not only raise questions but proposed possible solutions to the problems of the day. I refer specifically to her expansion of public discourse beyond the areas that were officially designated as aspects of Native Life in South Africa.

Her contributions questioned the uncritical translation into the modern world of the notions of urban-rural, men-women, civilised- uncivilised. Maxeke's theorisation of everyday realities contributed to a critical discourse of social transformation where these dichotomies did not rest in a timeless past, but played

⁴⁵ See Jullia Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ Specialised knowledge was required to establish whether the African mind had the ability to adapt to western education.

their part in the shaping of new relations in societies in transition. This narrative is found in the documents of Charlotte Maxeke.

A hand written letter in which she expressed gratitude to Rheinallt Jones upon her appointment as a probation officer for juveniles in Johannesburg in 1939 was also retrieved from the records of the South African Institute of Race Relations. This also revealed the centrality of Charlotte Maxeke on issues of justice and fairness in society. Inspired by the discovery of documents and papers of Charlotte Maxeke I set out to draft her intellectual trajectories.

From the records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, I also retrieved two published reports on Charlotte Maxeke. These are: The Yearbook of South African Missions of 1928 and The Report of Christian Students and Modern South Africa, a conference held at the University of Fort Hare in 1930 in which Maxeke participated. The paper entitled "*The Progress of Native Womanhood*" highlights Maxeke's philosophy of gender⁴⁷ Maxeke's theorisation of the evolution of native womanhood deconstructed the nationalist imagination which tended to fix women to a rural timeless past and rendered it open to new ways of

⁴⁷ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Bantu European Student Christian Conference 1930, file CO.3.12.

thinking about the different stages of human development. Her philosophy marked the different stages of the evolution of native womanhood.

A brief survey of the National Archives, Records of the SAIRR and SAHA demonstrates that a mere audit of collections in archival holdings does not do justice to the rich theoretical and philosophical formulations of the discourse of the struggles. Major archival holdings on the struggle for liberation are not exempt from this anomaly.

Even the manner in which the archival holdings are ordered tell an interesting story about aspects of the past which have been embraced as constituting the core values of the new South Africa.⁴⁸ The history of the struggle for liberation has been elevated as a major component of the values of the new nation. But, strange enough, the archives documenting the paths traversed towards the attainment of the new nation do not reflect Maxeke's theorisation on gender inequality.

Under the Records of the Institute of Race Relations, in the basement of the William Cullen Library, the South African History Archives (SAHA) possesses records of the Women's Section of the African National Congress. Crucial here are reports of the 2nd Consultative Conference of the Women's Section of the

⁴⁸ See Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town, HSRC, 2009).

African National Congress which was held in Luanda, Angola, September 1987. The reports present a survey of the position of women in the apartheid state and in the liberation movement.⁴⁹ When examined closely deliberations in the commissions celebrated a history of women's struggles in which Charlotte Maxeke features as iconic of the role of women in the ANC. The records, interestingly allow one to examine how Charlotte Maxeke has been incorporated as an extension of the women's role in the struggle for liberation and the society at large, but only superficially as a chronicle foretold.

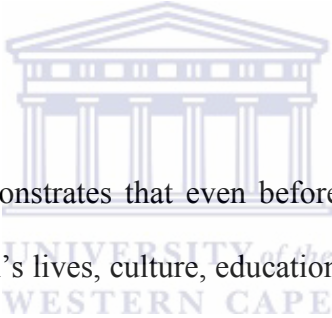
This is surprising given the rich possibilities that emerge through reading various reports of the conference traces the history of women's organisations to the Bantu Women's League (BWL) of 1918.⁵⁰ Although acknowledged as a precursor to the ANCWL of 1943, the BWL receives no further mention in South African historiography, political and academic. The narratives of women's struggles in the movement further fail to acknowledge the League's activities beyond the anti-pass campaigns. It is not surprising then that the narratives focus on 1950s as the golden age of women's activism in the struggle for liberation. Epitomised by the formation of the Federation of South African Women of 1954, the narrative of

⁴⁹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, South African History Archives, African National Congress Women's Section, AC 2517; AC 3051.

⁵⁰ Records of the Women's Section of the African National Congress, Minutes of the Second Consultative Conference of the Women's Section of the African National Congress, Luanda, Angola, 1987, SAHA, Johannesburg.

women's struggles highlights the movement's preoccupation with its own structure at the height of the state's repression.

Apart from the organisational structure of the movement, the records also document the activities of the Women's sections of the ANC in exile, and the remnants of women's organizations inside the country, and the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1970s. The reports also reflect the second round of internal regrouping of the women's movement in the 1980s in preparation for the "seizure of power."



Maxeke's theorization demonstrates that even before the 1950s intense debates about the spheres of women's lives, culture, education, women's health, women's rights and women's emancipation characterised the women's movements that existed in South Africa. How was it then that authoritative studies of black protest politics could omit women's theorisations of the political discourse of the twentieth century? And how could these movements have neglected their precursors in the work of intellectuals like Maxeke.

The conclusion which we might draw from the survey of the scholarship of the 1980s is that oral narrations when used as a corrective measure in presenting first-hand accounts of women's lives, experiences, achievement and struggles alone do

not suffice to overcome the flaws of the nationalist meta-narratives on women. Aware of these flaws, the research on the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke has been carefully framed to avoid a struggle biography that glorifies Maxeke. Rather, it takes Maxeke's theorisation of gender, equality, culture, tradition, social transformation, fairness and justice as indispensable areas of scholarship for studies of liberation histories.

Aspects of the extent of the involvement of women in South African history have slowly emerged from the marginal positions of various feminist strands that have taken up the positioning of women in historiography. The studies established the groundwork for the theorizations of the conditions and the experiences of women in colonial, post-colonial and apartheid and neocolonial state gender discrimination.

The study is divided into six chapters. The *Introduction* surveys nationalist and feminist historiography of the struggle for liberation. It also places the study of Charlotte Maxeke in the broader context of women's writing and the diaspora.

Chapter One, A doubling of an account of a celebrated and a neglected figure in history, examines the trends that define feminist scholarship in South Africa. It proposes a different relation to women, one that does not see them as merely

subjects of resistance history but as intellectuals who alter the dynamics of conceiving politics.

Chapter Two, *Theorising Women*- Surveys Feminist Literature on women in the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

Chapter Three, *Charlotte Maxeke: A trajectory of an intellectual*, examines three distinct spheres of Maxeke's life: her family background, education, adulthood and political activities, not as instances of biography but as informative of the shaping of a mind. Chapter Four, *Liberation Histories, State Discourse and the making of a sexualised female Subject*,^s The chapter illustrates Maxeke's critique of hegemonic constructions of women's subjectivities.

Chapter Five, *Charlotte Maxeke and the Women's Movement in the 1920s and 1930s*, examines how Charlotte Maxeke contributed to nationalism. It engages critically with Maxeke's involvement in the women's movement of the 1920s and 1930s.

Chapter Six, *The Making of Liberation Archives and the Politics of Archiving*, examines the processes that were involved in the making of the Liberation

Archives at Fort Hare. It presents a critical evaluation of the democratisation of the Liberation Archives with a specific focus on women.

The conclusion outlines five areas of intervention in the development of women's studies and politics on the continent. It discusses distinct features of the scholarship on women and liberation struggles on the continent.



CHAPTER 1

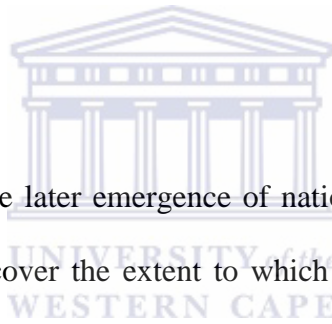
A DOUBLING OF AN ACCOUNT OF A CELEBRATED AND A NEGLECTED FIGURE IN HISTORY

The trends that define feminist scholarship in South Africa presently raise the question of whether we might have a different view of women, one that does not see them as merely subjects of resistance history but as intellectuals who alter the dynamics of politics and understandings thereof.⁵¹ The question is important because it engages critically with conceptions of “intellectuals and their role in liberation struggles.” Such an engagement does not seek to simply make women visible in the narratives of the liberation struggle. Rather, it seeks an engagement with the discursive formation through which women come to appear as political subjects.

The current chapter expands upon the four sites to which interventions about studies of women and liberation struggles are directed: 1] nationalist histories, 2] feminist studies of women, 3] liberation archives and 4] the sphere of intellectual

⁵¹ A review of the feminist scholarship on women and liberation struggles, not only in South Africa, but in countries like Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Algeria, tends to document the participation of women in organized women’s movements. See Jacklyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991); Geiger Susan, *TANU Women: gender and culture in the making of Tanganyikan Nationalism* (Portsmouth, NH Heinemann, 1997), Josephine Nhongo Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe’s Liberation Struggle*, (Harare, Weaver Press, 2000).

debate. In my reading of Maxeke's oeuvre, there is a substantial reworking of precisely these categories through an attention to the category of women, but that equally distracts from the scholarship at hand. To place Maxeke in relation to the four sites of intervention is to experience not only a refiguring of the history of the liberation movement, but also a remapping of the intellectual trajectory of scholarship on women and liberation. In other words, through her theorisation, she not only pointed to a discrepancy at the heart of the liberation movement, but also to faulty scholarship that takes as its precedent the self-narration of political movements.



To read Maxeke against the later emergence of nationalist historiography in the 1950s and 1960s is to discover the extent to which nationalism was read in its own terms by historians who had invariably allied themselves to the course of struggle. Characterized as history in the service of the nation, the studies on African nationalism suffer from absence of an analysis of the intellectual contributions of women in liberation struggles.⁵² The scholarship on nationalist historiography has drawn a thin line between 'nationalist historiography' and 'the history of nationalism'⁵³, one that figures like Maxeke frequently crossed.

⁵² See Tiyon Falola African Glories; Nationalist Historiography" in *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2004), p. 224.

⁵³ Ibid, p.215.

In Tanzania, for example, the entry of Titi BiBi Mohamed into politics is recorded as a response to the mandate of the senior leadership of TANU to organize women.⁵⁴ When viewed in the light of Susan Geiger's formulation of the significance of Titi Bibi Mohamed, the inclusion of women in liberation movements is premised on a deficit model where they are made to fill in the gaps and to act as custodians of unique features and talents, such as public speaking and the ability to sing. These features are often depicted as unique qualities without which the liberation movements could not have succeeded. In the Tanzanian case, Titi Bibi Mohamed's talent as a singer earned her the prominence and respect she had.⁵⁵ It is against this minimalist view of women in the liberation movements that women's theorizations of the everyday get displaced by 'the bigger national questions'. However, women's theorizations of the everyday do not always respond to the needs of senior leadership, but constitute a sphere of robust intellectual activity based on their reactions to an array of issues, including the struggle against various forms of injustice.

In his discussion of the Algerian struggle for liberation, Franz Fanon had stated that 'the women's entry into the war was harmonized with respect to the

⁵⁴ Titi Bibi Mohamed was one of the woman leaders who was involved in the establishment of the women's section of TANU, Susan Geiger states that a comprehensive biography of Titi Bibi Mohamed remains to be written. See Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: gender & culture in the making of Tanganyikan nationalism 1955-1965* (Portsmouth, NH Heinemann, 1997), p. 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

revolutionary nature of the war which demanded as much spirit of sacrifice from them as the men.⁵⁶ On the contrary, the entry of women into a war of liberation certainly disrupted the order of a revolution that was previously waged by men. The harmonization Fanon alluded to has served to facilitate the erasure of women's theorisations of the everyday. When examined closely, the entry of women does not harmonise liberation discourses but disrupts and causes ruptures in historical narratives of those struggles.

The studies of women in liberation struggles often approached 'nationalism' as an unproblematic historical discourse that created an aesthetic frame which rendered the past intelligible to the past, the present and future interpretations.⁵⁷ The history of the struggle for liberation, whether it is seen as an event or a lived experience, cannot be achieved in totality. Yet, it is necessary to grasp the competing grids of intelligibility through which liberation struggles become known. If nationalism has unduly prevented the significance of competing grids we may ask if a reflection on the intellectual interventions of women could alter and recharge our understanding of liberation struggles.

⁵⁶ Franz Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (London, Earthscan, 1989), p.48.

⁵⁷ B. Jewsiewicki & V.Y. Mudimbe 'Africans' Memories and Contemporary History of Africa *History and Theory*, Vol. 32. No. 4, (December, 1993), p.4.

Such an undertaking takes a critical look at the operations of nationalism in histories of liberation struggles. When taken as the key organizing concept, nationalism in all its manifestations (whether it is perceived as a movement or a set of movements or an ideology') is a historical discourse which still requires a great deal of rigorous historical questioning.'⁵⁸ Nationalist history often positions women in historicist ways so that they never affect the story in any significant way. In nationalist narration, women serve the function of political props without political consequence.

Charlotte Maxeke was among the early intellectuals in the ANC in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, substantial differences in interpretation and contestations over the generation of ideas characterised the sphere of intellectual debate in South Africa. On the intellectual plane, this was characterised by competing theoretical interpretations of the state, power and oppression and possible alternatives to these problems. Her ascension to political prominence could be attributed to her active involvement in various spheres of African society. Robust debates about the administration of Africans in urban spaces often filtered a commensurate investment in the everyday. While much of nationalist narration focuses on the big questions of urbanisation, everyday affairs were highly gendered and increasingly the subject of women's intellectual engagement.

⁵⁸B. Jewsiewicki & V.Y. Mudimbe 'Africans' Memories and Contemporary History of Africa *History and Theory*, Vol. 32. No. 4, (December, 1993).

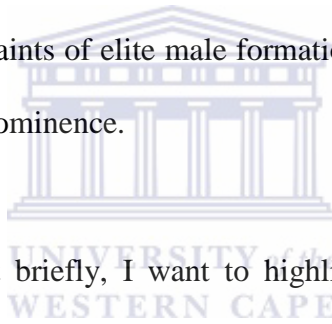
This was also true of Maxeke, except that she was able to make the connections between the big questions and everyday living. However, in focusing on the big questions nationalism tends to squeeze out the productive sphere of those, like Maxeke, who offered other ways of theorising the African predicament in the first half of the twentieth century. It is important though to grasp what I call the discourse of the big question. It was after all this very domain of largely male construction that rendered the theorisation of the everyday inaccessible to nationalism and its historiography.

In its formative years the African National Congress inherited a tradition of intellectual activism that was a product of decades of missionary activity in South Africa during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁹ In this period there was a growing missionary influence, also through mission schools in most parts of South Africa. The first generation of African intellectuals who later became leading figures in the national struggle for liberation in South Africa, were produced in mission schools. Prominent male intellectuals are often cited as central to the intellectual core of the liberation movement. A good example of this is a recent book by Mcebisi Ndletyana entitled *African Intellectuals in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* which surveys an intellectual tradition of 19th and 20th

⁵⁹ Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Donker Ltd, 1987).

century South Africa that not only ignores Maxeke but neglects women intellectuals altogether.⁶⁰

Other scholars have done the same, often attributing nationalism to founding fathers such as Tiyo Soga. Donovan Williams has argued that Soga has been accorded the status as “the one who stands in the forefront of the development of Black Consciousness on the African continent.”⁶¹ Such views frame an examination of the trajectory of nineteenth century nationalism in South Africa, but within particular constraints of elite male formation. It is worth recounting on what basis Soga came to prominence.



To pre-empt my argument briefly, I want to highlight the ways in which the definition of nationalism’s intellectual formation around the big question issues from the likes of Tiyo Soga. Mostly, this is a derivative discourse that depends on missionary formation. A more radical intellectual project, I will argue, issues from thinkers like Maxeke who contemplated nationalism’s twentieth century rebirth through inhabiting the problematics of urbanisation and the meaning of the

⁶⁰ Mcebisi Ndletyana, *African Intellectuals in 19th and early 20th century South Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press 2008).

⁶¹ Donovan Williams, *Umfundisi: A biography of Tiyo Soga, 1829-1871* (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1978), p. xix.

everyday for the African subject. We shall return to this question once we have outlined the sources of nationalism in South Africa.

As a precursor to the later African intellectual enterprise of the indigenised press, the missionary enterprise in which Soga participated had packaged ‘Native life’ in categories of primitive and modern forms.⁶² The packaging of Native life had consequences for the intellectual traditions of the indigenised press. Taking its cue from missionary trained early African intellectuals, Native life became the basis on which the early twentieth century nationalists based their demand for inclusion and full citizen rights within the Union. Although it elided in contemporary scholarship, women’s theorisations of the everyday arguably exists as an alternative contour along which to track the history of nationalism. Such alternative theorisations presented a contrast between the big questions and the small questions of the day.

David Atwell has defined this moment in South African history as a stage of modernity where the black intellectuals appropriated the press as a means to establish themselves as modern subjects in direct opposition to the identities

⁶² See John A. Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga: A page of South African mission work* (Cape Colony, James Hay, 1878).

ascribed to them in the colonial ideology.⁶³ While able to highlight the techniques by which the black intellectual traditions were created, Atwell's formulation remains neglectful of addressing the question of how women were constituted in the very techniques by which black intellectuals defined their identity. Atwell's formulation of the question of what it means to be a subject of history fails to theorise the collusion between nationalist and colonial masculine ideologies in their creation of "women" as subjects of control.

Blinded by the over determined concept of nationalism, and the rise of a nationalist intellectual tradition, Atwell argued that no amount of gender sensitive readings of the period can undo the masculine character of the black intellectual project of the early twentieth century.⁶⁴ Two observations can be made with regard to Atwell's argument; 1) the rise of the nationalist intellectual tradition reflects the confluence of colonial and traditional gender ideologies, 2) a re-reading of the records of early nationalists is necessary to deduce women's theorisations in the formative years of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Available studies on these aspects of the black intellectual project tend to locate gender readings outside the domain of the nationalist record. David Atwell has substantiated this claim by arguing that "efforts to describe and theorise the

⁶³ David Atwell, *Rewriting modernity: Studies in black South African literary history* (Scottsville, University of Kwa Zulu- Natal Press, 2005), p.3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

relationship between gender, race and modernity require a different distinctive kind of treatment”.⁶⁵ In doing so, Atwell forecloses a debate about the internal workings of the nationalist intellectual tradition on gender equality by locating gendered readings outside the scope of the indigenous press.

Unlike Atwell, who locates the theorisation of the relationship between gender and race outside the realm of the modern indigenised press, Maxeke’s thoughts about the penal system for juveniles, better living conditions for women in urban areas, provision of education and training to women irrespective of their geographical location highlight the theorisations of women that were inherent to the nationalist project expressed in the indigenised press. For a better understanding of how women have been understood in the context of modernity, I examine how historical knowledge about Natives and ‘Native Life’ was constructed in the intellectual debates of the time.

In the following section, I therefore examine the evolution of the nationalist intellectual traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth century. In tracing the development of intellectual traditions in the African National Congress, Raymond Suttner, a historian of the ANC and a past-political activist in the ANC, embraces

⁶⁵ David Atwell, *Rewriting modernity: Studies in black South African literary history* (Scottsville, University of Kwa Zulu- Natal Press, 2005), p.23.

Antonio Gramsci's view that intellectuals are defined by their role to society.⁶⁶ Suttner has argued that "intellectuals in the African National Congress have undergone various intellectual transformations in the organisation in order to perform tasks related to national liberation, to give them skills that are organisationally specific".⁶⁷ In this context, intellectual activities in the movement remained guided by the duties essential to national liberation. It was within a myriad of demands and organisation specific duties, I argue, that the intellectual traditions of the movement missed a theorisation of "women" as intellectuals in their own right. This has continued to build a narrative based on "the evidence" of decades of women activism without even attempting to engage with the constitutive processes of this phenomenon from within the movement itself.⁶⁸

As such, one could argue that the trajectories of leading African intellectuals who formulated questions and debated and discussed the status of the Africans in the Union of South Africa around 1910 formed a crucial record of the coalescence of

⁶⁶ Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist, activist, journalist and a philosopher known for his *Prison Notebooks* in which he states that all men are intellectuals. See Edward Said *Representations of the intellectual*; the 1993 Reith Lectures (New York, Vintage, 1994).

⁶⁷ See Raymond Suttner "The character and formation of Intellectuals within the ANC led South African Liberation Movement" in Tandika Mkandawire *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (New York, Zed Books, 2005), pp.117- 118.

⁶⁸ Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Donker Ltd, 1970 reprinted in 1987), p.80.

colonial and traditional socio, economic and political systems.⁶⁹ Soga registered the presence of a missionary inspired generation of educated Africans, the early intellectuals of the Cape Colony, who played a pivotal role in the conception of the forces that propelled a transition of traditional African society to modernity from the late 1800s.

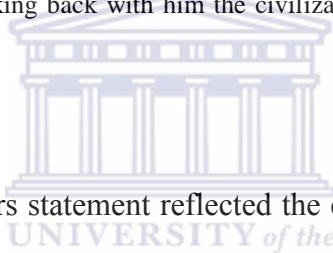
The period was marked by the weakening of traditional political structures. On the Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony, the Nongqawuse cattle killing episode of 1865 epitomised the subjugation of the AmaXhosa through loss of economic independence and access to a key social resource in cattle. A volatile environment persisted in which the early African intellectuals and their mentors applied their hearts and minds to the predicament they found themselves in.⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the cattle killing, John A. Chalmers, Soga's friend and colleague in the missionary enterprise predicted that Africans were approaching an age of

⁶⁹ In this area I refer specifically to collections such as the copies of the Christian Express. The magazine was a Christian publication which covered a range of issues on Christianity and missionary initiatives in different parts of the world, Asia, China, Africa, America and Pacific Islands. The publication speaks to the colonial period when religion was beginning to make inroads in areas new to the colonialists. The missionaries, unlike their colonial masters, took an interest even in the languages and were instrumental in the establishment of various associations for the study of various aspects of African languages. The magazine has volumes on various aspects of what was then called, Kaffir Orthography with specific focus on the translation of the Scriptures into Isi Xhosa. See an article by the Right Reverend, The Bishop of St. John's "*Some suggestions for improved Kaffir Orthography*" in the Christian Express, Lovedale, South Africa, January 1, 1881, p.13.

⁷⁰ Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The Beginnings of Black protest Politics in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984), p. 2.

extinction. In May 1865, Tiyo Soga responded to the controversial statement made by Chalmers in an article which appeared in The King William's Town Gazette and Kaffrarian Banner of 11 May 1865. In what later became the basis for the early African intellectual tradition, Tiyo Soga argued:

“Africa was God given to the race of Ham. I find Negro from the days of the old Assyrians downward, keeping his ‘individuality’ and ‘distinctiveness’, amid the wreck of empires, and the revolution of ages. I find him keeping his place among the nations, and keeping his home and country. I find him opposed by nation after nation and driven from his home. I find him enslaved – exposed to vices and brandy of the white man. I find him in this condition for many a day – in the West Indian Islands, in Northern and Southern America, and in the South American Colonies of Spain and Portugal. I find him exposed to all these disasters, and yet living – multiplying and never extinct. Yea, I find him now as the prevalence of Christian and philanthropic opinions on the right of man obtains among civilized nations, returning unmanacled to the land of his forefathers, taking back with him the civilization and the Christianity of those nations.”⁷¹



Soga's response to Chalmers statement reflected the convergence of colonial and traditional ideologies of masculinity in affirmation of a nationalism constructed around an African male figure. Soga's framework enumerated spheres for male participation in which the roots of the nineteenth and twentieth century nationalism were to be found. This formed the basis for the subsequent intellectual traditions of the Africans long after Soga's death in the early twentieth century. The effects of the nationalist project of the late nineteenth century took women as a salient category and as a subject of control. This missionary derived narrative must be seen as constitutive and formative of intellectuals in the history

⁷¹ Donovan Williams, *The Journal and Selected Writings of Reverend Tiyo Soga* (Cape Town, Balkema, 1983), pp.180-181.

of the African National Congress, especially in the first part of the twentieth century.

Although highly celebrated as a period of enlightenment and civilisation, education was the exclusive preserve of mostly male elites which was made available to promising “young African boys” who displayed good leadership qualities. By extension, the reservation of education to “young African boys” was supposed to discourage young women from participating in major intellectual activities as they remained the “property” of their fathers until they married. After marriage, the women became the “property” of their husbands.⁷² This familiar conception was at the very core of nationalist formation in South Africa. The nationalism of the nineteenth century framed the entry of women in nationalist discourse in indexical terms. A woman’s relationship to a male figure dictated her position in society. The missionary inspired intellectual traditions of Soga remained blind to the problematic insertion of women in Chalmers’s thesis on the extinction of the Africans. Using this colonial inflated text Soga’s response to Chalmers fell in this trend.

⁷² John A. Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga: A page in South African Mission Work*, 2nd edition (Edinburg, Andrew Elliot, 1878).

My first encounter with the construction of women in the intellectual pursuits of Tiyo Soga relates to his often under-recognised accounts of his mother, Nosuthu. The epigraph of the first chapter of John Aitken Chalmers's *Tiyo Soga, A page in South African Mission Work* recalls the formative years of Tiyo Soga which gives us a glimpse of an intriguing gendered configuration of nationalist intellectuals. The author emphasises the role of parents in mentoring a child in childhood. In this chapter, the genealogy of the Soga family is outlined with a strong emphasis on the status of Jotelo Soga Tiyo's father, a polygamist with eight wives and thirty nine children.⁷³ Nosuthu is introduced as the great wife of Jotelo, a leading councillor of Ngqika, the chief of the "western Xhosa". Jotelo's profile, judging from a closer reading, mediates the entry of Nosuthu into the nationalist record. She cannot be accounted for in any other way.

An interesting reappraisal of Nosuthu, Soga's mother, is found in Donovan Williams's *The journal and selected writings of Reverend Tiyo Soga* published in 1983. In this text, Nosuthu has been defined as the great wife of old Soga who hailed from the Amantinde and the daughter of Ngayi.⁷⁴ Nosuthu's identity is placed in relation to the clan of Amantinde. In each of these spheres, a set of rules determined the proper behaviour of a great wife, a daughter and a member of a

⁷³ John Aitken Chalmers *Tiyo Soga: A page of South African Mission Work* (Cape Colony, James Hay, 1878), p.1.

⁷⁴ Donovan Williams, *The Journal and Selected Writings of Reverend Tiyo Soga* (Cape Town, Balkema, 1983).

clan. To cement this order, *lobolo* (bridewealth) was used as a measure to regulate and facilitate adherence to rules governing gender relations between men and women. This is the only area of women's lives which has drawn the attention of the male patriarchs, the chiefs, the missionaries and the colonialist alike.

Outlining the significance of lobola in African societies John Chalmers stated:

“Some may suppose that because Kaffir women are bought for cattle they are serfs to their husbands. It is not so. If a Kaffir rebukes his spouse, or administers a slight corporal punishment for some great offence, she instantly rolls up her mat, takes her youngest child on her back, and turns her steps to her native kraal to pour out her grievances into her father's ear.”⁷⁵

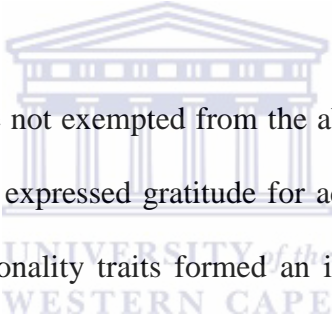
The effects of a woman leaving the husband's kraal are overshadowed as the emphasis is given to the father's motives for listening to the sorrows of her daughter. According to Chalmers the father's motives are to punish his son in law for impulsiveness by invariably demanding a bullock or two *to enrich himself* and his daughter can return to her home.”⁷⁶ As missionaries focused on the father's motives for punishing the son in law, the experiences of women in customary codes are eroded from the public discourse on the role of lobola in an African society.

The use of lobolo as a measure to ascertain the kinds of relations between men and women produced reductive categories and dichotomies of “men/women,

⁷⁵ John A. Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga: A page of South African mission work* (Cape Colony, James Hay, 1878), p.1.

⁷⁶ Ibid

father/daughter, son/mother relations. The dichotomies in turn produced reductive categories of thought for processing ideas about the subject, that invariably limit our ability to engage with the constitutive processes involved in the making of nationalist discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A survey of the intellectual trajectory of Tiyo Soga indicates that the advent of the early African intellectual tradition occurred through the construction of a salient female figure who occupied an ambiguous status as the rock upon which the missionary enterprise flourished.



Single unmarried girls were not exempted from the above rules. In his journal of 17th December, 1859, Soga expressed gratitude for admitting two young women into his congregation. Personality traits formed an important component of the norms and the values that the missionaries sought to instil in Africans. Soga's characterisation of the new converts demonstrates how the Christian missionary values were forged using traces of the traditional African values. He stated:

“One of the girls had a very sharp, severe temper. She appears serious and I have observed her some time past. The other young woman is the daughter of one of the Kaffirs who lately came amongst us.”⁷⁷

This characterisation of the two girls not only reflected the Christian ethics the missionaries embraced, but it gives us a glimpse of the confluence of the colonial

⁷⁷ Donovan Williams, *The Journal and Selected Writings of Reverend Tiyo Soga* (Cape Town, Balkema, 1983), p.24.

and traditional masculine ideologies in the constitution of a salient female figure. Elaborating on the dominant masculine ideologies of the time, Soga established the identity of the other young woman as a daughter of one of the Africans who later joined the congregation. Unlike the second, the first girl did not fit in the schema that enabled the characterisation of a 'girl'. The personality of the second girl remains obscure as the narrative continues to dwell on the father. The temper of the first girl becomes the basis on which her agency acknowledged. In this frame the girls' behaviour exceeded Soga's characterisation. A sudden rupture occurred in Soga's narration of the progress of the young women in the congregation. The conversion of the young women had a significant impact on Tiyo Soga spiritually as well as in his approach to his ministry. Spiritually, Soga admits that "the enquiring souls should awake me to greater concern of my own state before God."⁷⁸

Although entrusted with the duty to guide and ascertain the spiritual progression of his converts, a reversal of roles occurred wherein the two young women awakened Soga to his own limitations as a human being. Interaction with the girls enabled Soga to acknowledge his inability to predict his own state before God. In this way, the personality of the young women helped him to admit to his own

⁷⁸Donovan Williams, *The Journal and Selected Writings of Reverend Tiyo Soga* (Cape Town, Balkema, 1983).

imperfection before God. This eventually happened in less than a year of having been in contact with the two young girls.

As far as the two young women were concerned, admission to the mission station was the beginning of yet another journey in the construction of the category “women.” One of the requirements for acceptance in the mission station was baptism. Once baptised, the young women received new names marking the beginning of the new journey. Immediately after their baptism Soga has a different perception of the girl he once defined as “very sharp and of severe temper.’ The change in Soga’s perception of the young girl is encapsulated in his confession, much later after, having worked with two the girls at the mission station of Mgwali. This confession is found in Soga’s journal of 1860 in which he reflected on Catherine’s last days before she died. He stated:

“Catherine was once a girl with a very forward outspoken and as I thought ill-tempered disposition, yet on her death I was pleasingly disappointed. She spoke a good deal before she died and comforted her poor father and mother. Her replies to my question regarding her state were very pleasing. In fact I think we did injustice to the character of poor Catherine. People judged her perhaps by the natural and constitutional forwardness of her manner which she has inherited from her mother and grandmother.”⁷⁹

At this stage, we discern a level of self-critique where Soga re-evaluated prior perceptions of the young Catherine before he actually got to know her. This brought a new perspective on the character of one of the two young women to

⁷⁹Donovan Williams *The Journal and Selected writings of Reverend Tiyo Soga* (Cape Town, Balkema 1983), p. 29.

light. Soga's new perspective on Catherine Tsamse demonstrated that the rules governing the relations between men and women when examined closely can give a different perspective of historical processes. The transformation of gender relations and the new forms of relations have a direct consequence on the missionary enterprise which formed the base of Soga's intellectual tradition.

The intellectual genesis of Tiyo Soga was characterised by a continued construction of categories of women, his mother, his wife, women in his congregation and his daughters. The constructions of these categories are displayed in his own articulations and not in scholarship about him. This is important as it enables us to distinguish his intellectual trajectory from the scholarship about him. Soga's intellectual trajectory laid the basis for the creation of a salient female figure whose entry to the sphere of public political discourse remains unaccounted for.

The intellectual tradition of the twentieth century continued to craft itself around the celebration and the neglect of women's theorisations of the everyday. Maxeke's emergence to political prominence challenged the shadow figure of women in nationalist discourse from within the movement. Her rise to political prominence occurred at about the time when the missionary enterprise was under severe pressure from the colonial state, after the missionaries had inadvertently

produced intellectuals who were increasingly evaluating the principles on which religion and the state formation were based. Although based on Christian principles of obedience, the new generation of Africans raised concerns on a range of issues including social justice and gender equality.⁸⁰

At this juncture we observe how women have been understood in the intellectual traditions of the liberation struggle. Examining the manner in which the intellectual traditions of S. Molema, and A.B. Xuma, I ask: When and how did women become a factor in the intellectual activities of the ANC?⁸¹

The question is important because it enables us to examine how different histories and historiographies, missionary and nationalist, intersect in the production of historical knowledge about women. Firstly, it offers a critical evaluation of how a missionary inspired intellectual enterprise produced modern subjects. It also set the parameters and the terms for the conception and the articulation of their modernity. The missionary discourses of the late nineteenth century established conditions for the production of historical knowledge about Africans in South Africa. Secondly, the question enables an examination of how women participated

⁸⁰ See University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, The A.B. Xuma Papers, A 843; The personal papers of Solomon Plaatjie on the effects of the Native Land Act to the Africans in the Orange Free State.

⁸¹ A.B. Xuma "*Charlotte Maxeke: What an educated Native Girl Can Do*" edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale, 1930).

in the process that shaped the development of the modern society and participated in the sphere of black politics in South Africa during the twentieth century.

Intellectuals such as Silas Thelesho Molema, father of Silas Modiri Molema represented a second generation of African intellectuals. He was born in Bechuanaland c1852-55. He received his education at Healdtown where he obtained a teaching certificate in 1877. In 1877, Molema returned to Mafikeng where he established a school for the Barolong at a time when education for Africans in the then Transvaal republic was still scanty. With the end of the first South African War, the Royal Commission newly demarcated the Western boundary of the Transvaal. To facilitate the process, Molema became Chief Montshiwa's councillor and assisted in protest against the encroachment of the new boundaries.⁸²

During the South African War of 1899-1902 he served the British and commanded a Barolong detachment under Colonel Baden Powell during the siege of Mafikeng in 1900-1901. In this period, Molema provided financial support to Solomon Plaatjie who was at the time publishing a SeTswana newspaper, *Koranta ea Bacoana*. He had a good relationship with Solomon Plaatjie whom he regarded as a son. During the formation of the South African Native Congress, which later

⁸² University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Silas Thelesho Molema Papers 1874-1932, A 979.

became the ANC, Molema provided financial assistance to the delegations of 1914 and 1919 which went to Great Britain in protest against the imposition of the Native Land Act of 1913. Just before his death in 1927 Molema was part of a deputation that went to General Hertzog in protest against the provisions of the Native Land Act in September 1927.

Thelesho Molema's eldest son, Silas, was born in 1892 in Mafikeng and received his education at Healdtown and Lovedale in the Eastern Cape. While at Lovedale, Modiri's correspondence with his father reveals a strong bond between father and son. In his correspondence, Modiri often addressed his father with respect and expressed his longing for holidays to tell his father about life at Lovedale. Upon matriculation in 1912, Molema had taught at the Lyndhurst Road Public School until his departure for Scotland to pursue his studies at Glasgow University where he graduated in medicine in 1919.

In Scotland Molema wrote and published a book titled *The Bantu Past and Present*.⁸³ After graduating, he continued his medical studies and worked for a time in Dublin and Glasgow before returning to South Africa early 1921. On his return to Mafikeng he opened a surgery for the "non-white" populations in the area. Subsequently he opened a nursing home for all races but due to financial

⁸³ Silas Modiri Molema *The Bantu Past and Present: An ethnographical and Historical Study of Native Races in South Africa* (Edinburgh, W. Green & Son Limited, 1920).

difficulties, as the majority of the people were poor and could not afford health charges, he chose to close it. He was an active member of the BaRolong tribe and always supportive of the Bechuanaland government. He served as a member of the Advisory Council in Bechuanaland. He also served as the Treasurer General of the African National Congress. He was also an active member of the Wesleyan Church. In c1927 he married Anna Mashoela, a daughter of Reverend M.J. Moshoele of Klerksdorp.

In his study *The Bantu Past and Present: An ethnological and Historical Study of Native Races in South Africa* Silas Modiri Molema presented facts about *his people*⁸⁴. The intellectual activities of Molema are characterised by an aspiration to write about his people. In defence of this intellectual tradition, Molema believed that the process of writing the history of his people afforded an intellectual; the advantage of telling the story of his own life relying much on his personal observation and experience.⁸⁵

Molema's formulation characterises the ethos of intellectual engagements in the South African Native Congress (SANAC) on the Native Question in the 1920s. This was a form of intellectual engagement which moved on the assumption that

⁸⁴Silas Modiri Molema *The Bantu Past and Present: An ethnographical and Historical Study of Native Races in South Africa* (Edinburgh, W. Green & Son Limited, 1920).

⁸⁵ Ibid, preface.

the average African knew little about politics. Molema made this point clear when he argued “the average Bantu cares little and knows less about politics and generally is incapable of forming an independent opinion on any legislative measure unless it has been fully explained to him, the benefits extolled or its dangers magnified or in fact an opinion suggested to him by one or other of the Bantu leaders who are thus rather more the advocates than mouthpieces of their people.”⁸⁶ Molema argues, understandably, that the intellectuals relied therefore on the proliferation of indigenised local newspapers in which the native editors expressed their political views on matters pertaining to the average Bantu.⁸⁷

In the intellectual tradition espoused by Molema, the discussion of issues affecting the Africans remained a prerogative of men. The confluence of colonial and postcolonial ideologies of masculinity constructs a silent category “women” which enters Molema’s repertoire as a mere indexical point. Unlike Soga who demonstrates how his misconceptions of women changed over time, women in Molema reinforce the social organisation of the traditional African homestead. In this formation, women did most of the work in the homestead while men who according to Molema “were blood thirsty warriors”, were away fighting or in time

⁸⁶Silas Modiri Molema *The Bantu Past and Present: An ethnographical and Historical Study of Native Races in South Africa* (Edinburgh, W. Green & Son Limited, 1920). p.305.

⁸⁷Ibid.

of peace hunting and basking in the sun, gossiping or drinking bojoloa.”⁸⁸ Here, the construction of women in pastoral relations is evident as Molema constructs an inextricable link between women and land. The characterisation of men in Molema’s study forms the basis for the construction of an image of women as victims of men’s drinking habits.

If Molema was correct in his assessment of men, the intellectual traditions of the time however resulted in a failure to account for the consequences of these habits for women and assumed a male subjectivity whose acquaintance with ‘politics’ could be measured and qualified. The main assumption among writers like Molema was that average Africans knew little about politics. They needed the guidance and the mentorship of the educated elite. Such views extended a gendered dynamic of kinship into the spheres of politics, leading to an emasculated configuration of subaltern male subjectivity. This was a major weakness in the intellectual tradition espoused in Molema’s study as it failed to question the pastoral relations in the making of credible categories in documenting facts about Africans and their relation to the political sphere. After a long period of active engagement in the intellectual traditions that characterised the political discourse of the Africans in the twentieth century, Molema died on 13 August 1965.

⁸⁸ ⁸⁸Silas Modiri Molema *The Bantu Past and Present: An ethnographical and Historical Study of Native Races in South Africa* (Edinburgh, W. Green & Son Limited, 1920). p.192.

To demonstrate how an intellectual tradition of the 1920s and 1930s failed to engage with the constitutive processes in the making of historical knowledge about the changing face of African societies, I now turn to the intellectual activities of A.B. Xuma and examine how he thought about the struggles for land and voting rights.⁸⁹ Xuma's intellectual genesis, like that of Molema, assumed that the average African knew little about politics. Addressing a conference of European and Bantu Christian Student Association which was held at the University of Fort Hare in 1930, A.B. Xuma stated:

“On September 10th 1840 at Bunkers Hill, David Webster said: “when men pause from their ordinary occupations and assemble in great numbers, a prospect for the judgement of the country and of the age requires that they should clearly set forth the grave causes which bring them together and the purpose which they seek to promote. This evening as I stand before you I feel the force of this obligation. I shall in keeping with it endeavour in my humble way to place before you certain facts and suggestions which I believe are worthy of study and consideration by all.”⁹⁰

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The intellectual tradition espoused by Xuma, like Molema, placed facts and judgement of the country at the centre of intellectual activity. An intellectual in Xuma's terms has an “obligation” not only to judge events but to start a process that would bring people together for a common purpose. On this occasion, Xuma called for “the revolution of the people's thoughts, their ideas, their ideals and

⁸⁹ See A.B. Xuma “Bridging the Gap between White and Black in South Africa.” Paper read before the Conference of European and Bantu Christian Student Associations held at Fort Hare, 27th June to 3rd July 1930, and A. B. Xuma “Reconstituting the Union of South Africa: more rational Union Policy” Address delivered before a public meeting of the Bantu Studies Club of the University of the Witwatersrand, 30 May, 1932, Lovedale Press, 1933.

⁹⁰ Ibid. .p.1.

their spirit to recognise the African as a human being with human desires and aspirations which must be satisfied to concede to the African his reasonable demand to be considered a human being with full scope for human growth and human happiness.”⁹¹ In setting forth an agenda for intellectual activity, Xuma directed attention to the educated African as the one who should be consulted in all matters affecting the African community and concluded that “it is He (the intellectual), and He alone who can best interpret the European to the African and the African to the European.”⁹² He thus set the role of an intellectual as an intermediary between the African and the European.

On this momentous occasion, Xuma shared a platform with Charlotte Maxeke, a woman and an intellectual in her own right. She featured in an unconventional way as she surveyed the constructions of African womanhood in ways that questioned the continued subjection of women in a timeless past of customs and traditions. When the educated elite were increasingly claiming citizenship along the civilised standards set by the Union government, Charlotte Maxeke set out to theorise the everyday in which she questioned the limiting effects of formulations of the Native Question on the progress of women and children.

⁹¹ A.B. Xuma “Bridging the Gap between White and Black in South Africa,” Paper read before the Conference of European and Bantu Christian Student Associations held at Fort Hare, 27th June to 3rd July 1930.p.19.

⁹² Ibid.

At a time when the leading African intellectuals focused on the pastoral relations that emerged as a direct consequence of the Native Land Act of 1913, Charlotte Maxeke emerged as a dynamic thinker who could articulate the collusion of customary practices and the state in determining the material conditions of Africans, irrespective of their geographical location. Disturbed by gender inequality, and the rural/ urban divide, her foresight about the crippling effects of the levels of inequality between African men and women challenges the struggle biography in a direction that helps us to rethink Maxeke's theorisations of the sphere of everyday life. This aspect of the struggle for liberation is often submerged in nationalist narrations of the big national question.⁹³



African response to the drawing of boundaries between the rural and the urban areas characterised much of the nationalist discourse of the 1920s and 1930s.⁹⁴ Maxeke's theorisation of the everyday reconfigures the debate about 'the role of early African intellectuals' in negotiating the transition from traditional to modern African societies. Her theorisation on aspects of "Native Life" opposed the traditional role of intellectuals as intermediaries responsible for introducing

⁹³ See Charlotte Maxeke "The progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa' in *Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A yearbook of South African Missions*, compiled and edited by Rev. Dexter Taylor, D.D. (Alice, Lovedale Institution Press, 1928), pp.177-179.

⁹⁴ See the personal papers of Solomon Plaatjie on the effects of the Native Land Act to the Africans in the Orange Free State.

modern values to Africans.’⁹⁵ She challenges what Fanon has called ‘the inaptitude of the native intellectual to carry on a two sided discussion’ in significant ways.⁹⁶ Her ability to investigate and present arguments about unequal power relations that permeated the social and the economic spheres of the Africans enriched the political discourse of the twentieth century. She carried a two sided discussion which manifested in her ability to diagnose problems and propose possible solutions to the social ills in the 1920s and 1930s.

Evoking the various forms of inequality embedded in gendered spheres of Native life such as, education, womanhood, progress and modernity, Maxeke performed a double- edged theorisation as she highlighted gender ideologies that resulted in the social stratification of women as an oppressed social group. Her mastery of the analytical tools of education, western religion and aspects of African tradition enabled Maxeke to unearth the inequalities embedded in gender neutral categories when analysing the transformation from traditional to modern society. In doing so, Maxeke injected gender equality, an aspect which had been missing in the intellectual traditions of the early twentieth century.

⁹⁵ Unlike Xuma who defined intellectuals as intermediaries between the African and the European Maxeke occupied the intellectual space created by the conditions of the Africans.

⁹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963), p.49.

Charlotte Maxeke drew from her experience when discussing gender inequalities that permeated the various aspects of “African Life” in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was a daring step Maxeke took in moving away from the tradition of speaking on behalf of the Africans, to actually address them and highlight gender inequality as one of the major hindrances to the progress of Africans in the twentieth century.

She demonstrated an aptitude for double theorisation, of Native Life as it was, and of possibilities for improvement. In what she called “the primitive state of South African Natives,” Maxeke not only criticised the custom of lobola, but also the inequality that prevailed as a consequence of one of the hallmarks of customary law. While acknowledging the negative impact of dowry, Maxeke was quick to place the practices associated with traditional marriage in their proper context by asserting that in olden days, traditional customs had a great effect in shaping the conduct of the women.⁹⁷ Clearly, Maxeke occupied a crucial space in the theorisation of the Native Question as conceptualised in the public opinion of leading intellectuals of the early twentieth century.

⁹⁷ Charlotte Maxeke, ‘The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa,’ in, *Christianity and South African Natives of South Africa: A Yearbook of South African Missions* compiled by J. Dexter Taylor (Alice, Lovedale Institution Press, 1928), p. 177.

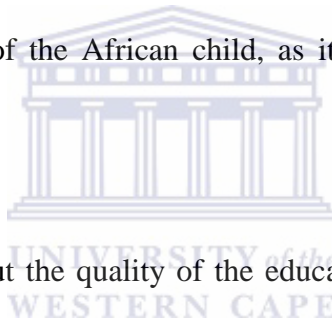
She surveyed these spheres of Native life in her formulation of “The progress of Native Womanhood”. Native Womanhood enabled Maxeke to articulate a discourse about the inequalities that prevailed among the Africans. Beginning with gender inequality from within the womenfolk, Maxeke demonstrated how power reproduced cycles of inequality among the women. She used notions of schooling as a trope to highlight various forms of education the Africans were accustomed to. Maxeke’s use of ‘schooling’ served to bridge the gap between traditional and modern formal education. She demonstrated how traditional education prepared young African woman to become marriageable. This aspect of native womanhood, Maxeke asserted “produced types of mothers who themselves took pride in keeping clean homes morally for which the Bantu have been so famous until the advent of the white man in South Africa.”⁹⁸ In this way Maxeke embraced the traditional role of women as homemakers, but simultaneously critiqued aspects of African traditions that made it difficult for women to achieve equality with men. She concluded:

“ Owing no doubt to the practice of paying fixed value for a wife, men considered women their inferiors, their property and children not being allowed equal opportunity with men, and being kept down, their progress was hindered.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Charlotte Maxeke, ‘The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa,’ in, *Christianity and South African Natives of South Africa: A Yearbook of South African Missions* compiled by J. Dexter Taylor (Alice, Lovedale Institution Press, 1928), p.178.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Using the advent of the European Missionary enterprise as a metaphor, Charlotte Maxeke identified yet another theoretical space in which African women are engaged in South Africa. It is that of the struggles over women's right to decision making in their domestic environments. In theorising this space, she highlighted the hard work of women in support of the missionary endeavours to provide education to Africans. In this sphere, Maxeke's transition from Native Womanhood paved the way for the inclusion of women and children as marginal categories in the debate about the Native Question. Here the basis for a theorisation of the plight of the African child, as it emerged in the 1920s and 1930s was formed.



Initiating a discussion about the quality of the education acquired in missionary educational facilities, Maxeke highlighted the tension in the value exchange between the literate and illiterate among the Africans. In this sphere, Maxeke highlighted inequalities in the provision of education as follows:

“Parents released boys and sent them wholesale away to advanced institutions, while some restraint had been placed against educating women who were to be given away for dowry in future as the custom had not died out even at the present day.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Charlotte Maxeke, ‘The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa,’ in, *Christianity and South African Natives of South Africa: A Yearbook of South African Missions* compiled by J. Dexter Tylor. (Alice, Lovedale Institution Press, 1928), p. 180.

As she continued to enumerate examples of how gender inequality restrained women, Maxeke did not overlook the inroads that the women of her time made in various spheres of public life. The Native woman of Maxeke's calibre 'forced her way up to the channels of progress until she won herself Government recognition in the various spheres of employment such as the Native Welfare Officer, Native Probation Officer, Teachers, Nurses, Office Clerks and Evangelists.'¹⁰¹ This was a conception of Native womanhood that challenged not only the domestication of women but also their subjection to administrative power.

Lastly, Maxeke has theorised a new form of native womanhood for modern times, a product of European civilisation in Africa. Conceptualising this generation of women, Charlotte Maxeke argued that modern women found in industrial areas amounted to a class whose progress or degeneration depended on the influences of their immediate environment.¹⁰² In her concluding remarks Maxeke placed 'the problem of Native women in South Africa' in its proper context and resisted labelling women as a problem and a cause of lawlessness in urban centres. She resolved to look at notions of gender embedded in the life of the Africans. In these spheres Maxeke reconfigured the debate about the role of intellectuals in the early twentieth century in ways that took the theorisations of the everyday seriously.

¹⁰¹ Charlotte Maxeke, 'The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa,' in, *Christianity and South African Natives of South Africa: A Yearbook of South African Missions* compiled by J. Dexter Tylor. (Alice, Lovedale Institution Press, 1928). p. 181.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Maxeke's courage and determination did not go unnoticed in the intellectual traditions of the movement. In 1930 A. B. Xuma published a booklet about her entitled "*Charlotte Maxeke: What an educated Native Girl Can Do.*"¹⁰³ The publication demonstrated some of the early attempts in the ANC leadership to acknowledge and consider the consequences of women and their abilities in and for leadership. The tone of the publication sought to create a space within which the intellectual interventions of Charlotte Maxeke could be located.

In his own words, Xuma's interest in Maxeke served as "an argument about the need for African girls to lead exemplary lives as wives as leaders of [African womanhood] to better things."¹⁰⁴ This demonstrates an appropriation of Charlotte Maxeke as an embodiment of dominant nationalist sentiments in the activities of early African intellectuals at the time. However, as indicated in her own theorisation of the "Progress of Native Womanhood," Charlotte Maxeke could not be limited to a single notion of African womanhood. Her foresight on the evolution of notions of womanhood placed her well beyond minimalist views of what it meant to be an African woman and created an intellectual space in which notions of African womanhood were contested in the 1920s and 1930s.

¹⁰³ A. B. Xuma, *Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) What an Educated African Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, (Alice, Lovedale 1930).

¹⁰⁴ A. B. Xuma, *Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) What an Educated African Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press 1930), p.26.

Two years after the debate at Fort Hare University, Xuma addressed a public meeting of the Bantu Studies Club of the University of Witwatersrand in which he described the ethos of his intellectual activities. He stated, “I have long resolved never to write or to say anything about my country or any section of its citizens unless I believe that what I say or write will in the long run benefit South Africa as a whole, White and Black.”¹⁰⁵

Xuma’s debate of the Native Question and the promise of voting rights depended on the tonalities of pastoralism in which land and voting rights were tied to education and wealth.¹⁰⁶ In this formulation the impact of the infringement of the rights of women was assumed and indexed in the tonalities of pastoral power cushioning the intellectual’s role as he negotiated and facilitated communication between the oppressor and the oppressed. This notion of intellectual engagement did not challenge the limiting effects of tradition and traditional value systems in the work of the intellectuals of the twentieth century, an aspect of the struggle Charlotte Maxeke took as a major omission in the public discourse of the time.

¹⁰⁵ A. B. Xuma “Reconstituting the Union of South Africa: more rational Union Policy” Address delivered before a public meeting of the Bantu Studies Club of the University of the Witwatersrand, 30 May, 1932, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1933), p.3.

¹⁰⁶ See Premesh Lalu “Gender, Pastoral Power and the discourse of Development in the Eastern Cape in Noeleen Murray, Nick Sheperd and Martin Hall, *Desire Lines: Space Memory and Identity in the Post-apartheid City* (London & New York, Routledge, 2007), p.196.

In later years, the debate about the role of intellectuals resurfaced during the first wave of struggles for liberation on the continent.¹⁰⁷ Taking its cue from expressions of the struggle for liberation in Algeria the role of intellectuals was revisited. Franz Fanon, an intellectual and activist in Algeria has defined the struggles by which Algeria attained its independence from French colonial rule as “a historical process which cannot be intelligible to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements that gave it historical form and content.”¹⁰⁸ Fanon’s formulation destabilized the narratives, which often describe anti-colonial struggles in the dichotomy of liberation movements versus colonial order. By pointing to the incomprehensibility of the Algerian Liberation struggle and the temporality of the French Colonial rule, Fanon created a space in which to consider the possibilities for theorizations of the Algerian struggle for liberation.

In destabilizing the dichotomy of liberation movement versus the colonial order, Fanon offered a frame within which an examination of the workings of the political project of anti-colonial struggles is enabled. Against this background, he

¹⁰⁷ The literature on intellectuals and their role in liberation struggles on the continent is vast. To illustrate this point, present few examples of the literature consulted to frame the debate. See Franz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (New York, Grove Press Inc, 1963); Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson, *The African Reader: Independent Africa: a documentary based on the writings of political leaders and writers including Nkrumah, Fanon, Senghor, Soyinka, Chief Luthuli, Eduardo Mondlane, Kenyatta, Aime Cesaire, Patrice Lumumba* (New York, Vintage Books, 1970); Raymond Suttner, “The character and formation of Intellectuals within the ANC led South African Liberation Movement” in Tandika Mkandawire, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Franz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963), p.36.

concluded that “in the context of the struggle the colonialist bourgeoisie looked feverishly for contacts with the intellectual elite, and it was with the elite that the familiar dialogue concerning values was carried.”¹⁰⁹

In examining the interaction between the colonialist and the African, Maxeke did not occupy an ambiguous position as a link between the coloniser and the struggling masses. She actively participated in the struggles of the 1920s, and thoughtfully so. This significantly challenges that scholarship on the role of intellectuals in liberation struggles which is given over to examining their role as mediators between the colonised and the colonisers. However, as Maxeke demonstrated, the point at which the intellectuals interact with the colonialist remained the basis for evaluating their role. Hence, unlike the colonists, African intellectuals were also duty bound to articulate the tensions that informed the complex relations of the twentieth century. At best, this can be summarised again in terms of what I have described as the simultaneity of the small and big question that is the condition for thought of the anti-colonial intellectual.

¹⁰⁹ See Franz Fanon. “The intellectual Elite in Revolutionary Culture” in W. Cartey and M. Kilson *The African Reader: Independent Africa: a documentary based on the writings of political leaders and writers including Nkrumah, Fanon, Senghor, Soyinka, Chief Luthuli, Eduardo Mondlane, Kenyatta, Aime Cesaire, Patrice Lumumba* (New York, Vintage Books, 1970), p.126.

In the Algerian case, as Fanon shows, it was a question of discerning the extent to which intellectuals can be said to have been a formidable force that shaped the form and content of the struggles for liberations on the continent. In so far as the question of women was locked into pastoral or kinship models, the political projects of liberation movements, and in Fanon's target of criticism, newly independent African states, would always be found wanting.

Such an order of knowledge is what lies at the core of Fanon's invitation to rethink the history of liberation movements. Incidentally, it also belies the interventions of women such as Charlotte Maxeke. Fanon's formulation of the debate about intellectuals in the Algerian liberation movement, like Maxeke's in South Africa, enables a view on liberation movements that refuses the limitations posed by the self-narration of these movements and the constraints that issue from its archives. Such work is only now emerging with scholars such as Raymond Suttner, an intellectual and activist in the African National Congress, who has taken up the demand for an intellectual history of the ANC.¹¹⁰ Yet, for Suttner to arrive at a reading of nationalism that would contest its self-narration, it might be important for him to consider the lesson of Charlotte Maxeke, and the ways in

¹¹⁰ See Raymond Suttner. "The character and formation of Intellectuals within the ANC led South African Liberation Movement" in Tandika Mkandawire *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2005)

which her re-ordering of nationalist narration challenged a hegemonic masculinity that found expression in notions of pastoralism and kinship.

By examining the rise of the early nationalist intellectual traditions this chapter has surveyed the trends that position women as subjects of political discourse, as particular kinds of political subjects. Women in the early twentieth century occupied an ambiguous position as bearers of tradition. Although leading African intellectuals of the time such as Tiyo Soga encouraged conversion to western religion, the troubling images of women as bearers of tradition, the foundation and rock on which the missionary activities were anchored, daughters, wives, persisted. The traditions facilitated the creation of women as celebrated and neglected figures at the same time. Maxeke's theorisations highlighted these contrasts.

Expressing early concerns about the forms of inequality that existed in society, Maxeke created a discourse which continued to claim a space for intelligibility to the discourse of the struggle. This chapter has surveyed the intellectual traditions espoused by the early African luminaries of the twentieth century such as Silas Modiri Molema and A.B. Xuma. To evaluate the intensity of the debate about the Native question, the chapter has juxtaposed these two iconic figures of twentieth

century nationalist traditions against that of Charlotte Maxeke's thought on the Native question.

As demonstrated in this chapter, an uncritical acceptance of 'women's roles' as focus of women's struggle for gender equality misses Maxeke's theorisations of the everyday experiences of the Africans in her contemplation of a rebirth of twentieth century nationalism. Maxeke provides us with an intellectual formation that compels the simultaneous thinking of the small and the big questions. In her theorisations, she inhabited the problematics and structures of feeling of urbanisation and the meaning of everyday living for the African subject. It is this doubling in theorisation that makes Charlotte Maxeke's theorisation important historically and indispensable historiographically.

CHAPTER 2

THEORISING WOMEN

This chapter surveys the feminist scholarship on women and the struggle for liberation in South Africa by tracing competing discourses on the liberation of women. In reviewing the scholarship that frames the studies on women and the liberation struggle, Cheryl Walker's *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (1982) was amongst the earliest sustained academic studies on women in South Africa from a revisionist perspective.¹¹¹ Tracing the development of a woman's movement within the context of the national liberation movement, Walker concluded that the constitution of 1919 barred women from participating as full members in the ANC but granted them the status of auxiliary membership only, thus "laid the basis of the ANC's treatment of women for the next twenty five years as a separate category of members outside the scope of its regular activities."¹¹²

In the circles of nationalist movements such as the African National Congress Walker's book was celebrated as a major scholarly intervention on "*the role of*

¹¹¹ Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx Press, 1982).

¹¹² Ibid, p. 33.

women” in the nationalist liberation struggle in South Africa.¹¹³ While holding the position that research on women is decidedly an act in the politics of liberation, scholars such as Cheryl Walker and Jenny Schreiner set out to demonstrate how women responded to the functioning of oppressive regimes.¹¹⁴ The activities of feminist scholars contributed to the resurgence of the women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

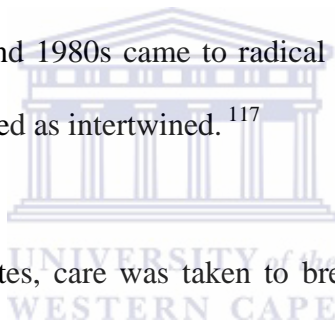
On the political front, the feminist scholarship of the 1980s succeeded in documenting women’s responses to various forms of oppression as it created greater awareness about the conditions of women under apartheid.¹¹⁵ While able to mobilise women into various women’s movements, the feminist narrations of women’s roles in liberation struggles did not theorise women as intellectuals in their own right, but tended to view them as objects of liberation history. In doing so, the narrations have not engaged with the ways in which the intellectual project of women altered the discourse of the liberation struggle. To understand and explain this oversight, a brief survey of the trends found in the intellectual project of feminist scholarship in South Africa is essential.

¹¹³ D. Budlender (eds), “Women and Resistance in South Africa” Review Article in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 10. No.1, Special Issue on Women in Southern Africa Oct.1983, p.132.

¹¹⁴ Jenny Schreiner “Thina singoomama asinakubulawa” Forms of organization adopted by the Federation of South African Women in the Western Cape, BA (Hon) Thesis, UCT, 1982 and Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx Press, 1982).

¹¹⁵ Hilda Bernstein, *For their triumphs and for their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa* (London, International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985).

To understand the trajectories of feminist scholarship in South Africa we need to examine the form and content of the different strands of feminist traditions in the period under investigation. In the 1970s and 1980s the feminist debates on gender equality in South Africa have sought to displace the oppression of women and to produce a concept of gender equality. Driven by this desire, feminist scholars in the movement such as Ray Alexander have outlined and explained the causes of gender inequality in society.¹¹⁶ When viewed against its objectives, the feminist scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s came to radical formulations in which race, gender and class were viewed as intertwined.¹¹⁷



In the midst of these debates, care was taken to break the racial segregationist ideology of apartheid. The theorization of ‘a triple oppression’ suffered by African women assisted in bringing the plight of African women closer to the feminist perspectives that cut across race, class and gender. But the articulation was always difficult. Taking the emancipation of women as its prime focus, feminist scholarship theorized the different facets of gender oppression. However, in accounting for ‘the role of women in the liberation struggle,’ the feminist

¹¹⁶ See Simons Collection, Ray Alexander Correspondence 1953-1990s, Manuscripts and Archives, UCT

¹¹⁷ Marxist feminists within the liberation movement deliberated on and pushed for the adoption of a Marxist analysis of the woman question within the liberation movement in the 1970s. The African Nationalists such as Christine Qunta resisted what they saw as an uncritical acceptance of feminist agendas drawn from outside the African continent.

interventions tended to be stratified along the organisations to which the women belonged. When left unattended, the trajectories of feminist strands within the nationalist liberation movement of the 1970s might lead to a skewed conclusion which may suggest that organisational visibility was a prerequisite for the inclusion of women in the narratives of the liberation struggle.¹¹⁸

To understand the different strands of feminist pursuits in the 1970s we analyse the contexts in which the movement operated. Firstly, during the exile period, the struggle for liberation was conducted in clandestine underground activities. Driven by the urge to recruit more members into the liberation struggle, the nationalist inclined feminist project was constrained by the primacy it gave to specific organisations. In this way, it failed to account for the ways in which women defined terrains of the struggle outside specific organisations and political norms.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ The literature on liberation struggles and women on the African continent is vast. I have concentrated specifically on the literature dealing with the liberation of the newly independent African states in the 1960s.

¹¹⁹ In reviewing key texts of the scholarship that framed the study of women in South Africa in the 1980s, I have discovered that the study of women's struggles cannot solely be confined to campaigns and organizational formations, but the intellectual work behind the campaigns and the formation of women's organization warrants close attention.

Secondly, theorizations of women in South Africa can be attributed to the international context in which the struggle for liberation was waged.¹²⁰ Characterized by the emergence of competing views about a supposed feminist agenda in nationalist feminist circles, debates within the movement reflected a tension between the different strands of feminisms namely: the Africanist, Nationalist and the Marxist feminist positions on women.¹²¹ While consensus was reached among women in the liberation movements and elsewhere in the world that there was no single feminist interpretation of the plight of women globally, the African feminist argued in favour of the preservation of the traditional roles of women whereas the radical Marxist feminists questioned the sustainability of those roles. This lively debate shaped the theoretical and ideological debates about women in the struggle for liberation.

Outlining the effects of the changing face of global feminism on the continent, Christine Qunta warned against an uncritical acceptance of the feminist agendas designed outside the African continent.¹²² Qunta advanced the argument for an

¹²⁰ See Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips, *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), p.2.

¹²¹ Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1987), p.14.

¹²² Christine Qunta was skeptical of what she called a continued degradation of women in the Scandinavian countries. According to her, this was a direct consequence of the developments if the feminist movements as it succeeded in securing equal rights for women. Gender equality resulted in continued degradation of women. This notion is not far-fetched. In the South African context today, an increase in the number of assaults on women and children is a clear indication of incongruence between legislative frames of gender equality and the lived experiences of women on the ground.

African feminist strand that would not only claim legal equality through state legislations, but one that also recognised the factors inhibiting African women. Qunta's argument resonates with the current dilemma of the state's feminist agenda on gender equality. The notion of an African feminist agenda emerged as an attempt to define the character and the form of a nationalist aligned feminist movement.

The African feminists warned that the attainment of legal equality between men and women did not guarantee equality, but would eventually lead to the degradation of women.¹²³ This highlighted the contradictions inherent in the feminist formulations of the liberation of women. At this juncture, African feminist scholars such as Qunta understood that women's struggles do not end with a legally enforced equality between men and women. They need to transcend the legal frames to ensure that women do not suffer degradation in their communities. This intervention related to a trend of feminism which characterized the development of women's movements in the liberation movements.

According to Qunta, women's positions in liberation struggles had to reinforce the narratives of liberation movements.¹²⁴ It proposed a genre of struggle biography which saw women as integral to liberation politics rather than as a separate

¹²³ Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1987), p.14.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

political interest within these movements. It is in this variant of liberation politics that the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke have been subdued, even repressed as I will show. Although highly celebrated within the various spheres of liberation politics, her intellectual inputs have not yet received the attention they deserve in the feminist scholarship on the liberation of women even within the liberation movement.

Outside the confines of the liberation movement, initiatives of ‘unattached feminists’ created a rights based strand of feminism. This strand of feminism was in confrontation with a series of state legislations and their relation to women.¹²⁵ The activities of feminist scholars based in universities bridged the gap between communities and academic institutions. Close working relations with women groups resisting forced removals in the squatter camps of Unibel and Crossroads in Cape Town as well as with the women faced with high infant mortality rates and malnutrition in rural areas were a major impetus for solidarity across race, class and gender lines.¹²⁶

The activities of university based feminist groups also contributed to establishing networks for international solidarity and support for women and, by extension, the

¹²⁵ I refer specifically to the work of the Black Sash and its contribution to the struggles of women in urban areas.

¹²⁶ See Hilda Bernstein, *For their triumphs and for their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa* (London, International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985).

struggle for liberation in South Africa. The groundwork was coupled with intellectual theorizations of the conditions and the experiences of women that played a significant role in highlighting the evils of the racism of the apartheid state and gender discrimination, its sister form of oppression. The activities of these women groups crafted a rights based discourse in which the demand for the recognition of women's rights was prominent.

The above situation has resulted in the study of women's history being segmented in three distinct trends. The first reduces women to particular, often mundane, functions in the development and spread of liberation movements and are cramped into the nationalist and feminist narratives, where they are assigned specific "roles" as secretaries, mothers of the revolution and women guerrilla's.¹²⁷ The second acknowledges the role of distinguished women leaders and their role in resistance and liberation movements on the continent.¹²⁸ The third deals with the development of women's movements and the subsequent spread of feminist discourses on the liberation of women in different parts of Africa.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ For a discussion of the competing views and experiences of women soldiers of the South African Defense Force and the military wing of the African National Congress, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) see Jacklyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres, war and Gender in South Africa* Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹²⁸ See Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the making of Tanganyikan Nationalism 1955-1965* (Portsmouth, HN Heinemann, 1997).

¹²⁹ See Amina Mama, *Women's struggles and studies of women in Africa during the 1990s* Dakar Senegal: CODESRIA, 1996, Working paper Series 5/96.

The three strands highlight the different stages in the development of women and gender studies in Africa.¹³⁰ In the narrower South African context these developments can be traced back to the mid-1980s when feminist scholars started to interrogate the formulation of women's roles in the writing of histories of resistance. One of the early critics of feminist scholarship on the liberation of women in South Africa, Julia Wells, observed that "the resurgence of interest in the women's struggles in South Africa had not been integrated into a unified treatment of black resistance, but remained as a genre apart."¹³¹ In critiquing the feminist strand of unattached and independent intellectual engagement on the emancipation of women, Wells's observation encapsulated the ethos of a variant of feminist scholarship that sought to integrate the studies of women's struggles with the broader histories of resistance.

The integrationist approach espoused by Well's observation reflected the problems inherent in the feminist formulations of women in the context of struggles for social change in South Africa in the first place. Once again, the failure of the feminist tradition to theorise women as intellectuals in their own capacity was highlighted. Instead of challenging the masculine hegemonies that confined women to specific roles in the liberation struggle, this strand of feminist

¹³⁰ See A. Ampofo et.al, *Women's and Gender Studies in Africa*, vol.18. No.6. Sage Publications Inc. December, 2004.

¹³¹ Julia Wells, *"The History of Black Women's Struggles against the Pass Laws in South Africa 1900-1960"* (Columbia, University of Columbia Press, 1982), p.7 published thesis.

scholarship sought to find ways to make the gendered category 'women' visible in the historical narratives of the struggle for liberation.

The intervention of Julia Wells may be located within such feminist scholarship as it sought to document women's struggles as a strategy to make women visible in the liberation struggle. The *add-on approach* espoused by Wells made little allowance for enquiring about intellectual formation, by overemphasising the agency of women.¹³²

This is not to say that feminist scholars in South Africa have failed to devise innovative approaches to gender and its significance for historical studies. Anne Kelk Mager for example proposes the displacement of the male subject when exploring 'space specific relational construction of women and men.'¹³³ Such a feminist strategy also reflects attempts of feminist scholars to move away from the methods of historical inquiries that replicate the nationalist formulations of liberation.

In my reading of feminist interpretations of gender and liberation struggles I encountered much effort related to "women's issues" and women's emancipation

¹³² Julia Wells, *The History of Black Women's Struggles against the Pass Laws in South Africa 1900-1960* (Columbia, University of Columbia Press, 1982).

¹³³ Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of A South African Bantustans: A social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* (Portsmouth, N.H. Heinemann 1999), p.1.

that was not necessarily confined in organisational terms but stretched beyond organisations in South Africa and across the African continent.¹³⁴ But this was not always a product of historical study. The broadening of the horizons of women's activism has not yet received the attention it deserves in South African feminist historiography. The limitations of the studies of the 1980s provide both a provisional ground from which new understandings of the significance of the intellectual project of the women in the struggle are derived and the basis for thinking beyond the limitations of an insertion of women into dominant political narratives.¹³⁵



With regard to the effect of the second strand of feminist scholarship, the formulations of women in specific “women’s roles” had two consequences for the theorisations and historicisation of intellectual formation of women in liberation struggles. Firstly, the concept of “women’s roles” in all its manifestations, whether in the establishment of women’s organs within the liberation movement or in independent unattached women’s movements, diminished the thought of women. It casts women in predetermined roles as they perform specific duties determined by the operations of unequal relations of power which were often

¹³⁴ Ray Alexander’s personal correspondence attests to a more renigated story of women’s struggles for recognition within the liberation movement. This changes the face of women’s struggles from public visibility in demonstrations, to a subtle and yet vigorous engagement in the struggle against masculine hegemonies in the movement.

¹³⁵ Judith Butler “Post structuralism and Post Marxism” in *Diacritics*/Winter, 1993, p. 6.

beyond the scope of intellectual engagement. In many ways, they replicate a kinship mode of analysis. The search for women's roles dismisses the viability of the intellectual project of in which women discussed competing ideas about emancipation, acted on these misrecognised interventions and produced other strategies by which to reason against power.

The third strand of South African feminist scholarship is derived from the radical revisionist scholarship. Here Marxist feminist scholarship on gender and oppression paved the way for the conceptualisation of 'female oppression' in South Africa, often in economically determinist ways. However, such conceptualisations have not been injected into the broader historical studies in South Africa. In what she called a rectificatory approach, Belinda Bozzoli has criticised Marxist feminist scholarship of the 1980s for questioning the usefulness of the essentially biological rather than social category of 'women'.¹³⁶ She concluded that Marxist feminist studies of the 1980s were characterised by the collapse of female oppression into the capitalist mode of production.¹³⁷ The inability of Marxist feminist scholarship to theorise the conceptual differences of categories of women in history is a manifestation of the problem of conceptualisation of 'notions of gender' in history more generally.

¹³⁶ Belinda Bozzoli Marxism, 'Feminism and Southern African Studies', in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 9. No. 2, April, 1983 p.140.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 142.

The problem identified in feminist scholarship on the liberation of women resonates with Linzi Manicom's critique of women's history in South Africa. As early as the 1990s Manicom observed that 'there was very little explicit theorising of gender and feminist perspectives in South Africa's women's history'.¹³⁸ Manicom's contribution to the debate about the gendered nature of the state has consequences for refiguring and relocating women and women's studies on the continent.¹³⁹ For Manicom the debate about the gendered nature of the state, in which she critiques Adam Ashforth's study of the state and the making of a discourse on the Native Question, directs attention to the masculinist bonds of statist and nationalist discourse, which have elided from the realm of investigation as the nationalist frames on which the struggle for liberation are based lacked the tools for explicit theorisation of gender.

Also outlining the state of women in the historiography of South Africa in the early 1990s, Helen Bradford has argued that "women have long been defined as "sex objects".¹⁴⁰ Bradford's hard hitting criticism suggests that the portrayal of sexualised bodies of women did not go unchallenged in women's history. As

¹³⁸ See Linzi Manicom, 'Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History,' *Journal of African History*, vol. 33, 1993 p.450.

¹³⁹ See Amina Mama, 'Women's struggles and Studies of women in Africa during the 1990s' Dakar Senegal: CODESRIA 1996 Working Paper Series 5/96.

¹⁴⁰ Helen Bradford, 'Sex, Lies and Englishmen' *South African Historical Journal*, 26 (1992), p.209.

early as the 1980s, scholars in South Africa increasingly drew links between the gender roles of women and the operations of the apartheid state.¹⁴¹ This has broadly framed the status of women in historical writings from being defined as “sex objects” to feminist re-inscription and re-definition of women ranging from life histories to social histories. If women have been defined as sex objects, as Bradford suggests, can we then investigate how the theorisations that questioned such definitions have impacted on the production of historical knowledge about “women in the struggle for liberation”?

Emerging largely from radical feminist perspectives, the scholarship on women and gender in South African History has been characterised by its larger commitments to social justice. Although often ‘ghettoised,’ radical feminist scholarship remained grounded on the conceptualisations of unjust social practices in South African society. Its long road to recognition in academic circles was expressed in 1992 as Helen Bradford stated, “only from the mid-1980s did the *Journal of Southern African Studies* carry articles on topics such as homosexuality, rape, prostitution.”¹⁴² Located at the cutting edge of debates about

¹⁴¹Helen Bradford, ‘Sex, Lies and Englishmen’ *South African Historical Journal*, 26 (1992).

¹⁴²Few things can be discerned from Bradford’s intervention regarding women and historiography. It appears that women have not only been defined as sex objects but also the discussion of women and the close link drawn between homosexuality, rape and prostitution continues to problematise the subject position of women in the production of historical knowledge. Taking Bradford’s argument forward, I have identified a space within which to frame a theorisation of women as crucial subjects in the production of historical knowledge. Theorising women enables us to

the production of historical knowledge in South Africa, Bradford's argument was part of an enlarged academic debate about the historical significance of the unbanning of political organisations and its consequences for the study of history. Inspired by these events, academics seized the opportunity presented by the new dispensation in South Africa and, at times, although all too infrequently, reflected on their practices. New ways of comprehending the changes were attempted in anticipating a new social order in South Africa. While this was an opening for recharging a feminist re-reading of South African history, it remained largely unclear which strategy would emerge as the major way of rewriting of South African history. At least, the moment gave rise to a degree of self-reflection.

Historians began to re-evaluate their research practices to grasp the transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid state. In some instances critiques of the research methods which had failed to take gender relations as a crucial subject in the production of historical knowledge were brought to the fore. Conferences were held at different institutions from 1994 onwards to debate the future of history in post-apartheid South Africa.¹⁴³ Carolyn Hamilton, a participant in these debates, set out to sketch “controversies associated with the production of

examine the ways in which Charlotte Maxeke articulated gender relations at the time when the sphere of intellectual engagement was limited to a selected few, a generation of intellectuals who had acquired the highest educational qualifications abroad.

¹⁴³ Conference ‘Problematising History and Agency From Nationalism to Subalternity’ held at the Centre for African Studies at UCT, 22-24 October 1997.

historical knowledge and the politics of identity in South Africa.”¹⁴⁴ In these discussions historians highlighted concerns about the decline and the grim futures of academic history in post-apartheid South Africa, unless it overhauled its preoccupations.

Reflecting on their practices historians interrogated their role in the production of history. Discussions about the production of historical knowledge have gone beyond the conceptual debates of history as an end in itself and have drawn the discourses that participate in the production of historical knowledge to the centre stage of debates about the meaning of the present. The emergence of a critical scholarship that does not only grapple with the past, but questions the basis on which the past has been rendered intelligible in the present, was given scope. It included questioning the modes of evidence on which academic history is based but also the distinction between the public and academic histories.¹⁴⁵

Carolyn Hamilton also argued that “the greatest challenge of academic historians is to rethink assumptions about objectivity, superiority of the scholarship pronounced in the academies and for scholars to consider carefully the power

¹⁴⁴ Carolyn Hamilton, “*Historiography and the Politics of Identity in South Africa*” paper presented at the conference on ‘Problematizing History and Agency From Nationalism to Subalternity’ held at the Centre for African Studies at UCT, 22-24 October 1997, p. (i).

¹⁴⁵ See Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hinsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the shape of recurring pasts* (Cape Town, HSRC, 2009).

implications of many of their practices.”¹⁴⁶ In rethinking “women’s roles” we might ask, when do women in South African historiography serve as evidence and when do they make a conceptual difference in the world? This question is important because it takes us beyond the confines of the trends of resistance histories which were written in autobiographies and histories of organisations.¹⁴⁷ These trends establish a pattern of historical writing based on major historical events and the distinguished leaders in those events. If the new scholarship suggested by Hamilton’s input emerges, it has to nevertheless account for the effects of women’s theorisations of resistance histories.

In various conferences, debates highlighted concerns about the production of history in post-apartheid South Africa.¹⁴⁸ Against the backdrop of the state’s discourse on truth and reconciliation, historians interrogated notions of truth and truthfulness.¹⁴⁹ In 1997, the Department of History in partnership with the English Department of the Western Cape hosted a conference “Gender and Colonialism in

¹⁴⁶ See Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hinsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the shape of recurring pasts* (Cape Town, HSRC, 2009), p.17.

¹⁴⁷ Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx Press 1982) and individual autobiographies of distinct leaders in the women’s movement of South Africa, Winnie Mandela, Thandi Modise, Elizabeth Rhesha, Rita Ndzanga to name but a few.

¹⁴⁸ Conference on ‘Future of the Past: Production of history in a changing South Africa.’ held at UWC, 1996.

¹⁴⁹ South African Historical Society Conference ‘Not Telling, Secrecy, Lies and History,’ held at UWC, 1999.

Southern Africa.”¹⁵⁰ Debates in the conference highlighted “shifts from earlier feminist interpretations of gender to theorisations of sexual difference, subjectivities, colonial (and postcolonial) discourses and the politics of representation.”¹⁵¹

The debate about the politics of representation is explored in Helen Scanlon’s portrayal of women’s lives in the Western Cape. Although a narrow regional work on women, Scanlon’s observation of the portrayal of women in histories of political movements is a major contribution to the study of Charlotte Maxeke. She concludes that “traditionally, the history of political movements has been studies in terms of ideology and collective experience, and in this the experiences of men are often seen as normative, despite the gendered histories published to date, there remain considerable gaps in our knowledge of South Africa’s past.”¹⁵² Maxeke’s theorisation of native womanhood offered a critique of the crystallisation of the nationalist perceptions on gender in the twentieth century. This aspect of the history of women in South Africa has not been explored.

¹⁵⁰ Contributions to the conference on Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa were edited published. See Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley eds, *Deep hiStories Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2002), p356.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Helen Scanlon, *Representation and Reality: Portraits of Women’s lives in the Western Cape, 1948-1976*, (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2007), p. 1.

Influenced by the composition of early African intellectuals, studies of the nationalist struggles on the continent have been characterised by a strong gendering of roles. Often men are celebrated while women are supposed to have assumed a supportive role as wives, mothers and secretaries of those movements.¹⁵³ An engagement with conceptual differences presented by 'women in the struggle for liberation' demands a different set of tools of analysis. Such an engagement may be located at sites of intellectual debates characterised by contestation in the very generation of ideas about liberation.

By enforcing the critical space of intellectual debates, Maxeke's work highlighted the dilemmas of feminist studies on women in liberation struggles significantly. Firstly, Maxeke's critical engagement with the question of gender inequality challenged traditional African society to acknowledge the inequalities that were embedded in their value systems. This was a critical contribution at the beginning of the twentieth century at a time when traditional African value systems were increasingly being measured against western values.

¹⁵³ Jacklyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres War and Gender in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991), Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender & Culture in the making of Tanganyikan Nationalism* (Portsmouth, N.H. Heinemann, 1997); Josephine. Nhongo Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle*, (Harare, Weaver Press, 2000).

The intellectual projects of women challenged the liberation movements in which they participated. This aspect of activism has elided feminist studies in their attempts to understand how women have been constituted in organised political formations of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁴ These studies have just begun to scratch the surface in exploring and explaining the tension that informs the relationship between nationalism and various forms of feminism. However, the problem of these studies is that they tend to be caught up in representational politics as they seek 'to represent' women within the spaces crafted by the nationalist formulations of 'women's roles.' Therefore it is not surprising that even the most recent scholarship on women and the liberation struggle is still caught up in documenting the representational politics of the liberation movements and continues to engage with women in women's organisations with little attention to the historical processes that informed the formation of such organisations.¹⁵⁵

The growing number of publications on women and the struggles for liberation in Sub Saharan Africa is testimony to the development and growth of women and gender studies as a substantial area of research in Africa.¹⁵⁶ The study of gender

¹⁵⁴ Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa* (Scottsville, University of Kwa Zulu Natal Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁵ See Nomboniso Gasa, et al, *Women in South African History: Basus' iimbokodo bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers* (Cape Town, Human Sciences Research Council, 2007).

¹⁵⁶ See Jaclyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991); Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa* (Scottsville, University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2006), Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern*

in mainstream academic history of South Africa has save a few exceptions that grapple with histories of gender and visibility or gender and violence, seemingly not developed beyond Walker's pioneering work of the 1980s. This can partly be attributed to the overarching influence of nationalist debates and nationalist politics on the social status of women in South Africa.¹⁵⁷ In post-apartheid South Africa the gap between Walker's pioneering work on women in the national liberation movement and recent debates on the status of the women re-opens the long standing 'WOMAN QUESTION.' When viewed in the context of African nationalist liberation politics, the debate continues to shape public discourse in South Africa. This highlights the limitations of a focus on representation of women in nationalist politics. The latter tends to view women as a support structure and not as theorists and authors of aspects of liberation discourses and politics in their own right.

The dilemma of feminist studies is best expressed in Judith Butler's critique of feminist politics of representation in which she argued "the politics that represent women as 'the subject' of feminism is itself a discursive formation and an effect

Africa (Johannesburg, 1987); Gasas N, et al, *Women in South African History: Basus' iimbokodo bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2007); M. Strobel, "African Women's History," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 15. No. 4 August, 1982, p. 510.

¹⁵⁷ Hilda Bernstein, *For their triumphs and for their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985).

of a given version of representational politics'.¹⁵⁸ She further argued that in this version of feminist politics, 'the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system which is supposed to facilitate its emancipation.'¹⁵⁹ Women such as Charlotte Maxeke are caught up in this dilemma. Yet her theorisations create a discursive formation which lends itself to the theorisation of the everyday in a way that neither the discipline of history nor nationalist discourse is prepared for.

The dilemma of Charlotte Maxeke highlights the limitations of current nationalist and feminist formulations of the women's role in liberation struggles on the continent. The representational politics of the nationalist movements tend to signpost leading women as embodiments of the first feminist sentiments of liberation movements.¹⁶⁰ Feminist studies tend to overlook the formative exclusionary power which constructs sexual difference which continues to reinscribe women in nationalist organisations. Critical feminist scholarship begins to question the exclusionary power which made it possible for women to organise as women in the first place. By taking the study of women in liberation struggles

¹⁵⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and subversion of identity* (London, Routledge, 1990), p.2.

¹⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and subversion of identity* (London, Routledge, 1990), introduction.

¹⁶⁰ The literature on women in national liberation movements tends to bear similar features. Women are often encouraged by leading men to organize among women. The literature on the African National Congress of South Africa, the TANU in Tanzania, ZANU in Zimbabwe bears this out.

beyond the work of the 1980s this study can partly be attributed to the influence of nationalist debates and nationalist politics on the social status of women in South Africa.¹⁶¹ In post-apartheid South Africa the gap between Walker's pioneering work on women in the national liberation movement and the recent debates on the status of the women present an opportunity to interrogate the intellectual project of women and its contribution to the struggle for liberation in South Africa.



¹⁶¹ Hilda Bernstein, *For their triumphs and for their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa*, (London, International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985).

CHAPTER THREE

CHARLOTTE MAXEKE: A TRAJECTORY OF AN INTELLECTUAL

In tracing Maxeke's intellectual trajectory, I do not place Charlotte Maxeke in an ascribed position in liberation politics. Rather, I attempt to account not only for her rise to political prominence, but also for the socio-economic context which groomed her to be a political subject. I examine three distinct spheres of Maxeke's life: her family background, education, adulthood and political activities. These spheres present an oeuvre of Charlotte Maxeke and her interventions on race, class and gender in South Africa during the twentieth century.

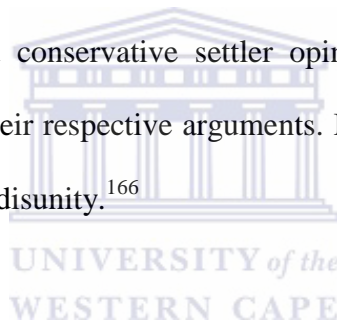
Maxeke's early life and educational background mirrors salient features of modernity expressed through reconfigurations of education, family, labour and migration around which her subjectivity was formed in the early 1900s. Missionaries were central to this process. The missionaries viewed the education of the African as the means to bring indigenous populations closer to Christianity, but not without difficulty. Since its inception in South Africa, missionary inspired education not only produced Africans who could read and write, but it also shaped

a generation of Africans whose world view differed from and at times was perceived to be in conflict with traditional ways of life.¹⁶² A space for translation and creativity was opened. This can partly be attributed to the fact that no education system is value free but contributes to the calibre of students it produces. Peter Harries has made an important contribution to the debate about values embedded in literacy traditions of the missionaries in South Africa by arguing “if literacy is imbued with different meanings in different contexts, learning to read will never be value-free; and nor will it be synonymous with reading to learn.”¹⁶³ Harries’ argument sheds light on the importance of values in education. In the case of mission schools, Christian values such as fairness was the overarching value system which enabled the missionaries to have a succinct view and understanding of their student population. This in turn enabled the missionaries to produce a generation of scholars who strived to achieve a fairer society. But the students did not accept this education in the way that missionaries expected. That was also true for Charlotte Maxeke.

¹⁶² For recent debates on missionaries and conversion see Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping and the Work of Imagination in Kenya* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2004).

¹⁶³ Peter Harries *Missionaries, Marxists and Magic: Power and the Politics of Literacy in South-East Africa* *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 27, Number 3, September 2001, pp. 1-2.

Maxeke's rise to political prominence was preceded by an era of intense missionary activity in which the very doctrine of Christianity was subject to different interpretations as contestations over the interpretations in the translations of the Bible in the vernacular languages as well as Jeff Guy's study of Bishop Colenso makes clear.¹⁶⁴ Divisions had formed around the relationship between the church and the settler populations.¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Elbourne's study of missionaries in the Eastern Cape titled *Bloodground: Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape and Britain, 1799-1853* also discusses the differences between humanitarian and conservative settler opinion both claiming biblical references in support for their respective arguments. Maxeke was formed in such circumstances of Christian disunity.¹⁶⁶




¹⁶⁴For example, the earliest isiXhosa Bible translations of the Bible can be traced to 1833. It consisted of the Gospel of Luke which was translated by William B. Boyce and William Shaw and W. J. Schrewsbury. In 1846 the New Testament was translated and revised by Henry Dugmore, William John Alyiff, C.W. Posselt, Jakob L Donhe, James Laing and Bruce Ross. In 1859, the first Bible was printed at Mount Coke under the auspices of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. The Old Testament was translated mainly by John Appleyard of the Wesleyan Missionary Society and Albert Kropf of the Berlin Missionary Society in sections of the missionary press at Mount Coke between 1857 and 1859. Xhosa Bible translation, <http://www.bybelgenootskap.co.za>. Downloaded on February, 16 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso 1814-1884* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1983).

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape and Britain 1799-1853* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) Studies in the History of Religion, Series Two, No. 19.

The sphere of education became one of the prime axes around which the Christian religion was propagated and in which the competing attitudes to African subjectivities were negotiated. Religion and education produced a frame within which the African subject was rendered intelligible to some of the early considerations of how race, class and gender were intertwined in a matrix of differentiation and inequality. Maxeke's rise to prominence in this context presents an opportunity to survey some of the early theoretical formulations and considerations of divergent views about race, class and gender in twentieth century South Africa.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape is a faint, light blue watermark in the background of the text. It features a classical building with a pediment and columns, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

Articles harbouring different views about questions of race, class and gender were circulated in the printed media of the time. Throughout the twentieth century the *Christian Express* published articles in which notions about *education*, *educability* and *educated Africans* were debated.

Debates about the educability of Africans reflected racist notions as well as more liberal views about their intellectual capabilities. These views were expressed in public debates and specialists in academic circles set out to assess the capabilities of the native mind and its ability to adapt to European education. Meanwhile, a generation of Africans who had gone through mission schools were a testimony to the intellectual abilities and capabilities of the Africans. Educated Africans

contributed to the arduous task of translating the Bible into IsiXhosa. The translation facilitated the standardisation of isiXhosa as a language suitable for the propagation of Christianity. This exercise has “fixed the language of religion in the manner the English and German versions have done.”¹⁶⁷ As a marker of progress and civilisation the orthography of IsiXhosa enabled some degree of comparison between indigenous languages and English where it previously did not exist.

When examined closely, the introduction of Christianity and western education did broaden the horizons of the African world view in a manner which seeks to understand how the African and the Christian world view could lead to a new world of ‘the educated,’ ‘the civilised’ African. Apart from being the conveyer of religious mores and ethics, missionary education introduced Africans to the magical world of books, techniques of reading and writing and the power of the pen. Proficiency in these genres enabled early African intellectuals to contribute to the development and the standardisation of indigenous languages. This contributed to a dialectical relationship between the traditional African views and Christian ones. The confluence of the two world views shaped much of the

¹⁶⁷See The Missionary Conference, *The Christian Express: A journal of Missionary and Christian Work*, Vol, XIV, No. 169 (Alice, Lovedale Press), August, 1, 1884, p. 120.

twentieth century discourse about the transformation from traditional to modern life.

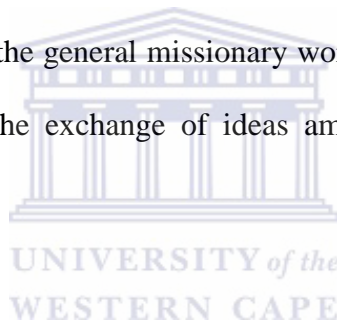
Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi's academically acclaimed book, *Ityala Lamawele* (1970, 1980) describes transition from traditional to modern societies and provides insights on a range of traditional African codes in the spheres of politics, law, justice and gender relations.¹⁶⁸ In these spheres elements common to traditional African practices and Western modes of knowledge were highlighted. As in western justice, evidence constitutes a major component in establishing a case in traditional justice also. In a foreword to the 8th edition of *Ityala Lamawele*, Mqhayi explains aspects of traditional law which were crucial in establishing a case and the passing of judgement in a traditional court. Here too, the validity of a case relies on evidence.¹⁶⁹ Mqhayi's book was highly recommended by the missionaries such as J.B. Ross for instructing the missionaries about African life until missionaries excised references to British colonialism.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi, *Ityala lamawele* (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1970, 1981), pp1-8.

¹⁶⁹ The testimony of two midwives who delivered the twins, Babini and Wele injected the question of gender and its place in a traditional court. See Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi, *Ityala lamawele* (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1970, 1981), p.9

¹⁷⁰ B. J. Ross, *Christian Express: A journal of Missionary News and Christian Work*, Vol. No.586, p.13.

By the end of the nineteenth century a generation of African intellectuals had emerged from centres of missionary enterprise. Their intellectual capabilities were measured by the ability to appropriate the structures of knowledge on which colonial power hinged. Apart from appropriations of European literary traditions highlighted in the work of Mqhayi, educated Africans broadened their horizons, through the printed media or what were called “indigenised newspapers.” Outlining the functions of the native press John Knox Bokwe stated that Isigidimi SamaXhosa was set to “scatter ideas in the moral wastes and the desert places of heathen ignorance and aid the general missionary work as well as in encouraging the habit of writing and the exchange of ideas among the Africans in South Africa.”¹⁷¹



In Bokwe’s view, Africans were capable of adapting to western modes of education through the indigenised press. The press served the double purpose of educating, informing, carrying ideas and stimulating literacy among Africans. However, a close examination of the modernisation of the mid nineteenth century highlights the failure of modernity to reflect on its limitations. The sphere of intellectual debate opened further scope for more critical investigation into the workings of modernity.

¹⁷¹John Knox Bokwe, ‘The Native Press: Lovedale Literary Society’ in *the Christian Express: A journal of Missionary News and Christian Work*, Vol XII, Lovedale, South Africa, April. 1. 1882.

The work of Hlonipha Mokoena sheds light on the dilemma of the intellectual traditions alluded to above. In a thought provoking article, Mokoena has described how a premature demise of the *kholwa* intellectual tradition of Magma Fuze, curtailed the development of black intellectual thought in the twentieth century. She highlights a grey area between the dominant themes of the twentieth century and the modes of theorisations that shaped the development of black intellectual traditions. In her description of the dilemma of black intellectual thinking in the early twentieth century Mokoena asks: how could traditions of social and political criticism and theorising develop in a colonial context in which the vanguard intelligentsia was itself ‘colonised’ and lacked independent means to sustain or protect their position?¹⁷²

The question is important because it takes the study of history beyond a celebratory mode of the great literary traditions of the twentieth century to a nuanced analysis of their place in South African history. It takes new ways of writing history that do not replicate the failure of the earlier traditions, by interrogating the modes of investigation on which the study of intellectual history

¹⁷² See Hlonipha Mokoena, What did this life mean?: Magma Fuze and the problem of writing a Kholwa intellectual history” Paper presented in the Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences Seminar Series held at the University of the Western Cape, September, 2006, p.2.

is based.¹⁷³ Like many of her contemporaries Charlotte Maxeke was also caught up in this dilemma. As a product of the influences of religion and education, perceived as the root cause of ‘moral degeneration,’ (ukumka nomsinga)¹⁷⁴ her focus on the ‘ordinary’, the often taken for granted issues of everyday living allowed Maxeke to develop a critique of the dominant intellectual traditions of the early twentieth century.

The research about the emergence of the educated elite of the twentieth century does not reveal the influences that shaped Maxeke’s world view. To address this lacuna , I have examined the various strands of Maxeke’s life using two major historical works on the life of this figure in South African history, namely, A B Xuma’s “Charlotte Maxeke: *Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) What an Educated African Girl Can Do*”¹⁷⁵ and Margaret McCord’s, *The Calling of Kathy Makhanya*.¹⁷⁶ These texts allow us to reflect about specific nationalist constructions of Maxeke’s life. Edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women’s Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church in 1930, Xuma’s work locates

¹⁷³ See Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the shape of recurring pasts* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi. *Ityala lamawele* (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1970, 1981), p. iii.

¹⁷⁵ A.B. Xuma, “ *Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) What an Educated African Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women’s Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930).

¹⁷⁶ Margaret McCord, *Ubizo luka Katie Makhanya; ifinyezwe ngu Robin Malan* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1997).

Maxeke in two major historical epochs in South African history.¹⁷⁷ At a time when conflicting views were held about the educability of the African, the book set out to use Charlotte Maxeke to prove ‘what an educated native girl could do.’ Of course, Xuma can be taken beyond minimalist Eurocentric academic debates about the suitability and the educability of the African that prevailed in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Xuma’s book participated in debates that were beginning to challenge traditional views about the educability of girls. Here Maxeke presented a case for the extension of education to women, thus, creating an alternative to traditional discourse about women in the twentieth century. On the other hand Margaret McCord’s autobiography of Katie Makhanya presents intimate details as to the family background, education and major turning points in Maxeke’s life.

Apart from reading what others have said about Charlotte Maxeke I have also closely studied Maxeke’s own writings and her articulations on issues affecting her as a woman, a mother, a daughter and an educated African. Odendaal’s view of Maxeke’s role in the rise of black protest politics in South Africa limits her to the auxiliary status in which women were perceived as a support structure of the

¹⁷⁷ See A.B. Xuma, “*Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) What an Educated African Girl Can Do*” edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women’s Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930).

struggle.¹⁷⁸ Maxeke's oeuvre demonstrates the ways in which gender refigured the discourse of the struggle. The latter has offered a reading of Charlotte Maxeke against the backdrop of black protest politics. This frame tends to confine Maxeke to major political debates of the first half of the twentieth century and the source of the ambiguities surrounding Charlotte Maxeke.¹⁷⁹

Her role and influence in the rise of black protest politics in South Africa neglects to show the extent of her influence in the ferment of ideas about the liberation struggle. Over-indulgence in and an attachment to the scholarship to protest politics at the expense of the other frontiers and configurations of the struggle for liberation have resulted in myopia. The use of protest politics as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for studies of liberation struggles has resulted in the erosion of and the invalidation of other attributes of the struggle. Nationalist descriptions of Maxeke use her to tell the story of nationalism. It is most important to understand how Maxeke, as subject of nationalist narration, is short-changed rather than understood.

¹⁷⁸ Andre Ondendaal, *Vukani Bantu : The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984).

¹⁷⁹ See Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Donker Ltd, 1987).

Who was Charlotte Maxeke?

In celebration of decades of women's activism in the nationalist struggle for liberation, the Women's Section of the African National Congress opened a kindergarten called The Charlotte Maxeke Child Care Centre in Morogoro, Tanzania in 1980. On this festive occasion Frene Ginwala, an activist in the liberation movement and an intellectual in her own right, posed the following questions about Charlotte Maxeke: 'Who was Charlotte Maxeke? What had she done to merit such praises and honour? What made her name retain its magic for decades?'¹⁸⁰ Implicit in these questions are assumptions about Maxeke's place in history. I do not attempt to claim Maxeke's place in history by limiting her activities to the recent concerns of the women's section of the African National Congress. I will instead attempt to present an account or a reading of Maxeke's intellectual trajectory by surveying her life which spanned a period of approximately sixty five years.¹⁸¹

The intellectual trajectory of Charlotte Maxeke does not lead directly to the manifestations of recent concern about gender politics and power in the liberation

¹⁸⁰ See Franz Fanon, "The intellectual Elite in Revolutionary Culture" in W. Cartey and M. Kilson *The African Reader: Independent Africa: a documentary based on the writings of political leaders and writers including Nkrumah, Fanon, Senghor, Soyinka, Chief Luthuli, Eduardo Mondlane, Kenyatta, Aime Cesaire, Patrice Lumumba* (New York, Vintage Books, 1970), p.126

¹⁸¹ Frene Ginwala, "Charlotte Maxeke: The Mother of Freedom," ANC Today, Vol. 2. No. 31, 2-8 August, 2002; Sechaba, August, 1990.

movement. It demonstrates how Maxeke's own theorisation of the everyday questions the nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s. Her work also alerted nationalism to other forms of inequality that were prevalent in South African society. This resulted in the consideration of gender inequality as one of the crucial frontiers and figurations of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

So, who *was* Charlotte Maxeke? She was bigger than the response of scholars and activists in the liberation struggles in their attempts to address the question of the role of women in the struggle for liberation would suggest. In nationalist frameworks, Charlotte Maxeke is placed so as to highlight the linear development of women's movements within the broader nationalist movement of the African National Congress in South Africa.¹⁸² In this perspective Maxeke's role as the first president of the Bantu Women's League indexes the role of women in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. While Maxeke's name helps to track the origins of the League as integral to the African National Congress, it falls short of integrating the ideas of Charlotte Maxeke.¹⁸³ This has created discord between Maxeke's name, her ideas and the early women's movement she helped to build in the formative years of black protest politics of the twentieth century.

¹⁸² See Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa South Africa*, (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2006).

¹⁸³ See Angela Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (London, Women's Press 1990), p.7.

The continuum between Charlotte Maxeke's ideas and the development of the early African women's movement reveals the extent to which experiences, differences and dominance have become the grid of intelligibility in the history of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. This is the common thread which runs in the feminist and nationalist historiographies of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. When followed in a single dimension, the ideological struggles staged in the three spheres tend to overshadow other features of the struggle for liberation. Charlotte Maxeke is a victim of this trend. Although she is remembered for her role in the formative years of the liberation movements of the twentieth century details about her family background, education and the vast range of her political activities has remained obscure in most scholarly work on the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

The ambiguities of leading women in the record of black resistance is further explored in Angela Davis *Women, Culture and Politics* in which she provides an evaluation of the plight of Afro American women in the women's movement in the US. According to Davis, the women's movement in America is characterized by two distinct continuums, one visible and another invisible, one publicly acknowledged and another ignored. The inclusion and the exclusion of Charlotte Maxeke highlight a pattern which characterises women's movements in general.

This state of affairs is best explained by Ruth Pierson, a feminist scholar who has warned against privileging one kind of human activity over the other. She argued:

“the chaos and complexity of human activity do not allow themselves to be contained by the schemata of tight systems. In the process some of the recalcitrant human matter inevitably seems instead, to leak out through the cracks of any grand theory and poses a challenge to totalising claims”¹⁸⁴

In other words, a simplistic view of Maxeke as an iconic representation of women in the formative years of the twentieth century’s struggles fails to account for her theorisation of the everyday. Maxeke’s doubling theorisation of the Native Question presented a mode of analysis to the workings of liberation politics. It is like the mode offered by Pierson. Maxeke’s ambiguity calls on us to engage with her as both a celebrated and a neglected figure.¹⁸⁵ It pushes us beyond the limits of a linear progression of political biographies as it raises questions about the gendering of black protest politics in South Africa in a substantive way that takes into account the production of ideas and thought.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ See Ruth Roach Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History” in Joan Scott and Judith Butler *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York, Routledge, 1992), p.79.

¹⁸⁵ Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa; Class, Nationalism and the State in twentieth century Natal* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1986), p. viii

¹⁸⁶ The debate about political biographies has featured prominently in the work of Ciraj Rassool who has brought the conditions for the production of political biographies to close scrutiny. He asserted that the conditions for the production of political biographies can serve as a means to extend the field of South African resistance history beyond the documentary realist methodological boundaries of the chronological narrative. Rassool’s critical stance offers an opportunity to reflect on the past and present condition of Maxeke’s biographies.

Maxeke's theorisation of the everyday presented a frame of intelligibility previously unknown to African women. This frame is often mistaken as essentialist. Essentialism takes reproduction, nurturing and care as the basis from which women are understood in historical narratives. As a direct consequence of this misreading, any attempt to produce a concise biography of Charlotte Maxeke has to transcend the limiting effects of such frames in which women have been rendered in history.¹⁸⁷

Maxeke's own theorisations of the everyday, her work on what she called "African womanhood", the living conditions of Africans in urban areas, the plight of young girls found destitute in urban centres of Johannesburg, juvenile care, education and the employment of Africans in urban centres transcends such reductionist views of women in history. She created an oeuvre through which her name continues to resonate, and she discovered deep and consequential meanings. The spheres of Maxeke's theorisation have unobtrusively been at the core of the twentieth century liberation discourse in South Africa. This warrants a close examination of the significance of Charlotte Maxeke in South African history.

See Ciraj Rassool, 'Contesting Isaac Bangani Tabata: New Directions for Political History in South Africa (Extracts)' paper presented in Historical legacies and New Challenges: 27-30, Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research Working paper No. 56. p.5

¹⁸⁷ Frene Ginwala, *Women and the African National Congress: 1912-1943* ANC online www.anc.org.

Her Family background

Maxeke is perhaps the most misunderstood figure in South African nationalist narratives. Even conventional biographies of the nationalist movement sketch her as a subject of mistaken identity. The fact that confusion and misunderstanding clouds her life history suggests a greater need for re-evaluating her subjectivity. One example of this misunderstanding stems from attempts to fix her in linear nationalist narratives of the origins of the struggle. It only compounded the problem. Nationalist concern about origins is troubled by contradictions about Maxeke's place and date of her birth at the outset. T.D. Mveli Skota in *The African Whos' Who: An illustrated register and national bibliographical dictionary of the Africans in the Transvaal* has traced the birth of Charlotte Maxeke to Ramokgopa in the Pietersburg district on the 7th April 1874.¹⁸⁸ E. J. Verwens in *The New Dictionary of South African Biography* locates Maxeke's birth at Fort Beaufort in the Cape Colony.

¹⁸⁸ T. D. Mveli Skota, *The African Who's' Who: An illustrated register and national bibliographical dictionary of the Africans in the Transvaal*, 3rd Edition revised and enlarged (Johannesburg, Frier & Murno Pty, Ltd, undated), p.77.

This contradiction is further complicated in the biography of Katie Makhanya, *The calling of Katie Makhanya*, written by Margaret McCord in 1995.¹⁸⁹ Katie Makhanya who is Charlotte Maxeke's younger sister, was born in 1873. This refutes Skota's finding that traces Maxeke's date of birth to 1874. The preponderance of evidence as to Maxeke's place of birth favours Verwens's choice of location of Maxeke's birth whereas J.A. Millard locates her date of birth to 7 April, 1872.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps the most important nationalist text on Maxeke is that produced by the then ANC stalwart, A.B. Xuma, in 1930. According to Xuma, Charlotte Makgomo Manye was born in the Cape Province, in Fort Beaufort in the 1870s.¹⁹¹ Her father, Lange Jan Manye hailed from the Transvaal. The time of Lange's travel to the Orange Free State was marked by increased numbers of landless Africans who travelled in search of greener pastures. So, Manye had stayed for a short period in the Orange Free State where he worked as a farm labourer.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ I first came across a reference to McCord's work in an unpublished paper entitled "The Mother of African Freedom: the contribution of Charlotte Maxeke to the struggle for freedom in South Africa", paper donated by Mrs. Sadie Foreman of the Liberation Struggle Archives at Fort Hare, Alice, 2007, See also, Margaret McCord *The Calling of Kathy Makhanya* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995). The same book was translated by Robin Malan, *Ubizo luka Katie Makhanya; ifinyezwe ngu Robin Malan* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1997).

¹⁹⁰ J.A. Millard, 'Maxeke Charlotte Manye, 1872-1939: African Methodist Episcopal Church of South Africa' *Malihambe –Let the Word Spread* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1999)

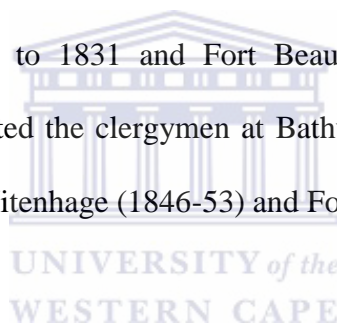
¹⁹¹ A. B. Xuma, *Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) What an Educated African Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p.9

¹⁹² Ibid, p.10.

Xuma's text traces Maxeke's development to instance nationalist theorisations about the struggles for land. This narrative comes out through Maxeke's return to South Africa. Her stay in the Transvaal during the Anglo-Boer war allowed Xuma a space to narrate how which Chief Ramokgopa emerged as an iconic figure of nationalist resistance. Her development is also overshadowed by interest in the paternal figure of Manye. In this way Maxeke emerged in nationalist writing as metonymic to the growing pressure of land displacement.

Xuma was interested in Manye because his life enabled a discussion about new conditions of labour, resistance to displacement from land question, education and the role of the family. Charlotte Maxeke's inclusion is only to complement Manye's story to allow Xuma to talk about the importance of education and the role of the family. On the question of labour Manye is given the status of a migrant labourer who is constantly forced to give up his relation to the land. On the question of resistance Manye is an example of someone who uses the opportunity of new-found forms of mobility to collect arms for waging a struggle against colonial invasion. But it was due to Xuma's commitment to ideas of education and family values that Maxeke becomes subject from whom nationalism might learn a lesson. This is why Xuma's book is called "What an Educated African Girl Can Do."

Maxeke's early childhood in the 1870s was in a time of historical instability due to wars and increased missionary expansion into the hinterlands of British Kaffaria. Following the colonial territorial expansion of the earlier period, the missionary invasion of British Kaffaria dated back to the early 1800s. The London missionaries were the first to embark on evangelical missions in that part of the British Empire. The records of the missionaries indicate that between December 1819 and the year 1846 the London Society had a strong presence in the area. It had contributed to the erection of churches at Grahamstown in 1821, Port Elizabeth from 1824 to 1831 and Fort Beaufort in 1839. The London Missionary Society supported the clergymen at Bathurst (1830-32) Graaf Reinet between 1845 and 1853). Uitenhage (1846-53) and Fort Beaufort (1846-53).¹⁹³



A narrative relating to women and the nationalist struggle for liberation emerged from the struggles waged by generations of women in their quest for recognition in society, what Shula Marks calls "hidden women in history."¹⁹⁴ The work of Margaret McCord seeks to highlight the struggles of generations of women before Maxeke, her own mother and her grandmother. Here we find Maxeke's life discussed through and in relation to her sister, Kathy Makhanya and in family

¹⁹³ Classified Digest of the Records of the Society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1702-1892 London: Society's Office Westminster, 1893, p.297

¹⁹⁴ See Shula Marks, *Not Either an experiential Doll: The separate worlds of three South African women*, (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1987), p.1.

relations beset by political, social and economic instability as in the early twentieth century.

The story about Maxeke's upbringing in Uitenhage is recorded in Margaret McCord's biography *The calling of Kathy Makhanya*.¹⁹⁵ In 1997, Robin Malan published a translated and shortened version of it entitled *Ubizo luka Katie Makhanya*. These publications offer insights into the formative years of Charlotte Maxeke, her interaction with her younger sister, her character and various stages of her development into adulthood. Both biographical versions of Kathy Makanya describe her character and the relationship of the two sisters growing up in Uitenhage. In the first publication, Kathy describes Charlotte as "the one who was never content with what others told her but had to know a thing for herself out of her own thoughts or else find it written down in a book."¹⁹⁶ Her interest in books could be attributed to influences she drew from her parents. With such an inquisitive mind Charlotte Maxeke proceeded to a missionary school of the Congregational Church at Uitenhage where she obtained her lower grades under the tutorship of the renowned Rev. Isaac Wauchope.¹⁹⁷ Under the stewardship of

¹⁹⁵See Margaret McCord, *The Calling of Kathy Makhanya* (Cape Town, David Phillip,1995) and *Ubizo luka Katie Makhanya; ifinyezwe ngu Robin Malan* (Cape Town, David Phillip,1997).

¹⁹⁶Margaret McCord, *The Calling of Kathy Makhanya* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1995), p.3.

¹⁹⁷ A.B. Xuma What an educated Native Girl Can Do" edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, 1930, p.12.

Reverend Wauchope, Charlotte Maxeke excelled in languages, mathematics and music.

Upon completing her lower grades, Charlotte Maxeke proceeded to Edwards Memorial School in Port Elizabeth in the late 1880s.¹⁹⁸ At Edwards Memorial School, Charlotte Maxeke and later her sister Katie, were introduced to Mr. Paul Xiniwe, conductor of the school choir and headmaster. Under his influence and guidance the two sisters discovered their musical talent. In 1889 Charlotte Maxeke qualified as a teacher. In 1890, the Manye family relocated to Kimberly.

In his study of missionary influences, Patrick Harries described Kimberly as a place of endless opportunities for educated and converted where Africans who were basically literate and numerate to occupy leadership positions in the local church and well to hold paid jobs as clerks and translators.¹⁹⁹ During this period, the ageing Lange Manye, Charlotte's father had decided to return to his birth place in Ramokgopa, in the Transvaal. This occurred at the height of diamond diggings in Kimberly. Charlotte Maxeke's career began in the 1890s as a teacher

¹⁹⁸ Margaret McCord *Ubizo luka Katie Makhanya; ifinyezwe ngu Robin Malan* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1997).

¹⁹⁹ See Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa c 1860-1910* (Portsmouth, NH Heinemann), p.62.

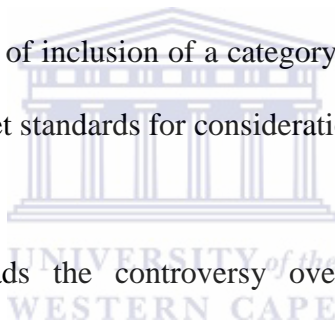
in a Wesleyan school in Kimberly.²⁰⁰ In the following year Katie joined the family in Kimberly, where the two sisters were exposed to a vibrant cultural life and to musical concerts. The two participated in an array of youth activities and in inter-denominational choirs. Simon Sinamela, the director of the Presbyterian Church Choir, gathered the best singers to sing at Christmas in front of white people's houses in town. Through these activities Charlotte and her sister became the idols of music lovers in Kimberly.²⁰¹ These activities laid a strong foundation for Charlotte's activism in church and society later in her life. They participated in the Jubilee Chorus, along with Wellington Majiza, Paul Xiniwe, Josiah Semouse, Johanna Jonkers, Katie Manye, Mrs. Xiniwe, Charlotte Manye, Letty, John Xiniwe and Albert Jonas.²⁰² Inspired by the rich and vibrant cultural life of young men and women in Kimberly, J.H. Balmer of Blackpool in England organised a two year concert tour for the Jubilee Chorus to the British Isles. In 1891, the choir received an invitation to sing before Queen Victoria. The group went to London and became "*the first Kaffir Choir to visit England.*" McCord focuses on the history of the social dimensions of biographic life in recording these milestones. Yet, she makes little of the racial dynamics that were at work.

²⁰⁰ A.B. Xuma What an educated Native Girl Can Do" edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, 1930, and Margaret McCord *Ubizo luka Katie Makhanya; ifinyezwe ngu Robin Malan* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1997).

²⁰¹ A.B. Xuma "*What an educated Native Girl Can Do*" edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, (Lovedale Press, Alice, 1930), p.11.

²⁰² Margaret McCord, *The calling of Katie Makhanya* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995) photograph of the African Native Choir.

The debate about the name change allowed McCord to describe certain relations that unfolded in the choir concerning race, paternalism, women and the politics of inclusion. As to paternalism, McCord reads Balmer's proposal to change of the name of the choir as a measure that would move closely link colony and mother country. Africans in British colonies became British subjects and had to adapt to the influences of western codes of education and religion. The very idea of a choir demonstrated their ability to adapt to western codes. This formed the basis for a discourse about the politics of inclusion of a category of Africans who, according to the colonial discourse met standards for consideration as British subjects.²⁰³



As to race, McCord reads the controversy over the name change as a manifestation of the difficulty of modernisation. “Kaffir” in the choir’s name was interpreted differently by those involved in the debate. For Balmer it suggested paternal relations between a colony and its mother country. For Paul Xiniwe, the name had a derogatory connotation of racial stratification.

However, McCord’s reading of Balmer’s proposal for the name change extended beyond a functional reflection to constitute relations in the colonies thus giving rise to troubling fissures in the project of colonisation. By the late nineteenth

²⁰³ Volumes of the Christian Express, a journal of missionary news present invaluable insights into the workings of the colonial office in Cape Town in the 1800s.

century, colonial domination had produced its own antithesis as Africans under the British Crown increasingly demanded the same rights and treatment as that enjoyed by their white counterparts in the colonies. The bonds between the colonies and their mother country were slowly giving in to the pressures of the nineteenth century. Paul Xiniwe's resistance to change of the name demonstrated these fissures.

The construction of the choir around the iconic figure of Paul Xiniwe, a respected teacher and musician, now served to reinforce a narrative about the politics of inclusion. In McCord's reading the inclusion of young and talented women complemented image of Paul Xiniwe as an educated male figure who adapted to western musical standards. McCord accounts for the politics of the inclusion of women rather than the politics of gender.

The distinction between the two is essential if one is to avoid collapsing two different and distinct discourses that influenced the form and substance of the struggle for liberation in the twentieth century. The inclusion of women served to reinforce a struggle for recognition as citizens of the newly constituted Union of South Africa. The politics of gender on the other hand serve to critique the very basis on which relations of gender are enacted. They determine the extent to which gender difference and inequality facilitates the inclusion and exclusion in

society. Charlotte Maxeke articulated the latter version of struggle politics which weaved together concerns about race, class and gender. Examples of her active role in these spheres can be found in the role she played in the formative years of the AME Church in South Africa.

The history of the Methodist Episcopal Church is recorded in the work of Joseph Ntlapho who traces its origins from the founding fathers of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley. According to Ntlapho, the two had sailed from England to Georgia on the 21st October 1835 and established a religious community of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.²⁰⁴ During this period, religion formed a crucial element in European expansionist discourse. The importation of the teachings of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the racial tensions and the discourse of non-racialism played a role in shaping the ideology of the struggles of African Americans. Non-racialism in this case, found expression in the church's articulations of unity in Christ. The church propagated the view that service to the people was in essence, a service to God. In keeping with this belief, as early as 1847, the Methodist Episcopal Church had begun a process of acquiring property for educational purposes.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ See Joseph Ntlapho, *Wilberforce Institute: Fancy Coppin Hall Built by Bishop J. Albert Johnson 1908* Boitshoko Institution, 1949.

²⁰⁵ In May 1856, the AME Church purchased a health resort near Xenia in Ohio which was called "Tawawa Springs" which it used for the establishment of the Wilberforce University. The establishment soon became an intellectual hub of the Afro Americans and the Africans in general

In April 1861 the Negro Methodist Episcopal Church held a convention which resolved to unite the people of Philadelphia and Baltimore to form an African version of the church called the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁰⁶ This church had a profound influence on the struggles of African Americans. It identified 'social upliftment' as the central aim of the activities of the church. The church continued to purchase land for the purpose of establishing training facilities for African American. J. Ntlapo has noted that in 1884 Samuel Mitchell became the president of the AME Church and through his presidency the first group of South African students were admitted to Wilberforce.²⁰⁷ These students became the first link between African Americans and the Africans of South Africa. Charlotte Maxeke was one of them.

Charlotte Maxeke developed a discourse which rendered African nationalism intelligible to the African American experience. This exercise is exemplary of Charlotte Maxeke as a universal figure who was able to relate to events across time and space. It testifies to the fluidity of ideas across barriers of race, class and gender. Charlotte Maxeke was able to keep abreast with them. For a better

upholding the principle of service to humankind. This was one of the key founding principles of the AME Church. See Joseph Ntlapo, *Wilberforce Institute: Fancy Coppin Hall Built by Bishop J. Albert Johnson* 1908 Boitshoko Institution, 1949.

²⁰⁶ Joseph Ntlapo *Wilberforce Institute: Fancy Coppin Hall Built by Bishop J. Albert Johnson* 1908 Boitshoko Institution, 1949, p.3.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

understanding of how Charlotte Maxeke engaged in these issues, it is well to interrogate the circumstances under which Maxeke came into contact with the struggles of the African Americans.²⁰⁸ After the first tour of Europe, the Jubilee Choir was invited to tour the US. On this occasion, seven members of the choir met Bishop Ransom of the AME Church who immediately saw an opportunity to expand the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church beyond the African American experience.²⁰⁹

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterised by divergent views about religion and the role of the church in the world. The African Methodist Church staked its claim to the social upliftment of Africans. The church propagated a consciousness which took the needs of the people to be a call to service God. As part of the first group of students Charlotte Maxeke was introduced to the key principles of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of serving God through servicing humankind. Asserting its African roots the AME church planted a seed from which the struggle against racial discrimination and other forms of oppression flourished. The struggle of African Americans served as model for the struggle for liberation in South Africa in later years. Charlotte

²⁰⁸ See A.B. Xuma What an educated Native Girl Can Do” edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women’s Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, 1930, p.11 and Margaret McCord *The calling of Katie Makhanya* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995), p.59.

²⁰⁹ See Joseph Nhlapho, *Wilberforce Institute: Fancy Coppin Hall Built by Bishop J. Albert Johnson 1908* Boitshoko Institution, 1949.

Maxeke was a link for exchange of ideas between the African American experience and the struggles of the so called Non-Europeans in South Africa.

Charlotte Maxeke: African Nationalism and The Negro Experience

In a foreword to A.B. Xuma's "*What an educated African Girl can do*", W.E. B. DuBois, who was one of her teachers recalled his first encounter with Maxeke at the Wilberforce University as follows:

"I have known Charlotte Maxeke since 1894 when I went to Wilberforce University as a teacher. She was one of the three or four students from South Africa, and was the only woman. She was especially the friend to Nina Gomer, former student, who afterward became my wife. We were interested in Charlotte Manye because of her clear mind, her subtle humor and the straightforward honesty of her character. She was having difficulties with language and the new environment, but she did her work with a slow, quiet determination that augured well in her future."²¹⁰

W.E.B.DuBois describes Maxeke as a student with character. The qualification is important. Such a characterisation is more personal than iconic and representative. It allows us to see a student who despite language difficulties, managed to achieve and become one of the most inspiring figures in the public life of Africans in the twentieth century. While still a student at the Wilberforce Institute, Charlotte Maxeke displayed her leadership qualities by taking an interest in the progression

²¹⁰ W.E. B. DuBois , in A.B. Xuma *What an educated African Girl can do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press 1930), Foreword.

of the struggles of the African Americans.²¹¹ Her ability to comprehend the essence of these struggles was nurtured by her close association with E.W.B DuBois and Nina Gomer who were leading figures in the struggles of African Americans.

Xuma's account of this stage of Maxeke's political initiation reflects a framing of the changing role of women in a changing society. His account was critical for our understanding of how an uncontested narrative about Maxeke as an iconic representation of the role of women in the struggle for liberation could come about. Xuma's framing of Charlotte Maxeke reflected a nationalist conception of the role of women in society. The selective use of different strands of Maxeke's active involvement in the 1900s served to reinforce 'women's role' as a constitutive element of nationalist sentiments in the twentieth century.²¹²

Xuma's account reinforces a narrative about 'women's roles' by reference to three areas of Maxeke's activism: her role in the formation of the AME Church, her stay in the rural outskirts of chief Ramogkopa's place, and her stay in Tyalarha. In each instance, Xuma's account supports the politics of inclusion in

²¹¹ A.B. Xuma *What an educated Native Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p. 13.

²¹² Xuma's account of Charlotte Maxeke was commissioned by the Women's Mite Missionary society, a society of women missionaries who were doing work among the women. It had done considerable work among the Africans of Tsolo in the Transkei where women were taught basic skills such as cooking, knitting and weaving.

which he set out to highlight the opportunities and explain the benefits the changing roles of women presented to the liberation movement.

A.B. Xuma described how Charlotte Maxeke contributed to the formation of the AME Church in South Africa. While in America, Maxeke had written letters to her sister Katie in which she shared her excitement about *the progress of Afro Americans in education and church work*.²¹³ Indeed, nationalist historiography cannot escape the framings of religion and education, as the anchors of colonial domination. At a theoretical level, these two engendered a way of comprehending the struggle for liberation in a futuristic mode in anticipation of progress through education and Christian religion. However, critiques of the missionary perceptions of the progress of the Africans reflect a dynamic theoretical plane on which the struggle for liberation emerged in the twentieth century.²¹⁴ New forms of relations between the coloniser and the colonised emerged from these activities. Xuma's description of Maxeke was in aid of the nationalist quest for inclusion in the Union of South Africa.

²¹³ See A.B. Xuma *What an educated Native Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930).

²¹⁴ A discussion of the perceptions of missionaries such as John Chalmers on native progress is presented in Chapter 2 of the study.

However, Maxeke's own articulations of the politics of gender which were reflected in the various spheres of her public engagements leave Xuma's narrative about the women's role is left in disarray. In keeping with this lively dialogue between Xuma and Maxeke a legacy of robust intellectual debate about gender reconfigures emerging scholarship of the struggle for liberation. This begins with Maxeke's significance in carrying the ideas and experience of African Americans across the Atlantic to South Africa. Maxeke's role in the formation of the AME Church intersects with aspects of black protest politics such as: the emergence of African Independent Churches, the land question, religion, the education of the Africans, race relations and the changing roles of women.²¹⁵ In these spheres of nationalist discourse Maxeke managed to unpack the opportunities the new forms of relations presented. She articulated the new forms of gender relations to accompany the changing roles of women, a transition that leading intellectuals of the time did not conceptualise.

The emergence of independent churches in South Africa was a manifestation of unsettling problems attending colonial domination. It signified the failure of the missionary enterprise in its endeavours to create a docile African subject. In 1892 the Reverends Mokone with Reuben Dlamini, Jantie Thompson, Joshua Mphela, James Henry Mazibuko, Job Malembe, Gama Hlatshwayo, Ginger Mahlabathi,

²¹⁵ See Andre Odendaal, Vukani Bantu: *The Beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984).

Abram Makone and James Hlathi broke away from their colonial churches and established the Ethiopian Church. During this period, a generation of educated Africans had demonstrated the limitations of the missionary project and gender disparities among them. That was a cause of special concern for Maxeke who continued to facilitate interaction between Reverend Mokone and Reverend Turner. It is difficult to ascertain the extent of Maxeke's influence in these process but the effects of her facilitation was evidenced in 1896 when Mokone, Marcus Gabashane, J. G. Xaba, P. S. Kuze, J.M.Dwane, Abraham Mqgibisa. Z.J.Tantsi and Samson Mtintiso affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²¹⁶ Like that of the African Americans, the AME Church of South Africa was described as an African church for the upliftment of Africans. The upliftment of the Africans as understood by Joseph Ntlapo meant "the establishment of a religious community composed of and managed maintained by the Natives only."²¹⁷ This had a profound impact on race relations in South Africa during the twentieth century. The separatist churches as they became known advocated a strand of black consciousness derived from biblical scripture. The social functions of such a consciousness served to raise awareness about the plight of the Africans.

²¹⁶ T.D. Mweliso Skota. *The African Yearly Register: Being an illustrated National Biographical dictionary (Who's who) of Black Folks in Africa* (Johannesburg, R.L. Esson & Co. Ltd, 1930), p.210.

²¹⁷ A.B. Xuma *What an educated Native Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p.113.

In this narrative, Maxeke mediated the connection of African nationalism with African American experience.

Three years after the establishment of the AME Church under Mokone, Charlotte Maxeke graduated in B.Sc (Wilberforce) and returned to South Africa. Exposure to the struggles of the African American created a major impetus for the Africans in South Africa to follow the example of their American brothers and sisters. Her return to South Africa coincided with the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902. Maxeke's ability to weave the two strands together continued after her return to South Africa. Meanwhile, her family had now moved from Kimberly and relocated at Ramokgopa, her father's birth place in the Transvaal.

On her return, she took up a number of positions in which she became of service to the people in the work of the church - in the Women's Mite Parent Missionary Society of the African Episcopal Church.²¹⁸ Here Charlotte Maxeke engaged in an environment characterised by scarce educational facilities and gender inequalities that were apparent in the circles of educated Africans. Maxeke was surrounded by a group of educated African men such as James Tantsi, B.D., later D.D. Charles Dube, BA, Henry Sikinya, B.D. Marshall Maxeke, B.A, and Edward Tolityi Magaya, B.A, STB. These men played a significant role in the education

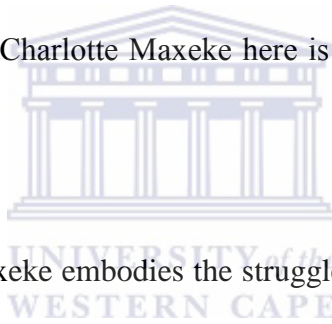
²¹⁸ A.B. Xuma What an educated Native Girl Can Do" edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p.13.

of Africans when the facilities for Africans were still scanty. In the Cape Province, Lovedale was the only institution that offered high school matriculation classes for Africans. In Natal, Kelnerton was the only educational institution in the province during this period. Unlike the Cape Province and Natal, educational facilities for Africans in the Transvaal did not exist. In the Orange Free State, the facilities for post primary education were non-existent. These men faced the challenges outlined in each of the provinces. Charles Dube with his brother John Langalibalele Dube established Ohlange Institute, an equivalent to the Tuskegee institute in South Africa. Henry Msikinya and Edward Magaya taught in the Cape. Charlotte Maxeke had to assert herself as an intellectual in her own right as the new breed of leaders sought integration in the social, political milieu of the Union of South Africa. She displayed her leadership qualities in an environment that was still unfriendly to women, especially the African women. Maxeke's ability to assert her ideas in this environment was nevertheless striking.

These qualities weaved together in a life lived in service of humanity. In analysing Maxeke's leadership qualities I trace her trajectories in the spaces she occupied. By focusing on Maxeke's spaces I refer specifically to the geographical, theoretical and ideological spaces she traversed. The space we concern ourselves with first is the physical space offered by the social

organisation of Ramogkopa, the village in which Charlotte resided on her return to South Africa.

A.B. Xuma has described Maxeke's encounters at Ramogkopa in great detail. His account documents the struggle of a lone woman in the rural political terrain of male domination in the chief's household.²¹⁹ In this environment, Maxeke had first-hand experience of male domination and control over all aspects of rural life. Again, Xuma's account of Charlotte Maxeke here is in support of the politics of inclusion.



Accordingly, Charlotte Maxeke embodies the struggle of a modern woman in her engagements with traditional structures to negotiate western modes of life into a traditional rural society. Narratives of this kind occupied a space in the constitution of black protest politics, as they reveal the difficulty of finding a common ground for understanding the new forms of gender relations that were unfolding as a consequence of the influences of education, religion and traditions

²¹⁹ A.B. Xuma *What an Educated Native Girl Can Do* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women's Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p. 14.

in African societies.²²⁰ However, the chief's progressive stance towards education during Maxeke's stay in his village was acknowledged.²²¹

As to religion, Xuma notes that despite the challenge posed by the traditional protocols at Ramogkopa, Maxeke laid a strong foundation for Christianity to grow by establishing a community school in the village.²²² Again Maxeke is used as a trope to highlight the role of women in religion and education in a narrative that examines the interplay of tradition, religion and education. Xuma noted that Charlotte Maxeke gave birth to a son, Edward Clarke whom they sent to their alma mater, Wilberforce to study towards a degree of Bachelor of Commerce. The narrative takes her child-bearing and nurturing serves to reinforce the reproductive role of women.²²³ Xuma's selective appropriations of Maxeke's

²²⁰ The archival material on this space includes official correspondence between Chief Ramokgopa and the Institute of Race Relations in the 1900s. As a rural village, all official correspondence was addressed to the chief. It is not surprising that her name does not appear in the records of official correspondence of the South African Institute of Race Relations and Chief Ramogkopa during her stay in the village. See, Records of SAIRR, Correspondence- General, William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand.

²²¹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, SAIRR Correspondence – General.

²²² A.B. Xuma *Charlotte Manye (Mrs. Maxeke) what an educated African girl can do* edited by Dovie King Clarke, Bs. For The Women's Mite Missionary Society of AME Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p.14.

²²³ See Joseph Ntlapo, *Wilberforce Institute: Fancy Coppin Hall Built by Bishop J. Albert Johnson 1908* Boitshoko Insitution, 1949, p.2.

doings demonstrate how he weaved a discourse to show the role of women in a narrative about the progress of African women.

Xuma also points to paternal relations obtained between Charlotte Maxeke and Dalindyebo, Paramount chief of the AbaThembu at Idutywa. Charlotte and her husband took charge of the chief's schools at Tyalarha. Xuma states that he often heard his father speak of Maxeke's courage and eloquence. He described her as one of the few women whose voice was heard in the chief's court among men and who had an influence in council. However, Xuma also notes that a meaningful engagement with men in the chief's council depended on Maxeke's mastery of the customs and this earned her an affectionate appellation in the council, "Nogazo."²²⁴ Interestingly, the recognition of Charlotte Maxeke depended on her ability to weave her mastery of customs with the knowledge she acquired through Western education. This formed the basis for the paternal relations established in the twentieth century discourse of the struggle for liberation. Here again we see a misleading inclusion of women based on a careful selection of western and traditional codes in the constitution of acceptable forms of relations between the king and Maxeke as his subject.

²²⁴ A.B. Xuma *Charlotte Manye (Mrs. Maxeke) what an educated African girl can do* edited by Dovie King Clarke, Bs. For The Women's Mite Missionary Society of AME Church (Alice, Lovedale Press 1930),p. 16.

Maxeke's work as the president of the Bantu Women's League in 1918 presents an interesting turn in the nationalist narration on women and the struggle for liberation. At this time women in the African National Congress only held membership without voting rights.²²⁵ During Maxeke's presidency, the Bantu Women's League led the anti-pass campaign which became one of the most celebrated in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. As the League was not incorporated in the structures of the SANNC women had no voice in an exclusively male domain. In this environment Charlotte Maxeke developed the women's organisation into a credible opposition in its own right. Frene Ginwala has noted that "in Charlotte Maxeke the Bantu Women's League had a leader of national standing among the African people and one who was capable of dealing with legislators and officials."²²⁶ Ginwala's characterisation indicates that Maxeke's social standing was not due to the generosity of the leaders of the movement.

Contrary to a belief widely held in nationalist narrations of women in the liberation struggle, Charlotte Maxeke's profile was due to her hard work and not the magnanimity of the leaders of the movement. Her active participation in public debates had earned her the credible reputation as a leader. This was evident

²²⁵ ANC Women's Section, "Women arise, organise united for people's power" in Programme of Action for the African National Congress Women's Section.

²²⁶ ANC Women's Section, "Women arise, organise united for people's power" in Programme of Action for the African National Congress Women's Section, p.12.

in her contributions to public debates and in her deliberations on matters that affected Africans. She was when the workers converged in Bloemfontein in July 1912. The purpose of this gathering was “to establish a union that would represent the skilled and unskilled workers of South Africa.”²²⁷ According to Helen Bradford Charlotte Maxeke addressed the conference and sensitised the delegates about the need to promote the rights of women.²²⁸ At close of deliberations the delegates resolved that:

“the time has come to admit women in the Workers Union as full members, and that they should be allowed to receive all the same rights as male members, and there should be female representatives in our conference. Further, that women workers receive equal pay, men and women for the same work done and that all members of the Conference should do all they can to get women to join the Workers Union of the different towns.”²²⁹

Furthermore, the conference resolved to “work towards promoting the social, moral and intellectual interests of its members and to obtain reasonable conditions of labour for the workers”.²³⁰ Maxeke’s influence on strategies for labour bargaining by African labourers cannot be underestimated. Her own articulations of ‘the promotion of women’s rights crafted a space for a discourse which cut across race, class and gender barriers that were increasingly characterising the broader discourses about the native question of the early 1920s.

²²⁷ See Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1988), p.2.

²²⁸ Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1988), p.4.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

The dynamic character of Charlotte Maxeke was reflected in her ability to interact with all racial groups in South Africa. In 1921 Charlotte Maxeke was invited to address the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU), an organisation that advocated for the voting rights of white women in South Africa. On this occasion according to Sadie Foreman "Charlotte Maxeke advocated the view that the personal is political approach, meaning that women's experiences were increasingly drawn into the political discourse of the time."²³¹ This was in relation to her understanding of African women as a marginalised group which was made invisible through interconnected racialised and gendered oppression. In this domain Maxeke laid the foundation for an understanding of the conditions leading to the development of a discourse about the relations that informed the debate about women, gender and politics.²³² At public gatherings Maxeke acquainted herself with the debates and discussions relating to aspects of the Natives lives. This earned her the recognition of Katie Sidwell, a superintendent of the Native Department in the Transvaal during the 1930s. She described

²³¹ Sadie Foreman, *The Mother of African Freedom* the contribution of Charlotte Maxeke to the struggle for freedom in South Africa., paper donated by Sadie Foreman of The Liberation Struggle Archives at Fort Hare, Alice, 2007.

²³² In June 1930 Charlotte Maxeke presented a paper "*Social Conditions among Bantu Women and Girls*" in 'Christian Students and Modern South Africa' conference held in on the 27th to the 3rd June in 1930 at Fort Hare. See *Christian Students and Modern South Africa: Report of the Bantu European Student Christian Conference, Fort Hare, June 27th -3rd June 1930.*

Maxeke as ‘one of the greatest advocates in temperance and one of the pillars in work among the native women.’²³³

Surely, the question of who Maxeke was cannot be answered by biographical details. Rather, as this chapter demonstrates, she merits a place in the history of ideas. Nor can she be properly understood from nationalist and state discourses on women. As indicated in this chapter Maxeke’s intellectual trajectory is a historical record of multi-theorisations of gender relations. Her articulation of an alternative discourse which was based on service to others, human dignity and equality helped to shape an inclusive discourse that spoke against the gender, ethnic and racial injustices that were increasingly being entrenched as the foundation of modern South Africa. The interventions of Charlotte Maxeke in modern black protest politics questioned both the state’s specialised knowledge about Africans and the public discourse about the Native Question. In time, Charlotte Maxeke gained both friends and enemies as Xuma suggests:

“Her training and experience naturally put her at the head of things unrivalled. I do not mean to say there are not people who envy her in the position of power and leadership. Their only motive of envy and their position is that of a dog which chases a horse off the grass even though he cannot eat the grass, a deplorable state of affairs, but bitter truth which must be acknowledged.

²³³ Kate Kidwell Superintendent of Native Department W.C.T.U quoted in A.B. Xuma *Charlotte Manye (Mrs. Maxeke) what an educated African girl can do* edited by Dovie King Clarke, Bs. For The Women’s Mite Missionary Society of AME Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), p.18.

Often our people will try to thwart the efforts of able leadership even to the point of defeating their own best interest.”²³⁴

This statement casts doubt on the view of contemporary scholars such as Julia Wells who assert that earlier women were not concerned about politics. Xuma’s characterisation of Maxeke shows Maxeke’s influence to be not so much that of a woman, but of an intellectual who opposed the various forms of injustice, with consequences for the political landscape of the twentieth century that cannot be undervalued. Her bold critique of the shortcomings in the intellectual project of African intellectuals of the twentieth century demonstrates her familiarity with and participation in the political debates of the time.²³⁵ In what she viewed as ‘the elimination of the Bantu woman as a factor’ Maxeke drew gender inequality closer to the debate about the Native Question in South Africa.

²³⁴ A.B. Xuma *Charlotte Manye (Mrs. Maxeke) what an educated African girl can do* edited by Dovie King Clarke, Bs. For The Women’s Mite Missionary Society of AME Church (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), pp.13- 16.

²³⁵ Charlotte Maxeke “The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa” in *Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A yearbook of South African Mission* compiled by Rev. Dexter Taylor D.D. (Alice, Lovedale Press, Alice 1928), p. 182.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIBERATION HISTORIES, STATE DISCOURSE AND THE MAKING OF A SEXUALISED FEMALE SUBJECT

The chapter illustrates Maxeke's critique of hegemonic constructions of women's subjectivities in the 1920s and 1930s. Histories of national liberations in Africa often obscure the struggles against other forms of domination. Of prime concern in this chapter is the obscurity in which the intellectual contributions of women to theorisations of nationalist struggles on the continent continue to linger.

While the narrative strategy of nationalism has been praised as the mainstay of scholarship on Africa's struggles against colonial domination, its analytical frame tends to overlook various forms of struggle embedded in histories of liberation struggles. I refer specifically, to the stagnation caused by the nationalist inability to comprehend gender relations in the history of liberation struggles.

This flaw continues to haunt the political project of modern revolutions on the continent. Women's struggles are at the core of both nationalist and gender activists whose primary objective is to pursue different forms of equality. In pursuing these goals, gender and women have often been collapsed into one body of scholarship which tends to focus on the activism of women in liberation

histories. However, interventions from the field of Women and Gender Studies on the continent highlight a fundamental misrepresentation that has rendered the intellectual project of women and gender unintelligible from the viewpoint of the nationalist discourse on liberation.²³⁶ In trying to address this problem, academics from a range of scholarly persuasions have sought to trace the significance of women in African history.²³⁷ Teresa Barnes's work on *gender relations* and urbanisation in colonial Zimbabwe presents an effort to highlight the limitations of gender blind nationalist narrations of African history.²³⁸

Apart from the research agendas determined by the practical needs of women on the continent, the studies on women/ gender in African history have been influenced largely by human rights discourse. Taking the attainment of gender equality as its strategic objective, the studies have identified inequality as one of the major causes of social injustices. Accordingly, the emergence of women's movements on the continent can be conceived as an effect of gender inequality. In the context of South Africa, the 1950s have been celebrated as the highlight of the women's movement in South Africa. For a long time, studies on women in the

²³⁶ See Teresa Barnes *"We Women worked so hard: Gender Urbanisation and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-1956"*, Social History of Africa (Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1999).

²³⁷ Ibid (viii)

²³⁸ Teresa Barnes *"We Women worked so hard: Gender Urbanisation and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-1956"*, Social History of Africa (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1999), p.1.

continent have sought to document women's lives without concern for their place in history. To elaborate on this aspect of gender research on the continent we will demonstrate how gender studies lacked the theorisations on the involvement of women in the formative years of modern struggles on the continent.

Cheryl Walker's pioneering work on the history of women's struggles in the 1980s has been followed by numerous studies on women in South African history. Although writing in the 1990s Nicky Rousseau has made the important observation that "although the discourse of women has become a remarkable visible and potent force in the history of the liberation struggle it has not been paralleled by a similar attention to conceptual and methodological issues."²³⁹ This critique also informs our examination of the work of Charlotte Maxeke. As indicated in chapter 3, the question: Who was Charlotte Maxeke? not only calls for a chronological depiction of events in her life, but for attention to the conceptual integrity that in her time allowed her to be turned into a symbol of women activism in the struggle for liberation. A critical examination of the framings of the role of women has created an opportunity to grapple with the significance of Charlotte Maxeke as a theorist and as a significant figure in the history of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. This registered a careful deconstruction of 'the iconic representations' of Maxeke in Xuma's account.

²³⁹ Nicky Rousseau Popular History in South Africa in the 1980: The Politics of Production, Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Arts Degree, UWC, April 1994, p.15.

When taken beyond Xuma's frame, Charlotte Maxeke's oeuvre about aspects of the lives of Africans begins to emerge. An engagement with Maxeke's oeuvre enhances the study of history in a manner that does not conflate women and gender, but critically reflects on a myriad of voices shaping modern society.

Feminist studies on the evolution of modern societies have warned against the conflation of gender and women. Linzi Manicom warns against such an exercise in South African history.²⁴⁰ Manicom argued that the conflation of the two obscures social, political categories and the actual historical processes from sufficient scrutiny.²⁴¹ These critical reflections on South African feminist scholarship inspire our focus on the activities of Charlotte Maxeke in this chapter.

In contemporary African states, gender issues and women's political pasts are increasingly drawn into the official discourse to facilitate state formation. In West Africa the literature on women sheds light on aspects of women's lives which including marriage, divorce, polygamy, love, female infertility and prostitution. Stephanie Newell has noted that "although literature remains a popular mode of

²⁴⁰ See Linzi Manicom, 'Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1992), p.443.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

expression in West African women writings, silences exist in the very areas where certainly noisy local debates have been taking place.”²⁴²

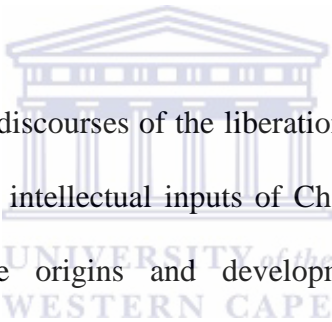
Maxeke's life and times takes the scholarship on women and the struggles for social justice beyond the recent debates about the representation of women in public offices to focus on some of the initial struggles that paved the way for the recognition of women as full citizens of South Africa. The period between 1920 and 1939 has not been associated with women in nationalist liberation narratives. However, the following sections demonstrate how Charlotte Maxeke became a factor in the activities of the African National Congress of the 1920s and 1930s.

The significance of Maxeke in South African history stems from her theorisations of the inequalities that prevailed in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s. Her work forms part of the critical scholarship on gender and racial relations in South Africa. Maxeke's theorisation of the everyday can enhance contemporary studies of liberation struggles and gender relations in Africa. She devised the conceptual tools that challenged early twentieth century debates about Africans in South Africa. Her gendered reading of the debate about the native question enabled her to articulate concerns about race, class and gender inequality among the educated

²⁴² Stephanie Newell, *Writing African Women Gender Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa* (London, Zed Books Ltd, 1997), p.1.

elite of the time. She highlighted the impact of the link between race, class and gender in the formation of the state.

A closer evaluation of Maxeke's intellectual oeuvre shows how she reflected on the liberties of the Africans in the Union of South Africa in the 1920s. In these debates she articulated a tension that informed the relationship between the nationalist quest for liberation and the struggle for social justice and a class struggle for gender equality.



The link between the three discourses of the liberation struggle presents a unique opportunity to examine the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke as part of a growing literature on the origins and development of modern political consciousness among the Africans in South Africa round the turn of the twentieth century. Her ideas regarding social justice and emancipation formed the basis for a consideration of 'the woman question' as part of the discourse of the national struggle for liberation in the 1930s.

Maxeke's theorisation of the everyday does not settle the question about who she was. Until now, none of the studies conducted have been able to provide a satisfactory answer to the question which must go beyond her biography to her place in history. It is not surprising that although she was instrumental in the

formation of the early movement for liberation in South Africa her place in history has not been ascertained. Available studies on the formative years of the early liberation movement have not investigated how Charlotte Maxeke became a factor in the intellectual activities of the African National Congress in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁴³ This is not surprising because her rise to political prominence challenges the linear nationalist and feminist narratives of “the women role” in the liberation struggle.²⁴⁴

The period of Maxeke’s return to South Africa after she graduated in Ohio, and her political activities in it enable us to investigate how she related to the constructions of the category “women” in South Africa.²⁴⁵ As the first black South African woman to obtain a BA degree Maxeke challenged the stereotypes that prevailed amongst the Africans about the status of a girl child within the homestead. At the level of the state, Maxeke’s interventions in the sphere of public education placed her alongside the educated elite of the time. Her contemporaries included figures such as John Dube, the founding father of Ohlange Institute in Natal. Like her contemporaries, Charlotte Maxeke played a pivotal role in the education and training of the youth in various spheres. She

²⁴³ A.B. Xuma *Charlotte Manye (Mrs Maxeke) “What an educated Native Girl Can Do”* edited by Dovie King Clarke for the Women’s Mite Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930).

²⁴⁴ See Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better For Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe’s Liberation Struggle* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2000).

²⁴⁵ After her graduating with a B.A. degree, Charlotte Maxeke returned to South Africa in 1902.

worked tirelessly to secure education for rural communities. At Ramokgopa in the Transvaal, Maxeke's work challenged the stereotype about women and leadership. She was in close contact with rural village life and did not theorise about the rural as a timeless past.

Maxeke's work did not fit into the border of statist and nationalist discourse of the beginning of the twentieth century. While the leading voices in native opinion borrowed from or fed into the statist discourse Maxeke's critique of the intellectual frames of the early twentieth century constituted a discourse opposing the gender ideologies of her time. Her critique surveyed the dominant frames in which the "native question" was addressed by "native opinion." Her foresight on the "woman question" as it became known, was premised on what she characterised as a constant erasure of the woman factor in the early nationalist discourse of equality.

In a paper presented in 1928, Maxeke stated that "many South Africans [educated elite] thought that if they eliminate the Bantu woman as a factor the so called Native problem could be solved."²⁴⁶ This set the tone for her critical discourse about gender relations in various spheres of the lives of the Africans in South

²⁴⁶ Charlotte Maxeke "The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa" in *Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A yearbook of South African Mission* compiled by Rev. Dexter Tylor D.D. (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1928) p.182.

Africa. Maxeke's critique was both diagnostic and prescriptive. During the early stages of the rise of modern politics, Maxeke diagnosed the elimination of women and gender as a conceptual problem which leading intellectuals of the time had to guard against. Her views of the so-called Native problem, clearly highlight her ability to think beyond the obvious. Maxeke's critical stance on the native problem is echoed in Adam Ashforth's critique of the state discourse in South Africa during the twentieth century. Ashforth has made an important contribution with regard to critiquing the official discourse of the state. He argued that to talk about the Africans as constituting a problem is essentially problematic.²⁴⁷ Maxeke's critique of the intellectual parameters on which the native question was framed demonstrated her refusal to succumb to the racialisation of social ills that were a direct consequence of various forms of inequality. In so, doing, Charlotte Maxeke established grounds for a consideration of how an uncritical view of women in debates of the Native Question ignored the inequalities embedded in the very manner in which the transition from the traditional to modern African society was theorised by the early African intellectuals.

In highlighting the impact of modern values such as education and industrialisation on gender relations, Maxeke re-orientated the nationalist discourse of the early twentieth century. While using concepts such as

²⁴⁷ Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), p.vii.

womanhood, motherhood and family she established grounds for a consideration of *the women factor* in the analysis of aspects of Native Life in the Union of South Africa. These ideas found expression within the early women's organisations she helped to build. Maxeke was indeed part of the discussions that led to the formation of the National Council of African Women in 1933.

Narratives about the history of women's struggles in South Africa often take the anti-pass campaign as a frame to highlight state control. In this frame the women's anti-pass campaigns have become the dominant frame in which women have been rendered visible to the context of mass mobilisation and the struggles of the twentieth century. The conflation of all women's struggles into the discourse of anti-pass campaigns has rendered the struggles about the social wellbeing and welfare of the Africans unintelligible within the broader struggle. While the big question of the state focused on the administration, the sphere of the everyday on which the welfare of the Africans hinged was erased from the state's official discourse. The early women's movement inhabited a critical space in the foundation of the modern society of the twentieth century. It provided a much needed critique of the gaps left in the transformation from traditional to modern society. The state's discourse about the administration of Africans in the early 1920s and 1930s evidenced neglect of areas of everyday.

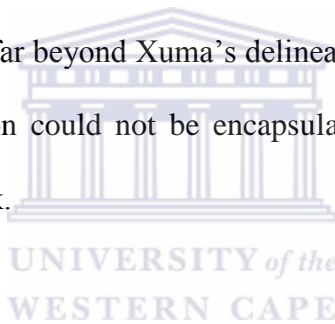
The state's discourse on social welfare in the 1920s and 1930s justified the state's segregationist policies.²⁴⁸ Debates about Juvenile Welfare during this period sought to find ways to include 'European boys' into trades.²⁴⁹ The discussion mirrored the states job reservation policies that were constantly limiting the rights of the so called non-European populations in South Africa. In official discourse a social welfare, Africans were only included to reflect the problem they posed for the job reservation policy to help the 'poor whites' who found themselves competing with 'non-Europeans' for scarce skills and access to the labour market. The state's intervention in the problem included the establishment of Juvenile Advisory Boards whose task was to create a national register of every [European] child.²⁵⁰ In a modernising state, assistance for the less fortunate was provided in racial segregationist terms. Populations deemed 'Non-European' were exempted from the core of the state's welfare programmes. Charlotte Maxeke devoted much of her time assisting those who were marginalised by the welfare discourse and politics.

²⁴⁸ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Social Services: Juvenile Welfare, Witwatersrand and Central Juvenile Affairs Memoranda (undated) AD 843/ RJ Nd. 5.5. p. 1-3.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a conference on Urban Juvenile Native Delinquency held at Johannesburg from 10-12 October, 1938, AD, 843 RJ/Nd.4.1.

Going beyond the bounds of the state's welfare discourse, Charlotte Maxeke and the Bantu Women's League aroused African interest in matters pertaining to their welfare and education. Although it did not last very long, the Bantu Women's League "enabled women to work among their sisters and thereby spread the spirit of service and leadership."²⁵¹ Xuma's comment indicates that African intellectuals were now beginning to take an interest in the activities of women to serve and lead in society in three politically significant functions: *sisterhood*, *service* and *leadership*. Maxeke's involvement in the formation of the early African women's movement, however, goes far beyond Xuma's delineation of 'the woman's work.' Her intellectual contribution could not be encapsulated by the functions Xuma suggested as woman's work.



Maxeke's work in the early women's movements suggests a more fragmented story about the circumstances that led to the formation of women's organisations in the 1920s and 1930s. Although it succeeded in widening the spirit of public political participation among women, the Bantu Women's League did not survive the lack of financial aid which led to its demise in the late 1920s and 1930s.²⁵² Despite these limitations, Charlotte Maxeke continued to participate in the

²⁵¹ A.B. Xuma *Charlotte Manye (Mrs. Maxeke) What an educated African Girl Can Do*, edited by Davie King Clarke for the Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the AME Church, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1930), preface.

²⁵² Ibid.

spheres of public political life, church groups, recreation and welfare associations.²⁵³

The formation of non-statutory bodies, such as the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1929, created an avenue of expression for Maxeke's critical stance on the formulations of the Native Question in major scholarly debates.²⁵⁴ Her interactions with the Institute had drawn the activities of the liberals closer to the nationalists. Once again, Maxeke's association with the liberals in the SAIRR presents an interesting fissure in liberation politics. But what transpired from Maxeke's interactions with Rheinallt Jones of the South African Institute of Race Relations reflects the fluidity of her ideas. She maintained a link with the influences of African Americans in the sphere of education.

An account of this aspect of Maxeke's political activities is incomplete without examining how she arose in the public sphere of politics in the 1920s. Charlotte Maxeke served in the Joint Council of Europeans and Bantu in Johannesburg where issues affecting the everyday life of Africans were discussed. In 1924 the

²⁵³ Charlotte Maxeke in her capacity as the President of the Bantu Women's League was one of the signatories and a participant at a Joint Council of European –Bantu Conference which was held in Cape Town in February 1929. Bantu –European Conference, Cape Town, February 6-8, 1929. See William Cullen Library, SAIRR Records, A.2.5.3, register of members and participants in the conference.

²⁵⁴ Historical Papers: Inventories of Collections, Records of the South African Race Relations, Part III AD 1947, Compiled by Michele Pickover, University of Witwatersrand, 1994; also see History of the Institute <http://www.sairr.org.za>.

South African Institute of Race Relations held a conference in which it discussed 'the evils arising from the presence of Native women in the towns.'²⁵⁵ The conference attributed these evils in urban areas to women who 'escaped from all control and based on these assertions, the conference resolved to consult experts in the native opinion in search for 'measures to address the matter.'²⁵⁶ A troubling image of sexualised females associated with diseases was conjured up. In view of the presence of an uncontrolled population, women raised alarm with state officials and strategies for containing diseases were debated in both state and nationalist discourse about the Native Question. In both the image of women as a group lacking in moral values justified the implementation of strategies that would control and confine them to their proper place.²⁵⁷

From her active involvement in clandestine activities a network of women who were increasingly taking a keen interest in the wellbeing of their society had emerged in all four provinces.²⁵⁸ T.D. M Skota's African yearly register indicates

²⁵⁵ William Cullen Library, SAIRR Conference and Native Welfare- Miscellaneous, (file 2-175).

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ See William Cullen Library, SAIRR Social Services: Social Welfare; General, July-December 1939, AD 83431 RJINb6 (file 3).

²⁵⁸ See T.D.M. Skota, *The African Yearly Register: Being an illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's who) of Black Folks in Africa*, (Johannesburg, R.L .Esson &Co. Ltd, 1930).

that by the 1920s and 1930s a substantial number of women had acquired some degree of political initiation.²⁵⁹

In part the political awareness of women of in 1920s can be attributed to the collusion between the traditional roles of women and the state's construction of a sexualised female subject. The state's discourse on social hygiene and native opinion's concern about the preservation of long standing African traditions combined to produce the image of a problematic female. The beginnings of a troubling image of the female body in state discourse may be traced to the start of the twentieth century with the unification of the Cape, Natal and the Northern Republics of the Orange Free State and Transvaal. This process required the creation of a new citizen in a new state. Each of the provinces had its own policy

²⁵⁹ In the Transvaal there was A. Temba one of the women who were elected by the African National Congress to be arrested by the police during the Women's Pass Test Case. Later she was appointed president of the Women's Section of the African National Congress. In Boksburg M. Bonojane, and Kondile were the founding members of the Women's Section of the African National Congress. In the Eastern Province, E Xiniwe, wife of Paul Xiniwe, Maxeke's choir Master from King William's town. In Cape Town, M.N. Bhola was the organizer of the African National Congress (Women's Section). She was the first African woman to be prosecuted under section 29 of the Native Administration Act of 1927. She had been the Chairman of the African National Congress (Women's section in the Western Cape). In Kimberly, Hlakudi was one of the leading women and social workers. She served as treasurer of the Women's Section of the African National Congress, Griqualand West and Bechuanaland Province. She had also been a delegate to the African National Congress Conventions in Bloemfontein. Mankazana too became active in the political and social life of her people. She was treasurer of the Women's Section of the African National Congress and was one of the best and strongest organizers in the Transvaal Province. See T.D.M. Skota, *The African Yearly Register: Being an illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's who) of Black Folks in Africa* (Johannesburg, R.L. Esson & Co. Ltd, 1930).

regarding the administration and control of its inhabitants.²⁶⁰ The Cape Province and Natal were strongly influenced by the British liberal tradition with the Cape Franchise allowing both the Native and Coloured populations a vote and guaranteeing their representation on the house of Assembly.²⁶¹ This “humanist approach” did not embrace everyone indiscriminately. In fact, western civilisation set a barometer that set the criteria for the selection of citizens. Although celebrated by the educated natives, the Cape Franchise had its own limitations. It excluded that part of the indigenous population that did not meet the qualifications set for it. It created a majority of subjects who could not be accommodated, the “uncivilised.” In Jabavu’s terms the Cape liberal tradition “imposed a criterion of civilisation on everybody alike, excluding both black and white uncivilised men.”²⁶² By embracing the selection criteria set by the official discourse on native policy the intellectual tradition of J.T. Jabavu produced its own denial. It stimulated a discourse about inequality. The debate about voting

²⁶⁰ Discussions about the Native Republic and the Black Republic placed the Communist Party of South Africa at the centre of political debates about the future of the Africans within the Union of South Africa. Unlike the liberal stance of intellectuals such as Jabavu that relied on the votes of a select few, the CPSA demanded inclusive voting rights for all irrespective of race, colour and class. This stimulated a heated debate within the Communist Party of South Africa with some whites leaving the Party out of disapproval of its slogan of the Black Republic. Ray Alexander was amongst the leaders in the Communist Party who supported the slogan of the Black Republic. See Julie Frederickse, Ray Alexander interviewed by Julie Frederickse transcript, Julie Frederickse Collection, South African History Archives.

²⁶¹ The Cape Native Franchise: Representation Bill, *Cape Times*, 29 January 1927,

²⁶² Ibid.

rights was included in the view that the prospect of voting rights depended on land education and wealth.²⁶³

The formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 created a major impetus for debate about the significance of the Cape liberal tradition in the newly founded union. The two ex-British colonies yielded to the tradition of the Northern ex Republics on the principle that a man's black colour should prohibit him from the right to the franchise.²⁶⁴ When viewed holistically, the Native Question described the state's classification process where citizens were distinguished from the subjects of the Union of South Africa. In response to the official discourse of the state about the Africans in the Union of South Africa, a group of interested white liberals and the educated African elite formed 'the African opinion' which in essence was a reaction to further the evolution of the Native Question as it unfolded in the Native Land Act of 1913 and the Urban Areas Act of 1923. The 'African Opinion' drew its support from Non-European organisations, Europeans interested in inter racial issues, the welfare of the Africans, the missionaries, individual scholars, and leading African intellectuals of the 1920s. The Native Land Act of 1913 was a first step towards the making of the union citizen. As far

²⁶³ For a discussion of the land question as it determines the relations powers See Premesh Lalu "Gender, Pastoral Power and the discourse of Development in the Eastern Cape in Noeleen Murray, Nick Sheperd and Martin Hall, *Desire Lines: Space Memory and Identity in the Post-apartheid City* (London & New York, Routledge, 2007), p.196.

²⁶⁴ The Cape Native Franchise: Representation Bill, *Cape Times*, 29 January 1927,

as the Non Europeans were concerned the Act created subjects instead of citizens.²⁶⁵

The land allotment prescribed by the Act created a barrier in which African claims to citizenship were restricted. It also forced the Africans into the migrant labour system. In the process, the problematic female body was produced and pastoral relations of power were established to diminish the harmful consequences. In rural areas, the packaging of Native Life tied women to land, child rearing and care for the aged. The thinking behind the scheme assumed that it would permit Africans to uphold their traditions.

The state's discourse on land distribution and acquisition facilitated a systematic classification of the Africans into two distinct categories: the urban and the rural. Framed in a developmentalist discourse, the state's creation of these categories encouraged separate development along racial lines. The purpose of this exercise was to entrench racial domination through territorial segregation.²⁶⁶ Thinking within the confines of the state discourse native opinion was caught between disentangling the parameters of the debate as determined by the colonial modalities of racial domination and control while on the other hand it sought to

²⁶⁵ See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996), p.6

²⁶⁶ Black and White in South Africa, Two Points of View *Foreign Affairs*, April 1927

establish a new set of questions based on the new relations of the twentieth century. The rural/urban dichotomy which characterised much of the early African intellectuals discourse was a direct consequence of their inability to disentangle the Native Question. Early African intellectuals had appropriated and reinforced the state's discourse of domination and it shows in their discussion of issues about land, migration and living conditions of the Africans.²⁶⁷

In these spheres leading intellectuals of the time did not see that they helped to perpetuate a discourse of inequality. Intending to anchor African land right, their claims established an indexical link between women, land and the migration patterns of the twentieth century. On the question of women, intellectuals have drawn the reproductive roles of women in validating African claims to land.²⁶⁸ However, the debate about land authorised and entrenched unequal power relations between men and women.

As for migration patterns, native opinion took the discovery of gold and diamond and industrialisation as a major reason for the movement of men from their rural homestead to the urban centres. Narratives about the migration patterns of Africans in the twentieth century discouraged the migration of women to the

²⁶⁷ See T.D.J. Jabavu, The Cape Native Franchise: Representation Bill, *Cape Times*, 29 January 1927.

²⁶⁸ I refer specifically to the dual operations where women are perceived as producers of food as well as raisers of children.

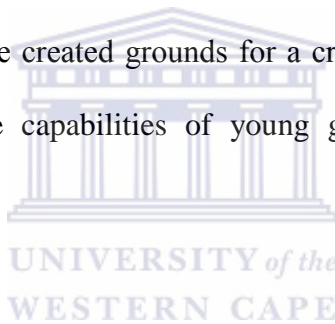
urban centres. Although barred from leaving their rural homesteads the migration patterns of women disturbed linear nationalist narrations of the effects of the Land Act on women. By the early 1920s a substantial number of women were found in major urban centres.

In response to the rising number of women in the urban areas the state reinforced its legislative frames in the Urban Areas Act of 1923. The Act facilitated the creation and perpetuation of unattached women as source of problems. This piece of legislation created a mechanism to ‘detect unattached women’ whose status could not be explained in terms of the legislative framework of the Urban Areas Act. The official discourse of the state had sought to prevent women from migrating to the urban areas, but it failed. By virtue of their status, the women were often subjects whose legal status depended on their relationship to men.²⁶⁹

The presence of categories of women whose legal status could not be ascertained through legal frames highlighted the limitations of the state’s official discourse of the 1920s. As a direct consequence of these limitations the state embarked on a drive to create an image of problematic sexualised women associated with disorderliness and diseases.

²⁶⁹ For a nuanced analysis of how labour, domestic struggles and law intersected in the lives of young men and women See Thomas. V. McClendon, *Gender and Generations Apart: Labour Tenants and Customary Law in Segregation Era South Africa, 1920s to 1940s* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2000), p.3.

Maxeke's theorisations of the plight of women in urban areas are expressed in an interview published in the *South African Outlook* in 1922. Here she discusses the factors that contributed to the abhorring conditions of young girls in Johannesburg. In her view the conditions of these young girls were due to their difficulty in securing suitable household positions upon their arrival in Johannesburg.²⁷⁰ Once again, Maxeke demonstrated an understanding of the link between the personal and the political. In highlighting the difficulty of securing a household position, Maxeke created grounds for a critique of the state's account that took the reproductive capabilities of young girls as explanatory of the conditions.



As early as the 1920s domestic workers employed in Johannesburg did not have proper accommodation. Maxeke's theorisations of people's everyday issues created a space making for debate about the plight of young women in public discourse about the Native Question. Charlotte Maxeke's view of contributing factors 'to the demoralising effects of native life in Johannesburg,' outline both the causes and the effects of the unpleasant conditions in which the young girls lived. She enumerated the factors that led to the conditions of young girls in Johannesburg as follows:

²⁷⁰ Interview with Charlotte Maxeke, "The demoralizing effects of life of Johannesburg upon young girls" *The South African Outlook*, August 1, 1922.

“the poor accommodation provided for, and the tax supervision bestowed upon those who enter household services, the facility with which rooms can be procured from unscrupulous white landlords on no question asked principle are contributing factors to the deteriorating conditions of young girls in Johannesburg.”²⁷¹

She did not limit her theorisation to causes alone, but also proposed solutions to the problems of the day. On the question of young girls in urban centres, Maxeke suggested that industrial schools and better accommodation be established and made available to young women in the city. Even domestic, service which later became associated with young women, was once of the scarce employment opportunities available to young men in the cities.

Maxeke’s theorisations of the everyday experiences of young women in the cities yielded positive results. Concerned groups of people associated with missionary activities came together and contributed to the establishment of a Bantu Girls Home in Pretoria. Public discourse around the conditions of young girls condemned the gender inequality that prevailed in the Union of South Africa. Outlining the effects of gender imbalance, Princess Alice reminded those who were present at the opening of the home that “only few years ago no girls were employed in houses at all. Naturally no accommodation for girls has been planned

²⁷¹ Interview with Charlotte Maxeke, “The demoralizing effects of life of Johannesburg upon young girls” *The South African Outlook*, August 1, 1922.

and what was good enough for a boy was not good enough for a girl.”²⁷² Present at the occasion of the opening of the home for the girls were two representatives of the Africans, Charlotte Maxeke and Reverend R.Hlongwane of Pretoria.

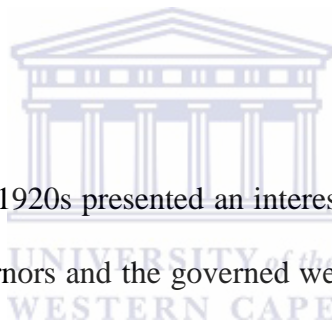
According to Hlongwane the hostel was needed to keep native girls away from the yards and streets.²⁷³ The Reverend’s view affirms the troubling image of ‘unattached women’ who posed threat to urban order. By contrast Charlotte Maxeke surveyed the migration patterns of the women to urban areas and outlined its causes.²⁷⁴ Changing the dominant lens through which women were being projected onto the stage of public discourse of the 1920s Charlotte Maxeke established a dialectical relationship between the interdependence of both African migrants and white employers who benefited from African labour. This called for a discussion of the migration patterns of women in urban areas. She did not associate women with lawlessness and diseases but tried to demonstrate how societal notions of gender contributed to the stigmatisation of young girls in the cities.

²⁷² “A Bantu Girls Home in Pretoria” *South African Outlook*, vol. iv (Alice, Lovedale Missionary Institution, South Africa, 1924), p.286.

²⁷³ Interview with Charlotte Maxeke, “The demoralizing effects of life of Johannesburg upon young girls” *The South African Outlook*, August 1, 1922.

²⁷⁴ “A Bantu Girls Home in Pretoria” *South African Outlook* (Alice, Lovedale Missionary Institution, South Africa, 1924), vol. iv p.287.

Maxeke argued that the movement of women in urban areas should not be viewed as a random migration of people, but as a movement of those in need of employment. Thus, she established a case to argue for the employability of women in urban centres in the twentieth century.²⁷⁵ In appreciating the availability of a *home* for the women who worked in domestic service, Maxeke did not problematise the presence of women in urban areas, but demonstrated how a gendered reading of migration patterns had ignored women from public view, and by extension, she even pleaded for the provision of basic amenities in urban areas.



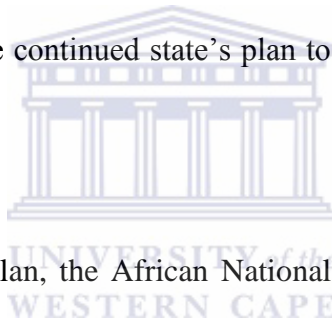
For Charlotte Maxeke, the 1920s presented an interesting period as new forms of relations between the governors and the governed were being forged. During this period General Hertzog came to power having united the white electorate. Under the stewardship of General Hertzog, the Union was moved towards a unified policy towards the Africans in all provinces. This raised alarm and in the Transvaal Selby Msimang of the African National Congress convened a

²⁷⁵ Available studies on this subject indicate that women were not considered as a viable segment of the labour force in South Africa, except for their reproductive abilities as bearers of the next generation of labourers. As the studies demonstrate, this was to change in the twentieth century. In Bloemfontein for example an increasing number of African women survived from informal trade and as washer women. See Jullia Wells, *We Now Demand! The history of Women's Pass Laws in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1993).

conference to draft a programme to unite the political aspirations of the Africans.

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By 1925, the fears of the Africans were justified when General Hertzog expressed a commitment to ensure that the “natives could not be allowed to sit in parliament” in his speech in Smithfield.²⁷⁷ To achieve this, Hertzog had to change native policy in the Union of South Africa. While the Africans in other provinces were barred from exercising a right to vote, educated Africans of the Cape were increasingly alarmed by the continued state’s plan to erase them from the voter’s roll.

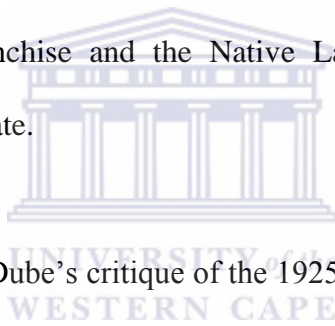


In response to Hertzog’s plan, the African National Congress held *The African Convention on Native Bills in Bloemfontein in 1925*. The conference set out to address the problems that emanated from a series of legislative acts hindering the social, economic and political participation of Africans in the Union of South Africa in the areas of labour, education and training. In what became a disappointing moment for the Natal delegation under the leadership of Reverend John Langalibalele Dube, the Bloemfontein convention on Native Bills ‘ended up being a convention on the retention of coloured vote over discussions around the

²⁷⁶ Selby Msimang, letter dated 25th September 1924.

²⁷⁷ ‘Union’s Future Native Policy: Premier Outlines his scheme’, *Rand Daily Mail* 14 November 1925, p.2.

Land Bill and the principle of Native Representation.²⁷⁸ Reverend Dube's critique of the Bloemfontein convention highlighted the difficulties that the leadership of the South African Native Congress experienced in expressing opposition to the state's onslaught on the Non-European populations of the Union of South Africa. The focus on the big questions of Native Franchise and Native Land Bill left the theorisations of the everyday behind. Taking Dube's critique further we might ask: how could a conference designed to discuss the Land Bill ended up discussing the principles of the franchise? Dube's concerns were raised by the failure of the Native Franchise and the Native Land Bills which called for discourse opposed to the state.



As indicated by Reverend Dube's critique of the 1925 Convention, native opinion was divided between those advocating for the retention of the Cape Franchise and those who were concerned with the retention of long held African traditions, the communitarians and the modernists in Mamdani's terms.²⁷⁹ This trend continued to frame the dominant debates within the ANC during the 1920s and 1930s. Traditionalists within the movement expressed concerns about the distribution of land to Non Europeans while the modernists' appeals for inclusion in the state fell on deaf ears.

²⁷⁸ African Convention on Native Bills, Natal Delegate Disappointed, *Natal Advertiser*, 20. April, 1925.

²⁷⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996), p.3.

Also in discourse oppositional to the state, the Africa People's Organisation (APO) expressed concerns about the state's views of the Land Question in South Africa. Dr. Abdurahman, president of APO, in his address to the congress held in Cape Town in 1926 stated:

"It is absurd to think that the non-Europeans will for all the time remain within the institutions which were founded in the dark days of ignorance. Certainly men will not in this age of progress submit to repressive and reactionary legislation and further curtailment of their rights if they have power to free themselves."²⁸⁰

Dr. Abdurahman's argument reflected a stage in the evolution of native opinion which rejected the state's discourse of civilised vs. non civilised subjects that found expression in the Land Act. His stated refusal to submit to repressive and reactionary legislation was forward looking, unlike that of 'native opinion' that wanted to cling to the past.

The state's definition of 'civilised labour' did not elude Dr. Abdurahma's analysis of the implications of job reservation in South Africa. He warned the Congress of the African People's Organisation not to succumb to the state's discourse of colouredness. He further warned that if members of the APO fell in with the state's plan, it would set a precedent for the preferential treatment of the

²⁸⁰ Dr. Abdurahman :The coloured Man's Outlook: Events Reviewed by Dr. Abdurahman in address before APO Congress *Cape Times*, 12 April, 1926.

Europeans.²⁸¹ In his concluding remarks Dr Abdurahman expressed a concern about racial prejudice. He called on all members to fight for the noble cause of educating younger generation in the values of universal humanity. He concluded:

“Let us fight our course with high and noble weapons. Let us educate our children to see the true meaning of manhood and motherhood and then I doubt not that though the present indications seem to point that we are all European and Non-European drifting like straws along the stream of irrational prejudice towards a sea of chaos we shall see that through the ages one purpose.”²⁸²

The contribution of D. Abdurahman contributed to the variety of voices opposing the state’s plan for the Non-European population of the Union of South Africa. It was this non-racial stance of oppositional politics of the early 1920s that much of Maxeke’s work too reflected. The Native Question as it found expression in the “native opinion” was characterised by its focus on the big question of the day. In these formulations prejudices found their way into the public discourse where women and children constituted a major problem for the state. The nationalist debates about these aspects of the native question did not dislodge the terms of reference embedded in the state’s formulation of its policies towards the Africans. Maxeke did so in significant ways.

Her theorisations on women and children moved beyond the state’s terms of reference in the 1920s and 1930s, and involved clandestine activities in civil

²⁸¹ Dr. Abdurahman: The coloured Man’s Outlook: Events Reviewed by Dr. Abdurahman in address before APO Congress *Cape Times*, 12 April, 1926.

²⁸² Ibid.

organisations concerned about the daily lives of the Africans. With the outbreak of diseases such as typhoid in Johannesburg in the 1920s, conditions for new forms of relations emerged. The Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases drew public attention to the dangers of the spread of diseases. The Council described the townships of Johannesburg as ‘the hot bed of immorality and drunkenness.’²⁸³ Based on this characterisation, the Council recommended that the control of the township to be transferred to the town council to be run like a native township. This was another way to render the African as a subject of control in the state discourse of the twentieth century.

Although not directly linked to the problems of administration, the increasing number of women in urban centres challenged the conventional gender stereotypes about women’s roles in society. Even the state’s administrative structures such as the councils reflected gender biases where women’s leadership abilities were not taken seriously. After four years of serving in the Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, Mr. Gluckman, who had been the president of the council for four years, announced his plan to step down to allow

²⁸³ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of the Transvaal Council For Venereal Diseases held on 25 November 1925.

new leadership, preferably a woman, to emerge.²⁸⁴ This demonstrated that gender inequality was not unique to the African population; even the white liberal tradition had its fair share. By 1925, gender had become part of the public discourse of civic organisations in Johannesburg.

However, the debates did not change unequal power relations between men and women in the organisations of the time. The appointment of Mrs. Scandret as leader of the TCCVD did not change unequal power relations in the council. Such a candidate was perceived to be “useful in the broader sphere of work that may be undertaken in the future.”²⁸⁵ The preference for a female candidate to lead the council in the midst of the prevalence of diseases perceived to be caused by women’s behaviour merely reinforced the council’s stance.

The appointment of a female candidate reflected a skewed view of gender. This view continued to define public debates about diseases in Johannesburg during

²⁸⁴ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of the Transvaal Council For Venereal Diseases held on 25 November 1925.

²⁸⁵ The council’s belief in a woman candidate was a reflection of conservative attitudes and the stigma attached to venereal diseases. This became evident in the meeting’s proposal of the name change for the South African Social Hygiene Council. The motivation for the name change was ‘to amplify the title by using the words such as “Social and Sex Hygiene. See William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of the Transvaal Council For Venereal Diseases held on 25 November 1925.

the 1920s.²⁸⁶ Throughout the 1920s the minutes of the Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases speak of the women in this vein in connection with disease in the mining towns of the Rand. The council proposed preventive measures to the spread of disease in line with the skewed conception.

The minutes of the Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases reflect the debates that inspired this skewed view of women. The perception of women as source of sexually transmitted disease built heavily on the presence of Africans in the mining towns of the Rand. All Africans applying for domestic service here were subjected to compulsory examination to determine their health condition.²⁸⁷ A panel system was instituted to facilitate regular examination against a nominal payment of a government fee. The 'health of house boys' was last on the items discussed in the meetings of the council. The council demonstrated concern about the living conditions of house boys in mines. These were considered to be less of a health risk than women found in the townships.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of the Transvaal Council For Venereal Diseases held on 25 November 1925.

²⁸⁷ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of the Transvaal Council For Venereal Diseases held on 25 November 1925.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p.2.

Another example of concerted efforts to sustain an image of the troubling female is found in the Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases' motivation for midwifery courses. The council pointed to prevalence of venereal diseases in young girls as a motivation to appoint a midwife.²⁸⁹ The expansion of public health care services in the Transvaal reinforced the view that African women in the townships carried diseases.

The Transvaal Social Hygiene Council embarked on a series of activities to create greater awareness about public health and social hygiene. On 1st March 1926, the council recommended the introduction of hygiene as an integral part of the curriculum taught in schools to prevent the spread of diseases. According to the council greater awareness about hygiene would in turn ensured better conditions of employment of young women, and thus prevent them from indulging in alcohol.²⁹⁰

In May of the same year, the council appointed a committee to look into the teaching of sex hygiene in schools. The council held meetings to discuss the mechanisms and practices to educate and to assess the value of the work done in

²⁸⁹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at YMCA on the 25th November 1925. The Transvaal Council for Combating Venereal Diseases: SAIRR SA Social Hygiene Council.

²⁹⁰ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, The Transvaal Social Hygiene Council, 1st March 1926.

the area of sex education in schools.²⁹¹ Debates about Social Hygiene established an inextricable link between women, alcohol and venereal diseases.

Apart from concerns about sexually transmitted diseases, the field of social hygiene took up the issue of birth control to be practiced by fully grown women. In the discussions that occupied the council in the 1920s the use of birth control by women took a centre stage. This divided the council, as some feared that birth control might have an important bearing on marriage and the matter was postponed for further discussion.²⁹² Unlike the one associated with lawlessness, the debate about birth control was considered to be very controversial and not an objective of the Council.²⁹³ Other members of the council considered the issue of birth control to be distinctive concern of Social Hygiene.

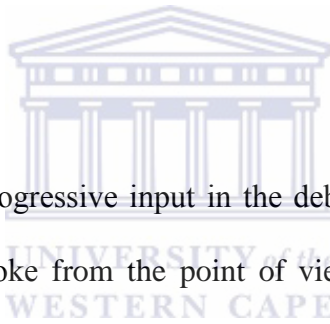
Although limited in its engagements with matters relating to the health conditions of African women on the mining towns of the Rand, the council provides invaluable material for our discussion of how the sexually problematic woman emerged in the 1920s. The women who served in the Transvaal Social Hygiene

²⁹¹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held at the Y.C. A on the 18th June, 1926, at 5p.m South African Social Hygiene Council: Transvaal Section.

²⁹² William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held at the Y.C. A on the 18th June, 1926, at 5p.m South African Social Hygiene Council: Transvaal Section.

²⁹³ Ibid.

Council opposed the injustice informing studies of social hygiene. By 1926 the discourse about diseases in the Transvaal Social Hygiene Council received a major boost from the intervention by Dr. Mary Gordon who stated that: “it is unjust to infer that immorality was confined to one section of the community. It was equally rife to all classes but the better classes were able to protect themselves from the consequences.”²⁹⁴ In a critique of the racist and sexist perspectives of women in public discourse about diseases, Gordon discounted race and gender and suggested preventive measures to mitigate the outbreak of the diseases.



Following Dr. Gordon’s progressive input in the debate about the prevalence of diseases, Mr.P.H Ross ‘spoke from the point of view of a man who had been brought up among people of the poorest classes.’²⁹⁵ Of crucial importance for the communities of the poorest, Ross asserted, is good parental guidance in which mothers play a central role in teaching children to take a clean and natural view of manifestations of life in the animal and plant life around them. ²⁹⁶According to Ross, women should not be emancipated, but should remain at home to raise

²⁹⁴ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Report of the Third Round Table Talk called by the Transvaal Social Hygiene Council and held in the Y.W.C.A. on Wednesday 9th June, 1926.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ The meeting resolved to embark on a programme to teach purity to young girls through short talks for mothers. Although aimed at addressing what they perceived to be a threat to social hygiene, the steps taken continued to presuppose young girls as sexually problematic.

children. The idea of women's emancipation, Ross asserted "was desirable but, the freedom with which it was attained had gone too far and that the modern scantiness of dress were all responsible for much temptation."²⁹⁷ This regression in the public debate was lamentable.

Alexander Mitchell, who was the secretary for Public health and Chief Health Officer of the Department of Health of the Union of South Africa, issued an information pamphlet informing the public about the symptoms of the typhoid fever, its duration, and its causes.²⁹⁸ By June 1930 the Department of Public Health released a statement in which it set forth preventive measures. The department emphasised the need for extensive sanitary measures to prevent the spread and prevalence of the disease and emphasised the effects of the diseases for all population groups. However, in rural areas the discourse about the prevalence of a disease was quick to find a native face.

The department continued by saying that "owing to the insanitary surroundings of their dwellings, natives are in many cases exposed, from infancy, to the attacks of organisms of intestinal origin, including those causing typhoid, contained in the

²⁹⁷ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Report of the Third Round Table Talk called by the Transvaal Social Hygiene Council and held in the Y.W.C.A. on Wednesday 9th June, 1926.

²⁹⁸ SAIRR Records, Catechism about Typhoid or Enteric Fever Department of Public Health, Union of South Africa, Revised and Printed, March 1930, p.2.

water they drink and in the food they eat. These organisms may set up diarrhoea lasting from a few days to several weeks and may be really due to typhoid. In such a case the illness is usually not recognised as typhoid since the sick natives in their own native kraals are rarely attended by a medical man. This non recognition of the disease by natives increases the danger of typhoid carriers among native servants. Women in domestic service thus became prime suspects in the outbreak of the disease. In response to this circular, Medical Officers in respective Municipal areas embarked on preventive measures. This included compulsory medical examinations for women entering into domestic service.

With regard to mother and womanhood the ideas perpetuated in the council did not embrace the principles that could lead to the emancipation of women. They were confined to long held traditions of raising children. The economic pressures on women however, increasingly forced women out of their traditional role at home raising children. In trying to solve the social ills identified by the members, the council produced a repressive discourse which sought to control women and children, particularly girls. The sexualised and criminalised young female continued to frame the work in the various interest groups. Even associations working for the improvement of conditions of women in urban areas sustained this troubling image as the basis on which remedial interventions were made. The establishment of 'Mthuthuzele,' a home for Non-European unmarried mothers

and their babies was perceived as a measure to remedy the problems caused by the women who were ‘ likely to drift into ways of vice and crime and become a danger to the physical health and well-being of the whole community European and Non-European.’²⁹⁹

Apart from young women, the children in urban cities were also seen as a social threat. The recommendations of the Child Welfare Committee of 1935 made provision for the establishment of institutions for neglected and delinquent minors.³⁰⁰ The work of the Diepkloof Reformatory received assistance from the Institute of Race Relations in finding employment for offenders when they left the institution.³⁰¹ This meant, first to acquire information about the home’s conditions, asking the police authorities to compile a report to assess the conditions of the home in which the offenders when discharged would be taken up.

In her capacity as President of the Bantu Women’s League Charlotte Maxeke was one of the signatories to and a participant in a Joint Council of European –Bantu

²⁹⁹SAIRR Records, Mtutuzele (under the care of Non-European Moral Welfare Society, Johannesburg). Pamphlet

³⁰⁰ SAIRR Records, Extract from the Report on the Work of the League of the Nations since the fifteenth Session of the Assembly, Part 1. No. A. 6.1935, Geneva, July 6th, 1935.

³⁰¹SAIRR Records, A.S. Paton, Warden at the Diepkloof Reformatory, letter dated 26th August, 1935.

Conference held in Cape Town in February 1929.³⁰² In the late 1930s, Charlotte Maxeke was appointed as a probation officer for Natives in the Transvaal, Kliptown.³⁰³ In these spheres Charlotte Maxeke had constructed a discourse opposed to state's administration of the Africans. She expressed her interest in the plight of women, children, employment and juvenile welfare in the organisations she helped to build.



³⁰² William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations *Bantu –European Conference register of members and participants in the conference.*, Cape Town, February 6-8, 1929 AD 2186 A.2.5.3.

³⁰³ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Charlotte Maxeke's Correspondence with Rheinallt Jones, letter dated 4th May 1939.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHARLOTTE MAXEKE AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT 1920and 1930s

Charlotte Maxeke's philosophy and the composition of the National Council of African Women show up the contrasts in the movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Maxeke, an anti-tribalist position encouraged work for the common good. Her selfless and relentless hard work embodied the spirit of service to others. Her philosophy centered in the self- help schemes of the African American Women's struggles which emphasised service to ones community. This philosophy was popularised through what became the slogan of the women's movement in the 1930s 'if you rise, bring someone with you.'³⁰⁴ The National Council of African Women focused on self-help and service to communities.

These principles were articulated in the activities of the Council. But before we examine its activities, the conditions leading to the formation of the Council need to be understood. The circumstances leading to the formation of the National Council of African Women were characterised by discord in the nationalist conception of the struggle for liberation. The All African Convention of 1933 reflected a degree of disagreement in nationalist circles. During this period, a

³⁰⁴ See Angela Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (Great Britain, Women's Press Ltd, 1990).

number of women, mainly wives of leading African nationalists observed ‘a discord among the men in the convention.’³⁰⁵

In this context the women set out to find solutions to the difficult questions that brought disagreement into the All African Convention. After long deliberations, the women who were present at the convention tabled a proposal to establish a woman’s organisation. Soga, together with Maxeke, Mahabane and Godlo had a short consultation with other women present at the All African Convention and drafted a resolution which they submitted to the convention stating their desire to get the women all over the Union organised into councils.³⁰⁶ Upon approval at the All African Convention, the women went to their respective provinces with a mandate to establish councils. The councils were an extension of the different women’s organisations that already existed in all the provinces. Unlike the common trend that locates the establishment of women’s organisations as a response to the invitation of the leaders of the nationalist organisations, the

³⁰⁵ Present at the convention were M.T. Soga, Charlotte Maxeke, Mahabane, Morake, Godlo expressed a desire to organise women all over the union into councils. The convention approved the proposal and the women organised in councils in different parts of the Union. See T.D.M. Skota, *The African Yearly Register: Being an illustrated National Biographical dictionary (Who’s who) of Black Folks in Africa*, (Johannesburg, R.L .Esson &Co. Ltd, 1930), See also William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, National Council of African Women Minutes of the African Women’s Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, SAIRR Part II, p.2.

³⁰⁶ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, National Council of African Women Minutes of the African Women’s Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, SAIRR Part II.

establishment of the National Council of African Women was an initiative of the women themselves.

Four years were to pass before the proposed plan would reach fruition. Meanwhile, preparations for the establishment of the National Council were made. Subsequent to the initial discussions held at the All African Convention two conferences were arranged to facilitate the formation of the National Council of Women. The first conference of the National Council of African Women was held in Bloemfontein in December 1937. The conference defined the terms of reference for the proposed council as an organisation that would facilitate “care for the welfare of Non-European populations as well as the training of African women in social welfare.”³⁰⁷ By doing so, the organisation had drawn the debate about the welfare of the Africans from the periphery to the centre of the major political debates of the time.

The Conference of the National Council of African Women 1937

At the inaugural conference Mrs. Nikiwe of Port Elizabeth was appointed to facilitate and chair the conference. She linked the challenges of the new

³⁰⁷ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Constitution and History of the National Council of African Women, Records of SAIRR Part II.

organisation to that of a canoe sailing to a distant unknown land.³⁰⁸ From its inception the National Council of African Women did not have a predetermined objective. It was more of an exploration of unknown terrain. The founding conference of the National Council of Women received messages of support from Charlotte Maxeke who expressed best wishes for the conference, from the Cape Town and East London consortiums, as well as from Isabel Sililo of Durban, the secretary of the Bantu Women's Society.

The first conference saw the election of the first national executive of the council. Delegates from the different parts of the country elected Charlotte Maxeke as the National President of the National Convention of African Women; Lily Nikiwe, of Port Elizabeth, was elected as Vice President. M. T. Soga of Queenstown was elected National Secretary. Mrs. Xala of Natal was elected as Assistant Secretary and Mrs. Mahabane of the Orange Free State was elected as treasurer. The headquarters of the National Council of Women was in Johannesburg.

³⁰⁸William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, minutes of the African Women's Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, p.1.

From its inaugural conference, the women were concerned about the autonomy of the National Council of African Women.³⁰⁹ In their deliberations in the conference the women resolved to remain an autonomous organisation with a working relationship with bodies such as the All African Convention. They also solicited the support of the Institute of Race Relations. Representing the institute, J.D. Rheinallt Jones characterised the conference as a day in which the women were writing a page in the history of South Africa.³¹⁰

In her concluding remarks, Mrs. Jones encouraged women in the conference to make the education of their children their priority. She also encouraged the conference to seek the opening of avenues of employment for Native women. These two issues set an agenda that took the National Council of African Women beyond the disagreements of its incarnation. In what she saw as scope for the interracial co-operation of women in the Union of South Africa, Mrs. Jones encouraged the NCAW to liaise with the International Council of Women on

³⁰⁹ Mrs. Moikangoa enquired about the status of the council and its relationship with the All African Convention. She wanted to know whether the National Council of African Women was controlled by the A.A.C. After deliberations by distinguished guests, Mrs. Msizi of Kimberly proposed that the conference be conducted in the vernacular and an interpreter be appointed to translate.

³¹⁰ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, National Council of African Women Minutes of the African Women's Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, SAIRR Part III.

subjects such as education, health and peace.³¹¹ In dealing with these subjects, Rheinallt Jones suggested that women should identify authorities responsible for each of the areas listed and in so doing will find a space to think clearly, to organise women and make their voice heard.³¹² The founding of the council had a profound impact on the work of the early women's movement and in race relations in South Africa during the 1930s.³¹³

At the conference was a visiting guest from the United States of America, Dr. Bunch, who in his address highlighted the role of African women as mothers and encouraged the organisation to fight for social privileges and improvement of the conditions of African Americans in the US.³¹⁴ Drawing from this cultural heritage Dr. Bunch saw culture as a way to revive respect and consciousness. Although meant to raise black consciousness, the cultural turn opened a debate about women, tradition and culture in a modern society.

³¹¹William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, National Council of African Women Minutes of the African Women's Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, SAIRR Part III.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³Mrs. Ballinger who encouraged the National Council to express the needs of the women.

³¹⁴ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the African Women's Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, National Council of African Women, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Part II.

Dr. Bunch related how Afro Americans at first tried to divorce themselves from their culture in order to be anglicised. Such a step did not in any way assert the African as an independent being. He argued that “recourse to one’s culture revives one’s self-respect and race consciousness.”³¹⁵ Here we see from its inception, questions about the traditional roles of women being discussed and notions of race, class and gender reflected in debates about Africanness, womanhood and motherhood.

On the question of race relations, women from all the provinces complained about the injustices they suffered. Mrs. Xala outlined the negative impact of the taxation system on the lives of the Africans in Natal. She reported that parents were arrested for failure to pay Poll Tax. The report also expressed concern about the impact of the system on the children who due to the parent’s inability to pay school fees were unable to attend school. The theorisations of the women extended the nationalist discourse to considerations of how the state’s official discourse impacted on everyday living.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the African Women’s Conference held at Bloemfontein from 17th -18th December 1937, National Council of African Women, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Part II.

³¹⁶ Nurse Hlale of Bloemfontien informed the conference of the probation work and pension for mothers whose children suffered from Tuberculosis.

Mrs. Kaba of East London deliberated on the effects of Native Residential Permits on women. The permits were meant to secure residence differed from the service contracts. This regulation had a negative bearing on working women who were subjected to harsh, brutal and indiscriminate treatment by the police. She complained about the brutality of the police against women in East London. She gave a detail of how the police forced the women from their sleep at 3.am demanding permits.³¹⁷

The issue of travelling passes for women was discussed in depth. Mrs. Lekgetho from Pretoria brought up the matter of travelling passes for African women under Section 12 (d), of the amended (Urban Areas) Act No. 46 and pointed out the serious implications of this part of the law. Participants in this discussion included Mrs. Demas, Mazwi, Kaba, Seseane, Mofutsanyane and Ramoshanoe.

With an elected executive in place, the conference set out a programme to prepare for the official launch of the newly elected Council. In preparation for the launch delegates were given two tasks: [1] to establish branches in their locales [2] and to think about an appropriate name for the proposed council. Proposals were to be

³¹⁷ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women held at Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Tuesday the 20th December 1938. Records of the SAIRR Part III, p.8.

sent through correspondence before the launch in December 1938.³¹⁸ To facilitate the drafting of the constitution, a committee which consisted of provincial convenors was established. Nikiwe became the convenor in the area of Port Elizabeth, Mss. Soga for Queenstown, Mrs. Bhola for Cape Town, Mrs. Msizi and Mrs Khuse for Kimberly, Mrs. Mahabane and Moikagoa, for Orange Free State, Mrs. Maxeke and Lesibe for Transvaal and Mrs. Xala and Sililo for Natal were elected.

Following the first inaugural conference of 1937, a second conference was held in Bloemfontein on the 20th December 1938.³¹⁹ The conference was graced by the presence of Reverend Z.R. Mahabane, the President General of the African National Congress. Charlotte Maxeke saw the presence of Rev. Mahabane as an indication of “cooperation” between the women’s movement and the African National Congress.”³²⁰ In doing so, Maxeke described the relations between the newly founded council and the African National Congress. Here we see attempts to establish a distinct identity for the newly found council. Concerns about the

³¹⁸ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women held at Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Tuesday the 20th December 1938. Records of the SAIRR Part III, p.3.

³¹⁹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women held at Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Tuesday the 20th December 1938. Records of the SAIRR Part III, p.2.

³²⁰ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women held at Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Tuesday the 20th December 1938. Records of the SAIRR Part III.

identity of the council were expressed and the women resolved to document the history of the council's formation. In debates about the history of the council, care was taken to reflect on the council's relationship with the All African Convention. Once again, the women demonstrated a concern about their autonomy and their relationship to the other organisations. While claiming to retain the independence of its affiliates, conference forbade the affiliates the retention of original names once in the council. The issue of retention of names was raised by Mrs. Mdlankomo, a delegate from a body known as 'Iziko le Nyembezi' from Queenstown who pleaded that they be allowed to retain their name as affiliates of the National Council of African Women under their own name. This aspect of identity politics continued to shape the history of the National Council of Women. A committee which consisted of Nikiwe, Jones, Mahabane, Maxeke, and Bhola was appointed to compile the history of the National Council of African Women.

As the deliberations continued, the women were determined to define their relationship with the Congress. The discussions reflected an urgent concern about the identity and the autonomy of the proposed council. The importance of these issues was reflected in the debate about the name of the council.

In her capacity as president, Charlotte Maxeke initiated a debate about the significance of the proposed name for the Council for Women. The conference agreed unanimously to retain the name of the council. Mrs. Msize, who was a delegate to the conference enumerated five reasons for the retention of the name. Firstly, she located the formation of the National Council of African Women in an international context. Secondly, the retention of the name would make it easy for the council to relate to existing councils of European women. The organisation was established considering that it would find common ground for co-operation with European councils. Thirdly, the name carried with it the African-ness which would be a strong connection with its geographical location, Africa. Fourthly, the idea behind an organisation of women was to enable all races domiciled in Africa to style themselves as “Africans.” Lastly, European women with good spirit were not opposed to African women using the name.

In support of Mrs. Msize, Mrs. Seseane said “as Africans were denied all our rights but not the right to call ourselves Africans.”³²¹ The debate about the significance of the name of the council marked the evolution of a discourse about race, class gender. It created an identity of the national council as a facilitator of relations across the racial spectrum. The evolution of an oppositional discourse to

³²¹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women held at Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Tuesday the 20th December 1938. Records of the SAIRR Part II, p.3.

the racialised provision of social welfare services of the state became a common thread which fostered co-operation across the racial divide. On the nationalist front, the activities of the women were increasingly drawn more closely to the Congress tradition.

Drawing a link between the activities of the women and the African National Congress, Reverend Mahabane advised National Council to join the ANC deputation which was preparing to go to Cape Town in February 1939. The purpose of this trip was to interview the Minister of Native Affairs; Government Officials and several Members of Parliament in Cape Town on matters pertaining to the Africans. The conference agreed to attach a deputation of the National Council of African Women to the African National Congress which was to go to Cape Town. The conference elected Maxeke, Lesabe, Bhola and Mahabane as representatives of the National Council of Women that joined the delegation to Cape Town.

The Resolutions of the second national conference of the National Council of African Women

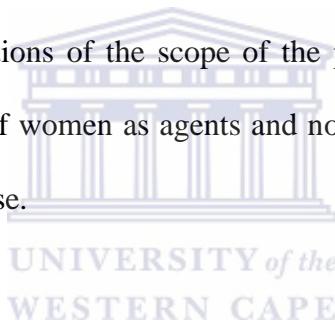
At the second national conference, The National Council of African Women resolved to be an independent body which will not be controlled by the All African Convention. It resolved to put an end to municipal beer brewing. It also set to advocate for the increase of wages in all sections of employment. It demanded compensation for people whose homes were broken down by the municipalities. It demanded the inclusion of women in Advisory Boards and aid for widows with children in areas such as Port Elizabeth.

The conference also demanded the provision of medical services in rural areas. It also called for improvement in the running of court cases. It raised the need for the use of Native interpreters for the smooth running of Native Court cases. The women demanded free compulsory education for the Africans. They also demanded that the feeding schemes for European and Coloured children should be extended to Native children in Kimberly. They also demanded the extension of the franchise to include African women.

The conference resolved to work towards the attainment of equal work and equal pay for African teachers with European teachers. It also set to work towards facilitating the training in trades for disabled persons. The conference resolved to

work towards the establishment of Juvenile Courts for African children who after committing minor crimes were cast in with all kinds of criminals in prison and then returned home worse than before. Lastly, the conference highlighted the need for hostels to be erected for delinquent children where they would be taught various kinds of work.

The National Council of African Women developed the organising concepts that defined women's participation in the development and the welfare of the Africans.³²² In their definitions of the scope of the participation of women, the council enabled the entry of women as agents and not as the result of changes in public largely male discourse.



Women organisations of all racial groups participated in debates and engaged in the construction of notions of womanhood, motherhood, femininity, girls and daughters. In interrogating these notions the women were beginning to identify the causes of their oppression as a social group. The power relations embedded in these gender categories were also brought to the fore. These formations became

³²² Charlotte Maxeke "The Progress of Native Womanhood in South Africa" in *Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A yearbook of South African Mission* compiled by Rev. Dexter Taylor D.D. (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1928), p.178.

the means of articulating the struggle of women in changing the social, political and economic conditions of the Africans, both in rural and in urban areas.³²³

In setting forth its programme of action, the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women resolved that in all schools children be supplied with milk; teachers to get a living wage, the state to provide butter for needy as for other sections of the community; and agreed to send a deputation to interview the Government on the question of old-age pensions such as those given to other sections of the community. This demonstrated the beginning of a women's movement based on the social needs of the marginalised in South Africa during the 1930s. The demand for inclusion in state subsidised feeding schemes for school children, the demand for better wages for teachers and state subsidy to the poor characterised the issues that were integrated into the women's movement in this early period.

³²³ Charlotte Maxeke delivered a number of papers in which she outlined the factors which hindered the progress of African women in the 1920s and 1930s. Records of the Transvaal Council of Hygiene in a rather disturbing discussion of diseases in the mining towns of the Rand produced an imagined identity of women, mothers and young girls alongside the discourse which sought to comprehend the causes of venereal diseases in the 1920s.

The resolutions of the conference reflect the issues threatening the lives of women in all provinces. The conference resolved that the Council of African Women be an independent body not controlled by the All African Convention.³²⁴ In so doing, the council sought an identity independent of established political formations of the time. In her closing remarks to the conference, Charlotte Maxeke said:

“I want to thank you very much and congratulate you for your excellent deliberations. This means progress in our midst and is due to the fact that we have a band of enlightened young people. This work is not for yourselves. Kill that spirit of “self” and do not live above your people, but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you. Circulate your work and distribute as much information as possible, because this is not your Council, but the Council of African Women from here right up to Egypt. Do away with that fearful animal jealousy, kill that spirit and love one another as brothers and sisters. The other animal that will tear us to pieces is tribalism. I saw the shadow of it, and it should cease to be. Stand by your motto Do unto others as ye would that they should unto you which is a golden rule.”³²⁵

After a period of illness, Charlotte Maxeke died in October 1939. She was buried in Kliptown. Her death robbed the National Council of African Women of one of its founder members. Two months after the death of Charlotte Maxeke, Miss. T.M. Soga took over as president of the Council until the third annual conference. The third Annual Conference of the National Council of African Women was held at the Abantu-Batho Hall in Bloemfontein on the 14-16th December 1939. On this occasion, T.M Soga paid tribute to the late president of the council through a brief summary of her life. She described Maxeke in the following word:

“She was a woman of great ability, vision and broad mindedness which was unique in the history of African womanhood. As a leader she fought fearlessly and indefectibly in the interest of

³²⁴ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Minutes of the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women held at Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Tuesday the 20th December 1938. Records of the SAIRR Part III.

³²⁵ Ibid.

her people. The late Mrs. Charlotte Maxeke was the first President of the Council, a woman of great ability, vision and a broadmindedness and unique in the South African womanhood. As a leader she fought fearlessly and certainly in the interest of her people. While she was in England she had visited Westminster Abbey where all the great men and women of the British Empire were buried. Africans in Africa would do well to follow this good example in veneration of their great men and women. A fund was inaugurated for the erection of a tombstone on her grave. In perpetuation of her memory, the conference established a trust fund known as the Charlotte Maxeke Scholarship for the education of well deserving African girls overseas”³²⁶



³²⁶ National Council of African Women, Minutes of the Conference held at the Bantu Abantu Hall, No.2 Location, Kimberly on the 14th -16th December 1939. Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Part III.

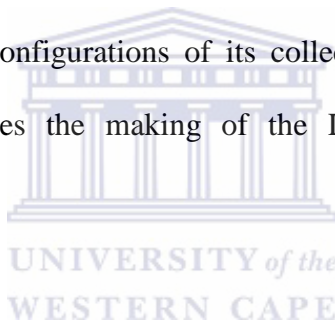
CHAPTER SIX

THE MAKING OF LIBERATION ARCHIVES AND THE POLITICS OF ARCHIVING

The silence of the Liberation Archives on the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke should not be viewed in isolation from the practice and politics of archiving. These two are the cornerstones of what I call “the anatomy of the liberation archives.” The making of Liberation Archives is a recent development in the history of the continent. Regional initiatives such as the ALUKA Project on the struggles in Southern Africa have been concerned with the preservation of historical documents on various aspects of the recent struggles for liberation in Angola; Botswana; Mozambique; Zimbabwe; Namibia and South Africa.³²⁷ The collections of the project include publications of the various nationalist liberation movements of Southern Africa, documents containing reports of colonial governments, local newspaper articles, personal papers, correspondences, core books, pamphlets, reports, speeches as well as oral interviews with those who participated in the struggles. These should serve to make liberation struggles intelligible for writers of history including academics.

³²⁷ See ALUKA The struggles for Liberation in Southern Africa, ALUKA News, Pdf Handout, ALUKA www.ALUKA.org.wam.seals.ac.za.

Apart from regional initiatives, there are also other large scale projects by which the collection and preservation of historical material about the struggle for liberation has been facilitated. Such is the project of the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare. This project makes for an interesting case study about the making of post-colonial archives. This chapter examines the processes involved in the making of the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare. It presents a critical evaluation of the ‘democratisation of the archive’ as expressed in the making of the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare. The making of liberation archives constitutes a theoretical problem reflected in the configurations of its collections. To demonstrate this problem this chapter traces the making of the Liberation Archives at the University of Fort Hare.



The making of the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare highlights paradoxes in the conception of Liberation Archives in general. Firstly, the conceptualization of the Liberation Archives *engenders* a debate about competing notions of liberation struggle (as the act of liberating as well as a discourse about the former). Secondly, caught up in its paradoxes, the concept of the liberation archives seeks to cleanse itself from the sins of the colonial archives while it embraces and rejects the practices of the latter.³²⁸ In this case we can safely argue that the

³²⁸ See Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archives* (Cape Town, David Philip, 2002).

liberation archives contrasts with colonial archives.³²⁹ Thirdly, the positioning of the liberation archives, both as an act of the liberation politics and as a practice of archiving presents an opportunity to examine the modes of intelligibility it engenders. This highlights the paradoxes and gives rise to an interesting body of scholarly work about the practice of archiving. Such scholarly literature has continued to shape debates about research in the fields of the Social Sciences on the continent.³³⁰ In the narrower South African context the liberation archives create a space to investigate the historical currency of the articulations of ‘liberation’, ‘struggle’, and freedom which are found in its collections. The collections of the Liberation Archives place the struggle for liberation at the cutting edge of debates about the possibilities for a new dawn in African history where the legacy of liberation struggles configures the production of academic knowledge.

In colonial histories the practice of archiving emerged as a tool of colonial domination where evidence of the debate about the status of Africa and Africans is prominent. This burden also haunts the status of archival holdings such as the

³²⁹ The conceptualization of the Liberation Archives distances itself from the exclusions and inclusions of the colonial archives. Its identity therefore stems from the recognition of what it is not. The negation of the colonial archive qualifies the paradox as it appropriates and rejects certain features of the colonial archives.

³³⁰ My interaction with colleagues reveal a general feeling that unless researchers and practitioners in the field begin to take their rightful place in the sphere of knowledge production, (increase publications with groundbreaking research) the field of Social Sciences is the least funded in South Africa. See B. Jewsiewicki and V.Y. Mudimbe “African’s Memories and Contemporary History of Africa,” *History and Theory*, Beiheft, 32 (1993) pp.1-11.

Liberation Archives. Characterised as such the very processes that defined the making of Liberation Archives need to be examined carefully in acknowledgement of the fact that the practise of archiving is tainted by being a colonial tool by which to facilitate the exclusion of the Africans in historical records of the past. Any attempt to configure and democratise the archives has to contend with this status.

In contrast to the erasure of the Africans in colonial archives, the ethos of the Liberation Archives seeks to democratize the archive. This meant the inclusion of the Africans in a more dignified manner, as actors in a specific historical process.³³¹ While claiming to ‘democratise’ the archive, the practices of selective inclusion and exclusion continue to haunt the archives and archival holdings. The exclusion of the life and times of leading female intellectuals such as Charlotte Maxeke are a glaring example of the dilemma of the Liberation Archives.

The paradoxes of the Liberation Archives suggest areas of investigation about the legacies of liberation struggles and the production of historical knowledge in academic history. Firstly, the paradoxes of the Liberation Archives place the conceptualisation and deployment of the notion of a “Liberation Archive” at the centre of the debate about the production of historical knowledge about liberation

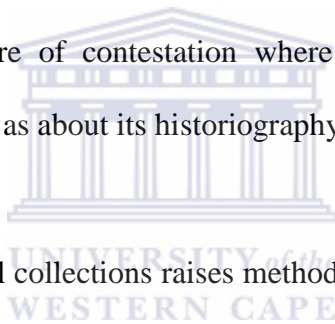
³³¹ See Nelson Mandela, African National Congress, Foreword to ANC Archives, Johannesburg, p.1 (pamphlet).

struggles on the continent. Secondly, it brings the historical currency of the paradoxes of the conceptions of “Liberation Archives” to the fore. This exercise brings the philosophy of “archives” and archival processes to the fore. Thirdly, the paradoxes of the Liberation Archives problematise the relationship between the ‘archives’ and the production of historical knowledge. However, the liberation archives hold the promise of rendering the struggle for liberation intelligible to the modes of knowledge it produces.

These paradoxes situate the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare in the context of the influences of the legacies of late colonialism in Africa. They enable an examination of the confinement of a liberation discourse in colonial knowledge systems while they go beyond that discourse to frame the knowledge systems it participates in. This leads us to the examination of the articulations of the liberation discourse as they were expressed in the literature about liberation struggles on the continent.³³²

³³² I take caution in approaching the literature of the liberation struggle given diverse socio economic and geopolitical contexts which define studies on liberation movements on the continent. See Franz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (New York, Grove Press 1963); W. Cartey & M. Kilson, *The African Reader: Independent Africa: a documentary based on the writings of political leaders and writers including Nkrumah, Fanon, Senghor, Soyinka, Chief Luthuli, Eduardo Mondlane, Kenyatta, Aime Cesaire, Patrice Lumumba* (New York, Vintage, 1970); Mahmood. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996); Tandika Mkandawire *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (CODESRIA Books Dakar in association with Zed Books London, New York, USA 2005 and in South Africa, 2005).

Articulations of liberation in the collections of the liberation struggle establish an analytical framework in terms of which to analyse the social relations, subjectivity and power relations embedded in both the conception and the deployment of the Liberation Archives. Such an analysis enables an examination of the nexus of power-knowledge relations.³³³ When closely examined the formulations of the Liberation Archives remain a bizarre dislocation of its antecedent. Given this paradox, the archives become a point at which power and knowledge intersects. The archives map a sphere of contestation where ideas about the liberation struggle as an event as well as about its historiography occur.



The ordering of the archival collections raises methodological questions about the ways in which the past is recorded and interpreted. Superficially, it evokes the theory/practice dilemma. However, the processes involved in the making of the Liberation Archives reveal tension between the liberation struggle as an event and the modes of knowledge in which the struggle for liberation has been rendered intelligible to the public discourse of redress and nation building in post-apartheid South Africa. In this case, a number of studies on the struggle for liberation have relied heavily on the use of oral interviews. These have resulted in the emergence of volumes and volumes of oral interview transcripts deposited in specific

³³³ See K. Hoskin, 'Foucault under examination' in S. J. Ball, *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, (London & New York, 1990).

designated spaces perceived to have close relations with the struggle for liberation.³³⁴

Research activities on the liberation struggle in South Africa have been driven by the desire to preserve the legacy of the struggle for liberation as an aspect of the national heritage in the new democratic South Africa. In this way the Liberation Archives reflects the ways in which a colonial notion of an archive was appropriated and deployed. The question then becomes: can Africa expect new and improved scholarship in contemporary African History even as it continues to appropriate and employ colonial modes of knowing and expression?

The above question calls for a close examination of the ethos of the Liberation Archives. Explaining the strategic choice of the University of Fort Hare as repository of the Liberation Archives at the official launch of the archives the then president of the Republic of South Africa, Dr. Nelson Mandela said,

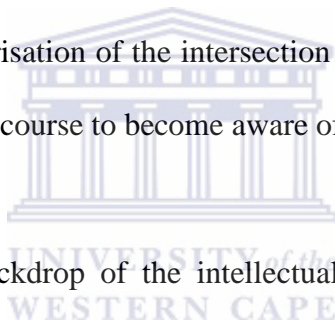
“the university of Fort Hare, founded in 1916 and situated in Alice, is the oldest historically black university in Southern and Eastern Africa.”³³⁵ He continued to state that since its inception the University of Fort Hare has been unyielding in its attempt to champion black advancement. Its lecture halls proved to be fertile ground for progressive thought and democratic ideals producing leaders such as O.R. Tambo and Robert Mugabe.”³³⁶

³³⁴ The Robben Island Mayibuye Museum and the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare

³³⁵ Nelson Mandela, African National Congress, Foreword to ANC Archives, Johannesburg, p.1 (pamphlet).

³³⁶ Ibid.

Dr. Mandela's formulation of the choices made when Fort Hare was identified as a repository of the Liberation Archives highlights the dilemma of the legacies of liberation struggles. While premised on the historical link between institutions associated with the development of modern politics, the backdrop of colonial oppression continues to raise its head behind the discourse about the advancement of the Africans.³³⁷ The end result of this exercise has been the conflation of the two. The intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke help us to distinguish between different oppressive regimes of power which were closely associated with colonialism. Her theorisation of the intersection of tradition and colonialism challenge the nationalist discourse to become aware of its own limitations.



When read against the backdrop of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke, the configuring of the Liberation Archives reflects the dilemma of an uneasy relationship between the tone of the struggle for liberation and her theorisations of the collusive relationship between tradition and colonialism in facilitating gender inequality. Technically, the silence of the Liberation Archives on Charlotte Maxeke's intellectual contributions demonstrates how the collections found in the Liberation Archives continue to establish the legitimacy of the liberation struggle by using the very same kind of selectivity found in colonial

³³⁷ The Formulations of the Archive, in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover Greame Reid and Razia Saleh in *Refiguring The Archive* have sparked my interest in the ways in which the Liberation Archives of the University of Fort Hare have been figured. See Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archives* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2002).

archives.³³⁸ Still in contrast with such techniques of archiving, the contents of the collections, especially the OR Tambo papers although they lack in content on Charlotte Maxeke, highlight the importance of the WOMAN QUESTION in debates about the struggle for liberation in the 1970s and 1980s. These paradoxes situate the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare in the midst of broader discourses of colonial legacies and liberation struggles on the continent.³³⁹

Scholarships on liberation struggles in the continent is characterized by the dichotomies of colonial/post-colonial, liberation/oppression, citizens/subjects, and democracy/ autocracy. Regardless of the rich conceptual formulations, a limitation of the current scholarships on colonial legacies and liberation movements lies in the inability to transcend these dichotomised conceptual formulations which continue to balkanize Africa. By these, I refer to the strong territorial demarcations by which the struggles for liberation follow the mapping of Africa in colonial terms. However, new histories are being forged as collections of liberation archive capture the disruptions of colonial borders where migration patterns of activists coupled the circulation of ideas about liberation. In

³³⁸ See Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archives* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2002).

³³⁹ See Franz Fanon *The wretched of the earth* .(New York, Groove Press, 1963); W. Cartey & M. Kilson, *The African Reader: Independent Africa: a documentary based on the writings of political leaders and writers including Nkrumah, Fanon, Senghor, Soyinka, Chief Luthuli, Eduardo Mondlane, Kenyatta, Aime Cesaire, Patrice Lumumba* (New York, Vintage, 1970); Mahmood. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996); T. Mkandawire *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (CODESRIA Books Dakar in association with Zed Books London, New York, USA 2005 and in South Africa, 2005).

following this trend the collection of the Liberation Archives articulate the concepts that define the ethos of liberation struggles and liberation movements.³⁴⁰

The collections in the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare allow for an engaged scholarship against various forms of injustices. Establishing the basis for an engaged scholarship on the legacies of late colonialism Mamdani has demonstrated that apartheid was not unique to South Africa but was instead, a generic form of colonialism on the continent. Mamdani's formulation of apartheid's exceptionalism has succeeded in characterising how the apartheid state's policies created its citizens and its subjects. However, in the absence of hegemony in the apartheid state, the ruler and the ruled remained in antagonistic power relations. The relationship between the ruler and the ruled defined much of the liberation discourse as it continued to establish the illegitimacy of the apartheid state. The collections of the Liberation archives amply testify to the truth of Mamdani's contentions.

In the broader context of practical politics and discussions of problems of Africa there are a number of observations which need to be made with regard to Mamdani's formulation of South Africa's exceptionalism. He argues that "the modernist and the communitarian approaches to the debate about the problems of

³⁴⁰ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996).

Africa both work in analogies and are unable to come to grips with a historically specific reality.”³⁴¹

In this formulation of the African condition, Mamdani invokes a long-standing debate among the French philosophers regarding the nature of dialectical thinking. In his *Search for a Method*, Jean Paul Sartre has discussed the nature of dialectical reason in which he asserts that “the material aspect of human existence, the movement from individual action to group activity and from group activity to history needs to be taken into consideration.”³⁴²

The packaging of the actions of the struggling masses on the continent in clearly delineated areas from material conditions of an individual, group action and group history which characterizes dialectical thinking defines much of the present scholarship on liberation struggles on the African continent. The biographies of liberation movements on the continent are tainted with histories and the material conditions of the founding members in the form of individual biographies. The group activities and group histories are then shared and constitute the history of a particular liberation movement.

³⁴¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996), p.11.

³⁴² See Jean Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, translated from French and with introduction by Hazel E. Barnes (New York, Vintage Books, 1968).

The history produced then becomes the rallying point tracing the trajectories and identities of liberation movements.

In outlining the nature, the possibilities and the limitations of human reason Sartre observed that the events of history may be interpreted as a dialectical process wherein existing contradictions give rise to a new synthesis which surpasses them.³⁴³ This means that the conditions that permitted the deployment of certain strategies in the formation of a particular liberation movement may have changed. Present scholarship on the African continent which as exemplified in Mamdani's formulations of South Africa's exceptionalism can be strengthened when it realizes the excesses of formulations by the structures of power in contemporary Africa, and not only in empiricist terms but also at the very locus of intellectual debate.³⁴⁴ Although formulated with the intention to demonstrate the compatibility of apartheid as generic form of colonial state in Africa Mamdani's interpretation of the apartheid discourse does not adequately address the contradictions in the movements and the forces that gave rise to the African condition of pre and post-apartheid South Africa.

³⁴³ See Jean Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, translated from French and with introduction by Hazel E. Barnes (New York, Vintage Books, 1968).

³⁴⁴ Mamdani's empiristic approach in arguing a valid point about the need for an integrated scholarship on Africa weakens the merit of the argument

When viewed against the collections of the Liberation Archives Mahmood Mamdani's formulation of South Africa's exceptionalism remains unsubstantiated.³⁴⁵ In trying to bridge the gap between Mamdani's formulation of South Africa's exceptionalism and the archives I ask: How does the conception of the Liberation Archives relate to the historical processes which defined the actions of the Africans in their quest for liberation not only in South Africa, but on the continent?

The answer to the above question awaits a critical evaluation of how the struggles for liberation have been archived in the ALUKA project on *The Struggle for Freedom in Southern Africa*. The project demonstrates how liberation struggles are brought to intelligibility in the social economic and political arenas to foster cooperation in the region. The composition of the advisory board on the preservation of documents of the liberation struggles in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe draws largely from leading

³⁴⁵ The notion of exceptionalism embraces the legacy of apartheid as it sought to colonise and oppress non White populations in South Africa. It does not explain the experiences of the combatants and political activists who fled the South Africa in search for better military training, improved educational facilities to better conceptualise and interpret social reality and develop a revolutionary theory for the advancement of the struggle for liberation. The experiences of combatants and political activists who fled South Africa in the 1950s demonstrate the extent to which the state sought to alienate the blacks from relating with sister African states on the continent. It was during their time in exile that the activists started to view the reality of liberation outside the borders of South Africa.

scholars, activists and public intellectuals.³⁴⁶ The collections of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa participate in an ongoing debate and in the authentication of the archives of liberation. The documentation of struggles for liberation in Southern Africa signals a new dawn in the study of history. It begins to critique the archival practices of the colonial order that have balkanised the continent. However, just like its predecessor, the colonial archive the modes of knowledge the liberation archives warrant close scrutiny.

Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover Greame Reid and Razia Saleh in *Refiguring the Archive* have made an important contribution to interrogating the processes involved in the making of the archive.³⁴⁷ In activities ranging from collecting and assembling of items into archival processes, archival collections continue to problematise liberation struggles as its foundational category.

In a period of high technological innovation, the process of digitization defines one of the key technical aspects in the making of archives today. After a careful examination of the definition of the processes involved in the making of the archives, I was tempted to conclude that the archive does not exist outside the

³⁴⁶ ALUKA The struggle for Liberation in Southern Africa. Online PDF Handout downloaded on 12/05.2010

³⁴⁷ See C. Hamilton et al *Refiguring the Archives* (Cape Town, David Philip, 2002).

specific contexts and processes which engender them. On the contrary, when read against the processes that facilitate the inclusion and exclusion of women the conceptualization of the Liberation Archives presents a fertile ground for investigating the ways in which ‘liberation and freedom’ were conceptualized as means by which to emancipate the Africans from various forms of oppression.

The formulations of freedom archived in messages of support conveyed by Africans in different liberation movements on the continent reveal the manner in which the movements functioned beyond the official geographical boundaries of colonial states. Here, the archives offer space for renewed investigation and explication. Archives bear unique features both as a tool and as a means of expression.³⁴⁸



Achille Mbembe, in his essay “*The Power of the Archive and its Limits*”, has defined the connotations of the archives both in the physical sense and metaphorically. According to him, the archive refers to a building which is a symbol of a public institution and to *an organ of the state*. Secondly, archives are

³⁴⁸ The archives I argue emerged in colonial Africa as one of the sites in which the illegitimacy of Africa and Africans was figured. It was one of the tools of colonial domination. Characterised as such the very notion of an archive speaks to an aspect of colonial domination which continues to delineate Africa as a unit of analysis. The only difference now is that the processes involved in the making of the archives at present seek to democratize the archive. This means an inclusion of the Africans in a more dignified manner and as actors in specific historical processes. The struggles for liberation defined much of the actions of the Africans on the continent in the twentieth century.

associated with collections of documents found in the physical space of a building.³⁴⁹ In this formulation, Mbembe asserts that “the archive derives power from an *entanglement* of documents in an architectural building.”³⁵⁰ When examined closely, the “Liberation Archives” do bear the features outlined by Achille Mbembe. Firstly, by virtue of having been deposited at the University of Fort Hare, the archives denote a physical space associated with the struggle for liberation. Secondly, they claim the physical space of Fort Hare as a site of liberation struggle. It is a site which symbolises the ferment of ideas about the emancipation of the Africans on the continent.³⁵¹ In his first characterization of the archive, Mbembe has warned against the instrumentalisation of the archive as an organ of the state. This is a critical reflection on the choice of Fort Hare as a suitable site to house the documents relating to various aspects of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

Let us take Mbembe’s argument forward by suggesting that it is in *disentangling* the documents from their physical spaces that the histories they bear become intelligible. I deliberately take a move from the visible to an invisible site of

³⁴⁹ Achille Mbembe “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” in Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archives*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 2002), p.19.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ In 2007, I approached the Mayibuye Archives in an attempt to complete one of my chapters on aspects of the liberation struggle. I was shocked at the news of the unavailability of the ANC documents which, according to the archivist, Simphiwe Yeko were closed to allow the archival process transferring some documents from Mayibuye Archives to Fort Hare.

theorisation to investigate how the collections held in the Liberation Archive have configured the generation of ideas about liberation in the different stages of the struggle, not only in South Africa, but taking the exchange of ideas about events and struggles in different parts of the continent into consideration. Although defined in its recent history, collections found in the archive of the Liberation Struggle relate not only to notions of liberation in South Africa, but resonate with the broader context of Africa's struggles in the distant past of the colonial era.³⁵²

The physical space of Fort Hare characterizes the ferment of progressive thought and democratic ideas not only in South African but in the African continent. As such, it engages in a dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized in colonial/apartheid context. Viewed in this context, the Liberation Archives does not preserve documents relating to South Africa's unique and exceptional struggle for liberation in the colonial era, but speaks against 'exceptionalism'.

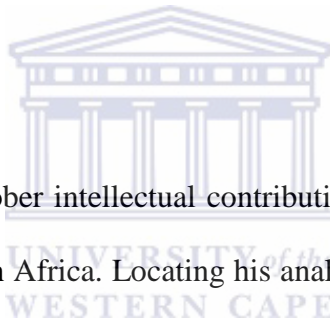
³⁵² In this area I refer specifically to collections such as the copies of the Christian Express. The magazine was a Christian publication which covered a range of issues on Christianity and missionary initiatives in different parts of the world, Asia, China, Africa, America and Pacific Islands. The publications speak to the colonial period when religion was beginning to make inroads in areas which were previously unknown to the colonialists. The missionaries, unlike their colonial masters took an interest even in the language and were instrumental in the establishment of various associations aimed at the study of various aspects of African languages. The magazine has volumes of publications on various aspects of what was then called, Kaffir Orthography which specific focus on the translation of the Scriptures into Isi Xhosa. See an article by the Right Reverend, The Bishop of St. John's "*Some suggestions for improved Kaffir Orthography*" in the Christian Express, Lovedale, South Africa, January 1, 1881, p.13.

The first wave of independence became a major impetus for the emergence of the nationalist historiography which celebrated the achievements of the newly independent states in Africa. This was marked by a proliferation of political biographies and profiles of leading statesmen such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.³⁵³ These activities motivated participants in the Southern regions who were in bitter struggles against the colonial forces of Ian Smith in Rhodesia, the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique and the Apartheid government in South Africa.

The collections of the Liberation Archives not only carry information regarding the political profiles of the newly independent states of Africa, but also demonstrate the nature of the struggle for liberation. The dual operations of the discourses of the liberation struggle gave rise to a new condition which surpasses the conceptualizations of South African exceptionalism and begins to recognize the need for an engaged scholarship on legacies of colonialism as well as the struggles for liberation. The collections bear testimony to the material conditions which determined kinds of human interactions and the cultural capital of the African states which strengthened the activists both in exile and in the internal structures of the banned movements in South Africa and anywhere else on the

³⁵³ Kwame Nkrumah, *Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah* (London, Nelson, 1967).

continent.³⁵⁴ The Liberation Archives at Fort Hare highlight the material conditions, the generation of ideas about the liberation of the oppressed, not only in South Africa but the continent at large.³⁵⁵ As the last colony to attain independence, South Africa drew heavily on the experiences of her sister African states involved in bitter struggles against colonial domination. Given the articulations of the liberation discourse found in the Liberation Archives one seizes the opportunity presented to further examine the extent to which the discourse of liberation features in the historiography of liberation struggles on the continent.



Franz Fanon has made a sober intellectual contribution to the scholarship on the process of decolonization in Africa. Locating his analysis in the Algerian struggle for liberation Fanon has characterised decolonization as a historical process which cannot yield meaning in itself but in the exact measure that we can discern from it the movements which gave it historical form and content.³⁵⁶ In other words any attempt to understand the history of liberation struggle should begin with an acknowledgement of the different movements which gave the struggles for

³⁵⁴ The influences of the independent African states on the culture and the conduct of liberation movements could be observed in the dress codes. I speak as a participant observer in this respect. In the 1980s we witnessed increasingly the influence of Ghana on the material culture of Africans in South Africa. What became known as “Isigana” which defined a traditional outfit of the liberated Africans was appropriated even in rural villages where I grew up. People were increasingly identifying with Africa not as an exceptional territory, but in acknowledgement and in affirmation of a common identity, as Africans.

³⁵⁵ See Simons Collection, Ray Alexander correspondence between 1950s-1990s.

³⁵⁶ Franz Fanon *The wretched of the earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963).

liberation content and meaning. From this vintage point the liberation archives highlight the role played by various organizations, political formations, religious fraternity, individuals and members in organized political and apolitical formations in the struggle against apartheid. In examining the archives one observes a resuscitation of the debate about the role of intellectuals in liberation movements. The debate preoccupied leading intellectuals on the continent in the 1960s.³⁵⁷

The archives of the liberation struggle demonstrate that there was a growth of intellectual activity which brought African intellectuals together across the borders of colonial domination together in pursuance of ideas regarding the emancipation of the continent from the bondage of various forms of domination long before the 1960s. The sources on the debate about the contributions of leading African intellectuals of the twentieth century have been found in historical papers and magazines found in the Howard Pim Library Section of the University of Fort Hare. The figuring of the Howard Pim Library, which is the rare books

³⁵⁷ The literature on intellectuals and their role in liberation struggles on the continent is vast. To illustrate this point, I present few examples of the literature consulted to frame the debate. See Franz Fanon *The wretched of the earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963); W. Cartey & M. Kilson *The African Reader: Independent Africa: a documentary based on the writings of political leaders and writers including Nkrumah, Fanon, Senghor, Soyinka, Chief Luthuli, Eduardo Mondlane, Kenyatta, Aime Cesaire, Patrice Lumumba* (New York, Vintage 1970); R. Suttner "The character and formation of Intellectuals within the ANC led South African Liberation Movement" in T. Mkandawire *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (CODESRIA Books Dakar in association with Zed Books London, New York, USA 2005 and in South Africa, 2005)

section of the University Library at Fort Hare, reflects the intersection of colonial records and those of the liberation struggles.

Archival holdings in the form of articles published in magazines indicate the enormous pressure intellectuals exerted in the public life of colonial states in the late 1800s up until the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁵⁸ The names of leading intellectuals of the time such as those of John Knox Bokwe, Tiyo Soga, John Tengo Jabavu, Phambani Mzimba, Charlotte Maxeke, Z.K. Mathews Selby Msimang and A.B. Xuma were among those vocal on matters pertaining to the rights to property, the vote, the provision of basic amenities such as housing, schools and health care to the non-Europeans sections of the population of the Union of South Africa. Seen in this manner, the intellectual project of these leading scholars sought to achieve the inclusion of the Africans as citizens and not just subjects of colonial state.

In trying to render the non-Europeans intelligible to the official discourse of the colonial state of the newly formed union government, the educated elite appropriated the language of the state.³⁵⁹ It was in these appropriations, I suspect,

³⁵⁸ The Christian Express was a journal of missionary news and Christian Work which was printed in Lovedale in the 1800s.

³⁵⁹ The African intellectuals are generally known for fluency in English, which was the symbol of the British imperial domination. By virtue of their association, the educated elite had to adapt to

that their role and allegiance was questioned and debated in the circles of the liberation movements. The questioning of the allegiance of the educated elite came not only in the ranks of the illiterate non-European population in liberation movements, but from the colonialists who in the late 1800s demonstrated discomfort about the state of the educated elites in the union.³⁶⁰ The intellectual traditions of the educated continued to move between two extreme positions. On the one hand, they sought to represent and make the masses intelligible to official discourse while on the other hand; their loyalty remained questionable not only in the eyes of the officials, but also of the masses they represented. It is this contrast which makes the intellectual traditions of the early African elite a viable area of research. The preservation and examination of documents on these aspects of the struggle in South Africa has just begun.

The official launch of the Liberation Archives was the culmination of a long period of consultation between different parties involved in the conception of the archives. The making of the archives of liberation began with an inquiry into the processes and general practice of archiving. It began with an acknowledgement of the distortions in current archival holdings which according to the then president

two worlds, the civilized and non-civilized world of the oppressed majority of Non-European populations.

³⁶⁰ The case of the Rev. P.J. Mzimba received public attention as an indictment of the missionary enterprise of converting the heathen. See, *The Christian Express: A journal of Missionary News and Christian Work*, Lovedale: South Africa, March, 7, 1899, vol. xxix.

of South Africa Nelson Mandela “condemned South Africa’s African inhabitants to historical obscurity.”³⁶¹ In its very conception, the Liberation Archives were set to reverse the myths and distortions of archival records preserved in national repositories.

An interesting turn occurred in Dr. Mandela’s formulation of the purpose of the ANC archive as he outlined three areas which he thought were relevant to the study of the work of the ANC and its contribution to the struggle for liberation. Firstly, he stated that the study of the work of the African National Congress stemmed from the ANC’s intrinsic understanding of the nature of South African society. Secondly, it stemmed from the transition that the country experienced. Thirdly, it was futuristic in its approach and stemmed from an anticipation of ‘what the future may hold.’³⁶² These three formed the core principles of the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare.

It was against the background of these principles that the then president of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, together with Professor Sibusiso Bengu, the then vice chancellor of the University of Fort Hare signed an agreement in October 1992 setting forth the process which led to the

³⁶¹ Nelson Mandela, African National Congress, Foreword to ANC Archives, Johannesburg, (pamphlet), p1

³⁶² Ibid.

establishment of the Liberation Archives at the University of Fort Hare.³⁶³ Given this background issues relating to intellectual autonomy may be further explored when examining the principles that guided the making of the archives of liberation struggle at Fort Hare.

The three principles set by the liberation movement in its characterization of the objectives of the archives resuscitate the debate about academic autonomy. How does an institution of higher learning relate to historical processes that deal with a distant past in the present futuristic formulations encapsulated in the underlying principles of the Liberation Archives?

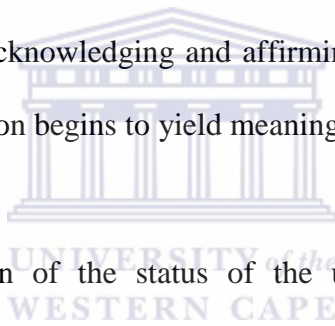


On the very day of the official launch of the archives, the then vice chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, Professor S. Bengu, allayed fears about the academic autonomy of an institution of higher learning when he acknowledged the relevance of Fort Hare as historically the oldest university of the Africans in East central and Southern Africa. As such, he stated “the University of Fort Hare played a significant role in nurturing the independence movement on the subcontinent.”³⁶⁴ In this conception of the significance of Fort Hare, the vice chancellor claimed the autonomy and the integrity of Fort Hare as a credible

³⁶³Nelson Mandela, African National Congress, Foreword to ANC Archives, Johannesburg, (pamphlet), p.1

³⁶⁴ African National Congress, *Message from the Vice Chancellor*, ANC Archives, Johannesburg (Pamphlet),p.4

academic institution of higher learning which exceeded the boundaries of the apartheid state's exceptionalism and contributed to the growth of independence movement on the continent. Directly linking the independence movement with the physical space of Fort Hare, the vice chancellor enumerated distinguished leaders such as Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, O.R. Tambo, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Barney Pityana, all distinguished alumni of the University of Fort Hare.³⁶⁵ Such a characterization demonstrates the relevance of Fanon's formulation of the need to recognise all contributions to the struggle for liberation. It is indeed in acknowledging and affirming diverse historical players that the struggle for liberation begins to yield meaning.



It was the characterization of the status of the university that defined the interpretation of the Liberation Archives housed at the basement of the Library of the University of Fort Hare. The making of the archives involved consultation with various institutions which housed various holdings of the documents related to the liberation struggle. It involved an assessment of the historical depth and the contents of documents. During this process, documents which were deemed relevant were then *closed* to the public.

³⁶⁵ African National Congress, *Message from the Vice Chancellor*, ANC Archives, Johannesburg (Pamphlet).

As a researcher who has conducted research on various archival holdings and collections of the liberation movements such as the African National Congress, I have witnessed the closure of some of the ANC documents at the Robben Island Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape in 2006-7. This was a step in the making of the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare. During this period, the proposed closure and removal of sections of the collections from the Mayibuye Archives to Fort Hare raised concerns among researchers based in the Western Cape. The proposed removal of specific collections brought uncertainty about the future of the Robben Island Mayibuye Archives. Questions ranged from fears of witnessing the demise of an institution which had been home to most of the exiled leadership of the liberation movements who found home “at the bush university” on their first return to South Africa in the 1990s. On the other hand, was the University of Fort Hare now beginning to stake its claim in the legacy of the liberation struggle as the hot bed of intellectual activities that shaped the form and the content of liberation struggles in the subcontinent at the turn of the twentieth century? In reflecting on the steps towards the making of the archives of the liberation struggle I draw attention to the power of the physical space of the repository of archival holdings as and its symbolism. In parting with some of the documents which were at our disposal in the Western Cape there was a general feeling of uncertainty to what would remain after the closure of the ANC collections. This suggests that archival documents need to be disentangled from

their physical spaces if they are to yield meaning. My fears as to what was left of the archives of the liberation struggle after the window period were allayed when I visited the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare towards the end of 2007. I found in the collections, the very same documents I had used before they were closed at the University of the Western Cape.

The significance of the removal of some of the ANC collections from the physical space of a “bush university” clearly had an impact on the researchers who were still busy working on these archives. Although removed from one place to another, the discourse of the struggle for liberation did not change. It is at this level that competing discourses of the struggle were articulated beyond their immediate environment, in exile, inside the country, in organizational archives and public archives. In thinking about the processing of documents of liberation movements such as the African National Congress for archival processes one has observed notions of liberation struggle implicitly/explicitly carried through ‘the Archives of the Liberation Struggle.’

Explicitly, the Archive of the Liberation Struggle denotes the collections of individuals, organizations and movements which gave the liberation struggle a historical content and meaning. Implicit in the documents housed at the section of the Howard Pim Library which is located at the basement of the University of

Fort Hare are competing discourses of the struggle for liberation. The discourses find voice in collections such as the Documents of the Women's Section of the African National Congress and The Papers of O.R. Tambo.

I have limited my quest to these two collections because of the manner in which they articulate competing discourses of the struggle for liberation. The debate about the autonomy of the Women's Section of the African National Congress has stimulated the debate about gender which gave rise to gender sensitive programmes in the African National Congress. The change in the discourse of the liberation struggle is observable in the personal correspondence of O.R. Tambo.

The change in the texture of the discourse found in the documents of the Women's section of the African National Congress and in the O.R. Tambo papers highlight the intensity of the debate about the autonomy of the Women's League of the African National Congress. Although archived within the nationalist frame, the debate about the autonomy of the Women's League did not occur in isolation from the struggles waged by the various women groups who worked independently of the ANC Women's League, even if some in collaboration with the League in advancing the struggle for improved social condition of women of all races in South Africa.

Within the African National Congress the debate occupied the structures of the exiled movement, as well as the underground structures that were resuscitated inside the country in the 1970s. The Women's groups in universities such as the Witwatersrand and UCT and community projects such as the adult literacy projects, women's theatre Imfuduko in Crossroads emerged as important units within which contact was made with women inside the country. The reading of this aspect of the struggle for liberation has been made possible by the collections of the Black Sash found in the Archives Manuscripts and Centre of African Studies of the University of Cape Town.³⁶⁶ The personal papers of Jack and Ray Alexander are in close dialogue with the documents of the Black Sash on the activities of the various women's groups that were involved in a struggle to improve the conditions of the women in the Western Cape during the 1970s.

The dialogue about the autonomy of the Women's Section within the liberation movement highlights the gendered nature of the liberation struggle. The dialogue of the Women's Section with the then President of the African National Congress, Oliver Reginald Tambo, demonstrates that archival holdings are not only about records of what happened and the physical spaces and locations of events in the liberation struggle, but also about the generation of ideas and the changes brought about by the movements which gave the struggle for liberation in South Africa

³⁶⁶ UCT Library, Manuscripts and Archives, Centre for African Studies, Ray Simons Collection, ANC Women's League General Correspondence 1953-1991 letter dated 8 July 1954, BC 1081.

historical form and content. In this case, the Women's Section of the African National Congress emerged as one of the movements which gave the struggle for liberation in South Africa historical content as it informed the change in the discourse of liberation in a manner which began to take women seriously.

The change from a male centered movement to one that embraced women as a force in the movement stemmed from the activities of women themselves. It did not emerge from the generosity of leaders, but it was a direct consequence of the struggles waged by women in their day to day activities.

Sadly, the authoritative studies on the history of nationalist movements often obscure the contributions of women leaders such as Charlotte Maxeke in those movements.³⁶⁷ The historiography of the struggles waged by the Africans against various forms of domination does not engage with the question of how organisations in the liberation movements viewed unequal gender power relations. The failure of the scholarship to highlight the manner in which gender domination served as a counter revolutionary tendency when left unexplored will continue to shape past, present and future scholarship on legacies of liberation struggles on the continent. However, it took dedicated women such as Maxeke, Nikiwe, Soga, Bhola, Msizi, Khuse, Mahabane, Moikagoa, Lesibe, Xala and Sililo to introduce

³⁶⁷ Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Bantu Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984).

women as an unstoppable force within the official structures of the organizations that fought for the rights of the Africans in the twentieth century.

The Liberation Archives at Fort Hare, the Archives of the African National Congress, houses historical papers of the African National Congress. Within the collections of the African National Congress I have found the personal papers of Lionel Foreman, one of the founding members of the Communist Party of South Africa.³⁶⁸ The collection sheds light on the formative years of the Communist Party of South Africa, the political activities of women in the Communist Party of South Africa and its debates of the National Question in the 1920s. The collections consulted at the ANC Archives mainly date back to the period between the 1950s and 1960s.

The archives also house the Oliver Tambo Papers. The papers consist of the correspondence between the Women's Section of the African National Congress in Lusaka and the office of Oliver Tambo, who was the president of the African National Congress.³⁶⁹ The correspondence sheds light on how women raised concerns about their liberties within the movement. This included questioning the decision-making processes within the movement. One of the key themes which emerged from these collections was the question about the autonomy of the

³⁶⁸ University of Fort Hare Library, Liberation Archives, Lionel Foreman Papers

³⁶⁹ University of Fort Hare Library, Liberation Archives, OR Tambo Papers

women's section. This issue emerged in the correspondence between the women and the National Working Committee of the ANC where women complained about the lack of consultation and demanded that practical steps be taken to acknowledge and respect the autonomy of the women in the movement.³⁷⁰ In quite a succinct presentation, the women made three areas of intervention in the functioning of the NWC and the women in the liberation movement. Firstly, they demanded an urgent and a clear definition of the role and the scope of the function and the power of the women's section. This was informed by the conviction that the section was being dictated to. Contrary to the NWC's dictation, the women believed that the NWC's role was to make suggestions to the women's section. Secondly, they demanded that matters concerning women be handled by the Women's Secretariat itself and all correspondence and all information regarding women should be directed to the Women's Secretariat. Thirdly, they demanded freedom to choose their own representatives to attend international conferences as opposed to what they perceived as the NWC's imposed candidates.

Subsequent to the recommendations made by women, the then Secretary General of the African National Congress, Alfred Nzo responded and informed the women that a unanimous decision of the joint meeting of the National Working

³⁷⁰ University of Fort Hare Library, Liberation Archives, OR Tambo Papers, Women's Section Correspondence, letter dated 11th June, 1975.

Committee and the Lusaka Committee of the Women's Section decided it would be inconvenient for a new representative to replace the candidate it had identified to attend the conference.³⁷¹ These instances reveal how women struggled for gender equality within the movement and calls for further study.

This chapter has benefited from material found in the South African Historical Archives which is located at the William Cullen Library of the University of Witwatersrand. The archival collections of the South African Historical Archives consist of collections which include (SFJ) Struggle for Justice Programme. The programme is dedicated to preserving and creating access to collections of records that document the struggle against apartheid.³⁷² The records of the ANC's struggle against apartheid are archived in this programme. The records of the Women's Section of the African National Congress initiate intense debates about the nature of the future of South Africa and the position of women. In the debates that occupied the Women's section of the African National Congress, some of the earlier conceptions of women were now refined as women were preparing for "the seizure" of power. The records include minutes and reports of the Second Consultative Conference of the Women's Section of the African National

³⁷¹ University of Fort Hare Library, Liberation Archives, OR Tambo Papers, Women's Section Correspondence, letter dated 12th June, 1975.

³⁷² William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, South African Historical Archives, SAHA Guidebook:2006 Edition,p.1.

Congress which was held in Luanda in Angola in 1987.³⁷³ The conference opened a platform for the participation of women in planning the future of South Africa. This marked a drastic change in the tone of the Women's Section to that of the earlier period when women defined themselves as women in support of the struggle. Women were now demanding their own share in the future South Africa. This highlights the dilemma of an intellectual project in the midst of the liberation movement's quest for liberation, an on-going struggle which is defined by continued attempts of women to confront various forms of domination and oppression in the 21st century.³⁷⁴

Apart from the Records of the ANC Archives, the study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke has benefitted from the archival collections of various institutions in South Africa. The Historical Papers of the William Cullen Library of the University of the Witwatersrand is home to the records of the South African Institute of Race Relations. The records of the Bantu European Council constitute a major part of the collections of the South African Institute of Race Relations. These records have provided information about the activities of the

³⁷³ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, South African Historical Archives, Minutes of the Second Consultative Conference of the Women's Section of the African National Congress, Luanda, Angola, 1987 found in the records of the Women's Section of the African National Congress.

³⁷⁴ bell hooks encapsulate the ethos of this kind of work among the black women intellectuals in the United States of America bell hooks, "Black Women Intellectuals" in bell hooks & Cornel West, *Breaking Bread*, (Boston: South End Press, 1991), p.148.

Joint Councils of Europeans and Africans in the Union of South Africa in which Charlotte Maxeke participated in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷⁵ The material provided a background against which the trajectory of Charlotte Maxeke, her study overseas, her return and her role in establishing one of the first training institutes for Africans in the Transvaal, the Wilberforce Institute.

The records also shed light on Charlotte Maxeke's personal correspondences with A.B. Xuma, Rheinallt Jones, the conferences she attended and published papers on African women in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷⁶ A hand-written letter of Charlotte Maxeke was recovered from the archive that gave a sense of where she lived just before she died in 1939. From these archives, I have also managed to locate her inputs to the debate about the Native Problem in the Union of South Africa. Her intellectual inputs to the debate were published in 1928 and in 1930 respectively.

In the Historical Papers of the William Cullen Library I also managed to access the personal papers of A.B. Xuma and Silas Modiri Molema.³⁷⁷ The two captured some of the early attempts of the African intellectuals at conception and analysis of the Native Question. In the midst of leading African intellectuals Charlotte

³⁷⁵ The records included press articles on the Native Opinion. The articles consisted of various contributors to the debates about the Native Question.

³⁷⁶ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, SIRR Records

³⁷⁷ A.B. Xuma and Silas Modiri Molema Papers located at the Historical Papers of the William Cullen Library at the University of Witwatersrand.

Maxeke emerged as an authoritative voice and a confirmation of the intellectual capabilities of African women who made an impact in discussions about the plight of the Africans in South Africa. The collection enabled an examination of the trajectories of Charlotte Maxeke in the various spaces she occupied until her death in 1939.

Long after Maxeke's death, the legacy of active intellectual debates on various aspects concerning women and their position in society continued in the circles of the Women's Sections of the African National Congress. This aspect of the liberation discourse is encapsulated in the historical papers of Ray and Jack Simons found in the manuscripts section of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town. The collection covered a number of themes related to women and the struggle for liberation in South Africa.³⁷⁸ The themes included an investigation into the legal status of women in South Africa under apartheid. Apart from the analysis of the legal status of women in South Africa, the collection also carried personal correspondence of Ray Alexander and women in different parts of the world. This has brought an internationalist dimension to the investigation of the feminist discourse of the liberation of women.

³⁷⁸ Simons Collection found in the Manuscripts section of the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, BC 1081, Interview with Hilda Bernstein, MCA 9 12 94, Tape 1; Oral interview with Hilda Bernstein by Rachidi Molapo for Mayibuye Centre's Oral History of Exile Project, 19 March 1996, MCA 6 441; MCA 9- 12 94, Tape 1 Oral Mayibuye Archives.

The Simons Collection has strengthened the research on feminist scholarships in South Africa and made connections between various contributors to intellectual debates about the status of women. The collection ranged from personal correspondences to academic and non-academic papers which were produced by women in and outside of the liberation movement. However, the untimely death of Ray Alexander and Hilda Bernstein, in the formative years of the present study, have deprived us of an opportunity to probe deeper in their analysis of the patterns and trends into the history of political activities of women in South Africa, but inferences have been made from the material they generated while they were still alive.



The Mayibuye Archives which is located at the University of the Western Cape has been of great assistance with regard to material on Ray Alexander and Hilda Bernstein. The archives house a number of collections including the ‘Oral History Project of Exiles.’³⁷⁹ The collection consists of oral interviews which were conducted with political activists who participated in the struggle against the apartheid regime. The interviews have been a source of information on “women’s experiences of the struggle for liberation.” The interviews were tailored on inquiries which sought to make “women” visible in the historiography of the

³⁷⁹ University of the Western Cape, Mayibuye Archives, The Oral History Project of Exiles.

liberation struggle. In reading the interview transcripts, I got a sense of desperate attempts to make women visible in an already existing discourse of the liberation struggle. In listening to un-transcribed audio tapes of women, one observed instances where women's contributions are overshadowed by the struggle for national liberation. In the same interviews there were instances where the interviewees diverted from the interviewer's questionnaire and expressed what they thought was significant to them. These shifts in power dynamics presented an interesting case to investigate further the relationship between organised political formations of women and the broader liberation movements. The interviews were used as background reading to frame one understands of the tension which informed the relationship between the feminist and the nationalist inquiries into the women question.

Upon surveying the collections I have discovered that women were not only projected as supporters of the struggle, but their intellectual inputs were obscured in the practices of archiving and documenting black politics in major archival collections found in South Africa.³⁸⁰ The establishment of the Liberation Archives sought to 'democratise the archive' through the recognition and inclusion of the

³⁸⁰ Finding material written by Charlotte Maxeke proved to be a daunting task because much of her work is not archived properly. Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx Press, 1982).

records of political activists who participated in the struggle for liberation. The formation of the archival holdings on histories of liberation struggles created a major impetus for a series of seminars and discussions about the making of the archives.³⁸¹

In conclusion, this chapter has presented the *modus operandi* of research on the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke in three distinct stages. Firstly, it draws the link between the biographical constructions, the intellectual inputs and the problem of historical knowledge. The three areas frame an inquiry into the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke. Instead of alienating one area from another, the chapter has demonstrated the impact of the limitations of the biographical methods on the construction of the biographies of women in liberation struggles on the continent. As the chapter demonstrates, selective biographical constructions and the iconic representations of women have led to the erasure of the intellectual inputs of women in the narratives of the liberation movements. Secondly, the chapter has demonstrated how current studies on women have missed a theorization of the intellectual inputs of women in the liberation struggle. Thirdly, the chapter outlines the politics of the Liberation

³⁸¹ In 1998, the Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of the Witwatersrand in partnership with the National Archives, the University's Historical Paper, the Gay and Lesbian Archives and the South African History Archives hosted thirteen series seminar which attracted speakers from a wide range of academic disciplines and professions. The archive emerged as an overarching theme of the seminar discussions.

Archives as repositories of aspects of the liberation struggle. Using evidence from primary and secondary material, the chapter has demonstrated the intellectual capabilities of Charlotte Maxeke. An examination of the link between intellectuals and the production of historical knowledge about women in the intellectual activities of the African National Congress is discussed in the conclusion.



CONCLUSION

**THE LEGACY OF CHARLOTTE MAXEKE AND THE
FRONTIERS OF THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH
AFRICA**

The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke has outlined five areas of intervention in the development of women's studies and politics on the continent. It enables five distinct shifts in the studies on women and liberation struggles on the continent. In the first instance, it contextualizes the intellectual project of women in contemporary struggles on the continent.

**Reconceptualising the Struggle for Liberation: Women as actors
in the production of historical knowledge**

The task of any scholarly engagement on this difficult question is to arrive at a reconceptualization of women actors in liberation struggles and as passive supporters of the struggles. This demands more than an empiricist evidence of their presence but calls into question the very processes by which women have placed in narratives about liberation struggles. This justifies the choice of thinking about the ways in which the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke reconfigured the discourse of the liberation struggle. This choice has major epistemological consequences for the study of women and liberation struggles. Firstly, it offers a unique opportunity to review the conceptualizations of women in the feminist

literature of the 1980s. Secondly, borrowing from a range of influences such as the African American experiences and the feminist literature on the continent, the study has embarked on a journey tracing the development of the intellectual projects of women in the spheres of women's histories, women's studies and politics.

Bridging the Gap between History and Historiography

Consistent with the problem identified in authoritative studies on women in liberation movements the title of the study *Theorising Women: The intellectual input of Charlotte Maxeke to the discourse of the Liberation Struggle in South Africa* is an attempt to bridge the gap between the history and the historiography of the liberation struggle. It proposes ways of outlining and addressing the problem of historiography and intellectual history. This aspect of the study takes the analysis of the feminist and nationalist discourses of women in the liberation struggle as a prompt to consolidate a research problem.

The feminist literature that emerged in the 1980s when uncritically examined may create the impression that organisational visibility is a prerequisite for the

inclusion of women in the narratives of the liberation struggle.³⁸² This is in contrast to the overwhelming documentary evidence from debates and intellectual engagements of women about “women’s issues” and women’s emancipation which were not necessarily confined to organisations stretched beyond organisations in South Africa, across the African continent.³⁸³

Intellectual debates: A crucial site in the production of historical knowledge about the legacy of liberation struggles on the continent.

Here the focus is on the activities of women which were not necessarily confined to organisations but stretched beyond organisations in South Africa, across the African continent.³⁸⁴ This concerns two different but complementary themes in the narrations of the liberation struggle in South Africa. Firstly, the notion of women’s roles in the liberation struggle as it punctuates the national question is considered. The problem of women’s roles is re-evaluated and taken beyond the reductionist view of women supporting of the struggle for national liberation to also incorporate the intellectual inputs of women in the debates about national

³⁸² The literature on liberation struggles and women on the African continent is vast. I have concentrated specifically on the literature dealing with the liberation of the newly independent African states in the 1960s.

³⁸³ Ray Alexander’s personal correspondence attests to a more fragmented story of women’s struggles for recognition within the liberation movement. This changes the face of women’s struggles from public visibility in demonstrations, to a subtle and yet vigorous engagement in the struggle against masculine hegemonies in the movement.

³⁸⁴ Ray Alexander’s personal correspondence attests to a more fragmented story of women’s struggles for recognition within the liberation movement. This changes the face of women’s struggles from public visibility in demonstrations, to a subtle and yet vigorous engagement in the struggle against masculine hegemonies in the movement.

liberation. Secondly, the intellectual contributions of women are shown to exceed nationalism's selective narrative, with for both the state and nationalist discourse.³⁸⁵ Both themes are especially made available through a theorisation of the theorising performed by Charlotte Maxeke. This leads us to the fourth area of inquiry identified in this study, the biography of Charlotte Maxeke.

The biography: the dilemma of Charlotte Maxeke

By working selectively with the biography of Charlotte Maxeke, I examine the inclusion of women into histories of liberation struggles. While her biographical insertion into the history of the liberation struggle gives rise to a singular monolithic narrative where she fills in the gaps, the intellectual work of Charlotte Maxeke suggests a more fragmented story of contestation, debate and differences. In avoiding a narrowly biographical representation, the effects of Charlotte Maxeke's intellectual work on the programmes of liberation politics in South Africa and how she is taken up in its discourse, at times selectively, becomes intelligible.

³⁸⁵ See A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1984).

The origins and development of the intellectual traditions of the liberation movement

The African National Congress in its formative years inherited a tradition of intellectual activism that was a product of the missionary enterprise of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Peter Walshe has characterised the rise of political consciousness among the Africans as follows:

“the formation of African political attitudes as they evolved in the early years can be seen as the result of a composite set of influences.”³⁸⁶

The incorporation of British Kaffraria and the acquisition of the Transkei Territories between 1872 and 1894 played an important role in shaping the political consciousness of the Africans in the Cape.³⁸⁷ In this volatile period of new systems of social control, women carried the burden as subjects and objects of the changes that were taking place. Much of the available literature on the rise of African Nationalism has not yet acknowledged the manner in which the woman question featured in these changes. The influences which informed Maxeke's intellectual activities have not yet been included in the selective appropriations and insertions of her biography in the literature about the role of women in the rise of African Nationalism in South Africa during the twentieth century.

³⁸⁶ P. Walshe, “The Origins of African Political Consciousness “ in *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912-1952* (London, first published in 1970 and reprinted in 1982), p.1.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, p2

Maxeke's oeuvre creates the necessary fissures in the discourse of the struggle for liberation. Her critical stance on gender and inequality shaped a discourse about gender equality in the formative years of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Charlotte Maxeke by her interventions, created a shadow archive of the struggle for liberation. When read against available collections on the struggle for liberation, Maxeke's active involvement in the formative years of the struggle for liberation shows that she envisioned a reconfiguring of a discourse of liberation in a manner which would take gender inequality as a manifestation of gross violation of human dignity. In her striving for humanitarian values, Maxeke demonstrated her courage and resilience.



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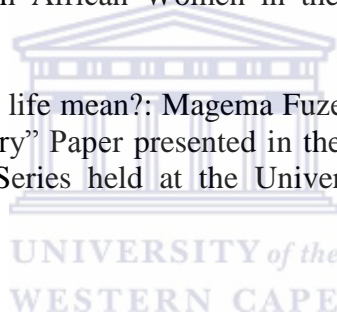
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