

CHARLOTTE MAXEKE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH

AFRICA

THOZAMA APRIL

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 no more, not an intellectual, a theorist, a feminist or nationalist; only a figurehead. Yet, the period of Maxeke’s political prominence from 1902 to 1939 establishes grounds for understanding the links that bind state, women’s political pasts, politics of the public and private and history. Of immediate concern in this paper are layers of inequality which have been erased from accounts of South African history. The paper reflects the difficulty of disentangling women’s political pasts from the dominant trends of the meta-narratives of women in liberation struggles on the continent. Charlotte Maxeke 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.

Maxeke’s intellectual legacy advanced the argument for gender equality after her death in 1939 and pointed to gender as a critical component and a site in the struggle for liberation. Her profile challenged conventional historiographical trends which tended to fix women in a timeless past of tradition and domestication. Her views challenge the representation of women in subsequent regional studies on African women in Africa.² As the historiography of the struggle for liberation emerges in Southern Africa it might seek to conceptualise the struggle against

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

² Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, ‘Gender Biases in African Historiography’ in Oyeronke Oyewumi. *African Gender Studies A Reader*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan: 2005) pp. 207-208.

gender inequality in a manner that would not only acknowledge “*the role of women in liberation struggles*”. Rather, it ought to enable us to rethink the intellectual history of women which borders nationalist struggles.

The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke defines the demarcations that operated in the struggle for liberation in South Africa in the twentieth century and the formation of the black nationalist discourse.³ Here we might discover the 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 African society. She epitomized women’s struggles against deprivation of basic human rights such as dignity, happiness, education, employment opportunities and property ownership.

The idea to pursue a scholarly investigation on the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke occurred in the two years I spent working as a research assistant in a presidential project called the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET). The project was commissioned by the then president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to examine and analyse the events that led to the negotiated settlement and democracy in South Africa.⁴ 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 legitimation*.⁵ The writing of the history of the struggle for liberation in state initiated projects venerates the principles of freedom, democracy and

³ Andre Ondendaal, *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).

⁴ The 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 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.

⁵ 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).

equality. These concepts align closely with narratives of the state. While it is necessary to examine the principles on which the contemporary African states are built, an over simplification of concepts such as freedom, democracy and gender equality may erase the genealogies and the histories embedded in their deployments as the basis of state formation. Therefore, when writing histories of liberation efforts should be made to keep a clear distinction between state discourse and the principles on which liberation struggles have been waged on the continent. This constitutes a first step towards a conceptualisation of the struggle for liberation for the sake of advancing the intellectual project on which the struggle for gender equality was based. Changing the mindset of the broader society about the need to have a harmonious relationship where power relations are theorised in a manner that does not only cast women as vulnerable group, but as contributors to theories and practices of social change. Such a critical reflection is important when considering the contributions of Charlotte Maxeke in South African history. Unfortunately, Maxeke's theorisations of gender have not been considered as an essential part of the discourse of liberation. This can partly be attributed to the frameworks on which the historiography of the struggle for liberation is based.

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 in between the 1950s and 1990s. Intrigued by the interviewee's narrations, I immediately 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.

The inclusion of women in oral narrations of the liberation struggle in South Africa has offered a unique opportunity to explore the extent of the involvement of the women in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Authoritative studies on this subject incorporate the theoretical and the political discourse of the women as part of the broader framework and a strategy to amass the nationalist struggle for liberation. While able to highlight the strategies used by the nationalist movement this frame overlooks the intellectual history of women. The literature on women and resistance in South Africa bears salient features of the nationalist struggle.

The 1970s and 1980s created a major impetus for the emergence of the literature on resistance histories in South Africa. A close examination of the dominant trends in resistance histories has focused primarily on ‘the representations of women.’⁶ The results of these trends are evident in what I call the struggle biography. The latter casts the involvement of women in predetermined terms, as an effect of the generosity of male figures in those histories. To date the scholarship has failed to theorise the entry of women in public political spheres in its proper context.

My initial interest in the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke sought to transcend the limits of the struggle biography of the state and conventional academic history writing to consider alternative ways of comprehending theoretical and political discourse of

⁶ See Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (London: Onyx Press, 1982), Julia Wells, “*The History of Black Women’s Struggles against the Pass Laws in South Africa 1900-1960*,” (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1982, (Published Thesis), Christine Qunta *Women in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987), 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 NH Heinemann 1997), Franz Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 1989), Josephine Simbanegavi, *For Better or worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe’s Liberation Struggle* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2000), Tanya Lyons, *Guns and guerilla girls: women in the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle*, (Trenton N.J: Africa World Press, 2004), pp338; Shireen Hassim *Women’s Organisations and Democracy in South Africa*, (Scottsville: University of Kwa Zulu Natal Press, 2006).

women. This focus lent itself to investigating the intellectual sphere as a viable area of research in the history of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

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 which had been collected and archived in various repositories in South Africa served as evidence of events and processes of the struggle.⁷ My personal interest in the struggle for liberation was largely influenced by the oral interviews I conducted with political activists while working as a research assistant for SADET, although my new interest soon distracted from the norm.

Outside the confines of the presidential project, my inclination on the participation of women took a life of its own as I developed an interest in the primary documents related to the active involvement of women in the struggle for liberation.⁸ While the interviews were based on the 1960s the primary documents that were at my disposal soon led me to the intellectual activities of Charlotte Maxeke and her influence on the social and political lives of the Africans in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹ Maxeke provided a discourse that was in sharp contrast to the documentary trend of both the feminists and the nationalist narrations of women in the struggle for liberation.

⁷ Mayibuye Centre, Oral History of Exile Project, Interview with Hilda Bernstein conducted by Rachidi Molapo, 19 March, 1996, Tape 1 MCA 6- 441.

⁸ Two years after working in SADET I was appointed as a manager for the visiting scholars programme of the Robben Island Museum. Also closely associated with the struggle for liberation, my work on the Island exposed me to even a more fragmented 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.

⁹ Women such as Charlotte Maxeke have played a significant part in the social and political spheres of the Africans in South Africa. See John Pampallis, *National Struggle, Class Struggle: South Africa Since 1870* (London: Caledonian Press, 1986).

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 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 in the field of politics as mere supporters.

Towards the end of my term on Robben Island, I delved into materials on the rise of black politics in South Africa dating back to the early 1900s. During this period the hope to find leads to the extent of the participation of women in the struggles for liberation were raised as I embarked on major archival research which was supplemented by a survey of secondary literature on the formative years of the struggle for liberation.¹⁰ At this stage, I spent months ‘digging’ for leads into the life and times of Charlotte Maxeke in two major historical collections of the struggle for liberation such as the Mayibuye Archives and the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare, but neither of the two had collections on Charlotte Maxeke.¹¹ Disappointed at this, I turned to the references which have often been made about Maxeke’s work on the social welfare of the Africans.¹²

The research on the activities of Charlotte Maxeke took me to the University of Witwatersrand where I spent time in the William Cullen Library of the University of

¹⁰ Andre Ondendaal, *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).

¹¹ Women such as Charlotte Maxeke have played a significant part in the social and political spheres of the Africans in South Africa. Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, University of the Western Cape; Liberation Archives, University of Fort Hare, Alice.

¹² Frene Ginwala, “Charlotte Maxeke, *The Mother of Freedom*,” ANC Today, Vol. 2. No. 31, 2-8 August, 2002

Witwatersrand researching the Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations.¹³ The records contained aspects of Maxeke's public political involvement and her discussions about the state of the 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 the Africans in South Africa. They contain publications, newspaper articles, official and unofficial reports on the Native Question, 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.¹⁴ Bodies such as the Transvaal Hygiene Association called for a compulsory examination of all people entering the domestic service.

The records also reflected 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.¹⁵ Running parallel the debate about women missionaries, the debate about the Native Question reflected the state's concern about the proper place of the African. Debates about the Native Question as well as the sanitation syndrome of the early 1900s classified, graded and labelled the African women as the main causes of social ills such as 'lawlessness', illicit beer brewing, prostitution, overcrowding and diseases in urban centres.¹⁶ Maxeke provided an oppositional discourse to the state's conclusions about the African urban population.

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

¹³William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Records of the African National Congress, AD 2186.

¹⁴William 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.

¹⁵ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Women's Missionaries, AB 226; AB 932.

¹⁶ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Health and Diseases, AD 384, file B. 55.2.

records of the SAIRR contain voluminous reports on the safety of mine labourers. As the public concern focused on the safety of a gendered category (male mine labourers), the presence of African women in urban areas was problematised, thus justified the introduction of major preventive and control measures.

In contrast to the state's racialised and gendered discourses on the African urban population, the co-existence of the different population groups in urban areas fostered co-operation across the colour line.¹⁷ The council in which Maxeke participated often expressed discontent with the poverty, filth and diseases associated with Native women. By doing so, 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 problematise the African urban population, but proposed possible solutions to the problems of the day.

Also found in the records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, two published reports on Charlotte Maxeke have been retrieved. The yearbook of South African Missions of 1928 and The Report of Christian Students and Modern South Africa held at Fort Hare in 1930 in which Maxeke presented a paper on "*The Progress of Native Womanhood*" provided leads to Maxeke's philosophy of gender.¹⁸ Inspired by the discovery of the two documents I set out to draft Charlotte Maxeke's intellectual trajectories. A hand written letter in which she expressed gratitude to Rheinallt Jones after she had been appointed as a probation officer for juveniles in Johannesburg was also retrieved from the records of the South African Institute of Race Relations.

¹⁷The SAIRR and the work of the Joint Councils

¹⁸ 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.

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 of the struggle for liberation reflect an uneasy relationship between the political discourse of women and the nationalist struggle.

The tension became the basis on which the focus on Maxeke's intellectual contributions began. When read against her papers, Maxeke offers an oppositional discourse to the gendering of roles which is evident in the early studies of black protest politics in South Africa. This became the basis on which her theorization of the experiences of women, their living conditions and gender relations centered. This intellectual tradition became a constituent part of a political discourse of the nationalist struggle in the 1920s and 1930s. Her theoretical contributions to the debate about the Native Question 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.¹⁹

Although she operated within the prescripts of modernity, Maxeke devised conceptual tools to unpack her critical stance against gender inequality. This aspect of Maxeke's activism only get inscribed in academic history through case studies of women's anti pass campaigns as the framework within which the political participation of women is understood.²⁰ At the level of practical politics, the demarcation of women's anti- pass campaign may serve as a strategy to amass the nationalist movements that were involved in the struggle for liberation. In subsequent

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Women were deprived the right to education, earn salaries and make 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.

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, 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 "*The Progress of Native Womanhood*" problematised perceptions about linear progression of an analysis of "the role of women" in society. 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 both the feminists and the nationalist narrations and later feminist writing on women in the struggle for liberation. Her discourse also contrasted sharply with that of the state. But this fissure has been unfortunately neglected in the historiography of the liberation struggle.

Below the Records of the Institute of Race Relations, in the library basement I found the South African History Archives (SAHA). The records contain records of the Women's Section of the African National Congress. The most dominant feature of the archives were the reports of the 2nd Consultative Conference of the Women's Section of the African National Congress which was held in Luanda, Angola, September 1987. The reports presented a survey of the position of women in apartheid state as well as in the liberation movement.²¹ When examined closely deliberations in commissions celebrated the history of women's struggles in which Charlotte Maxeke features as an iconic representation of the role of women in the ANC.

²¹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, South African History Archives, African National Congress Women's Section, AC 2517; AC 3051.

The narrative of the history of women's struggle found in various reports of the conference traced the history of women's organisations to the Bantu Women's League of 1918. Although acknowledged as a precursor to the ANC WL of 1943, the history of the BWL has not been documented beyond this point. Even the narratives of women's struggles in the movement fail to account for the League's activities. Following this grey area, the narratives about women's struggles in the ANC have focused on the 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 the narrative of women's struggles as reflected in reports of the second consultative National Congress of the Women's League highlight the movement's preoccupation with its own structure.

Apart from the organisational structure of the movement, the records also reflected on the activities of the Women's sections of the ANC in exile, and reminisces of women organizations inside the country, and the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1970s. The reports also reflect on the second round of internal regrouping of the women's movement in the 1980s as they were in preparation for the "seizure of power." Intense debates about the spheres of women's lives; culture, education, women's health, women's rights and women's emancipation emerged. Given these spheres of women's activism, I asked, how authoritative studies of black protest politics missed women's theorisations of the political discourse of the twentieth century?

Available studies on the rise of black protest politics have failed to account for Maxeke's outline of the theoretical and political discourse on women. An example of this flaw is found in Andre Odendaal's academically acclaimed book, *Vukani Bantu: The Beginning of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912* of 1984 in which he presented a study on the origins of black

protest politics in South Africa. The book overlooks the intellectual project of women in the formative years of modern politics.²² In his survey of the avenues in which the early nationalist sentiments were expressed Odendaal has identified the subjugation of traditional relations as well as the establishment of the administrative control of the magistrates as the contributing factors to the emergence of black protest politics in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Odendaal's study, the changing roles of apparatuses of control automatically became a lens through which gender roles were effected in the creation of modern African society. The latter was achieved through a salient erasure of the intellectual capabilities of women from the public discourse.

The effects of the scholarship of the 1980s can be discerned in the strong gendering of roles which is apparent in the history of early nationalist organizations.²³ By gendering of roles I mean the definition and the classification of early political activism along gender lines. Odendaal's work epitomized the crafting of the struggle biography around male figures. His discussion of the role of churches in the formative years of the struggle does not include Maxeke's role in facilitating the formation of the AME church in South Africa, yet she was actively involved in clandestine activities that established links between the African American struggle and Africans in South Africa.

Subsequent to Odendaal's work, Christine Qunta published her book, *Women in Southern Africa*.²⁴ Tracing the status of women in pre-colonial African societies, Qunta examined the problems of black women and proposed solutions to the destruction of all forms of oppression which impeded women in Southern Africa. Setting out to present "a firsthand account of essays",

²² Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912*, (Cape Town; David Philip 1984) pp. 25-26.

²³ Andre Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912*, (Cape Town; David Philip 1984).

²⁴ Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers 1987) pp.17-18.

“interviews” and “life stories” of the “achievements” and “struggles of women” in Southern Africa, she examined “the role of women” in African society before during and after colonialism.”²⁵ The linear progression of the roles women played in the past has resulted in its recurrence as an overarching theme in women’s histories. This limits and fixes the women in gender specific roles in history. Attempts to write against this paradigm have often reverted to the inclusion and the glorification of women with exceptional leadership qualities in history.²⁶ The limits of the studies of the 1980s provide a provisional ground from which new uses are derived.

New uses of the 1980s studies begin with a close examination of the extensive use of oral narratives when recording women’s role in history. The oral narrations of the struggle for liberation acknowledge the supportive role of the women’s movements associated with nationalist movements. Charlotte Maxeke’s intellectual pursuits disrupt a linear progression of the narrative about the supportive role of women in the struggle. Even nationalist leaders of the early twentieth century have acknowledged her significance in debates about the proper place of the Africans in the Union of South Africa.²⁷ Her participation in the Native Question demonstrated a stark difference between women’s support and women’s political participation in the struggle. This distinction became clearer as the study 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.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Christine Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers 1987) p.23.

²⁷ 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).

From the survey of the scholarship of the 1980s it became evident that the use of the oral as a corrective measure to present first hand accounts of women's lives, experiences achievement and struggles alone cannot address the flaws of the nationalist meta-narratives on women. Based on this observation, the research on the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke has been carefully framed to minimise uncritical acceptance and the "use of the oral" to avoid a duplication of the struggle biography. .

The archival research on Charlotte Maxeke took two years of digging in various historical archives, much of it driven by my critical engagement with SADET. During this phase of my research I suspected that the intellectual inputs of women were submerged in the mediums through which the struggle for liberation was archived and documented.²⁸ In these archives women were not only projected as supporters of the struggle, but their intellectual inputs were obscured in the archiving and documentation of black politics in archival collections.²⁹ Little did I know that even the historical archives associated with the liberation struggle such as the Robben Island Mayibuye Archives and the Liberation Archives at Fort Hare did not have a properly archived collection of the work of Charlotte Maxeke. At this stage I soon learnt that archival collections should not be taken as a mine of evidence about the past, but that they constitute a frame of intelligibility, a way of comprehending a social reality.³⁰

²⁸ See Ann Stoler 'Colonial Archives and their Arts of Governance: On the Continent in the Form' in Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive*, (Cape Town: David Philip 2002) pp.83-99.

²⁹ 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).

³⁰ See Premesh Lalu "The Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Texts and Modes of Evidence" in *History and Theory*, vol. 39, No. 4, Theme Issue 39: "Not Telling"; Secrecy, Lies and History (Dec., 2000) p.68.

My observation of the archival processes as evidenced in the collections found in the liberation archives was shaped by the debates that unfolded in academic circles about the status of the archives in post apartheid South Africa.³¹ In what we may regard as the *Archive Fever* which hit post apartheid South Africa, seasoned scholars, archivists and researchers from different parts of the world discussed a range of issues including the functions of archives. Scholars such as Achille Mbembe have argued that the archives should be conceived as an acquisition of material and an imaginary status.³² In other words, archives are a product of both the construction and deconstruction processes. The coexistence of the two facilitates an evaluation of the themes the archival collections of liberation archives engender. In this case, Charlotte Maxeke presents an interesting contrast to Mbembe's formulation.

When read against recent debates about transformation and archives the documents; conference papers and the interviews generated by Charlotte Maxeke on various aspects of the "Native Life in South Africa" have not been properly studied in the frameworks of the archive. The absence of specific collection on Maxeke's contribution to an important debate about the Africans in South Africa raised a question about the material and the imaginary status of her papers. Viewed in this context documents of Charlotte Maxeke remain "a piece of data" whose material and imaginary status has not been evaluated outside the collections of the Historical Papers of the William Cullen Library of the University of the Witwatersrand.

³¹ 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.

³² See Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archie and its Limits," in Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Phillip,2002), p.19.

In evaluating the status of Maxeke's intellectual contributions, the study observed the manner in which she deliberated on matters pertaining to the welfare of the 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 the African women in rural areas. In these spheres of *Native Life*, Maxeke's contributions demonstrated a deep investment in the ideas of the time. Given the articulate and succinct intellectual depth she demonstrated, once again, I asked myself, how have authoritative studies of women in the liberation struggle missed the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke, and what does this mean for South African history more generally? ³³

The study works completely with a different conception of Charlotte Maxeke who is not reducible to the category women, to figurehead or to nationalist but as one who is seen as in relation to the theoretical and political discourses which have helped to elaborate the intellectual project of women. I examine the problematic insertion of women into histories of liberation struggles. While her biographical insertion into the history of liberation struggle gives rise to singular monolithic narrative where she is made to fill 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 I explain the effects of Charlotte Maxeke's intellectual work on the programmes of liberation politics in South Africa and how she is taken up, selectively at times, in its discourse.

³³ In the case 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 political *events* and organisations that shaped the struggle for liberation in between the 1950s and 1990s. This observation was informed by my involvement in SADET. The project was largely on oral interviews. Design of the research in SADET corroborated data from oral history interviews as well as the written documents.

I focus on the intellectual inputs of Charlotte Maxeke in part because of her significant inputs on debates surrounding women and the liberation struggle. In her public engagements, she outlined the problems and the challenges of women in South Africa during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁴ She deliberated and defined arguments about legislation relating to marriage, the relation of women to children, the politics of the employment of women, women's mobility as well as the discourses of what I will call *body politics*.³⁵

To date, the intellectual project of women in both the feminist and the nationalist scholarships and critiques of the state have not changed much. The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke provides a critique of the failure of these trends in their definition of the scope and the degree of the participation of women in liberation struggle in South Africa. Maxeke's intellectual contributions highlight the sphere of intellectual debate as an area which needs major scholarly intervention in South Africa.

The study examines the effects of selective appropriations of Maxeke's intellectual contributions in the discourse of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. It examines how generations of women sustained an intellectual tradition within the liberation movement long after Maxeke's death. I refer specifically to the activities of the Women's League of the African National Congress, women in the Communist Party, and the Young Christian Women's Movement up to the early 1990s.

The study of the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke occupies the gaps in the current trends in studies on women in liberation struggles. It broadens the scope for investigating the participation of women in the formative years of black politics in South Africa in a manner

³⁴See 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

³⁵ See Interview with Charlotte Maxeke , *The South African Outlook*, August 1, 1922

that does not merely fill the gaps in histories of liberation struggles but grapples with the very notion of ‘women and women’s role in the struggle for liberation’ and what these mean for the emerging scholarship on histories of liberation struggles on the continent? Maxeke’s theorisation of the evolution of native womanhood highlighted the dynamic character of women and as such, proposed a dynamic approach that refuses to succumb to the stereotypes about women. 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. 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. In this case, the study makes an important contribution to the study of Liberation Archives, not only in South Africa but in the region. Initiatives such as ALUKA are beginning to make inroads in the documentation of materials related to liberation struggles in the region. The most important question the study poses then is: how do initiatives of this nature relate to the theoretical and political discourse of women in those struggles?

Bibliography

- A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)
- J. Cock, *Colonels and Cadres War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991).
- F. Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, (London, Earthscan Publications Ltd, 1989).
- S. Geiger, *TANU Women: gender & culture in the making of Tanganyikan nationalism* (Portsmouth, NH Heinemann 1997).
- S. Hassim *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa*,(Scottsville: University of Kwa Zulu Natal Press, 2006).
- D. Lewis, "African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges" in Oyeronke Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).
- T. Lyons, *Guns and guerilla girls: women in the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle* (Trenton N.J, Africa World Press, 2004).
- F. Meli, *A history of the ANC: South African belongs to Us* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988)
- A. Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2002).
- A. Ondendaal, *Vukani Bantu : The beginnings of Black Protest in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984).
- J. Pampallis, *National Struggle, Class Struggle: South Africa Since 1870* (London, Caledonian Press, 1986).
- C. Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers 1987).
- J. Simbanegavi , *For Better or worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2000).
- South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006)
- A Stoler 'Colonial Archives and their Arts of Governance: On the Continent in the Form' in Carolyn Hamilton et al, *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip 2002)
- C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx Press, 1982).
- P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Donker Ltd 1987).
- J. Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press: 1993).
- 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. T. Zeleza, 'Gender Biases in African Historiography' in Oyeronke Oyewumi. *African Gender Studies A Reader* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

Journal Articles

F. Ginwala, "Charlotte Maxeke, *The Mother of Freedom*," ANC Today, Vol. 2. No. 31, 2-8 August, 2002

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.

P. Lalu "The Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Texts and Modes of Evidence" in *History and Theory*, vol. 39, No. 4, Theme Issue 39: "Not Telling"; Secrecy, Lies and History (Dec., 2000) p.68.

Published Papers

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

Published Thesis

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

Interviews

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

Interview with Charlotte Maxeke , *The South African Outlook*, August 1, 1922

Archives

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

William 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.

William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Records of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Women's Missionaries, AB 226; AB 932.

William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, SAIRR Records, Health and Diseases, AD 384, file B. 55.2.

The SAIRR and the work of the Joint Councils

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.

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