

A Literature Review on the State of Research on Women's Contribution to South Africa's Liberation Struggle



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ABSTRACT

This paper presented a literature review reflecting on the state of research in South Africa pertaining to women's contribution to the liberation struggle. It analyzed the trends in research pertaining to women's contribution toward the liberation struggle. The paper critically reviewed existing literature that focuses on women's role in the struggle for equality, liberation, and nationalism. Additionally, this paper reviewed literature in its relevancy to the historiography and body of historical research about South African women political activists under the following themes: women voices' through men's articulation; the interpretations of feminist discourse; change of historiography of women's liberation movements; narrative theory and women's relationship to the struggle; the politicization of women's participation into the struggle; pedagogical approach to women history and gender justice; and gender politics as a struggle for theory and phenomenology of women's existence. This paper's approach in reviewing literature and the state of research on women's contribution to the South African liberation struggle. With this paper, it is envisaged that it will greatly contribute to the ongoing debates about the liberation historiography in South Africa and further enhance research themes and scope focusing on South African women's liberation. It concludes that through the review of literature on the role of women in the liberation struggle, an appreciation to document more of their stories might be significant for the the country's liberation historiography.

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INTRODUCTION¹

The universality of the issues of gender equality and women's liberation is not in doubt. The involvement of African women in this struggle gained momentum during the period of modernization in the United States of America (USA) and other economically developed countries (EDCs) in the late 1960s and thus continued to the 1970s.² Women's liberation is described as the struggle for collective fight for gender

¹ This paper was prepared for presentation at the Historical Association of South Africa (HASA), 20-22 June 2018, at the Black Mountain Leisure and Conference Hotel, Thaba Nchu, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

² Linda Napikoski, "Women's Liberation Movement – Feminism Glossary Definition," 2014, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-second-wave> (Accessed on 17 June 2023).

equality. Moreover, the concept of women's liberation is used synonymously and sometimes interchangeably with feminism because of the correlation in their agenda that seeks to free women from male supremacy and any form of oppression. Scholarly research continue to elevate the significance of males on liberation matters at the expense of female counterparts. As it will be shown in this paper, the patriarchal dominance reflected on scholarly literature on the broader scope of liberation studies tends in one way or other to 'neglect' the role by women.

The paper attempts to answer the following question: Are there sufficient narratives that locate the voices of women in the struggle for liberation both domestically and as political agencies? Why for political expediency are the voices of men eclipsing those of women in scholarly literature? In South Africa like other parts of the world women were historically recognized to have politically organized protests and revolutions against their oppressors notable during the anti-colonial periods and other forms of oppression. However, there is dearth of scholarly literature in appreciation of the role they played.

For example, on 9 August 1956, about 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest legislation aimed at tightening the apartheid regime's control over the movement of black women in urban areas. Thus, the regime intending to enforce the carrying of passes by women. This march was led by women of colour and included the likes of Sophia Williams-de Bruyn Helen Joseph, Raahima Moosa, and Lillian Ngoyi. Resistance by women was not limited to South Africa. Aaronette contends that women in Algeria instead of becoming victims of colonial conquest, became creators of history through their resistance against French colonizers.³ In this instance, rural women worked behind the scenes rendering domestic support, such as cooks, messengers, and informants in the war against Algerian occupation.⁴

They also acted as combatants, financiers, as well as active members of political associations, where they engaged in anti-colonial resistance in places such as Namibia's South West Africa National Union (SWANU), Zimbabwe African Women's Union (ZAWU) in Zimbabwe, and Tanganyika National Union (TANU) in Tanzania to mention but few. Unfortunately, there are lesser accounts whereby women are centred as important in their narratives and prioritizing their voices. In South Africa, for example, a number of women played in the above and underground liberation struggle as members of the liberation movements before and after their unbanning. Others sacrificed their youthful years and went into exile to pursue the liberation struggle, but little is known about them.

One notable example is that of South Africa's Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin who was active in the African National Congress (ANC) underground structure formed in Soweto by Winnie Mandela. She became crucial for the ANC and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) organization, the South African Students' Organization (SASO) where she formed the links for the underground mobilisation and activities for both organizations in the 1970s.⁵ This paper further argues that in modern times, the subject of gender equality and women's liberation has undoubtedly evoked intense debates among scholars, researchers, politicians, women political activists, and feminists. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines a critical review of the state of research in South Africa in the field of women's contribution to the liberation of South Africa. This paper will further analyze the subject of discourse with the concept of eight interpretative bodies of research as it relates to gender equality, feminism, and women's liberation.

Women's Voices through men Voices: The Interpretations of feminist discourse

Nationalism in South Africa inspired by global Pan-Africanism, anti-colonial wars and decolonial movements generated political consciousness within the country and hence the ability to grapple with colonialism and apartheid. On a comparative note, Amira Osman argues that in Sudan, Pan-Africanist ideology founded a fertile ground for inspiring the political consciousness and philo-praxis in the women's movements.⁶ Literature on the women's movements in Sudan is scarce, as little has been written on the

³ Susan Geiger, Jean Allman, and Nakanyike Musisi, *Women in African Colonial Histories* (Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁴ Joyce M Chadya, "Voting with Their Feet: Women's Flight to Harare during Zimbabwe's Liberation War 1," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 18, no. 2 (2007): 24–52.

⁵ Gregory Houston, *The Post-Rivonia ANC/SACP Underground*, ed. South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004). See Interview with Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin with Gregory Houston, 16 May 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

⁶ Amira Osman, "Beyond the Pan-Africanist Agenda: Sudanese Women's Movement Achievement and Challenges, Pan-Africanism and Feminism," *Feminist Africa*, no. 19 (2014): 43–57, 44.

political role of women during the colonial or pre-colonial era. The few literature that exist disregard or ignore the impact of women's contribution to the liberation of the country.

This study argues presently that Sudan poses a complex challenge as the country found itself in the ruins of wars started by the very same men who are proclaimed to be liberators through historiography. Additionally, in Sudan, the gendered predispositions of the recorded histories are not especially accommodating for those who put resources into inspecting how women and men truly collaborated and what parts they played. All things considered, this has brought on various reactions among scholars and researchers in Sudan who emphatically assert that women's history should be accessible.

Sudanese scholar Osman who works in the field of social sciences through the classical work *Sudanese Women: Brightens of the Past and its Darkness* makes a critical point while noting that Sudanese historians Shibeika (1959) and Said (1965) have influenced the historiography which in turn centres in the male-dominated narratives.⁷ Ajoba argues that Shibeika (1959) and Said (1965) have depicted history as a male area, where men are the main performing artists. Shireen Hassim strongly believes that liberation history has sided with a masculine narrative.⁸

Hassim's argument suggests that the history of women in the liberation struggle has been narrated through the voices of men's experiences.⁹ For instance, Winnie Mandela's narrative mostly revolves around Nelson Mandela, which means there is less focus on her as a woman, and as an individual. Marlene Dixon makes a case that in the United States of America (USA) the demise of women's activism emerged because of the collapse of the New Left in the early 1970s.¹⁰ In this instance within the USA and in South Africa, the failure to articulate the contradictions which some were embedded in the class antagonism (resulting from social determinants) at the height of the Cold War further created a major downfall.

The liberation movements headed by men while locked in the fights for liberation had access to the mainstream media or created alternative mouthpieces which in turn reinforced the notion of the imaginary of 'macho men' due to the notion of gender militarization. This further permits the status of men and not of women to be socialized and this approach strengthened a gendered division of power and legitimacy. In psychoanalysis, this point emerges within the system of belief(s) which is embedded in forming a worldview that arose through the domination of the 'Other' indirectly and subduing the 'Other'. Unconsciously this is akin to philosophical transcendence which generates a form of the imaginary – influences the socialization and enculturation of males and preserves hypermasculinity. As argued in this paper, redressing the challenges emanating from the dominant patriarchal history many of the South Africa communities is a course for concern. The roles played by women either as leaders or followers are relegated to the periphery with little acknowledgement if any. This situation calls for re-thinking South African historians approach in documenting the country's history, thus, ensuring that it is devoid of gender stereotyping.

The male-dominated narratives situated within black nationalism emerged as the only language while denying women voices. Of course, not all the liberation movements had this character, however many were fashioned within this principle. For example, the ANC on its founding and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) embraced this position. In the main, the liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere refers to women as 'passive' actors and their activities mainly articulated by men representations without giving the platform of equal footing with their male counterparts. Sometimes their activities were ignored at all. This paper argues that in this instance, women's voices, rights and demands were traded as a secondary matter within the broader liberation struggle. The literature that focuses on women's experiences and contributions to the liberation of South Africa is usually posed to their heterosexual marital relations.

In other words, their experiences and perspectives were somehow analysed within the context of their husbands' or men's incarceration with whom they were partnered and considered the following powerful women (Winnie Mandela, Adelaide Tambo, Amina Cachalia among others). The literature

⁷ Osman, "Beyond the Pan-Africanist Agenda: Sudanese Women's Movement Achievement and Challenges, Pan-Africanism and Feminism," 45.

⁸ Shireen Hassim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: The ANC in Exile and the Question of Women," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 433–56, 437.

⁹ Hassim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: The ANC in Exile and the Question of Women," 433.

¹⁰ Marlene Dixon, "The Rise and Demise of Women's Liberation: A Class Analysis," *Synthesis* 2, no. 1/2 (1977): 21–38.

further omits that these men-centric narratives had effects that affected women and children. Thus, this dominant perspective locates women in the identity of “mother” and “domestic wife” and/or as faithful supporters of their ‘heroic husbands.’

These narratives of ‘heroic husbands’ as coexistent and in the same scope as political life, sought to be of importance (as solely of importance) because of the creation of political biography, which had a reifying effect. For example, the biographical work of the former President Nelson Mandela is no exception in this tradition. Anne McClintock contends that African nationalism and liberation movements took the form of Afrikaner nationalism, whereby women’s liberation was treated as a secondary matter, and so were the women themselves.¹¹ These conditions allowed women to be secondary citizens within liberation movements and that influenced even the historiographical writings.

Change of historiography of women’s liberation movements: Narrative theory and women’s relationship to the struggle

The history of women’s in the liberation struggle in South Africa has undergone phases. Scholar such as Penelope Hetherington argues that around the 1970s South African historiography shifted from mainstream racial analogy, which was based on the policies of apartheid.¹² The alteration happened as feminists started to adopt neo-Marxist approaches to analysing society. The interpretation of neo-Marxist approaches allowed women to understand the economic and political ills and how lasting divisions of capital on the black population, in the interest of capital growth informed the formation of the black working class.

Belinda Bozzili believes that the association between Marxist theory and feminism remains the significant solution to the problems that feminist historians face. She thrusts that Marxist historians when inscribing their historiography tend to focus more on the family as a reproductive unit in society, whereas gender tussles also take place within the family.¹³ Bozzili states:

History is significant because it plays an imperative role in forming and shaping our consciousness. Contributing to our belief of who we are, who friends are, and enemies are, and how our societies might and should evolve.¹⁴

During the early 20th century, women’s liberation narratives already existed because of the accounts of women such as Amy Jacques Garvey and Indira Gandhi. These women leaders were married into liberation leaders and their roles and contributions to the struggle were different because their contributions were within a context of national liberation first, then the liberation of women. Amy Garvey reflected to this by asking such rethorical questions “what is the innovative motivation behind women on the planet? Instantly one answers? “To hold up under kids.” And on this supposition alone men of Africa and Asia, up to the early piece of this century kept their women uneducated, hidden openly, and closeted in collections of mistresses and women’s quarters. Since these men remained unaware of pre-natal impact, they moronically suspected that since they were sheiks, rajahs, bosses, and rich men their children would grow up to the same-solid and effective.¹⁵

Amy Garvey was fighting liberation for women against what she perceived as a constitutive culture that still maintains that women have to be placed under the concern of a man for all aspects of their lives. There is a relative amount of literature in the 21st century that documents the involvement of women in the struggle for liberation movement throughout the apartheid period. One can cite among many others the likes of Albertina Sisulu, Mamphela Ramphele, Patricia de Lille, Winnie Mandela, and others, who were among those whose experiences in the struggle were documented.¹⁶ Some recent developments were

¹¹ Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa,” *Transition*, no. 51 (1991): 104–23.

¹² Penelope Hetherington, “Women in South Africa: The Historiography in English,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 241–69, 245.

¹³ Belinda Bozzoli, “Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9, no. 2 (1983): 139–71.

¹⁴ Merle Lipton, *Liberals, Marxists and Nationalists* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

¹⁵ Amy Jacques Garvey, “The Role of Women in Liberation Struggles,” *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1972): 109–12, 110.

¹⁶ Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai, “A Case of ‘Strategic Ethnicity’? The Natal Indian Congress in the 1970s,” *African Historical Review* 46, no. 1 (2014): 22–47, 32. See Mamphela Ramphele, *A Passion for Freedom: My Life Mamphela Ramphele*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Sindiwe Magona & Elinor Sisulu, *Albertina Sisulu: Abridged Memoir* (Cape Town: New Africa Books, 2018); Charlene Smith, *Patricia de Lille: My Life*, (Cape Town: Spearhead Publisher, 2002).

that political autobiographies and biographies are usually a creation of ‘narrow elitist’ narratives that present a certain socio-economic and societal status. This is to mean that within the autobiographical and biographical research as an expertise, in a way there was an emergence of similar kind of tendency that embraces statemens and other elites to cement a particular position in a society. If there has been cases whereby women are mentioned, it is often that there are not centred upon in these narratives since most are not statemen or elites.

Largely few of these existing narratives speak about unknown women who did not have ‘heroic husbands’, or politically robust male life partners engaged in efforts of transformation. Fatima Meer argues that men could make their mark during resistance, since they had women to keep the home fires smouldering, oversee kids, and, now and again, bring home huge shares of the bread.¹⁷ Ciraj Rossool contends that this approach have been to develop national histories in which pioneers have been made to discourse national subjects through resistance history.¹⁸ Autobiography, the political profession of the pioneers, and the entire question of leadership have been vital to these national histories’ resistance. Regardless of this, we argue that there has been an amazing absence of hypothesis of the generation of the lives and place of account in addition to the issue of sexual orientation, personality, and subjectivity. Political lives have been seen, rather, as units of national history.

The way to deal with autobiography has tended to be formalist and teleological, in which lives have been transformed into moderately un-messy accounts of resistance, with their subject supplied with judiciousness, consistency, and reason, and the procedure of their lives built as constituting improvement and movement.¹⁹ The postcolonial or the ‘afterlife’ of apartheid South Africa came with new changes and new ways of writing history, with different aims and relationships to the text. These texts were not only biographies or autobiographies but were also political and historical biographies which overall had intentions, among other intentions, to write national history through heroic figures. Leading researchers in the field of history, Jonathan Hyslop and Rassool had a vigorous discussion about whether South African historians ought to influence political autobiographies on an academic discipline. Rasool argues that most personal histories are progressed as a straight human profession in which individual lives take after a requested order and they appear to be consistent, autonomous and to practice discerning decisions.²⁰

He thusly contends that accounts take cognizance of shared developments and how individuals portray each other seeing someone. This will consider more perplexing developments in individuals’ lives, since in every life there, are ‘various portrayals converging and crosscutting each other, negating each other’ and the issue is still just one voice among various. The critique of historiography of resistance (including biographies) is that they keep up with an idea of women’s imperceptibility or homogeneity. Women do not experience the battle, nevertheless, being injured, pure, or described as strong relatives. They are dressed in these marks however at the same time imagined as having no self-sufficiency, the same political interests, and no battle. These narratives are then by large not presenting the voices from below.

Politicization of women’s participation in the struggle and feminist existentialist practices of women

Despite the lack of literature that narrates important events where women have been able to gather themselves and organize and fight for similar courses, more opportunistic narratives have come to dominate their experiences. Within the existing literature women participating in the struggle for their rights are limited. Their participation is not differentiated from men’s narrative, which proves in the eyes of the patriarchal view that their agency depends on men. Notwithstanding, the dearth of literature that documents the major contributions of women in South Africa towards the liberation struggle is available and one can recount the 28 May 1913 Women’s Pass Protests in Bloemfontein led by Charlotte Maxeke and among others who were present was Cecilia Makiwane.²¹

The study makes a point that during this period, the newly formed South African Native National Congress (SANNC) now the ANC gave no room for women’s participation and these women were brave

¹⁷ Vahed and Desai, “A Case of ‘Strategic Ethnicity’? The Natal Indian Congress in the 1970s.”

¹⁸ Rassool, “The Challenges of Rethinking South African Political Biography: A Reply to Jonathan Hyslop,” 28.

¹⁹ Rassool, “The Challenges of Rethinking South African Political Biography: A Reply to Jonathan Hyslop,” 29.

²⁰ Rassool, “The Challenges of Rethinking South African Political Biography: A Reply to Jonathan Hyslop,” 29.

²¹ South African History Online, “Cecilia Makiwane” n.d., <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/cecilia-makiwane> (Accesed 5 May 2024)

enough to stand on their own.²² The 1913 resistance then inspired the 9 August 1956 whereby women demonstrated what could at the least be called a semblance of political resistance and autonomy.²³ In contemporary literature, women's participation in struggle has not been outlined as women-centric and also women's autobiographies and biographies have not been put to be part of post-apartheid political biography/national history or nation-building exercise and influence the role of women in the historiography.

Among the other factors, that contribute to this politicization, is the fact that dominant political history usually influences change and motivates people to partake in the post-liberation narratives of statesmen history with the idea of configuring a nation-state. The discourse on the liberation history is unique in different parts. Within the broader struggle, some leaders understood that liberation without 'self' liberation means nothing. When women were engaging in these protest politics, they were embarking on the journey to 'self-liberate' and that was the broader picture. In some parts of the continent, the patriots comprehended that national freedom required women's support and additionally required battling against frontier frameworks and customary socio-social chances that conflict with women's liberation and rights.

Among the first to pledge to a feminist approach to national liberation was Amilcar Cabral, a Bissau-Guinean and Cape Verdean politician whose intention was to unite the whole country and challenge all forms of social contradictions. Across the continent, many leaders joined in and allowed the internationalization of the struggle of women especially during the second wave of feminism. In South Africa, the existentialist practices and women's involvement in the struggle date back to the early 20th century during the period of Charlotte Maxeke who is widely considered 'the mother of liberation struggle' in South Africa.

Maxeke was a middle-class feminist who was educated in the USA under W.E.B Du Bois. The contributions of Maxeke are significant besides that they enrich the historiography, but they allow space for other women who have undergone similar experiences and completely new notions of women in the liberation struggle.²⁴ Maxeke's political manifest of 1902 to 1930s sets up validation and connections that women's political contribution has been largely under-researched. She can be regarded as the icon in women's history of liberation in South Africa who inspired many women including Mrs Esther Shabalala who was amongst the notables of the PAC.²⁵

Pedagogical approach to women's history and gender equity

In historical discipline, there have been several approaches used to understand and explain certain phenomena. Among the approaches that are used for pedagogical purposes in history as a discipline is meta-narrative theory. This means there is a certain fundamental aim for the approach used to explain or to tell a story. Take for instance this would mean that the liberation meant different understandings of different people, but I will use the example of Charlotte Maxeke who was educated in the USA. For many women, liberation meant total liberation from colonial rule and traditional rules and better opportunities for better socio-economic rights.²⁶

In this understanding, Maxeke can be seen as a strong feminist who engaged with all kinds of social contradictions including fighting for gender justice, and in doing so, different histories of nationalism in South Africa would be posed to people. Maxeke's account also causes a defy to orthodox historiography trends which are inclined to dose women in an enduring past of custom and subjugation. Her views challenge the representation of women in regional studies on African women in Africa.²⁷ We position Maxeke as one engaged with what is to be understood under the boarder theory of 'feminist history' as commitment and making women's history visible.²⁸ Furthermore, theorizing through feminist

²² South African Native National Congress, "Constitution," n.d., <https://www.anc1912.org.za/south-african-native-national-congress/>. (Accessed 2 May 2024).

²³ Amina Cachalia, *When Hope and History Rhyme an Autobiography* (Cape Town: Picador Africa, 2013), 9.

²⁴ Desiree Lewis, *African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges* (Springer, 2005), 383.

²⁵ Ayanda Sphelele Ndlovu, "The Life of Esther Shabalala: The Struggle for Freedom and Equality" (University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2017).

²⁶ Zubeida Jaffer, "Beauty of the Heart: The Life and Times of Charlotte Manya Maxeke," 2016, 8.

²⁷ Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza, "Gender Biases in African Historiography," in *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (New York: Springer, 2005).

²⁸ Gwen Dunganich, "She's Who Makes History: Reviewing the Historical Treatment of Black Women by Four South African Scholar," *Historia* 44 (1999): 65–83.

history brings about the recognition of women, and subservience in each society, and as this occurs many problems and that phenomenon require major contest and enlightenment.²⁹

The above authors have put forward strong arguments about their studies, but the shortcomings of their studies are based on the conceptual framework and the perception of women's relationship with struggle. This paper makes reference to two women, Fatima Meer and Ramphela Mamphela, both educated and fought in the liberation struggle. Often, it has been the case that the lens and tools of analysis that are used to analyze their work are based on their 'heroic husbands or lovers.' The delinquent largely has been the tradition of writing on fixed assumptions, which aims to champion and portray men as the centre of all struggles. Thus, this dominant literature locates women in the identity of mother and domestic wife and as faithful supporters of their valiant husbands. However, the feminist conceptual framework during this epoch was not largely used as a tool to understand and analyze all the social contradictions that women faced even in their writing, but many women merely accessed into status quo not total liberation of themselves.

Gender Politics as a Struggle for Theory

Gender politics, as a struggle for theory, involves a dynamic and often contentious negotiation over the meaning and implications of gender roles, identities, and inequalities. At its core, this struggle is not merely about the practical aspects of gendered experiences but about the intellectual frameworks that shape how these experiences are understood and addressed. Theoretical debates in gender politics encompass a wide range of perspectives, from feminist and queer theories to postcolonial and intersectional approaches. Each theoretical lens brings different insights into the ways gender intersects with other axes of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality, challenging and reshaping traditional notions of gender.

As theories evolve, they often encounter resistance from entrenched ideologies that seek to maintain existing power structures. This resistance can manifest in various ways, from academic debates to public policy conflicts. For instance, discussions about the fluidity of gender and non-binary identities confront deeply ingrained binary conceptions of sex and gender, which are deeply embedded in legal and social systems. The struggle for theory in gender politics is thus a struggle to redefine and expand the boundaries of how gender is understood and experienced, aiming to create more inclusive and equitable frameworks that reflect the complexity of human identities and social realities.

Joan Scott in his work *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis* identifies a theoretical framework that could be used to outline and analyze feminist history. The feminist determinations endeavour to explain the society relations to women and patriarchy. She explains that within Marxian traditions there is also an accommodation of feminist critiques by looking at the 'history from below'. She further points out that there are different psychoanalytic schools which explain the production, and reproduction of the subject has gendered identity.³⁰ The arguments above suggest the division between feminist interpretation and the schools of thought that influence the theoretical framework.

The first indulgent could be the second wave of feminism which includes struggle which was against the state and patriarchy. Until historians began to conduct histories as 'social history', meaning started to collect the 'history from below', the 'untold contributions of women' from neglected classes were not going to be heard. Among the prominent scholars who championed women's history is Bozzoli, a Marxist feminist. She believed that power and private property go hand in hand, and that was among the reasons why women's exposure was limited since they were the private property of men.

Phenomenology of Women's Existence

Phenomenology emphasizes the subjective nature of experience. For women, this means exploring how they perceive and interpret their own existence and societal roles. Unlike objective or scientific analyses that may generalize or reduce experiences to mere data, phenomenology delves into the first-person perspective. This approach reveals how women's experiences are shaped by their unique contexts and personal histories. In examining the phenomenology of women's existence, we begin with the concept of "embodiment," a central theme in phenomenological discourse. The embodiment stresses that our bodies

²⁹ Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx Press, 1982), 2.

³⁰ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Culture, Society and Sexuality* (Routledge, 2007), 77–97.

are not just biological entities but integral to how we experience the world. For women, the experience of embodiment includes how societal norms and expectations shape their perception of their own bodies. From beauty standards to reproductive roles, women's embodied experiences are often subject to external evaluations and internal negotiations.

Women's lived experiences are deeply intertwined with social structures and cultural norms. Phenomenology helps to uncover how these structures impact personal experiences. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir's existential phenomenology in *The Second Sex* explores how women have historically been marginalized and defined in relation to men. She argues that women's existence has been largely shaped by their roles as the *Other*, which influences how they experience their identity and agency. The concept of *Otherness* is crucial here. Women, as the *Other*, experience a form of existential alienation in general. Their subjectivity is often overshadowed by dominant male perspectives. This dynamic affects how women relate to their own experiences and how they navigate societal expectations. Phenomenology provides a framework for understanding this alienation not as an inherent condition but as a result of specific historical and social constructs.

Understanding the role of women in liberation requires a pedagogical approach which speaks directly to the complexities and contradictions faced by women. This philosophical framework analyzes the relationship between women, men, and power. African feminism has phenomenology pedagogy that should equally perceive the solid specificity of individual gendered experience, and how this is associated with and is not quite the same as the encounters. These prerequisites will give the way to conjecture the changing modalities of South African women's presence. Even as one perceives the diverse conventions and societies of those quandary contemporary African women to other women in different circumstances and different spots.

Phenomenology is obviously not by any means merely pedagogical that fit for records of gendered encounters in South Africa. In any case, its emphasis is on an arranged and typified assumption of learning and experience together with its dismissal of dualisms, including the privileging of the mental over the physical, subject over protest, and culture over nature, makes it helpful for investigating how specific social subjectivities are built, and to liberate conceivable outcomes of presence.

CONCLUSION

The above review has reflected a commitment to women's contribution to the liberation struggle in South Africa. Their challenge involved challenging forms of limits for women, the masculinity hegemony and patriarchy in South Africa. The article indicates that a critical review of literature provides an essential feature of any academic research project. Hence, this review objectively promotes a firm basis for emerging or established researchers towards advancing knowledge in the field of history, gender, and women studies. We conclude by arguing that the reflected research areas demonstrated in the paper still requires urgent research attention in consideration that some research areas are not even been subjected into much research given the complexities provided by the academy itself. Furthermore, the lack of theorization of this subject much come to an end so that more research appreciating the field can be conducted.

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