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WOMEN'S VOICES, WOMEN'S LIVES: QWAQWA WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF THE APARTHEID AND POST-APARTHEID ERAS

Abstract

Spivak's (1988; 1995) famous question, "Can the Subaltern speak" holds important connotations about many people living on the margins of society. It has greater significance for the sexed subaltern subjects who cannot speak and who cannot be heard because they are doubly-oppressed. In many post-liberation regimes on the African continent this is a troubling question. It is a troubling question because the end of colonialism and apartheid did not necessarily translate into major gains for most of society, and women in particular, who, like men, actively participated in, or supported the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. This article, based on the voices of rural and urban women from the former "homeland" of Qwaqwa, South Africa, brings to the fore their experiences, as well as perceptions of both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. It has established that women were much more oppressed under apartheid than they are today. Thus, while the social status of women has changed for the better, gender discrimination and gender-based violence persist, reinforcing the motion that even in post-apartheid South Africa women have no voice. The extent to which social security grants are entrenching the culture of dependency and entitlement as claimed by our interviewees, calls for further academic scrutiny, and so does the perceived increase in the trafficking of women and children in post-apartheid South Africa.

Keywords: Qwaqwa; Mopeli; women; subaltern; liberation; rural; urban; apartheid; post-apartheid; dependency; discrimination; street vending; gender; violence.

Sleutelwoorde: Qwaqwa; Mopeli; vroue; ondergeskikte; vryheid; plattelands; stedelik; apartheid; post-apartheid; afhanklikheid; diskriminasie; straatverkope; geslag; geweld.

1. INTRODUCTION

"It is important for us to unite women committed to a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa. Otherwise we will find ourselves in the same situation as women from other countries in the post-liberation era. After having struggled together with their men for liberation,

women comrades found their position had not changed. We need to assert our position as women more strongly now than ever before and we can only do that effectively as one, unified, loud voice" (Feroza Adam[1] 1990).

This article draws on subaltern theory to problematise the condition of Qwaqwa[2] women in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Conventionally, the term "subaltern" denotes an inferior military rank. However, in critical theory and post-colonialism it is used to denote a group of people who are marginalised and subordinated and, thus, excluded from power on the basis of race, gender, class, ethnicity, or economic and political status[3]. It is in this context that the term is used to the study of Qwaqwa women. Women, across space and time, have remained one of the most marginalised groups of people. Subaltern studies, therefore, attempt not only to put women's issues on the agenda, but also to provide a politic of liberation for the marginalised constituencies. The study of subalterns was initially undertaken by Said (1978), Ashcroft and co-authors (1989) and Antonio Gramsci (1992). Later, it was taken up by Spivak (1988; 1995), Chatterjee (1993) and Bhabha (1994), among others. Zeleza (1997:167) posits that, despite the proliferation of literature on women, including women's history, "women remain largely invisible or misrepresented in mainstream, or rather 'malestream', African history". It is this invisibility that has prompted Spivak to pose the question, "Can the subaltern speak?" Using South Africa's sexed subaltern subjects from the former "homeland" of Qwaqwa, this article attempts to bring to the fore the extent to which they can speak and can be heard. Thus, as women participated in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, they also pursued an additional struggle – the struggle for women's liberation from oppressive gender relations. Non-sexism was made an aim of the mainstream struggle, at least at the level of language. But Meer (2005:37) observes that, "progress on gender equality made during the transition has not automatically been transformed into unambiguous gains for women within the post-apartheid era of development". The narratives of women from rural and semi-urban Qwaqwa both confirm and contradict this observation.

Our findings show that both rural and urban women from Qwaqwa have varying understanding and interpretation of the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, particularly in terms of the impact on their lives. Women from rural Qwaqwa indicated that they were particularly happy that the end of apartheid

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1   Feroza Adam was a feminist activist who became a Member of Parliament in South Africa's first democratic parliament in 1994. She was a former member of the Federation of Transvaal Women.

2   Qwaqwa became a "self-governing homeland" in 1974, but Paramount Chief Mopeli repeatedly rejected Qwaqwa independence and insisted on seeing all "homelands" as regional governments within a greater South Africa. Botshabelo, 200km away and within commuting distance from Bloemfontein, was incorporated into Qwaqwa in 1986. After the 1994 democratic elections, Qwaqwa was incorporated into the Free State Province.

3   See Spivak (1988:271-313); Chatterjee (1993); Bhabha (1994); Spivak (1995:24-28).

made it possible for them to migrate from white-owned farms into semi-urban Qwaqwa to start a new life. Most of these women ventured into street vending businesses. Women from semi-urban Qwaqwa expressed satisfaction that the end of apartheid ended the sexist practice of giving women lower salaries than men for similar jobs and similar qualifications. They also hailed the demise of the tendency to leave most decisions in the hands of men. However, both rural and urban women bemoan what they see as the escalation of human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and girls in post-apartheid South Africa, thus solidifying the treatment of women as second-class citizens; Spivak's sexed subaltern subjects. They also bemoan that increased lawlessness in society has left many women, children and the elderly as hapless victims. The trafficking of women and the violence against women in post-apartheid South Africa has reinforced the notion of the double-oppression of women through the perpetuation of gender biases (Spivak 1988; 1995; Ashcroft *et al.* 2007; Petersen and Rutherford 1986; Gilman 1992). However, it is important not to play down the agency of the so-called victims. Hudson (2012:450) critiques the hegemonic framing of agency which tends to determine who is assigned or denied agency, arguing that, "the overemphasis on essentialist, stereotypical notions of women as victims or mothers underplays the role of women as political agents in conflict, and conversely masks the victimhood of men and boys".

2.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the liberation struggles in Southern Africa and across the continent, women fought as equals with men. However, after such struggles women suddenly found themselves in an inferior position, thus exposing the weaknesses of the discourses of Africanness. Thus, women's struggle for economic and political independence may have been obvious and very visible, but the struggle for personal freedom and dignity within their own societies is not. It is this that has prompted Spivak to ask the question as to whether or not the sexed subaltern subject, who is doubly oppressed, can speak? This article, using the voices of women from rural and semi-urban Qwaqwa, seeks to establish the extent to which these women not only perceive both the apartheid and post-apartheid regimes, but have also experienced life in the two eras. Using the same voices, the article also seeks to offer an assessment of the quality of transformation in their lives under the African National Congress (ANC)-led government.

3.   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research was approached from an interpretivist epistemological perspective which acknowledges that knowledge created can never be totally objective (Crotty 1998; Nieuwenhuis 2007). This stance determined that the design of the

research adheres to the qualitative research approach as a guiding paradigm and methodology (Babbie 2004; Babbie and Mouton 2005). As such, empirical data was collected using two approaches, namely the interview method and the unstructured questionnaire. In total, 14 women and one man, all from rural and semi-urban Qwaqwa, were interviewed or completed a questionnaire. While our study sample shows a huge gap in gender representation, this was deliberate because we wanted to capture the voices and experiences of women in particular. We, therefore, do not deny that men's voices would have added nuance to our understanding of the lived realities of women in post-apartheid South Africa.

Our contacts in Qwaqwa made it possible to bring together in one place ten women and one man for in-depth interviews and for questionnaire administering by the researchers.[4] The participants were identified through snowball sampling, while those purposively selected identified additional informants for interviewing; individuals who became part of the sample (Babbie 2004). Pre-set questions were administered to each of the informants, while others volunteered to give detailed accounts of their views of the apartheid and post-apartheid society in writing. The majority of these were completed in Sesotho. Consequently, we had to translate the texts from Sesotho into English. Clearly, translation has its own advantages and disadvantages. According to Müller (2007), Bower and Ervin (1953) and Lopez and co-authors (2008), the translation process is fraught with problems of translator bias; distortions arising from differences in the meaning of words, syntactical and cultural contexts; lack of equivalent words in the target language; and ambiguity in the original language. The other four women who participated in the study were all vendors who were randomly picked and interviewed using the interview guide.

While it may appear to some that our sample was very small, it does not necessarily mean that the validity, reliability and objectivity of our findings were called into question. We were, of course, constrained in both time and resources to widen the size of our population. Answers to the question, "how many qualitative interviews are enough?", or put differently, "how large should a sample size in qualitative research be?", are not easy – the general response is almost always, "it depends", or that the concept of saturation is the most important factor (Barker and Edwards 2012; Dworkin 2012). Dworkin (2012:1319) says that many scholars suggest that, "anywhere from 5 to 50 participants [are] adequate". In view of this, we do not consider our sample size of 15 to be too small. This is because valid and reliable inferences and generalisations, buttressed by findings from previous scholarly work, were possible, as demonstrated in the section on findings of the study. Our findings show that the voices captured provide a window into the lives and experiences of most ordinary women in Qwaqwa

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4   All interviews were conducted in Qwaqwa in February 2017.

(Slater 2002).[5] To guarantee the anonymity and privacy of our informants and to protect their identity, as per their request, we created pseudonyms in the local Sesotho language for all of them. Thus, the names used in this article are not the real names of our informants.

4.   CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

Throughout history, resisting oppression has been a manifestation of women's experience throughout the cultures of the world. The experiences of women in liberation and post-liberation struggles are not often well documented and seldom understood. During the Algerian War for Independence from France (1954-1962), thousands of women were active participants as combatants, spies, fundraisers, couriers, nurses, launderers and cooks, and even in taking initiative on deadly missions. While Algerian women made great strides after the war by securing some rights, many women, including former combatants, returned to private life after the war, only to be rejected by the civilian society they liberated (Turshen 2002). A rare study of seven *mujahidat* (women combatants) describes their considerable difficulties in reintegrating after the Algerian War. In Mozambique and Namibia, Collins (1977) posits that women played a key role in mobilising support for the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) respectively. This they did through the Organisation for Mozambican Women (OMW) and the SWAPO Women's Council by not only showing solidarity with the liberation movements, but also consciously associating themselves with the liberation movements, as well as participating in forums aimed at the revolutionary transformation of their societies. In Namibia, there was general consensus during the liberation struggle that, "a liberation of the country which doesn't include liberation of women [was] only half a liberation. It [was] only a liberation of the men" (Collins 1977:43).

Yet, in the post-colony, the situation of women in these countries, as in many others, has not changed much. In Zimbabwe, for example, after independence there was much rhetoric by elite men and women about women's roles in the liberation struggle. It was claimed that women had formed a large proportion of the fighting forces and that they had won equality of status and esteem on the battlefield. Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000), however, shows that these claims were not accurate, as women were always subordinated and marginal, both during the war and after independence. The Women and Land Lobby Group claims that, as hardly any female-headed household has been allocated land, land occupations and redistributions did not benefit women at all. The Zimbabwe African National

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5   Slater's study on the complexity of livelihood diversification among Qwaqwa residents between 1970 and 2000 was based on interviews in 125 households and on the life histories of 40 individual respondents.

Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)'s[6] emancipatory rhetoric was only rhetoric, because women's situation changed little after independence in Zimbabwe and, by extension, elsewhere in the modern world (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000; Schmidt 2001). These circumstances of women in post-liberation Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and across the continent, buttress Feroza Adam's statement quoted at the beginning of this article.

In South Africa the fact that women, like the rest of other members of society, suffered immensely under apartheid, is beyond doubt. As a result, many women resisted apartheid in numerous ways. However, as in many countries on the continent, women in the post-apartheid era continue to experience socio-economic and political inequality. Even during the struggle against apartheid, while the contribution of women was highly valued, fellow African men tended to place limits on what they could do. For example, in 1988 plans to set up a national women's structure within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) were subverted by the male leadership in the same way calls for women representation within the trade union were resisted by COSATU men. It was only in 1993 that there was a female in the national leadership of COSATU, while a sexual harassment policy took more than seven years to be adopted (Meer 2005:40). Similarly, in 1990 in the ANC there were no women among the six national office bearers of the organisation due to resistance by men in the ANC. The ANC Women's League (ANCWL)'s proposal that at least 30% of the positions on the National Executive Council (NEC) be filled by women was rejected at the 1991 Conference, notwithstanding ANC male leaders initially agreeing to support it (Meer 2005:40). It was then that the ANCWL realised that, "unequal social relations within society enter even liberation movements such as the ANC" (Meer 2005:41). The examples of COSATU and the ANC clearly demonstrate that, while men in these organisations ostensibly accepted the idea of non-sexism, they were not ready to change their behaviour or give up their power.

And today, in the post-apartheid South Africa, it is not generally acknowledged that women continue to be economically dependent on men; that they lack easy access to education, as well as the right to have control over their own bodies – reproductive rights and the access of men to their bodies

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6   Save for the Coalition Government of 2009-2013, ZANU-PF remains the only ruling party in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. It is heralded for bringing about independence on the one hand and, on the other hand, excoriated for its human rights' abuses in recent years. Post-independence organs established to deal with women's affairs have remained subordinated to the agendas of ZANU-PF's male leadership. Few women were well-rewarded in the newly independent government, namely Fay Chung (was Education Minister), Margaret Dongo (worked for ZANU in many capacities) and Joice Mujuru (rose through the ranks to become Vice-President). The latter two have now fallen out of favour with the ruling elite. A few more women, for example Grace Mugabe, acquired vast swathes of fertile land through political connections and force because of their privileged positions.

(Penzhorn 2005). As in Zimbabwe, women in South Africa are invisible within the land redistribution programme. Davis and co-authors (2004:276-277) posit that this invisibility is a consequence of the inconsistent interpretation of gender equity and uncertainty on how to foreground women in the land reform programme. They make a case for a supply-led and class-based gender approach that deliberately targets poor rural women against the current "willing-buyer, willing-seller" principle which tends to privilege only those strategically positioned rich and educated women, the majority of whom have the necessary networks, knowledge and resources.

The above discussion reinforces Spivak's fundamental question about whether those living on the margins of society can "speak" for themselves? Spivak's famous question emphasises the idea that representation is a type of speech act, with a speaker and a listener. This is because more often than not, the subalterns' attempts to represent themselves (self-representation) tend to fall outside the official institutional structures of representation.[7] Therefore, in a world of domination by the powerful, self-definition and self-representation will always remain an illusion. Mda (2013:9) posits that conservative and oppressive, "African culture decrees that a good African woman must be seen and not heard, and [that] her place is in the kitchen and the bedroom". Spivak (1995) argues that in the relationship between coloniser and the colonised in India, the abolition of the Hindu rite of *sati* (widow sacrifice) by the British has generally come to be understood as a case of, "white men saving brown women from brown men". Yet, argues Zeleza (1997:167), it is important to caution against, "the romantic myth that the roles of women and men were equal and complimentary in good old, harmonious, pre-colonial Africa". In pre-colonial Africa, women were considered as minors, peasants, traders and wives, and nothing more. For example, Schmidt (1996:14) posits that, in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, Shona women, no matter their age, "influenced public affairs only indirectly" and, "with […] exceptions, their voices were mediated by fathers, husbands, sons or other male kin". Senior men in Shona society, as in many pre-colonial societies on the continent, wielded enormous political and religious power and controlled and exercised authority over the labour power of women, children and junior men. Thus, women were equally prejudiced in pre-colonial times and were doubly-oppressed under colonial rule and apartheid as one patriarchal society confronted another.

5.   FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: VOICES FROM QWAQWA

Most women in our sample appear not to have directly participated in the liberation struggle, except for a few who claim to have been forced, as school

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7   See Spivak (1988; 1995). See also, Abrahamsen (2003).

girls, to take part in political demonstrations.[8] Yet, there are those who do not even know that women participated in the liberation struggle which began in the Free State, let alone how and why there was such a struggle. Women from the rural areas did not have adequate knowledge of South African politics. This is probably because, in African culture, politics has always been considered a man's domain, due to the patriarchal nature of African societies. In this section we discuss, firstly, narratives from rural and urban women regarding their experience of apartheid, and secondly, narratives from rural and urban women regarding their experiences of the post-apartheid era. However, this division does not propose an essentialised experience of our informants; far from it.

6. VOICES OF RURAL AND URBAN QWAQWA WOMEN ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF APARTHEID

This section discusses rural and semi-urban Qwaqwa women's experiences of apartheid. It shows that women, just like every black person, were excluded from decision-making positions, had limited access to education opportunities, and were treated as second-class citizens, among many forms of marginalisation and exclusion.

6.1 Exclusion from decision-making positions

Our informants point out that, during the apartheid era, in Qwaqwa, like in many homelands, life was extremely difficult, not only for women, but for every black person. Women, in particular, were deliberately excluded from decision-making positions. The result was that decisions made for them did not have their best interests at heart. They charge that women in Qwaqwa were disadvantaged in most aspects of life – socio-economic, political, and even religious; thus, confirming their status as second-class citizens.[9] Since most of them were unemployed, they were bound to live in the rural areas under very difficult conditions. In these areas, they were subjected to extreme poverty, because they were not empowered to exploit their environment for the betterment of their lives.

6.2 Limited access to education opportunities

During this period, most women in rural Qwaqwa did not have easy access to education, because there were a limited number of schools. Schools were concentrated mostly in the urban centres. Women's limited access to education and the lack of information on family planning impacted negatively on their lives, as they could not explore other means of survival, such as engaging in domestic

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8   As school girls, these women claim that they were made to demonstrate against the "dombas".
9   See Section 5.1.3 *supra*.

work. As a result, they were forced to stay in the rural areas, performing menial work (Interview 2017b:Lineo and Matsoso). In the view of some women, the situation changed for the better from 1974 when Qwaqwa became a self-governing homeland under the leadership of Dr TK Mopeli. Mopeli's government built more schools, introduced self-help associations and encouraged business entrepreneurship. Some informants posit that, as a result, Qwaqwa came to be known as a "well of education" and many women started their own businesses, turning Qwaqwa into one of the leading homelands in terms of development (Interview 2017b:Lineo, Matsoso and Tholang). Mopeli's government also facilitated the electrification of Qwaqwa and the provision of piped water, as well as, "creat[ing] jobs for everyone, including the uneducated people" (Interview 2017b:Lineo). Today, women in Qwaqwa nostalgically look back to Mopeli's era, because then life was good and manageable. It is therefore interesting to see that the legacy of Mopeli is still held in high esteem due to the infrastructural and other opportunities he created. By remembering him for these opportunities, it reinforces the thesis that women, given a chance and the right opportunities, can become engines for their own economic empowerment.

6.3   Women as second-class citizens

However, experiences of apartheid have left deep scars on some women. For example, they remember very well the notorious "passes" they were forced to carry in order to access urban areas and to secure employment. The story of women's resistance to the pass laws in the (Orange) Free State and the Transvaal in 1913, in the 1920s and in 1931, and the arrests or prosecution of over 17 745 000 Africans for violation of the pass laws is one of the most stirring chapters in 20th century South African history (Savage 1986:181; Barnes 1989:40; Van den Berghe 1970; Greenberg 1987; Wolpe 1995; Murray 1995). According to Lerato (Interview 2017a), "the apartheid regime was only interested in black cheap labour. Women served as domestic workers while men were shepherds and gardeners for white families". Lineo (Interview 2017b) narrates a case which brings to the fore the privileged status of white women and how they abused black women with impunity. She narrates that, one morning, a domestic worker over-slept and when she arrived at her employer's house, her "boss", a white woman, was so furious that she poured a bucket full of cold water over her and the "poor" woman simply fainted and collapsed to the ground. She says that to this day, her family members, relatives and friends "still live with this scar". Mamosa (Interview 2017b) recalls a case in which a black woman, confused by her sick child on her back, entered a shop using the "whites-only" entrance. She was pushed out of the shop by a white woman and was called a, "monkey with bad manners". "In another incident", recalls Lineo (Interview 2017b), "we were in a queue in a shop when a white lady standing behind me just pounced on me and said, 'you Zulu maid your breath stinks'. I lost it and slapped the white woman

and I was immediately taken to a police station for questioning. To everyone's surprise, the white lady apologized." These narratives by our informants show that in colonial Africa, particularly South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe), "those who wore the uniform of the white skin wore it with inherent power, authority and privilege" (Mushonga 2013:1). The narratives also show that many people who experienced colonialism and apartheid have, in their memories, a huge heritage of the past.

It is therefore important to note that the apartheid racist policies sowed hatred between white and black women by elevating white women to a superior status. Black women with similar qualifications and holding similar positions were paid lower salaries than white women. Moreover, black women with equal qualifications and doing similar work as their male black counterparts earned lower salaries. For example, in 1982, in Qwaqwa, the average wage for women per month was R75 and between R75 and R100 for men (Pickles and Woods 1992:644). These disparities represented not only sexist practices, but also extreme exploitation of cheap labour (Murray 1995). In Qwaqwa, as in most so-called homelands, decision-making positions were also held by men only. For example, assert our informants, a woman could never become a school principal, even if she was better qualified than her male colleagues (Interview 2017b:Bokang and Tholang; Interview 2017a:Mamello). The apartheid regime was both racist and patriarchal in nature and disregarded the fact that there were, "women who [were] more intelligent and endowed with better leadership qualities than men" (Interview 2017b:Mamosa). Most of our informants concur with each other that reporting gender violence or abuse in those days was a humiliating experience because the then South African Police (SAP) did not protect women from abuse by their husbands. Instead, they made fun of them (Interview 2017b:Mamorena and Tholang; Interview 2017a:Neo, Maabi and Mamello).

7. VOICES OF RURAL AND URBAN QWAQWA WOMEN ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

"Our independence has both good and bad aspects."
(Interview 2017b:Mamosa)

Rural and urban women in Qwaqwa perceive and interpret the status of women in independent South Africa differently. There are those who contend that independence came with many positives, while some think their livelihoods have not changed dramatically and that levels of crime have increased since independence. However, all our informants expressed satisfaction with the fall of the apartheid regime, which, in their view, was not only racist, but also sexist as they regarded its policies to be more oppressive for women than for men. Some

of our informants openly confessed that it took time to accept that they were free to use the same public facilities as whites – for example, toilets, buses, trains and the same entrances to shops. Some openly admitted that coping with the death of apartheid was a challenge that required a mindset re-adjustment. In this section of the article we capture some of the voices of women to highlight what they perceive as the, "good and bad aspects" that came with independence.

7.1   The fruits of political freedom

Among some of the positives that came with political freedom and that were emphasised by our informants, was the possibility for them to migrate from the white-owned farms into Qwaqwa to start a new life. Political freedom enabled them to start small businesses, like street vending. A further positive that found emphasis among our informants was that, in the new South Africa, they were free and able to work anywhere without any restrictions. To them, the abolition of the "pass" system was a victory for all black South Africans. They are of the opinion that, during the apartheid era, especially after Qwaqwa became a "homeland", they could not easily work outside Qwaqwa due to the need for "passports" (Interview 2017a:Lerato and Thabo; Interview 2017b:Matsoso and Bokang). However, it is important to note that there were no passports in Qwaqwa during this period. Our informants must have either mistaken a *kiki* for a passport, or just used the word "passport" loosely to refer to a *kiki* or to a "pass"'. According to Lerato (Interview 2017a), such "passports" directly linked them to Qwaqwa, thus jeopardizing their chances of getting jobs because the, "Qwaqwa homeland was disliked in many areas". According to our informants, Qwaqwa was "disliked" by the apartheid state because it was under a "revolutionary" leader, Dr Mopeli, who had strong backing from "vigilant" chiefs, such as Chief Charles, Chief Ntsane and Chief Motebang. People from other parts of the country "disliked" Qwaqwa by refusing to openly interact with people from the "homeland" for fear of landing themselves into trouble with apartheid authorities (Interview 2017b:Bokang and Matsoso; Interview 2017a:Lerato). The above viewpoints can be contested depending on how individuals viewed the political situation in Qwaqwa.

Qwaqwa women also indicated that one of the most celebrated changes in South Africa was that women were no longer confined to life in the rural areas, reserves or to house chores. They were happy that fellow women were holding decision-making positions as government ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs), ambassadors, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), judges and other professional positions. Unlike under apartheid, they were gaining access to equal job opportunities with men and could, among other careers, become pilots, bus drivers, train drivers, plumbers, carpenters, engineers and electricians (Interview 2017a:Maneo, Lerato and Maabi; Interview 2017b:Mamosa and Puseletso). If these testimonies are anything to go by, this is highly commendable, given that in some African countries like Algeria, "the world of work remains largely closed

to [women]" (Sörlin and Vessuri 2007:26). According to Thabo (Interview 2017a), the non-discriminatory education system has also provided an opportunity for young educated South Africans to, "dream big and conquer". While affording young South Africans access to education in post-apartheid South Africa is both liberating and progressive, gender disparities in higher education remains acute in, "virtually all African countries and in most disciplines"[10] and more needs to be done to close the gap (Teferra and Altbach 2004:35-37). Women in Qwaqwa further commended the post-apartheid regime for a special recognition of people who played leading roles in the struggle against apartheid. They were satisfied that those who gallantly fought against apartheid were recognised with positions in government, while surviving children and close relatives of those who lost their lives in the liberation struggle were receiving social grants (Interview 2017b:Mamorena and Mamosa; Interview 2017a:Mamello). A number of post-liberation regimes in Southern Africa have put in place special schemes to support former liberation fighters and their surviving immediate family members. For example, in Zimbabwe, the War Veterans Act of 31 March 1995 provided for the establishment of schemes to aid war veterans and their dependants while in Namibia, and a Ministry of Veterans' Affairs oversees the welfare of former liberation fighters and their dependants.

Women in Qwaqwa also expressed satisfaction that their rights were guaranteed in the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). "I am happy with the women's rights law in South Africa because it favours us a lot" (Interview 2017a:Maabi). They praised the South African Government for setting aside three days in a year, namely Women's Day, Mothers' Day [sic] and 16 Days of Activism to celebrate the cause of women in society. "The one I like most is 16 Days of Activism", says Lerato (Interview 2017a). Qwaqwa women also commended the government for working with NGOs to improve the welfare of women and society. One NGO, Thusanang Advice Centre (TAC), was highly commended for caring for the destitute, as well as the victims of gender violence, particularly children, women and the elderly. TAC also offers legal advice to victims of gender violence, as well as conducting seminars to educate people about human rights and gender violence (Interview 2017b:Lineo; Interview 2017a:Nthabiseng).

7.2 Unfulfilled dreams/promises and the persistence of crime and inequality

Notwithstanding some commendable achievements by the South African Government, some Qwaqwa women registered their disappointments and

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10   There are, however, a few exceptions to this. According to Teferra and Altbach (2004), there are more female students (56%) enrolled at the National University of Lesotho; more female students (68%) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities in universities in Mauritius; and more female students in private universities in Uganda.

frustrations with the ANC Government. Among the street vendors there was a feeling that the government was not doing enough to support their initiatives. Matseliso (Interview 2017b), a street vendor, indicated that she did not see the difference between the apartheid regime and the present government as she was still struggling to make ends meet. "I am playing indifferent to what is happening around me because the change of regimes has not directly benefited me as an individual" (Interview 2017b:Matseliso). This ambivalence is prevalent among many subalterns living on the margins of society in many post-liberation and post-independent societies in Africa and around the world. Several street vendors complained that there were no government schemes which enable them, not only to start their own businesses, but also to get loans for their small businesses. They also complained that the government has not built them decent stalls to protect them from cold winds in winter and during the rainy season (Interview 2017b:Puseletso, Bokang and Matseliso). They also expect the state to sponsor training workshops for women of different educational levels on entrepreneurship and to provide the necessary equipment. However, it should not be forgotten that street vending activities were only possible due to increased deregulation by which strict licensing laws for shops and other businesses were relaxed. According to Slater (2002), deregulation resulted in an explosion in informal retailing as people in both town and country in Qwaqwa attempted to take advantage of relaxed trading laws. "Women selling fruit, drinks and snacks lined the gates of Qwaqwa's schools whilst shop frontages in Qwaqwa's main shopping centre were overtaken by the stalls of informal retailers" (Slater 2002:605).

Most of our informants agree that the post-apartheid government has not fulfilled its promises of a "better and easy life for all". They claim that, during the liberation struggle, they were promised free housing, electricity, piped water and educational opportunities. However, 23 years after independence, these promises have not been met. They complained that they were still living in "shacks", while their children travelled long distances to school, with some even dropping out of tertiary education due to increased tuition fees that they could not afford (Interview 2017b:Mamosa, Puseletso and Bokang). The Fees Must Fall (FMF) movement that left many university campuses in South Africa paralysed for much of the 2016 academic year was occasioned by a proposal to increase tuition fees for 2016 by 10,5 % (De Vos 2015) and a demand for free education. Mda (2013) calls this culture of dependency and entitlement an, "African malaise [which] is largely self-inflicted".

Women in Qwaqwa further observed that crime levels have increased since the dawn of freedom. They blamed this on unemployment and the continued existence of hostels which, in their view, have become havens for criminals. What worried them most was that women and children were the major victims of different types of crimes (Interview 2017b:Puseletso, Bokang

and Matseliso). According to Penzhorn (2005:345), South Africa has, "the highest reported rapes in the world". This shows that violence against women, the subaltern in this instance, is endemic in South Africa, despite government denials. Such violence is both a reflection of unequal power relations in society, while also serving to perpetuate it. Women in Qwaqwa also claimed that, while their rights were protected in the Constitution, they were unhappy with the manner in which the legal system was operating in practice. In their view, increasing levels of crime, including the trafficking of women in post-apartheid South Africa, were due to a lenient justice system. According to Nthabiseng (Interview 2017a), the justice system, "defeats the ends of justice through lenient sentences given to perpetrators of criminal acts". It is also our informants' view that women's rights are violated due to the absence of mechanisms to enforce the law. Nthabiseng (Interview 2017a) felt that women were victims of political maneuverings. "While women are protected by the law and the Constitution, the problem is that people in power discriminate against women on the basis of political affiliations" (Interview 2017a:Neo). Nthabiseng (Interview 2017a), in reference to opportunities available to women in a new South Africa, had this to say, "Life as a woman in post-apartheid [South Africa] is not as good as can be expected due to the fact that every opportunity is politically motivated. To get opportunities, you have to belong to the ruling party and have connections with the party […] Also, you have to have a love relationship with the officials in order to get opportunities."

Neo and Nthabiseng's testimonies, just like the rest of those that we interviewed, only serve to confirm the continued double-oppression of most women in post-apartheid South Africa; women who are forced to make difficult choices, thus further entrenching their subalternity. While women could be seen as victims of political maneuverings, as claimed by Nthabiseng and Neo, Hudson (2012) posits that it is equally important not to underplay their role as political agents in their own oppression. However, it is true that in Africa the state has become a "site of eating", with political connections as a ticket to government jobs and tenders. Kopecky (2011) shows how political competition and party patronage has influenced appointments in the public service in Ghana and South Africa, while Thabane (2017) and Khasoane (2017) show how party-political appointments and party-politicisation of the public service in Lesotho have contributed to political instability. In these situations, women are less agentic players than victims.

While women in Qwaqwa complain that the government has not fulfilled its promise of a "better and easy life for all", they also blame the government for cultivating and nurturing the culture of dependency through its social grants scheme.[11] The social grants have made South Africans regard independence as

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11   There are five major social security grants in South Africa, namely the State Old Age Pension, the Disability Grant, the Child Support Grant, the Foster Child Grant and the

dependency on government for all basic needs *(bo ahlama u je)*. According to some of our informants, the Child Support Grant, for example, has led to moral degeneration in society because it encourages South African teenagers to bear children without shame, as babies have become a sure source of money (Interview 2017b:Lineo and Mamosa; Interview 2017a:Maabi). Reflecting on this culture where a number of black South Africans tend to equate independence with dependency on government, Mda (2013:6-8) argues that, "this whole culture of dependency and entitlement is oppressive rather than liberating, disempowering rather than empowering".[12]

8.   CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to bring to the fore, through the voices of rural and urban women from Qwaqwa, their life experiences of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The findings show that the position of black women was more precarious under apartheid, and that in post-apartheid South Africa, women in Qwaqwa have realised some positive changes in their lives. However, the study of Qwaqwa women's experiences of both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa has also revealed the persistence of gender oppression and gender-based violence, which appears to be on the increase in the post-apartheid dispensation. In this instance, while South Africa's sexed subaltern subjects may speak, their voices are not heard. Thus, Feroza Adam correctly observed that women in South Africa need to speak with, "one, unified, loud voice" as the first real step towards their full emancipation (Meer 2005). The persistence of gender oppression and gender-based violence clearly points to the need for further investigation in understanding the way these manifest themselves in society across space and time. Another interesting aspect that emerges from this research, and probably deserves further scrutiny, is the social security grants and its impact on society, including the extent to which these grants are entrenching a culture of dependency and entitlement among the country's citizens.

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Care Dependency Grant.
12   The dependency mentality, which Mda sees as just one of the many symptoms of the African malaise, is a subject for another article.

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