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Gendering protests: Mapping women's participation in community protests in Duncan Village, Eastern Cape

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INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in protests is long documented in history. However, protest narratives tend to lean more towards the position and role of women as victims of protests, mostly relegated to the backstage of care work and emotional labour. This is not to dismiss or trivialise gendered experiences of women in protest. However, where women's participation has been recognised, it is usually in the context of protests that mainly affect women's immediate concerns. These protests are not considered broadly as community struggles, but as struggles that are specific to issues that directly affect women. Yet, some of these protests specific to women's immediate challenges continue to influence and shape the political atmosphere more broadly.

This chapter maps the participation of women in community protests as strategists and organisers in community struggles. It seeks to map the role of women mobilised under the identity of *omama boManyano* to insert their voices and assert their bodies at the centre of protests and community struggles in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

The analysis draws evidence from three case studies of protest: the Black Sunday (1952) where hundreds of women, organised by *omama boManyano* (women of prayer), became victims and survivors of a massacre; the Duncan Village massacre (1985); and the Reeston 87 protest (2014), where episodes of violence were likened to ‘scenes from Marikana’.¹ These case studies were documented by the author through ethnographic mapping in East London in the Eastern Cape province between 2014 and 2019, and by interviews, also conducted by the author, in April 2022 for the forthcoming documentary, *Democracy from Below*. While the first two cases are drawn from a historical perspective, analysis of the 2014 protest demonstrates the continued role of *omama boManyano* in the community struggles and protests of the Eastern Cape. Common to these three cases is the role that *omama boManyano* have played in mobilising and participating in the protests. Evidence presented throughout the chapter suggests that there is a network of generations of *omama boManyano* who have actively mobilised for and participated in community protests, yet their documentation and visibility in scholarly literature remains marginal or absent.

POSITIONING OMAMA BOMANYANO IN COMMUNITY PROTESTS

Several scholars have written on women’s organisations and their participation in community struggles (see Fester 1997; Gasa 2007; Hassim and Gouws 1998; Dlakavu 2017; and Xaba 2017). Lihle Ngcobozi’s (2020) work has focused on *omama boManyano* and their role in national politics. Building on some of this work, this chapter is

1 This refers to the protest at Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana in North West province on 16 August 2012, where 34 striking mine workers were shot dead by police.

concerned with the role of women in the community protests of the Eastern Cape province in particular. Many of the women interviewed for this research identify as *omama boManyano* – consciously mobilised under this identity – and members of the community of Duncan Village identify *omama boManyano* as the legitimate and authoritative voice of reason in times of crisis.

The word *umanyano* originates from the Xhosa verb *ukumanya*, which means to join. Brandel-Syrier (1962) suggests that *umanyano* was first coined by Methodist church women referring specifically to their weekly meetings known as prayer unions. This identity was further adopted by women from other denominations referring to their church organisations (Haddad, 2004). It is important to note that *omama boManyano* (women of prayer) and *umama woManyano* (mother of prayer) are not used interchangeably. The former denotes a collective identity for a group of women (plural) and the latter refers to the identity of one woman (singular). However, *umama woManyano* (mother of prayer) and *umama we bhatyi* (literally translated to a woman who wears the Manyano uniform, as it appears on direct interview citations) are used interchangeably depending on the context, reflecting challenges of translating isiXhosa to English.

Both the church and the women of *uManyano* (women of prayer) have always played a crucial role in the histories of black communities by occupying a space in the spiritual, economic and political life of the community. In her ground-breaking work, *Mothers of the Nation: Manyano women in South Africa*, Lihle Ngcobozi (2020) notes that in the United States' civil rights movement and South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, the church became a crucial space for political mobilisation and ideological constructions of resistance to colonial occupations and apartheid. For Ngcobozi, *omama boManyano* hold a 'critical space in the South African imaginations of black womanhood, particularly where it intersects with ideas of religion, motherhood and the expression of black women's voices and their participation in politics outside of state-centric confines' (2020: 9).

Writing on women's movements in democratic South Africa, Shireen Hassim (2005) has highlighted the ways in which apartheid violence affected black communities, particularly the home, which

historically has been considered to be a woman's space. In reconfiguring the home as a space of resistance, Hassim contends that spaces such as the church, burial societies and stokvels transformed into solidarity networks and spaces of collective mobilisation and resistance (2005: 4). Furthermore, Zine Magubane (2010) notes the central role in shielding political activism of church groups such as omama boManyano, who constituted a space where women organised and mobilised for political consciousness. As such, the historical role of omama boManyano in Duncan Village and their participation in community struggles and protests can be traced to earlier anti-apartheid struggles that transformed the home and the church from private intimate spaces to public political spaces.

The women of uManyano, mapped throughout this chapter, have played a crucial role in community struggles in the Eastern Cape, from the defiance campaigns of the 1950s, through the township struggles of the 1980s, to the everyday community protests that have taken place since 1994. Omama boManyano are the voice of reason that continues to bring community members together to challenge and contest the post-apartheid order. As Ngcobozi (2020: 20) reminds us, 'the legitimacy of the Manyano women's identity as the entry point of political activism – their characterisation as mothers and the reliance on motherhood should be read with a level of complexity and depth'. Similarly, the women of uManyano in the Eastern Cape, and the role they continue to play in communities post-1994, should be understood as grounded in historical struggles in which women's role and voices have often been silenced.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The evidence presented in this chapter draws on ethnographic mapping and interviews conducted by the author. The latter forms part of research for a forthcoming documentary, *Democracy from Below*, recording understandings of democracy from a grassroots perspective. The chapter draws data from 22 life histories and interviews, archival work from the *Dispatch* newspaper in East London, and participant observation and informal conversations with participants from the

community protests that took place during the research period (2014 to 2022). From these narratives, we learn not only about anti-apartheid struggles and post-1994 protests, but about the meanings attached to the role of being *umama woManyano* (a woman of prayer) and the responsibility of that role beyond the church. Most of the stories shared were stories of struggle, trauma and resistance, while emphasising the role of prayer in overcoming everyday township struggles.

This chapter explores the agency of women as strategists and organisers in community struggles – accounts of which have tended to erase their presence and agency at the frontline, presenting them only as mothers responsible for care work. It explores the experiences of *omama boManyano* (as a collective identity) throughout the three protests as actors with agency, capable of (re)producing their urban space in ways that make sense to them as they share their everyday lived experiences. As Tsing (1993: 34) observes, ‘by treating women (and men) as individual commentators on their culture, we ask about disruptive as well as unifying features of their perspectives without assuming gender, ethnic, or political homogeneities’. Thus, empathy and sensitivity become a thread that runs through the reading and understanding of the experiences of *omama boManyano* as they assert their presence in collective community struggles and protests in the Eastern Cape.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter builds on the existing work of feminist scholars on the recognition of women and their labour in protests (see, for example, Fester 1997; Gasa 2007; Hassim and Gouws 1998; Dlakavu 2017; Xaba 2017). The chapter contributes to this scholarship by adding the voices of church women mobilised under the identity of *omama boManyano*, whose role and presence in community protests has largely been erased from histories of community struggles in the Eastern Cape.

Writing on the experiences of women's organisations in the Western Cape, Fester (1997) problematises some of the arguments that maintain that ‘South African women organise on the basis of motherhood’. She posits that ‘female consciousness becomes politically activated into feminist consciousness under certain conditions’. For Fester, ‘women's

resistance arises out of their particular historical contexts'. She therefore argues that 'motherism and working "shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk" can be seen as a form of South African feminism' (1997: 46). In her book *Women in South African History*, Nomboniso Gasa (2007) also challenges scholars who have maintained the position that the 'motherist' politics driving anti-pass protests during apartheid South Africa was fundamentally conservative. She argues that, at the heart of the 1950s struggles, is the fact that African women were rendered homeless through state policies that required them to carry passes. For Gasa, the struggle against pass laws was, in fact, a struggle to be in the public domain at the same time as a struggle for free movement.

Reflecting on women's organisations and democracy in South Africa, Shireen Hassim notes that 'women do not organise as women simply because they are women' (2005: 4). They tend to mobilise diverse identities such as workers, students, African, white etc., and these identities may in turn frame and shape their organisation. In redefining the public space, Hassim and Gouws (1998) argue that 'civil society is not a gender-neutral concept, but is founded on the separation between public and private as two distinct arenas in society. Women's movements in South Africa have constantly challenged these boundaries' (1998: 55). They highlight that, ideally, citizenship should establish equality; however, in practice, 'the public-private distinction has shaped the different ways in which men and women citizens have been incorporated into citizenship—men as workers and soldiers, women as mothers' (Hassim and Gouws, 1998: 55). Reproductive responsibilities and the division of labour in society therefore become gendered constraints that tend to narrow the scope for women's participation in formal politics and in civil society (Hassim and Gouws, 1998).

The voices of omama boManyano that are centred in this chapter have fallen through similar cracks where narratives of community protest in the Eastern Cape continue to silence and erase them from broader community struggles. The mobilisation and deployment of their identity as omama boManyano has seen these women mobilising collectively in ways that position them strategically in public politics and collective community protests, shifting the narrative of their participation from the private sphere to the public politics.

GENDERING PROTESTS

Writing on internationalism and solidarity, McGee (2018: 87) notes with concern that 'when women raised sensitive issues pertaining to their own family lives that did not fit within activist campaigns, men often dismissed these issues as ancillary to immediate political struggles'. Hassim and Gouws (1998), similarly, have observed how women's concerns, which emerged out of their direct responsibilities for household management and childcare, were deemed to be 'private' rather than 'public' concerns. Drawing from Lister (1997), they state that whenever these issues were brought into the public domain, welfare systems treated them as 'temporary compensations for family failures rather than legitimate citizenship claims' (Hassim and Gouws, 1998: 55). This response consequently marginalises women's interests from core political discourses (Hassim and Gouws, 1998).

Healy-Clancy (2017) shows that histories of women's erasure in South Africa date back to the apartheid era and how the state was complicit in unwriting the role of women in anti-apartheid struggles. She argues that throughout the anti-apartheid struggle women were routinely underestimated and ignored as political actors. Officials' underestimation of women opened up valuable political space for women who ran politically lively schools and clinics, but were never seen as threatening compared to male-led political groups. These conceptions have pushed the political labour of women to the backstage, consequently removing them from the frontline of protests, and relegating their labour to the home as a private space.

In the #FeesMustFall protests at South African public universities between 2015 and 2017, where students protested against exorbitant fees and made calls for decolonisation of the curricula, younger women contested the political space, seeking to challenge and disrupt patriarchal domination, sexual harassment and gender-based violence (Ndelu et al., 2017; Ndlovu 2017a; Xaba, 2017). However, the issues that women and non-binary participants in the movement raised were never considered to be central to the demands of the #FeesMustFall protests (see Dlakavu, 2017 and Xaba, 2017). Instead of treating the issues raised by women within the movement as central to the struggle for inclusive university

spaces, the debate around calls for an intersectional struggle contributed to the downfall of the movement as other student activists argued that those who called for the inclusion of women's issues were being divisive.

It is therefore not accidental that protests against gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide in South Africa have only recently gained attention within the general public and political parties in particular, some of which have utilised the issue in their political campaign strategies. For a long time, the struggle against GBV and femicide in South Africa remained the domain of women and related protests were not largely seen as affecting the economic and political landscape. However, if we are to begin the process of correcting our histories by historicising the role of women in protests and other community struggles, we need to recognise, acknowledge and take seriously the role of women in addressing intersectional struggles through protest action.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the home is a battlefield for women, understood and conceptualised as a space where power dynamics are not a reflection of pure patriarchal domination, but a site of struggle and contestation (Ndlovu, 2021). The shifting of the home and the church as a space of resistance, as transformed by omama boManyano, has reasserted the presence of women in the public political space. Histories of their participation in protest attest to the role they have played. This chapter thus contributes to efforts to reassert women's bodies at the picket line (Ndlovu, 2017b) and to highlight their role in community protests. Despite efforts to erase women from histories of protest, I argue that, in the Eastern Cape, the identity of women as omama boManyano, has been mobilised and deployed in ways that position them strategically in public politics and collective community protests, thereby making them visible.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS¹

The participation of women in community protests is not a new phenomenon in the Eastern Cape. While women have always

¹ The case studies presented here also appear in my previous work on the histories of women's participation in community struggles of Duncan Village, my Doctoral thesis and Masters Research Report (see Ndlovu 2020a; Ndlovu 2020b; Mukwedeya and Ndlovu 2017; Ndhlovu, 2015).

participated, and continue to participate in, everyday community struggles, I focus on particular episodic events that form part of the history of the province, and on some ongoing service delivery-related protests. Here, the aim is to highlight the presence and participation of women in protests and to emphasise the role of *omama boManyano*, who hardly appear in documented histories of struggle and resistance in the Eastern Cape.

The case studies have been carefully selected to align with the protest methods and strategies employed by *omama boManyano*. While the first two case studies are drawn from a historical perspective (1952 and 1985), the 2014 case study is brought into the conversation to demonstrate the continued presence of *omama boManyano* and their role in community protests in post-apartheid South Africa.

BLACK SUNDAY AND THE BANTU SQUARE MASSACRE (1952)

Duncan Village township has a long history of resistance and violence. The events of the Black Sunday that led to the Bantu Square massacre in Duncan Village are some of the cases that are scantily recorded, even though they remain engraved in the memories of the residents of the township (Ndlovu, 2020a). On 26 June 1952, the African National Congress (ANC) launched a Defiance Campaign to resist pass laws, curfews, the Group Areas Act and the Suppression of Communism Act (Lodge, 1983; Breier, 2015; Bank and Carton, 2016). The wave of the Defiance Campaign had started in Durban and moved to other cities like Johannesburg and then to Kimberley and Port Elizabeth, among other regions. Most leaders of the ANC had already been banned under the Riotous Assemblies Act and Suppression of Communism Act as a result of the Defiance Campaign (Mager and Minkley, 1990; *Daily Dispatch*, 1952). Alcott Skei Gwentshe, who was one of the ANC Youth League leaders in Duncan Village, requested permission for a political gathering in Duncan Village. The permission was declined and Gwentshe made a further request for a religious gathering, which was permitted (Mager and Minkley, 1990; Breier, 2015; Bank and Carton, 2016).

Disguised as a church gathering, the meeting at Bantu Square in Duncan Village was attended by a crowd estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000 people (Breier, 2015; Bank and Carton, 2016). As local historians maintain, hundreds of women put on their uManyano uniforms and headed to the prayer gathering. Authors and local historians maintain that while the preacher was still reading the Bible, the police issued a warning arguing that it was not a religious gathering (Breier, 2015; Bank and Carton, 2016). Within a few minutes, live ammunition was fired, and the crowd fled; some people were stampeded or shot, with some injured and some killed. The crowd that was gathered at Bantu Square broke into smaller groups running away from the police, while the police arrested those who were injured and locked them up in police trucks. The violence continued for about a week, with police arresting and killing protestors while residents burned anything associated with state power, such as municipal buildings and offices (Interview with Blauuw, 2017; Life history of Qebeyi, East London, 2017; Life history of Mkonqo, Duncan Village, 2017).

An eyewitness account of the hospital scenes at the casualty ward of Frere Hospital in East London is captured by Connie Manse Ngcaba, one of the staunch members of uManyano, in her moving biography *May I Have This Dance?*. Ngcaba (2015: 43–44) recalls the scene as follows:

I first experienced the barbarity of apartheid in November 1952. It was a Sunday afternoon. I was looking to the end of my shift at 4.30 pm. Suddenly, there was a call on the intercom 'Emergency. Emergency in Casualty. Please, everyone come.' ... What was usually a well-ordered unit was in utter chaos. There was blood everywhere, injured people groaning and pleading for help ... more ambulance drivers were pushing their way in, with heavy stretchers... Dozens of friends and family members anxiously pushed into the crowd, hoping to identify those on the floor. The police were there too, pulling people aside, asking questions, threatening, trying to find ringleaders of what they called a riot ... My head reeling, I picked my way over bodies of people who were already dead ... some still clutched the bibles fresh from

church ... so many women were lying around ... women of prayer that were familiar faces, some already dead ... Some of the injured had been shot in the head and the back. If they survived, they would probably be permanently crippled or paralysed.

Sister Quinlan Aidan, a Roman Catholic nun and Irish medical doctor at the St Peter Claver Mission in Duncan Village, died as a result of the violence. Her death made international headlines. Despite this, the official statistics maintained that only nine people died including two so-called Europeans i.e., Sister Aidan and Barend Vorster – a man who was selling insurance policies to the residents of Duncan Village.

Seven decades later, in 2022, the real number of black people who died is still unknown despite existing evidence about the Bantu Square massacre. The then apartheid policeman, Donald Card, who was tasked with investigating the murder of Sister Aidan, later acknowledged that the investigation revealed that more than two hundred black people died on Black Sunday. In their investigation, Card claims that they found that many bodies were not reported because of the fear of further victimisation and possible arrests for the murder of Sister Aidan (Thomas, 2007; Qebeyi, 2011). Local historian and former councillor, Mxolisi Koko Qebeyi, with support from the Eastern Cape Department of Arts and Culture, produced a documentary titled the *Dark Cloud* (2011). In that documentary, Donald Card² is recorded saying that some of the dead bodies were secretly transported to King William's Town, while others were taken across the Great Kei River to the rural areas (Breier, 2015; Bank and Carton, 2016). Local historians also note that other funerals in the township took place at night where only five people or less could gather due to police violence (Life history of Koko Qebeyi, 2017).

The women who died with Sister Aidan and those who survived to tell the story were (and continue to be) erased and silenced from the histories of resistance and protests in the Eastern Cape province by the state, the media and other narratives emerging from scholarly work (Ndlovu, 2020b). The distorted narratives erased the role and death of

2 See Thomas (2007) for a comprehensive biography of Donald Card.

more than 200 black people, while silencing *omama boManyano* who were at the forefront of this gathering. Judith Butler reminds us that the framing/frame ‘does not only exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality’ (2009: xiii). It is therefore not an accident that Sister Aidan’s death dominated both local and international writings, while the loss and death experienced by black women were overlooked. Where histories of the Bantu Square protest appear, they centre heroic images of certain male figures, such as Alcott Skeyi Gwentshe, Joel Mabi Lingisi and Cornelius Fazzie, who had initiated the meeting at Bantu Square (Breier, 2015; Bank and Carton, 2016).

THE DUNCAN VILLAGE MASSACRE (1985)

In the 1980s, Duncan Village became one of the focal sites where the struggle against apartheid rule took place. In 1985, United Democratic Front leader, Victoria Mxenge (*uNoMxenge*), was gunned down returning from a political meeting in Durban. *uNoMxenge* was mostly referred to as the wife of famous lawyer, Griffiths Mxenge. Yet, she was an activist in her own right. While her funeral was attended by more than 10,000 people, and letters of condolence received from exile, the majority of the attendees were women from Duncan Village. They mobilised under the identity of *omama boManyano*, who filled the bus to King William’s Town (*eQonce*). One local historian remembers (Life history of *mama MaMtolo*, *eQonce*, 2017):

We had to do it for our own. *Wayengumama we Bhatyi* [she (Victoria Mxenge) was part of the Manyano union] who cared a lot for everyone around her. If there was no one, it had to be us *omama beBhatyi* [women of *uManyano*] because *naye ebengumama weBhatyi, kwakunyanzelikile* [it was very important for us to attend as *omama boManyano* because she was also one of us.

On 11 August 1985, following the funeral of Victoria Mxenge, mourners returning from the funeral carried out arson attacks on

every building associated with apartheid rule, including local offices. The confrontation with police continued in the following days. This ultimately left 23 people dead and 138 injured (Truth Commission Special Report, undated; SAPA, 1996). The events associated with this violence later dominated the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission post-1994, where they were referred to as '14 days of war between residents and security forces' (Truth Commission Special Report, undated; Ndhlovu, 2015).

Reliving the memory of the massacre, one participant spoke about the loss of his mother at the protest. He spoke about the role of the church in community struggles of the time and how, even though he did not attend NoMxenge's funeral, when he heard about the protest that led to the massacre, he feared for his mother and other church women: 'Even though they always participated and played an important role in many community struggles, this one was a special one for them. Umama uNoMxenge was one of them, so we had to give them space in the bus because it was important for them' (Life history of bhuti Tura, Duncan Village, 2014). Under the identity of omama boManyano, women played an important role in mobilising for and attending the funeral of Victoria Mxenge, which resulted in the protest that led to the Duncan Village massacre of 1985.

REESTON 87 PROTEST (2014)

On 23 November 2014, I had an opportunity to sit through the planning process of a protest while conducting participant observation for research fieldwork. The protest took place between 23 and 24 November 2014 as one of the ongoing protests in Florence Street informal settlement in Duncan Village. The protests were intended to remind the mayor of an on-going service delivery issue of the 87 houses that 'disappeared' in Reeston when they were forcefully occupied by residents who were not the supposed beneficiaries. The 87 houses belonged to the residents of Florence Street informal settlement, who had been notified to prepare for relocation to Reeston township as part of a de-densifying project. However, residents of Florence Street (the 'Reeston 87') later learnt that they would no longer be moving. Their

houses had been occupied by residents from an informal settlement near Reeston who also protested and claimed that they had been waiting for houses for a long time (see Ndhlovu, 2015; Mukwedeya and Ndlovu, 2017). The protest came after a series of marches to hand over letters of demand and petitions to the mayor of Buffalo City (East London), asking him to find a means of returning the houses to the rightful owners, or to sign a written agreement that they would be allocated other houses.

On the evening of 23 November, a group of women gathered at the house of the chairperson of the special committee elected by community members to represent them in the ongoing housing struggle. The special committee was made up of five women and two men; the chairperson and her deputy were both women. In the planning meeting there was a total of eight women (including myself) and two men: one of the men was a committee member, and the other was a young man who assumed the duties of running errands to prepare material for the protest (see Ndhlovu, 2015).

When the chairperson of the committee was convinced that there was enough material for starting and maintaining a fire to block the road for the protest, she gave the young man a list of houses where he was to invite omama boManyano to come and pray for the success of the protest. Even though some of these women were not part of the Reeston 87 group, the chairperson trusted them, and they came to assist with prayer. In her words, 'these are the women that I pray with. When I go to war, they do not care if the problem concerns them or not, it is a war and it needs prayers, that's it' (Conversation with sisi Noluthando, Florence Street, 2014).

About four more women joined the planning team and we prayed: for the success of the protest, for the safety of everyone who was going to participate and for a long-term solution to the issue of the 87 houses that continue to haunt the people of Florence Street to date. Key to this 2014 protest, is the centrality of prayer and the role of omama boManyano who played the role of strategising, but also collectively coming together at night to pray for the success of the protest and the safety of protesters. Moreover, the emphasis on finding a permanent solution to the Reeston 87 housing issue with omama boManyano,

who were not affected, is a further testimony to how women mobilise collectively under the identity of uManyano to deal with community struggles and facilitate protest action for long term solutions. It is important to note here the importance of omama boManyano and their continued role in community protests, even post-1994.

A few hours before the beginning of the protest, women also took the responsibility of calling the *Daily Dispatch* newspaper to alert the media that there was going to be a protest and framing the narrative around their ongoing struggle for the Reeston 87 houses. The protest was successfully executed at around 03h00 on 24 November 2014. The police only arrived at the scene around 05h30 because traffic had started building up, with truck drivers calling their companies to complain that they were stuck trying to enter the East London town (see Ndhlovu, 2015). A lot of people were injured, especially women. This particular protest and many others that have taken place in Duncan Village are generally characterised by excessive violence with police firing rubber bullets and throwing teargas; community members retaliating by throwing stones. Zwanga Mukhuthu (2014) of the *Daily Dispatch* newspaper described scenes from a protest similar to those at Marikana.

The activism of omama boManyano and their participation in community struggles is a thread that runs throughout the history of protests, from the 1950s to present struggles. Their role remains central in community struggles and protests as they navigate different forms of marginality. Yet, despite the power of their mobilisation, the strategic planning, the prayer meetings and the execution of the protest itself, omama boManyano have remained absent from such narratives, contributing to practices of erasure and silencing of women's participation in protests.

RECASTING WOMEN AT THE PICKET LINE

The history of the Bantu Square massacre has haunted many local historians, especially those who are still seeking justice or, at the very least, acknowledgement from the state of the lives of the black people lost along with Sister Aidan. The Eastern Cape Provincial Government

has, however, built a memorial site for the victims of the 1985 massacre. According to Mxolisi Koko Qebeyi, the documentary, *Dark Cloud*, was meant to appease the ancestors of both black people and the Roman Catholic sisters who continue to work at Sister Aidan's Memorial Centre situated at the St Peter Claver Mission in Duncan Village. Qebeyi concludes the documentary by stating the importance of this historical event, arguing that the Bantu Square massacre, which claimed more than 200 lives if historical records are correct, is larger than the Sharpeville massacre of 1960³ and is thus deserving of the same recognition.

In emphasising his point, Qebeyi asks, 'Sixolisile kuNongendi, kodwa aphi na amathambo amaqhawe awangaleyomini?' [We have apologised to the nun, but where are the bones of the heroes from that day?] Alongside this, however, I argue that, in recollection of these memories and revival of the history of Black Sunday, an equally important question should be asked: 'Aphi na amagama amaqhawekazi awanikelwa kwimfazwe yase Bantu Square?' [Where are the voices of women (dead or alive), who were sacrificed at the battlefield of Bantu Square?] While Qebeyi's question is important for recollecting the history of the Bantu Square massacre, recognising the individual women who were at Bantu Square constitutes an effort to ensure that, in correcting this history, we recognise and centre their role and that of omama boManyano in the community protests and struggles of Duncan Village.

Zuko Blauuw, a historian working for the East London City Museum and Library, is an important figure in the oral histories of Duncan Village and the narratives of the Black Sunday. He has a rich history of the St Peter Claver Catholic Mission in Duncan Village where Sister Aidan practised as a medical doctor, a resident and a church member. Despite his positionality in the community and the church, Blauuw strongly believes that the story of the Bantu Square massacre should be told in a balanced way that does justice, not only to the death of Sister Aidan, but to the role of history and the political atmosphere in the Bantu Square tragedy (Interview with Zuko Blauuw, 2017). In locating

3 The Sharpeville massacre refers to the killing of 69 people by police at a gathering in Sharpeville township organised by the members of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) on 21 March 1960. 21 March is celebrated as a public holiday to observe Human Rights Day in South Africa.

Sister Aidan's tragic death at Bantu Square in the political climate of the time, we begin to recognise the role of omama boManyano in mobilising for the gathering and their active role in other community protests. It is this rich history of women's activism and participation in protests of the 1950s that generations of omama boManyano have built on to further their community struggles, including the women of the 1985 Duncan Village massacre and those involved in the 2014 Reeston protest. It is a thread that weaves through the historical and current protests of the Eastern Cape.

Pumza Mkonqo is a community leader and activist, and a devoted member of omama boManyano under the Baptist Church in Duncan Village. In the forthcoming documentary, *Democracy from Below* (Barry, forthcoming), covering local reflections on the meanings of democracy, Mkonqo notes that she comes from a generation of omama boManyano from whom she draws most of her activist skills and strategies. For Mkonqo, women occupy a very important space in the history of Black Sunday, the 1985 massacre, and current community struggles in Duncan Village. In her own words (Interview with Mkonqo, Duncan Village 2022):

... to be umama woManyano [to be a woman of prayer (singular)] means that people trust you and take seriously whatever you say to them. This is because when you get that uniform, they fasten it to the last button. The significance of the last button is trusting you as umama woManyano with imfihlo zabantu (people's secrets). Those [the 1952 and 1985 protests] were difficult times and having to convince people to come out and attend any gathering, given the political atmosphere, whoever was calling people needed to be trusted. No one could have done that in ways that omama boManyano did. Therefore, I insist that when the Eastern Cape finally recognises the people of the massacre, the names of these women [omama boManyano] must be thoroughly searched and be written in the history of the province.

In a separate life history, Mkonqo contends that the role of omama

boManyano in the history of mobilising for community struggles and protests cannot be contested. They were also the main victims, both dead and alive, of the Bantu Square massacre (Life history of Mkonqo, 2017). Mkonqo notes that ‘at a gathering of more than 1,500 people with women seated on the ground in their Manyano uniforms, one cannot help but imagine the scenes of violent breakouts and implications of their disadvantaged sitting position. This is the same case for the women who attended the funeral of uNoMxenge’ [the 1985 massacre] (Life history of Mkonqo, 2017). This thread of resistance and resilience can be traced throughout most protests of Duncan Village, weaving from Bantu Square, through the Duncan Village massacre, to the Reeston 87 and other current protests in the township.

On 27 April 2022, I went to Duncan Village as part of a team of researchers to document reflections on 28 years of freedom in South Africa. Upon entering the township, the researchers were met by an angry crowd, predominantly women and children, burning tyres and blocking the streets of Duncan Village in protest. In most of the video clips taken on the street, documented women express their frustrations over ongoing electricity blackouts that had lasted for more than three weeks (Barry, forthcoming). The presence of women protesting on a day intended to be celebrated as ‘Freedom Day’, marking the anniversary of South Africa’s first democratic elections, indicates the continuation of women’s participation in community struggles.

On the day of the 27 April 2022 protest, local resident, Mrs Dini Nzama was waiting for the research team at Ntsenyerho Street in Duncan Village, ready to film the first episode of *Democracy from Below*. Sharing her life history with us, Mrs Nzama noted the struggles faced by women in Duncan Village community and the Eastern Cape broadly. She traced her own participation and that of other women in protests, from the struggles of the 1980s to those of the present. Mrs Nzama maintained that women bear the brunt of service delivery failures and an uncaring government, finding themselves having to mobilise (sometimes violent) protests because of the burden of care they carry for their families. Reflecting on the experiences of Covid-19 and the precarity of women, I have argued elsewhere that gendering care labour imposes a double burden on women, where the constant battle for survival and resistance

exacerbates the degree of their precarity (Ndlovu, 2021).

Central to Mrs Nzama's narration was the role of the church, her identity as *umama woManyano* and how the women's union has carried community struggles in Duncan Village (Barry, forthcoming). In a moving episode of the documentary, she expressed her return to *uManyano* union after experiencing poverty, in song as she sang: '[crying] *Akwaba sendivuma nangenhliziyo yami... (I confess with my heart to leave all my sins...)*'. This is a song drawn from the Xhosa Methodist Church, hymn number 170. Mrs Nzama used this song to explain to us the role of *omama boManyano* in restoring her dignity and their role in holding the community in the historical and present struggles (Interview with Mrs Dini Nzama, Duncan Village, 2022). Mrs Nzama's is not a unique story, but a narrative shared by many women in Duncan Village who continue to see their involvement in community struggles as having been shaped by histories of resistance as learnt from generations of *omama boManyano*.

El Sadaawi notes that industrialisation and capitalism place a burden on women's responsibilities as women 'continue to bear the double or even triple burden constituted by their new roles at home towards the husband, children and sometimes relatives' (2010: 65–66). Drawing from these observations, I argue that the double role imposed on the women of the Eastern Cape, in both historical and current struggles, is an epitome of how the accounts of community struggles that broadly focus on the care labour of women, serve to erase women's broader contribution to these struggles. Throughout these histories of resistance and protest, the role of *omama boManyano* remains key in shaping the mobilisation and strategisation of protests.

Like many other communities across the country, *uManyano* has provided a collective space for women as a 'site of struggle, survival and resistance' (Haddad, 2004: 4). Consequently, the presence and role of *omama boManyano* at Bantu Square, at the Duncan Village massacre and in the Reeston 87 protests cannot be erased from history. Their role as active strategists who plan and execute protests that influence change in society must be recognised.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Drawing from the oral histories of the Bantu Square massacre (1952) and the Duncan Village massacre (1985), and experience as a participant-observer at the Reeston 87 protest (2014), this chapter has shown that understanding the role played by *omama boManyano* is crucial for gendering community protests in the Eastern Cape. Women's role, strategies and participation in community protests are usually erased from the narratives of organised community struggles linked to broader national struggles. However, re-mapping the participation of women in the community protests of the Eastern Cape and Duncan Village in particular, by centring the role of *omama boManyano*, will contribute to resurrecting the voices and role of women in these protests and many others.

This is a necessary exercise to counter histories of deliberate omission that continue to silence and erase women from accounts of community protests. I have argued that women have always been and continue to be present at the forefront of community protests as active strategists who plan and execute protest actions using repertoires that are sometimes similar to those largely ascribed to men. The life histories of *omama boManyano* in the Eastern Cape offer a window through which protests have presented an opportunity for women to claim and reassert their position in society as active leaders in mobilisation and protest.

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Interviews and life histories

Conversation with bhuti Siphso, Florence Street, 2014

Conversation with sisi Noluthando, Florence Street, 2014

Interview with bhuti Siphso, Florence Street, 2014

Interview with Mrs Dini Nzama, Duncan Village, 2022

Interview with Pumza Mkonqo, Duncan Village 2022

Interview with Zuko Blauuw, 2017

Life history of bhuti Tura, Duncan Village 2014

Life history of Koko Qebeyi, East London, 2017

Life history of Mama MaMtolo, eQonce, 2017

Life history of Pumza Mkonqo, Duncan Village 2017