Women in Anti-Colonial and Nationalist Movements: A Comparative Study of India and South Africa

Kalpana Hiralal

Abstract

Women have been at the forefront of global nationalist movements. In Latin America, Asia and Africa colonialism and its subjugation of men and women inevitably led to the rise of nationalistic fervour. In both South Africa and India women were at the forefront of the struggle challenging gender roles and creating new spaces for their political activism. This paper adopts a gender lens and engages in a comparative approach to document the role and contributions of women in the nationalist and anti-apartheid movement in India and South Africa respectively. It highlights the similarities and differences in terms of their mode of resistance, political agency and mobilisation. More significantly, it documents the challenges and constraints they endured in different geographical settings, in the context of gender, class, race/ethnicity and religion and how it shaped and defined their political activism and consciousness. This article contributes to narratives on gender and nationalism and how regional and continental histories shape and define women's participation and opportunities.

Keywords: Gender, resistance, Africa, India and nationalism

Introduction

In the late 19th and 20th centuries nationalistic fervour swept through most of Africa and Asia. Men and women challenged colonialist rule and questioned the colonial right to rule in the colonies. Women were an integral and significant part of that freedom movement. Women, both young and old, urban

and rural, the elite and working class joined forces to challenge decades and centuries of oppressive rule. In various parts of Africa, women were active in various nationalist movements. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO); the Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola (MPLA); the South West Africa People's Organization in Namibia; the Zimbabwe African National Union and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, women's political organisations were at the forefront of resistance (Giesler 2004: 40; White 2007). In east Africa, in Uganda, resistance to colonial rule saw women engaging in protest marches, drafting and submitting petitions and mobilising across race, ethnicity and class barriers (Tripp & Ntiro 2002:33-35). Presley notes that 'Women's massive participation in Mau Mau contributed to the rebellion's initial psychological, if not military successes' (Presley 1988: 504). In India, both urban and rural women challenged British colonial rule in places such as Gujarat in western India, Bengal, on the east and in Allahbad in the Uttar Pardesh. They were visible in key resistance campaigns such as the Swadeshi Movement of 1905; the Non-cooperation movement launched (1920); the Civil Disobedience campaign and the Dandi Salt March (1930) and the Quit India Movement (1942) (Thapar-Bjorkert 2006). Whilst women in South Africa and India were an integral part of the nationalist movements, their geo-political settings and socio-economic differentiation shaped and defined their resistance. These aspects of resistance and mobilisation across different regions and continents, in particular between India and South Africa, are examined in this paper.

Over the past few decades there has been an extensive scholarship on women's roles in nationalist movements globally. Scholars have provided an analysis in the context of women's status as citizens in post-nationalists' struggles (Molyneux 1985; Beckwith 2001), the intersections of feminist issues and nationalist goals (Basu 1995) and the gendered nature of women's activities (Unterhalter, Elaine, 2000; Cock 1991; Disney 2008; Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000; Walker 1991). Some scholars have also argued about the complex nature of women's participation in nationalist struggles, in terms of gender roles and religion (Giesler 2004; Mlambo 2009). Patriarchy and the socially constructed roles of women, in many instances, hindered women's political participation, thus limiting their access within the public sphere. In India it led to the politicization of the domestic sphere. According to Mlambo (2009), 'Women also had to deal with patriarchy within their own societies and

handled that struggle in many subtle ways that defy easy classification and labelling between the women's determination to assert their independence and the men's desire to control women's activities. Clearly there were unresolved tensions' (Mlambo 2009:105). Giesler (2004) provides a comparative account of African women's struggles for political representation in Africa in their varying political and historical contexts and argues that despite these differentiation, women had to contend with male chauvinism in the political arena. This paper draws on the above studies to highlight how both women in India and South Africa negotiated and accommodated their political identities. in the context of race/ethnicity, class, gender and religion.

Comparative analysis on women's movement in the context of feminism and nationalist struggles in different geographical settings provides interesting insights to the complexity of women's experiences in the context race/ethnicity, class and gender (Kuumba 2001; Beckwith 2001; Weldon 2011; and Beckwith 2013). Studies by Kuumba (2001) highlight women's motives for participation and their experiences as women activists in the context of different racial and ethnic institutional structures. In her study of women's activism during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the Montgomery bus boycotts in the United States, Kuumba argues that women's resistance stemmed from their particular positioning within oppressive political systems reinforced by race/ethnic, class and gender inequities. This had profound impact on women's political opportunities (Kuumba 2001). Jones (2006) in her comparative study on the experiences and roles of women in the United States and Caribbean Black Power Movements highlights the twin challenges women experienced in the context of racial and gender oppression. The Movement sought to eliminate racial and economic discrimination but was 'unresolved' with regards to notions of patriarchy, 'emasculatation, black manhood, and the defeminization of black women' (Jones 2006: 109). She adds, 'the interlocking social forces of race, class, and gender impacted women participating in the Black Nationalist movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's' (Jones 2006: v).

Both in India and South Africa there has been considerable literature on the role and participation of women in anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles respectively in the aftermath of a new political dispensation. In India, traditional narratives sought to portray the nationalist movement as homogenous thus overlooking gender perspectives (Thapar-Bjorkert 2006, 41). However, recent scholarly work have sought to rectify this gap. Bipan

Chandra (2008) has examined women's participation in trade union movements and their key role in the nationalist struggles. Thapar-Bjorker has shown how women challenged social and cultural norms such as purdah, illiteracy and patriarchy and made a significant contribution to the nationalist struggle (Thapar 1993; Thapar-Bjorkert 2006). Taneja (2005) has examined women's role in the context of Gandhi's ideological construction of women within the public and private domains. Scholars such as Chatterjee (1989) and Thapar (1993) have highlighted how women became 'symbols' of the nationalist struggles within the confines of patriarchy. Chatterjee (1989) has argued that the women's question was located in 'the ideological framework' of nationalist interests, between the 'material' and the 'spiritual'/inner worlds. The 'material'/outer worlds represented equality and liberalism of the West. The 'spiritual' inner world represented the true identity of the Indian peoples. Women represented the 'spiritual'/inner worlds which embodied Indian femininity and 'motherhood'. In this scenario motherhood was given a new political meaning.

In South Africa, since the dawn of democracy, there has been an increase in scholarship on the anti-apartheid movement. The advent of new kind of sources such as sources like women's writings (Govinden 2008), autobiographies (Cachalia 2013; Jaffer 2003; 2008), biographies letters and correspondences (Daymond 2014), interviews as well as the re-interpretation of historical documents: organizational and private papers, official reports and correspondent has certainly widened the scope of women's history. Among the pioneering studies on women's resistance in South Africa are notably the works of Walker (1991) and Wells. Walker provides interesting insights on the intersections of race, class and gender and how they shaped and defined women's activism and political consciousness. Wells (1983) provides a comparative study of the 1913 and 1958 anti-pass campaigns in the Orange Free State and Pretoria. She raises pertinent issues of the significance and impact of the campaigns in terms of women's political agency and consciousness. Scholars like Berger (2007) and Tshoaedi (2002) have written extensively on the impact of trade unions in politically conscientising women between the 1940s and 1970s. Trade unions provided grassroots women to articulate 'bread and butter' issues and a platform for political mobilisation. According to Berger,

Through union activities, women were politicised, introduced to the

pressing issues of the time and to a new world of debate, organising and protest. These experiences transformed the women involved, as well as the groups they helped to launch and sustain. Within these new political spaces, some women challenged racist practices and institutions, struggling to interact with one another on a basis of relative equality; they also acquired the skills to launch new groups with gender-specific objectives (Berger 2007: 204).

According to Tshoaedi, in the 1970s, African women in Durban such as June-Rose Nala and Joyce Gumede were appointed General Secretaries of the emerging independent unions (Tshoaedi 2002, 205-231). My own research has sought to incorporate race and ethnic perspectives in the nationalist narrative in South Africa (2009; 2010; 2013; 2014; 2015). These studies have examined women's participation in the context of the 1913 and 1948 passive resistance movement, the role of Salisbury Island as a site of resistance and political mobilisation and women's incarceration during the apartheid years thereby broadening the narrative of resistance, confrontation and negotiation in the telling of the liberation struggles. Whilst the above studies are significant there has been no comparative analysis of women's role in the nationalist struggle in India and South Africa. Recently, studies by Van Der Spuy and Clowes (2012); Govinden (n.d.), Hiralal (2015) have made some inroads to examine and analyse the impact of Indian women nationalists on South African women and how women in both countries negotiated the political space within the realm of patriarchal politics.

This article adds to the above studies by examining the role of women in the nationalist struggle in South Africa and India within a comparative perspective. It locates the analyses in the context of how women were perceived in the nationalist struggle, notions of 'motherhood', their diverse political roles, the socio-economic conditions that shaped their activism and the challenges and constraints they faced in terms of religion, family obligations and cultural norms. This paper argues that women's political participation in different geographical spaces was shaped and defined by class, gender, religion, ethnicity and race. Hence women's experiences within nationalistic struggles cannot be homogenised but must be viewed through multiple lenses, such as gender, race/ethnicity, class and religion. A comparative study between India and South Africa is both significant and relevant. Firstly, it highlights the social and cultural fluidity and diversity of

regions, and thus disengages one from making generalisations about women's resistance globally in the context of gender relations, ethnicity, class and religion. Secondly, both South Africa and India were colonised (under British rule – South Africa up until 1910) and were subject to a racially oppressive system that located women to a secondary status in society. The nuances of women's responses and resistance to their subjugated status politically, culturally and socially will broaden our understanding of feminist discourses and activities over different time, space and regions. Thirdly, Indian women activists such as Sarojini Naidu, Kalpana Dutta and Pandita Rama Bai were inspirational heroines for women in South Africa. Their courageous fight against British oppression and gender oppression drew parallels to South Africa's own political trajectory. In addition, Indian nationalists such as Rabindranath Tagore and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, called upon Indians in South Africa to align with the African majority in their struggle against racism and reverently supported the anti-apartheid movement (Reddy 1995:3). Hence a comparison of women's political participation will contribute to narratives on gender and nationalism and how regional and continental histories shape and define women's participation in nationalist movements. This paper adopts a feminist lens, integrating race and gender as key theoretical concepts. It engages with these concepts not as separate entities, but ways in which they overlap, 'ways in which each is implied in and experienced through the other ...' (Maynard 2001: 131). This study also incorporates the intersectionality theory which highlights varying levels of inequities, such as race, gender class, age and how they are interactive and intersect in shaping and defining women's experiences (Ludvig 2006; Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005; Yuval Davis 2006). Thus, this paper argues that race and gender, along with class and religion are central to understanding resistance strategies of women in South Africa and India's road to democracy.

Research Methodology

This study is primarily based on archival and secondary sources. Secondary sources were useful in the documentation of the role and participation of women in India's nationalist struggle. During the literature search several sources were consulted, consisting of primary unpublished and published sources, secondary sources (books, journal articles, unpublished thesis and papers, chapters in books), oral interviews, private collections, community

pamphlets and leaflets. Information on women's resistance in the anti-apartheid struggle was largely gleaned from several archives located in KwaZulu-Natal. Among them were the Killie Campbell African Library (KCAL), Gandhi Luthuli Documentation Centre (GLDC), the Natal Archives and the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (Pietermaritzburg), based at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (NAB), Durban Archives Repository (TBD) respectively. KCAL has a fantastic collection of documents on the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) that provided information on their activities, policy and political activities in the 1980s. Newspapers such as *Indian Opinion*, provided valuable information on the 1913 Satyagraha campaign and 1913 anti-pass campaigns whilst *The Leader*, *The Graphic*, *The Passive Resister*, *Flash*, *Drum*, *The Guardian* and the *New Age* provided information on the 1946-1948 Passive Resistance campaign and the anti-pass campaign of the 1950s. They not only mapped the various stages in these political movements but also included the names of participants, leaders and organizations involved, and how they worked collectively in their defiance of discriminatory measures. Interviews with sisters and anti-apartheid activists such as Amina Cachalia and Zainub Asvat highlighted individual experiences and how socio-economic and political events shaped these women's realities.

Notions of Motherhood and Women as Agents of Change

Both in Asia and Africa women were seen as an important catalyst for political and social change. Key political leaders, social reformers and revolutionaries believed that women's roles as mothers and wives were significant in mobilising and canvassing support for nationalist movements and that without women the freedom movement could not be complete. For example, in Ghana in 1960, Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the Convention People's Party relied heavily on women in the urban and rural areas during the struggle for independence and the post-colonial period (Azikiwe 2014). C.R.L. James in his book, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* noted that 'in the struggle for independence, one market women ... was worth any dozen Achimota (college) graduates ...' (Azikiwe 2014). Ghana's nationalist leader, Se'kou Tour'e, stated women were 'the most dynamic force because in them lies the total hope for progress' (Geisler 2004:40). However, *gender* played a pivotal role in how women were perceived and articulated in political discourse. In both India and

South Africa patriarchy were firmly entrenched. Any deviation from women's socially constructed roles were met with resistance. In India, Thapar has argued that 'while, Gandhi encouraged women's political participation, he was careful that their activities did not threaten men's masculinity in any way' (Thapar 1993: 87). Both rural and urban women were expected to fulfil her traditional roles first and only after familial approval were expected to engage in non-violent nationalistic activities. Moreover, the symbolic representation of women in the nationalist struggle also justified their entry into the public sphere. In India, nationalism was evoked through mythical and religious figures such as 'Sita' and 'Savitri' who were the embodiment of suffering, self-sacrifice, courage and preservers of Hindu culture. They were seen as the 'epitome of ideal Indian womanhood' (Thapar 1993: 83-84). In South Africa, it was 'bread and butter' issues that propelled women into the political arena. This 'motherist' approach (Giesler 2004: 67) in South Africa also motivated women to participate in the freedom struggle as they wanted to 'secure a better future for their children'. Winnie Mandela, former wife of Nelson Mandela, was viewed as the 'Mother of the Nation', appearing at public events 'dressed in combat fatigues ... creating powerful notions of a near mythical radical motherhood' (Geisler 2004: 51). In both India and South Africa, the 'motherist' approach was successful because it not only reinforced traditional gender roles within a political context but also did little to challenge male patriarchal authority. Thus, notions of 'motherhood', served as an important mobilising tool for nationalist leaders, and thus limited women's political opportunities and activism.

Role Models

Both India and South Africa had dynamic, brave women who were not afraid to challenge state authority and gender inequality. They showed commitment to the struggle, were bold in their decisions and took leadership roles when their male comrades were imprisoned or exiled. In India, during the first quarter of the twentieth century, among the notable women were Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya who encouraged women to challenge British colonial rule and support the Indian independence movement. They used multiple methods to inform and educate the public: they spoke at political meetings, addressed several public platforms and newspapers. Kamala Devi took part in the Salt March and was one of the founding members of the

All India Women's Congress (AIWC). She founded the Vidhwa Ashram where women received political training (Bala 1986:99). Annie Besant, a fiery woman activist addressed several political platforms and urged the women of India to support the nationalist movement and end British rule. Sarojini Naidu, was a famed poet and orator and became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. In 1930 she took leadership of the Salt March when Gandhi was arrested. She was jailed for 21 months in 1942 during the 'Quit India' protests and remained incarcerated for 21 months (Alexander 2000: 92).

Similar notable women activists could be found in South Africa during the anti-apartheid period. Women such as Lilian Ngoyi, Winnie Mandela, Bertha Mkize, Albertina Sizulu and Dora Tamana combined their multiple identities as African, women, mothers, wives and workers and mobilized women to support the anti-apartheid struggle between the 1950s and 1980s . They endured banning orders, imprisonment and censorship (*New Age* 22 March 1956). For example, Ngoyi was Secretary General of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), the National Chairman of FEDSAW and together with Rahima Moosa, Helen Suzman and Sophie Williams lead the march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on the 9th of August 1956, to present petitions protesting the pass laws. She was among the 155 political activists arrested for high treason in 1956 (*New Age* 19 April 1956; Bernstein 1989). Tamana was an ardent political activist in the Western Cape and became actively involved in community struggles against forced removals, poverty, high rents, passes, and improving living conditions. She advocated many community upliftment programmes such as sewing groups, creches and schools. Her political activism subjected her to constant police harassment and repeated pass raids¹¹ (Laber 1999: 28-36).

Socio-Economic Conditions

In both countries socio-economic conditions shaped and defined women's political activism. In the late 19th century India was under British rule and

¹ The issuing and carrying of passes by people classified as 'black' in South Africa, was one of the dominant features of the apartheid system. Pass laws were permits designed to segregate the population, manage urbanisation, and allocate migrant labour.

whilst there were murmurings for Home Rule women were not politically active. Prior to the 1930s there was no mass mobilization of women. Activism was confined to social reform, the formation of women's clubs and associations. Men and women reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan and Pandita Ramabhai sought to eradicate the social 'evils' of Indian society that were inflicted on women such as the caste system, purdah system (female seclusion), sati (Hindu practice of a widow throwing herself on to her husband's funeral pyre), child marriages, and illiteracy (Sen 2000: 7). The Partition of Bengal in 1905 did provide an opportunity for women to participate in the political arena, however activism was largely confined to women from politically famed families (Chatterjee 2001:40). In the 1930s the failure of the British to heed to the freedom demands of the Indian people, led Gandhi spearheading the Civil Disobedience (also known as the Non-Co-operation) campaign. He called upon women to picket liquor shops selling foreign goods and take up spinning. Women immediately responded to the call. They included both urban and rural women, peasants, educated elite, housewives and labourers. Some women joined the revolutionary wing of the armed struggle (Chatterjee 2001:42).

In South Africa prior to the advent of the Nationalist Party in 1948 there was no 'mass' political mobilisation of women across racial groups. The black majority, comprising of Indians, Africans and Coloureds not only experienced differing forms of oppression but also socio-economic realities. African women - who comprised the largest racial group amongst women in South Africa, lived primarily in the reserves at the turn of the century. By 1921, only 7% of African women were living in urban areas (Walker 1991, 11). For African women, reserve life and the migrant labor system were twin evils of the state which wreaked havoc on their lives. The migrant labor system forced African males to live and work in the cities, only returning to the reserves after several months, sometimes never to return. It created women headed households thereby increasing the agricultural and domestic burdens of women in the reserves. Migrancy gave rise to the urbanization of African women. Some women challenged by the poor socio-economic conditions of the reserves began to move to the cities. However, the gradual influx of women in the cities forced the authorities to introduce passes for African women living and working there. In 1913, the introduction of pass laws on African females in the Orange Free State (OFS) led to widespread resistance by women in the province. This resistance was largely confined to African women as the passes affected them more than any other racial group (*The Guardian* 9 March 1950;

Drum May 1958; Wells 1991: 135).

Whilst the pass laws mobilised African women to political resistance, their Indian counterparts did so under different socio-economic conditions. Indian women arrived as indentured labourers and free immigrants from 1860 onwards. They were heterogeneous in terms of their place of origin, religion, language and caste. As contractual labourers they were assigned mainly along the coastal regions of Natal in the tea and sugar plantations working as domestic servants and as agricultural labourers (DAR, II, Minute Paper, 1/8, 77/1881; Report of the Protector 1883:30; 1886:4). Their lives differed from Indian women who arrived as free or ‘passenger’ Indians². The latter, unlike indentured women, lived primarily in the cities and small towns and were mainly housewives. Given their differentiated migratory status the lives of indentured and ‘passenger’ Indians rarely intersected. However, by 1913 this situation was to change as both groups of women were affected by political legislation that not only restricted their mobility but was also an affront to their womanhood. For example, the introduction of the £3 tax on ex-indentured Indians in 1895 forced many women into poverty and prostitution and the non-recognition of Indian marriages in 1913 restricted the mobility of ‘passenger’ Indian women seeking to join their spouses in South Africa. These two pertinent issues provided an opportunity for both indentured and non-indentured women to collectively resist these discriminatory legislation passed by the Union Government. Thus Indian women, both urban and rural, indentured and ‘passenger’ origin, hawkers, domestic workers and labourers collectively and boldly participated in the 1913 Satyagraha campaign of 1913 (*Indian Opinion* 5 April 1913; Reddy & Hiralal 2017: 142-160).

In the 1940s rising food prices, poverty and unemployment forced working class women to mobilize around these issues. Factories and trade unions became an important platform that informed women’s political consciousness. African, Indian and Coloured women, mainly unskilled, worked alongside each other and this provided opportunities for women to strive towards non-racialism. For example, the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU) in Cape Town, provided women of all racial groups with an opportunity to mobilize support on pertinent issues (wages, working and living conditions and high food prices), increased union membership and addressing

² ‘Passenger’ Indians – also known as ‘Free’ Indians – arrived in Natal unencumbered by contractual labor but under normal immigration laws.

political platforms (Walker 1991:58; *Drum* August 1953). In the 1950s the Nationalist Party passed a series of laws that aimed at the political, economic and social segregation of the races. The state re-introduced the passes and this led to national protests against passes in Cape Town, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Port Elizabeth and Natal. In the 1960s the introduction of the state of Emergency and the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) led to thousands of political activists being detained, arrested and many fled the country. This political vacuum allowed women in some instances to seize leadership roles in trade unions and political organisations whilst their male comrades were imprisoned or exiled (KCAL Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) File no 98/61/18/19, Walker 1991: 58).

It also gave rise to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the 1970s which espoused Black solidarity and Black power. This period also witnessed an increase in youth activism and a series of labour strikes nationally. By the 1980s women were an integral part of the liberation struggle, participating in several campaigns such as rent boycotts, childcare, bread and bus fare increases and setting up civic organisation (Malibongwe 2007: 13-15).

Modes of Resistance

Women contributed both directly and indirectly to the anti-colonial and nationalistic struggles in Asia and Africa. Their activities and contributions were diverse and both direct and indirect forms of resistance were played out both within the public and private sphere. They engaged in intelligence work, raising soldiers' morale, served as cooks, porters, nurses, combat trainers, recruiting agents, supported mass rallies and were disseminators of propaganda (Cock 1991; Curnow 2000:36-40; White 2007; Geiger 1987; Presley 1988; Kam Kah 2011). In Uganda resistance to colonial rule saw women engaging in protest marches, drafting and submitting petitions and mobilising across race, ethnicity and class barriers (Tripp & Ntiro 2002:33-35).

South Africa and India share similar trajectories in modes of resistance. During the 1950s, in South Africa, non-violent resistance took the form of national protest marches. Passes inhibited African women's ability to lead normal lives and struck at the heart of their livelihood. In 1954 the Federation of South African Women was established (FEDSAW). FEDSAW was significant as it was the first serious attempt to establish a non-racial women's political organisation. Its members consisted of women of all race

groups, rural and urban, domestic workers, trade unionists and factory workers. Under the leadership of FEDSAW the first national anti-pass protest took place in October 1955 when over 2000 women marched to the Union buildings in Pretoria (*Drum* March 1955; *Drum* January 1956; Bernstein 1989; Interview Amina Cachalia 2010; Zainub Asvat 2010). In 1956 FEDSAW launched another march on a much larger scale when over 20 000 women marched to the same venue and left petitions containing over 100 000 signatures outside Prime Minister's Strijdom's office door. This anti-pass campaign was significant because it not only highlighted women's defiance of the passes but also their ability to mobilise on pertinent issues affecting them. According to Geisler (2004), the 1956 demonstration at the Union buildings was a show of 'women's political maturity and solidarity' as women of all racial groups participated and it also highlighted that women were an important constituency within the liberation movement (Geisler 2004: 67).

In the 1960s the ANC and the PAC (Pan African Congress) and their military wings *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and *Pogo* respectively, went underground and were temporarily paralysed due to state repression. Many women joined the military wing of the ANC and received military training in exile. For example, Lindiwe Sisulu, current minister of Housing joined MK and underwent military training. She later specialised in Intelligence for MK. Women in exile, became fierce critics of the apartheid state and mobilised international support for the freedom movement. Ruth First whilst in exile in the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s, gave lectures, held seminars and public discussions in support of the ANC and the South African Community Party (SACP). Women were also an integral part of the labour unrest of the 1970s and 1980s in the garment, textile and food-processing industries (Magubane 2006:1022). There were work stoppages, boycotts and stay-aways in Johannesburg, Natal, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town (Magubane 2006: 1022-1023).

In India, women's resistance was noticeable in regions such as Bengal, Maharashtra, Madras, Calcutta and Gujarat. Resistance took various forms: meetings and demonstrations, picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops, door to door campaigning, supported the Swadeshi movement (support of domestic goods and boycott of foreign goods) and courted imprisonment (Taneja 2005:215-220). Rural women in Nagar, East, West Khandesh, Nasik and Poona engaged in forest satyagraha, refusing to pay for grazing fees and chopping down grass and timber from reserved forests (Thapar-Bjorket 55).

Approximately 17000 women became involved in the Salt protest campaigns by engaging in the illegal manufacturing of salt during the Civil Disobedience campaign of the 1940s (Thapar 1993: 89). Salt, a daily commodity used by women in the home, became a symbol of defiance and gave them an opportunity to link the domestic sphere to the public political realm thereby supporting the independence movement (Thapar 1993:87-90).

Both in India and South Africa the domestic sphere acquired a new political meaning during the nationalistic struggles. Women governed by religious and cultural norms negotiated between the private and public sphere to participate and seek alternative forms of participating. Women sheltered and provided nursing care for escaped prisoners and refugees, inculcated nationalist ideas among their children and supported and encouraged the political activities of their menfolk in the movement (Thapar 1993:87-90). For example, in South Africa in the 1980s, Rabia Motala was involved in the United Democratic Front (UDF) and her home was the venue for many political meetings. According to Tripp and Ntiro they [women] used 'domesticity as a rationale for entering into politics and to bring necessary female values into the public sphere' (Tripp & Ntiro 2002:36).

Political Organisations

Political organisations, women's clubs/groups and associations were important platforms for awakening women's political consciousness, notions of sisterhood and shaping women's political identity. Scholars like Cohen (2009) have rightfully argued that women's clubs, associations or voluntary organisations served 'as a training ground for participation in public life and nation-building', they inculcated 'the building blocks of democracy' (Cohen 2009: 169-195.) In Uganda, Tanganyika, and Southern Rhodesia, 'women's clubs over time came to serve as political platforms for women's participation in the process of colonial devolution and in the politics of the successor states' (Higgs 2004:120.)

Both in India and South Africa political organisations during the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles were highly gendered. Politics was the domain of men and women were relegated to the domestic sphere. Collective organisation by women took the form of women's clubs and associations. The latter mainly addressed social and cultural issues and rarely challenged traditional gender roles. In India in the late 19th century, male initiated

women's organisations, clubs and associations such as the Bharat Ashram (Indian Hermitage) in Bengal; Arya Mahila Samaj (The Aryan Women's Association) in Bombay, Bharat Mahila Parishad (Ladies' Social Conference), whilst they sought to empower women through education did little to reverse gender roles. In the early 20th century the Women's Indian Association (established 1917) the National Council of Indian Women (1925) and the All-India Women's Conference (1927) were broad based organisations that promptly heeded the call for independence (Chatterjee 2001:43-44). In South Africa prior to 1948 existing political organisations were largely male centred providing no opportunity for women to become fully fledged members. The African National Congress (ANC) established in 1912, allowed women equal membership in 1943 and a women's branch, the ANC Women's League was established. However, their role confined women's activities to traditional roles such as 'fund-raising and catering' (Geisler 2004: 66). Similarly, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), limited Indian women's political participation within their structures during the early part of the twentieth century. It was only during the 1940s that both the NIC and the TIC, after making changes to its 'archaic' constitution that subsequently allowed female membership for the first time and provided women with an opportunity to be part of the political leadership. Thus in 1946 Dr Goonam was elected vice-president of the NIC and Zainub Asvat, Mrs P.K. Naidoo and Mrs Suryakala Patel occupied senior posts within the TIC executive committee (*The Passive Resister* 28 October 1946). In the 1950s the formation of the FEDSAW in 1954 was a multi-racial women's organisation aimed at positioning women at the forefront of the struggle (Giesler 2004: 65-66). FEDSAW spearheaded both the 1955 and 1956 anti-pass campaigns. Moreover, FEDSAW adopted at its founding conference in April 1954 a Women's Charter which sought full gender equality and firmly believed that national liberation could not be achieved without removing gender oppression. In the 1970s the Black Women's Federation (BWF), a national umbrella body launched in 1975 under the auspices of BCM) was mainly concerned with racial subjugation rather than gender oppression (Giesler 2004:69).

By the 1980s collective organisation towards non-racialism became more firmly entrenched. Women in the Western Cape in the 1980s formed the United Women's Congress (UWCO). They launched campaigns against high rents, housing, defended children against police brutality, childcare, bread prices and bus fare increases. In Natal women formed the Natal Organisation

of Women (NOW) in December 1983 as one of the affiliates of the UDF. NOW campaigned for better housing, and the lack of maternity benefits and child-care. During the 1980s many political leaders were banned or detained. In their absence NOW provided the political leadership in Natal and spearheaded a number of UDF campaigns. The 'Black Sash' organisation (were nicknamed the 'Black Sash' which referred to the black sashes that members draped over their right shoulder during protest marches) was also vocal in its condemnation of passes and opposed the government's policy of racial discrimination. They worked jointly with a number of organisations such as the UDF, FSAW and the End Conscription Campaign (called for the end of the compulsory military subscription for young white men and their deployment in the townships) (KCAL, NOW File no 98/61/18/19).

Challenges and Constraints Experienced by Women

In both countries gender, caste, religion, and ethnicity had an impact on women's roles and participation. Firstly women had to deal with patriarchal attitudes and familial resistance. In India, some women were torn between family commitments and responding to the call of the nationalist struggle. Older women responded to the call of non-violence whilst the younger middleclass women, rejected non-violence and were 'active in organizing underground activities' (Thapar 1993: 89-90). Religion also shaped and defined women's activities. Some Muslim men resented the idea of their womenfolk picketing liquor and cloth shops, thus contravening the principles of purdah tradition (Thapar 1993: 91). In South Africa in the 1940s some men were 'unhappy 'with their wives' staying away from home and made it difficult for women to attend meetings' (Giesler 2004:66). Zainub Asvat's mother expressed concerns of her daughter's participation in the 1946-1948 passive resistance struggle. However, an adamant Zainub, asked her late father's political confidant, Dr Yusuf Dadoo to reassure her mother, 'She'll be following in the footsteps of her father' he stated' (Interview, Zainub Asvat 2010).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated via a comparative study between India and South Africa that women's experiences within global nationalistic struggles cannot

be homogenised but must be viewed through multiple lenses. Whilst the nationalist struggles both in India and South Africa gave women new spaces to develop their individual and political identities their activities were gendered to a very large extent. Firstly, gender played a pivotal role in shaping women's political status in society. In both countries, during the struggles, political organisations and its associated structures were male dominated, providing no political opportunities for women. In South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s sexism was rife in many political circles. Political platforms were dominated by men; debates on feminist issues were ridicule. According to Seekings (cited in Giesler 2004: 69), leaders of the youth politics of the mid-eighties 'scoffed at the idea of women participating in fighting or strategic planning and dismissively said that women's role was to attend to food and look after the kids'. Secondly class and race played an important role in shaping resistance movement. In India, activism and social reform were initiated by the educated elite. Men and women such as Raja Ram Mohan and Pandita Ramabhai sought to eradicate social evils that were inflicted upon women. Moreover, women's clubs and associations were largely urban based. In South Africa, African, Coloured and Indian women were racially oppressed but shared different trajectories of oppression. Passes, and reserve living plagued African women and not Indian women. Indian women, too, separated by their migration status (indentured and 'passenger') were subject to different forms of oppression. Indentured women were subject to the horrors of the £3 tax whilst 'passenger' Indian women were hindered entry to South Africa by stringent immigration laws. Thirdly, women were also subjugated to criticism for deviating from their roles as wives and mothers in their efforts to participate in the struggle. To some extent it restricted women's activism and forced many to engage in covert operations. Collectively these factors shaped and defined women's resistance and political consciousness. Whilst there may be divergent views on nationalism versus feminism, what is most notable are the opportunities created by women's participation in these political struggles and how it transformed their identities as woman, wives and mothers.

Funding: This work is based on research supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa. Any opinion, findings or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and the NRF does not accept any liability in this regard.

References

- Azikiwe, A. 2010. Women at Forefront of Africa's Liberation Struggles. *Workers World* 13 August 2010. Available at: http://www.workers.org/2010/world/women_africa_0819. (Accessed on 20 March 2016.)
- Alexander, M. 2000. Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance. In Krishnaraj, M. & A. Thorner (eds.): *Ideals, Images, and Real Lives: Women in Literature and History*. Mumbai: Orient Longman Limited.
- Bala, U. 1986. *Indian Women Freedom Fighters 1857-1947*. New Delhi: Manmohan Publishers.
- Basu, A. 1995. *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Beckwith, K. 2001. Women's Movements at Century's End: Excavation and Advances in Political Science. *Annual Review of Political Science* 4: 371 - 390.
- Beckwith, K. 2013. The Comparative Study of Women's Movements. In Waylen, G., K. Celis, J. Kantola & S.L. Weldon (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berger, I. 2007. Generations of Struggle: Trade Unions and the Roots of Feminism, 1930-1960. In Gasa, N (ed.): *Basus'iimbokodo, bawel' imilambo/ They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers. Women in South African History*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Bernstein, H. 1989. When you Strike the Women you have Struck a Rock. 18 March 1989. Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Cachalia, A. 2013. *When Hope and History Rhyme*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Chandra, B., A. Mukherjee & M. Mukherje 2008. *India since Independence*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Chatterjee, M. 2001. 1930: Turning Point in the Participation of Women in the Freedom Struggle. *Social Scientist* 29, 7/8: 39 - 47.
- Cock, J. 1991. *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, B.B. 2009. Networks of Sociability – Women's Clubs in Colonial and Postcolonial India. *Frontiers: Journal of Women's Studies* 30,3: 169 - 195.

- Crenshaw, K. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43,6: 1241 - 1299.
- Curnow, R. 2000. Thandi Modise, A Woman at War. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 43:36 – 40.
- Daymond, M.J. 2014. *Everyday Matters: Selected Letters of Dora Taylor, Bessie Head & Lilian Ngoyi*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Disney, J.L. 2008. *Women's Activism and Feminist Agency in Mozambique and Nicaragua*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Drum* 1953 - 1958.
- Durban Archives Repository: (DAR), Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants 1884 – 1895.
- Geiger, S. 1987. Women in Nationalist Struggle – Tanu Activists in Dar es Salaam. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20,1: 1 - 26.
- Geisler, G. 2004. *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa – Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation and Representation*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Goldstein, J.S. 2001. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Govinden, B. n.d. Spelling out the Fragments of a Broken Geography – Claiming PANDITA RAMABAI in an Indian Christian Diasporic Location in the Early 20th Century. Personal Collection.
- Govinden, B. 2008. 'Sister Outsiders' – *The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.
- Higgs, C. 2004. Zenzele: African Women's Self-help Organizations in South Africa 1927-1998. *African Studies Review* 47,3:120.
- Hiralal, K. 2009. Our Plucky Sisters who have Dared to Fight: Indian Women and the Satyagraha Movement in South Africa. *The Oriental Anthropologist* 9,1: 1 - 22.
- Hiralal, K. 2010. 'Docile' Indian Women Protest – We shall Resist: Passive Resistance in South Africa 1946-1948. *Journal of Social Sciences* 22,3: 153 - 162.
- Hiralal, K. 2013. Gendered Narratives of Salisbury Island. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 31,1: 117 - 134.
- Hiralal, K. 2014. 'Married to the Struggle – For Better or Worse': Wives of

- Indian Anti-Apartheid Activists in Natal – The Untold Narratives. *New Contree* Special Edition 70: 83 - 106.
- Hiralal, K. 2015. ‘Mothers of the Indian Nation’: The Impact of Indian Women Nationalists on South African Women. *Alternation* Special Edition No 15: 183 – 201.
- Indian Immigration Papers, Minute Paper, 1/8, 77/1881.
- Indian Opinion* 1913.
- Interview, Amina Cachalia, Durban 2010.
- Interview, Zainub Asvat, London 2010.
- Jaffer, Z. 2003. *Our Generation*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Jaffer, Z. 2008. *Love in the Time of Treason - The Story of Ayesha Dawood*. Cape Town: Kwela Books
- Jones, E.M. 2006. The Unknown Struggle: A Comparative Analysis of Women in the Black Power Movement. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 712. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/712>.
- Kam Kah, H. 2011. Women’s Resistance in Cameroon’s Western Grassfields: The Power of Symbols, Organization, and Leadership, 1957-1961. *African Studies Quarterly* 12,3: 67 - 91.
- Kapadia, S. n.d. A Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: His Views on Women and Social Changes. Available at: <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/kapadia.htm>. (Accessed on 10 September 2016.)
- Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL), Natal Organization of Women (NOW), File no. 98/61/18/19.
- Kuumba, M.B. 2001 *Gender and Social Movements*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- Laber, M. 1999. Women’s Resistance to Apartheid. *The Review: A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research* 2: 28 - 36.
- Ludvig, A. 2006. Differences between Women? Intersecting Voices in a Female Narrative. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13,3: 245 - 258.
- Magubane, Z. 2006. Attitudes towards Feminism among Women in the ANC, 1950-1990: A Theoretical Re-interpretation. In *Road to Democracy*, South African Democracy Education Trust, Volume 4, Part 2. Pretoria: UNISA Press.
- Malehoko, T. 2002. Women in the Labour Movement. Perceptions of Gender Democracy in South African Trade Unions. In Colgan, F. & S. Ledwith (eds.): *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions. International Perspectives*. Routledge: London and New York.

- Malibongwe – Praise be to Woman – Remembering the Role of Woman in South African History through Dialogue. Dialogue for Justice, Nelson Mandela Foundation, May 2007, Booklet.
- Maynard, M. 2001. 'Race', Gender and the Concept of 'Difference' in Feminist Thought. In Bhavani, K-K. (ed.): *Feminism and 'Race'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCall, L. 2005. The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30,3: 1771 - 1800.
- McClintock, A. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
- McClintock, A. 1991. 'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Women and Nationalism in South Africa. *Transition* 51: 104 - 123.
- Mlambo, A.S. 2008. From the Second World War to UDI 1940-1965. In Raftopoulos, B. & A. Mlambo (eds.): *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Molyneux, M. 1985. Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua. *Feminist Studies* 11,2: 227 - 254.
- New Age* 1956.
- Ngcobo, L. 2012. *Prodigal Daughters: Stories of South African Women in Exile*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Nhongo-Simbanegavi, J. 2000. *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver Press.
- Presley, C.A. 1988. The Mau Mau Rebellion, Kikuyu Women, and Social Change. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/ Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 22,3: 502 - 527.
- Rajab, D.M. 2011. *Women – South Africans of Indian Origins*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Reddy, E. & K. Hiralal 2017. *Pioneers of Satyagraha – Indian South Africans Defy Racist Laws 1907-1914*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan.
- Reddy, E.S. 1995. India's Support to the Struggle for Liberation of South Africa – Selected Documents. May 2, 1995, Unpublished.
- Taneja, A. 2005. *Gandhi, Women and the Nationalist Movement, 1920-1947*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.
- Thapar, S. 1993. Women as Activists: Women as Symbols: A Study of the Indian Nationalist Movement. *Feminist Review* 44. Nationalisms and National Identities.
- Thapar-Bjorkert, S. 2006. *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen*

- Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
The Guardian 1950.
The Passive Resister 1946.
- Tripp, A. & S. Ntiro 2002. Women's Activism in Colonial Uganda. In Tripp, A.M. & J.C. Kwesiga (eds.): *The Women's Movement in Uganda – History, Challenges and Prospects*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Unterhalter, E. 2000. The Work of the Nation: Heroic Masculinity in South African Autobiographical Writing of the Anti-apartheid Struggle. *The European Journal of Development Research* 12:157-178.
- Van Der Spuy, P. & L. Clowes 2012. 'A Living Testimony of the Heights to which a Woman can Rise': Sarojini Naidu, Cissie Gool and the Politics of Women's Leadership in South Africa in the 1920s. *South African Historical Journal* 1 - 21.
- Walker, C. 1991. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.
- Weldon, S.L. 2011. *When Protest Makes Policy: How Social Movements Represent Disadvantaged Groups*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Wells, J.C. 1993. 'We now demand!' *The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- White, A.M. 2007. All the Men are Fighting for Freedom, All the Women are Mourning their Men, but Some of us Carried Guns: A Raced - Gendered Analysis of Fanon's Psychological Perspectives on War. *Signs* 32,4: 857 – 884.
- Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. Intersectionality and Feminist Politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13,3: 193 – 209.

Kalpana Hiralal
School of Social Sciences
University of KwaZulu-Natal
hiralalk@ukzn.ac.za