Gendered Boundaries: Feminist Politics and Popular Struggles in South Africa

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Abstract

Events in the last decade of contemporary South African history have ruptured the normalised regime of politics on the mines and in the universities. These events began with the Marikana strikes in 2012 and South Africa's hashtag movements - #rhodesmustfall, #feesmustfall, #RUReferencelist, (and relatedly #metoo). The rejection of representative forms of politics signalled by the direct action of workers at Marikana and students in universities seemed to suggest that institutionalised structures, i.e., the trade union and student representative councils, were not capable of articulating political concerns on the ground. I am interested in how, in the absence of these organised political forms at Marikana and during #feesmustfall, women suddenly appeared visible on the frontlines of these struggles in these spaces. More specifically, I am interested in how such an appearance of women was accompanied by discourses that challenged dominant representations of popular politics in the public domain. At Marikana, Sikhala Sonke's claim to be "The women of Marikana" foregrounded the gendered dimensions of a struggle that until that point had focused exclusively on striking male mineworkers who had occupied a mountain. During #feesmustfall, women held placards that read "#imbokodolead" and "this struggle will be intersectional, or it will be nothing," claiming a central role for women and gender in the student protests. Through women's discursive practice, the space of the mine and the university seemed to *become* gendered in ways that made prior representational focus on wages, fees, class, and race, through representative bodies appear suddenly narrow and limited.

Although these events occurred in very different spaces with different socio-economic and political actors, this article attempts to consider women's movements in Marikana, #RUReferencelist and relatedly, #metoo, as part of the same spectrum of contemporary feminist struggles. I argue that their

commonality lies in how these events exposed the naturalised patriarchal order of things, reviving historical feminist debates about the gendered boundaries of representative forms of politics. Focusing on women's critiques of institutional and popular forms of politics in universities and the mines, the article responds to the question of why women constitute themselves as separate collectives, even within those domains of struggle considered popular or subaltern. However, whilst young women's interventions in student politics in the university have been publicly claimed as explicitly feminist, this article focuses on research conducted in the shack settlement called *Nkaneng* in Marikana in order to read women's struggles within such a space as part of the same spectrum of feminist politics in contemporary South Africa. This is done by demonstrating how women's everyday life in the shack settlement emerges as a fundamentally gendered experience that shapes the issues around which women make a set of political claims, constitute themselves as separate collectives, and illuminate their critique of gendered power relations within institutionalised and popular politics.

The article begins by providing a brief history of women's experiences with institutionalised politics in South Africa in order to situate contemporary struggles within such a historical trajectory. The next section provides a brief overview of women's collective interventions in the university highlighting their feminist critiques of the gendered boundaries of the political. Finally, the article focuses on women's struggles in Nkaneng, revealing how their everyday lived experience in the shack settlement informs their need for separate spaces where women address unequal gendered power relations. This provides an insight into how women's collective struggles are shaped and conditioned by the political economy of space.

The Social Location of Black Women in Colonial, Apartheid, and Post-apartheid South Africa

Understanding how and why women's appearance at the forefront of contemporary popular struggles seemed both sudden and novel requires us to think about these struggles as part of a history of women's experiences with institutional politics within the broader political economy of South Africa. From the late 1800s, imperial capital and colonial segregationist governmental policies

shaped black women's social locations in South African society in specific ways. Under colonial rule, black women could not exercise public political power through voting until 1994. Yet, in the early parts of the century, a restricted number of educated and propertied black males could vote, and white women were enfranchised from 1930. Whilst this may seem an obvious point, it is also a significant one. Marxist-feminists have illustrated how contemporary forms of liberal representative politics such as the franchise were coterminous with European industrial modernity and informed a patriarchal re-ordering of the social. The male industrial wage, the gendered public-private dichotomy, and women's violent social transition from collective labour in the commons to individual workers in the home all marked the emergence of industrial euro-modernity (Federici 2004; Mies 2014). The patriarchal form of the nuclear family minimised women's individual and collective political and social power while women's unwaged social reproductive labour subsidised capital. In South Africa, the gendered re-ordering of the social and the enclosure of the commons occurred through violent colonial conquest of land, forcing African people into reserves. In this context, local understanding of gender and sex had to contend with European impositions of such notions.

After the 1860s, the political economy of southern Africa was defined by the discovery of minerals and the use of migrant labour in an industrialising imperial economy in a white settler society. Under indirect rule, new forms of African patriarchy assisted in the release and administration of male migrant labour whilst confining women to the reserves. African men became new fiscal subjects of the colonial state, paying colonial taxes and performing waged labour while African women performed unwaged agricultural labour in rural reserves and were made the juridical juniors of male chiefs, headmen, fathers, husbands, and sons (Mamdani 1996; Guy 2018). Under colonial rule, the rural and urban became an imagined and real gendered separation between male waged work in the urban areas and women's social reproductive labour in the rural areas. This process intensified under apartheid; as the state increased and extended patriarchal controls, notably through the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951, women's pass laws in 1956, and forced removals from the 1960s, intended to keep African women and children out of the white city and within new homelands.

Black women's exclusion from representative politics and industrial labour impacted the form and content of black organised politics as practised in the political party and the trade union, after Union in 1910. New African nationalist organisations, including the South African Native National Congress (SANNC, later ANC), were influenced by the euro-modern gendered public and private divide and fashioned in the image of Westminster parliamentary politics. Therefore, while the SANNC could accommodate male *Iinkosi* in the Upper House of the party, women only gained formal membership in the 1940s (Ginwala 1990). Despite notable exceptions, the masculinisation of waged work informed male-dominated trade union movements and their focus on the mediation of wages. Women did however informally and formally participate in these organisations, challenging gendered power relations, but such challenges did not find easy translation into organisational discourses and practices. By the 1950s, Lilian Ngoyi's infamous words, "the husbands speak about democracy in the street, but they do not practice it in the home," (Berger, 2007: 196) exemplified women's contradictory political experiences in the first half of the century. This public-private dichotomy continued to inform the struggles of women unionists later in the century (Mashinini 1989). From the 1970s, young women increasingly challenged issues around sexual autonomy, care work and military work in exiled ANC camps, making important inroads (Hassim 2006). On the one hand, their challenges to patriarchal organisational practices were often subverted in the name of unity, the creation of separate women's struc-tures, or developmental discourses right up to the early 1990s (ANC National Conference proceedings, 1991). On the other hand, women's achievements were visibilised in the new constitution which significantly focused on inclusive rights for women and targeted discrimination based on sex and gender. Even so, from 2001 the reinvigoration of traditional authorities threatened to reinscribe gender boundaries and patriarchal authority (Ainslie and Kepe 2016).

That black women were historically positioned at a particular conjunction of South African political economy has meant they have had to navigate the afterlives of this history in practice and discourse. In fact, black women most often do not appear in those histories that we might consider nationalist or labour historiography. This is not to say women do not appear in history at all or that there is not a significant and growing literature to this effect. Rather, even as

women's political activities have been retrieved and documented, they do not often find easy categorical gestation in mainstream nationalist or labour historiography. Instead, such histories are often additive and represented as so-called women's history. Significantly, this has also occurred in feminist literature where the category women's history has functioned to exclude women from explicit inclusion in the category of feminist history. This is precisely because the issues around which women have struggled have often occurred at the margins of nationalist, class–based, and white feminist discourses.

Post-apartheid South Africa opened a space for more explicit feminist writing agendas and debates around what constitutes feminist critique and struggle. This has been informed by a long history of how black women had to negotiate conflicting demands and loyalties. On the one hand, black women had to contend with masculinist nationalist struggles which emphasised race; on the other hand, white feminism often ignored the complexities of intersections between race and gender (Wicomb 1996, 51). The latter often attempted to draw a boundary around explicitly feminist actions and those that involved notions of womanism, motherhood, or the home Gasa 2007). This ignored how black women's precarious social locations under apartheid turned the notions of home, motherhood, and the family into "constructs characterised by desire," (Wicomb 1996, 49), constituting a specific political domain for black African women. Further, attempts to delineate the political boundaries of feminism often relied on the deployment of particular bounded discourses on class and feminism which subvert and silence black feminist voices and the critiques they raise about nationalist politics and academic theorising (Lewis 1996).

It is against the backdrop of the foregoing debates that I locate my discussion of contemporary feminist struggles and the possibility of reading seemingly disconnected events on mines and universities together in ways that can acknowledge difference whilst raising points of convergence. This may complicate approaches that seek to narrowly focus only on two important differences that one might raise between women's struggles in the university and on the mines. The first could be class difference; while mines are historically associated with the production of an exploited black and largely male working class, the university is associated with the production of a historically white male middle class. The second difference is that while women in the student movement

specifically claimed a feminist narrative for student struggles, women in the mines articulated their struggles around a range of issues that did not explicitly include feminist language. Thinking about mines and universities as part of the same disciplinary regime of imperial patriarchal power may allow us to think across women's struggles at the centre and women at the margins as part of the same spectrum of feminist struggles that began to claim public political power in the post-apartheid period. This may also help to account for how and why #RUReferencelist and Sikhala Sonke emerged from within the domain of popular politics, providing insight into how women continue to negotiate the afterlives of patriarchal state institutions and organised forms of politics on material and discursive grounds.

#mustfall Movements and the Gendered Boundaries of the Political

I begin with a discussion of black women's struggles in the student movement in order to highlight points of commonality that I wish to explore in my discussion of women's movements in Marikana. The connection between mining capital, colonial governance, and the establishment of historically white universities in South Africa, notably the University of Cape Town (UCT), Rhodes University and the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) is well established. Less discussed, however, is how racially segregated universities were informed by the public/private dichotomy and characterised by a male-dominated student body for a large part of the twentieth century. Even as black African women entered mission schools, women's seminaries, and later Bantu education institutions in the early parts of the century, they continued to be targets of policies around social reproductive labour which channelled women into professions like teaching, nursing, and health care work (Unterhalter 1990). As such, the settler colonial state did not just seek to confine the majority of black women to rural reproductive labour but also extended such forms of labour into formal schooling and education available to a small but growing number of black women. Such feminisation of education allowed some black women new avenues of economic and social power, but this was made possible through racist and sexist policies (Healy-Clancy 2014). This contradiction informed the institutional culture of

educational institutions where racism, violence, and sexual abuse were both widespread and largely ignored (Unterhalter 1990). From the 1980s, black and female students slowly entered historically white universities in larger numbers. However, between 2005 and 2017, black students became the majority at all universities, including all but one historically white university (Essop, 2020). At the same time, these universities remained white and male-dominated spaces both in terms of leadership, academic staff, and curriculum. These became central issues expressed in contemporary student protests.

From mid-2015, predominantly black students at the University of Cape Town bypassed their Student Representative Council (SRC), dominated by university branches of national party politics, and embarked on direct strikes calling for the decolonisation of university curriculum, staff, and campus culture. Termed #RhodesMustFall, the protests directly referenced the connection between Cecil John Rhodes, an imperial mining capitalist, and the university. The protests spread and evolved into #feesmustfall and #endoutsourcing campaigns, bringing demands for equity in higher education and increasing neoliberalisation of the university, long raised at former black universities, into former white universities across the country. As SRCs momentarily faded into the background of direct action, young black women led and participated in protests in large numbers. Students referenced women's pass marches in 1956 and introduced explicitly feminist and scholarly terms, notably intersectionality, on placards and in struggles.

But by November 2015, the student movement began to fracture along gender lines when the hashtag #RapeAtAzania visibilised the rape of a female student at the student occupation of a university building at UCT (Bernado 2015). Women who raised concerns about sexual harassment and assault were reportedly told by male students "not to cause divisions among their comrades" (Mugo 2015). These threats were followed by physical violence. In April 2016, when an activist tried to raise the issue of sexual violence during a protest, she was physically assaulted by male comrades (Isaacs 2016). A few weeks later, a group of young female students at Rhodes University took direct action to highlight how due process had failed young women who tried to report sexual

abuse. Against the procedural structures of the university, the women released a list on social media naming their sexual abusers. #RUReferencelist sparked protests at Rhodes and campuses around the country, involving many women who had been part of #feesmustfall (Robertson 2016). On the 19th of April, hundreds of young women staged a nude protest at Rhodes, drawing attention to how the feminised body and its associated performance was over-burdened in the space through which it moved, making visible the gendered power dynamics of the university. The protests culminated in a group of women retrieving three males from their residences and detaining one, who was a member of the SRC (Solomon 2017). #RUReferencelist was the first time the university was shut down over sexual violence in South Africa and university management called police onto campus who arrested and charged the women. Two of them were banned from the university for life. Yet, as the name suggests, #RUReferencelist did not evolve into a #mustfall movement. Rather, Yolanda Dyantyi, in a YouTube video (Archive Amabali Wethu 2021) called #RUReference list "the debris of #FMF," positioning it as something excessive, outside the student movement.

Already from October 2015, hashtags like #patriarchymustfall and interventions by the trans collective at UCT began to call attention to the erasure of women's participation in #feesmustfall that was underway. Activists argued the patriarchal attitude of male students towards female leadership *and* media coverage focused only on male leaders; *both* reproduced the image of popular protest as a male domain (Pilane 2015; Omar 2016). Therefore, women of #feesmustfall and #RUReferencelist have deliberately made attempts to archive their experiences against the possibility of erasure and individualisation of women's participation (see for example Archive Amabali Wethu; Ndlelu et al., 2017).

Significant for this article is how through archiving their experiences the activists draw attention to the invisibilisation of women's work in the fallist movement on the one hand and the masculinisation of protest politics on the other. Hlengwe Ndlovu (2017, 71) outlined how raising bail money, sourcing legal aid for arrested students, organising food donations, and running media and logistics teams counted as women's "behind the scenes" work in the fallist movement. Ndlovu (2017, 76) argues that this was "womxn's hidden work that is never celebrated or made into headlines." Rather, the media's focus elided the way in which the picket line "is a contested space that privileges masculinity while

womxn's bodies are often objectified, denying the hard work that is undertaken every day in building the movement" (Ndlovu 2017, 69). The women linked their hidden work to the objectification of their bodies and male dominance in student organisations, and later to the student movement, illustrating how these were all mechanisms of policing the political domain. Amanda Mavuso (2017) illustrates how young men at the Tshwane University of Technology actively policed entry points into politics, arguing it was reminiscent of protest politics that unfolded at her home on the outskirts of uMkhondo in Mpumulanga province. In both spaces, protest politics was considered "the job of men" and the mere appearance of her feminised body at protests turned her political participation into an 'invitation' to ridicule, abuse, and rape (Mavuso 2017, 6). The women viewed the university's decision to call police and private security onto campuses during protests, where police shot and tear-gassed students in general, as part of an already existing context of women's experiences of institutional and popular politics. For Xaba (2017, 101), "militarised masculinities" and militarised campuses transformed women from political protestors in resistance to feminised bodies and targets of sexual harassment by police, private security, and male comrades.

These experiences explain why women made deliberate inventions to shape and change patriarchal media narratives, creating WhatsApp groups and hashtags, co-ordinating sartorial choices, using particular images, and staging direct interventions to centre women and claim political space (Dlakavu 2017). Nude protests became a way of "reasserting the presence and impact of womxn's bodies on the picket line" during #feesmustfall, obstructing various patriarchal gazes even as womxn's bodies continued to be objectified (Ndlovu 2017, 71). Through such interventions, women called attention to how both university administration and male comrades actively attempted to sweep sexual violence under the rug. Ragi Bashonga and Zuziwe Khuzwayo (2017) illustrate how, despite the growing numbers of women at former white universities like Rhodes, Wits, and UCT, sexual harassment policies remained largely procedural, inert, and ineffectual in confronting sexual violence on campuses. This informed why #RUReferencelist and the grapevine became a tool of feminist solidarity. Like their Indian counterparts, who released #Losha a few months later, gossip became a way to protect other women by sharing information otherwise subjected

to legal discourses of *reasonable* doubt which conversely protected men from accountability (Morais dos Santos Bruss 2019).

The women specific gendered experiences of #feesmustfall tell us why they had to constitute separate collectives within the student movement, and how they used social media, grapevines, nude protests, and archives, to challenge through an explicitly feminist lens dominant narratives that portray protests as male-led and fee-centred. The women's critiques illustrate how binary-gender narratives functioned to feminise particular activities and particular bodies, locating them outside the domain of the political. Significantly, their stories demonstrate how such boundaries are policed through various actions and inactions of male comrades, university administration, police, private security, and media, whose practices overlapped and reinforced each other. This informed women's gendered experience of protests and reinscribed already existing and normalised gendered power relations within the space of the university. It is based on such gendered boundaries of the political that I draw connections between women's struggles on the mines and in the universities. The rest of this article considers a set of questions stimulated by these events through a specific focus on contemporary events in Nkaneng at Marikana. By examining how successfully women are able to express their political concerns through institutional forms of politics, I show how the institutional is constitutive of a specific gendered experience of the everyday that conditions and shapes the terrain of feminist struggle in the space of Nkaneng shack settlement.

The Women of Nkaneng Shack Settlement in Marikana

Shack settlements on platinum mines are largely a post-apartheid phenomenon. Under colonialism and apartheid, mines were predominantly masculine spaces made up of large male migrant workforces housed in single-sex mining hostels. From 1986, as pass laws were lifted, families of mineworkers and various work seekers slowly began to move to the mines. Rather than housing, mining companies offered an insignificant living out allowance to mineworkers who elected to move from single-sex hostels to outside accommodation. Lack of employee housing and low wages account for the emergence of shack settlements and their physical location adjacent to mines, providing proximity to the workplace

and mine services such as transport to shafts and mine clinics. However, shack settlements changed the demography of the mines in significant ways. Today, Nkaneng shack settlement is home to a mixed population of several thousand men, women, and children, the majority of whom are Sesotho and isiXhosa speaking people who have lived in the area for more than twenty years. Yet, despite such changes, literature on mines remained largely focused on men, trade unions, and labour issues until August 2012.

In 2012, male mineworkers embarked on strike at the Lonmin platinum mine in the North-West Province of South Africa, bypassing their trade union, occupying a nearby mountain, setting up a worker collective and formulating their own wage demand. On August 16, 34 mineworkers were gunned down by police in events referred to as the Marikana massacre. During the strikes and amid the quick disintegration of the representative of striking workers, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), a vibrant, audible, and autonomous women's movement emerged. Sikhala Sonke was formed during the strikes by women living in the Nkaneng shack settlement. While men were on the mountain, women worked behind the scenes, organising food donations, staging marches against police brutality, and supporting strikers' demands for higher wages. They received widespread media attention (Naicker 2016). Sikhala Sonke used public platforms to raise issues around housing, services, and safety, and drew attention to unwaged social reproductive labour, illustrated by a placard that read, "Lonmin, what do you want with our husbands?" A labour strike became about not only wages, collective bargaining structures, and mines as places of industrial production but also about the intimate life of mineworkers and the domestic space in which it unfolded, challenging the long-projected image of the mines as a purely masculine space.

In 2012, I met Nomzekhelo Sonti and Thumeka Magwangqana, instrumental in the formation of Sikhala Sonke. At the time, they shared a close friendship and were both unmarried women in their forties whose financial relationship to the mine was not directly related to men. Sikhala Sonke became involved in local community structures and creating economic activities for women, including communally planting vegetables and maize; keeping cattle, goats, or chickens; fostering financial practices like stokvels; selling waste materials

from the mines; and carrying out social activities like rape-counselling and theatre (Naicker 2016; 2020). The women's ability to build separate and collective domains of power in their society allowed them to engage in institutionalised politics and find individual and collective fulfilment.

After the massacre, the collapse of ruling-party-aligned NUM opened a space for new institutional political challenges. Inspired by the potency of the worker strikes and the women's movement, a new national political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, emerged and was launched at Marikana in October 2013. Sikhala Sonke was instrumental in EFF electoral campaigns and victory in local government elections at Marikana in 2016 (see Sargas 2014). According to Thumeka, Sikhala Sonke campaigned for the EFF because men often excluded women from participating in community politics (Naicker 2020). The EFF became a major political role player in the area, and unlike what pertained in other branches, there was a "solid representation of women" who performed much of the administrative and recruiting work at Marikana (Essop 2015, 229). Additionally, Nomzekhelo was invited to become an EFF member of parliament. However, rather than dealing with specific issues around which women had built their political power, the party discourse to nationalise the mines continued to be structured around mainstream political economy and militarised culture in the party (Magadla 2013). Such issues were soon visibilised in the women's movement which experienced strain over its relationship to the party, and when the EFF lost the last municipal ward elections in Marikana, new women's collectives emerged. The next sections seek to provide insights into this process by illuminating the persistence of certain conditions under which women's separate collectives emerge. I utilise older research on Sikhala Sonke, together with new interviews with members of Sinethemba, a new women's movement formed in 2017, which forms part of over ten years of continued research.

The Gendered Terrain of Popular Politics

In July 2022, I met, shared a meal, and had a collective conversation with six women in Nkaneng in the zinc structure which hosts the church they attend. The women were all members of Sinethemba and were between the ages of 36

and 60. The majority were unmarried, and all participants either lived or had lived in Nkaneng and its surrounding areas for periods ranging from five to 20 years. The interviewees included Thumeka, who was instrumental in starting Sinethemba and part of the women who left Sikhala Sonke. My conversation with the women illustrates how the lived space of the settlement and the institutional authorities operating within it produce a specifically gendered experience of everyday life for women in Nkaneng.

The material life of Nkaneng shack settlement is constituted by hundreds of zinc shacks of varying sizes which function as private residences, shops, shebeens, churches, meeting places, and other communal spaces. There is no sufficient access to water, sanitation, electricity, or roads. Rudimentary communal services are offered, including a few taps, pit toilets, and high mast lighting, shared amongst the several thousand residents. I summarise how this infrastructural regime informed specific material and gendered power relations on the ground by focusing on three major issues, discussed in parts in other studies (see Fakier and Cock 2009; Benya 2015; Naicker 2018; Oldfield et al. 2019). The first issue concerned women's reproductive health. The lack of proper access to sanitation and water mediated women's bodily experiences like menstruation whilst women juxtaposed the cost of sanitary pads and scarcity of birth control pills with the ubiquitous availability of free condoms. The latter, already a site of negotiation between women and men, was seen as a deliberate decision made by mine clinics, and supported by trade unions, to privilege male bodily experiences over women's reproductive health. A second set of issues pertained to women's sensory and bodily experiences of safety, informed by lack of access to sanitation and electricity, and provision of only rudimentary high-mast stadium-type lighting common in South African shack settlements. The lights which illuminate some parts of the muddy, uneven roads and cast large shadows on other parts, together with communal toilets, turn something as routine as using the bathroom at night into a life-threatening experience for women. Within such a context, the lack of policing facilities also acquired gendered significations. Lastly, such issues collectively entailed high material costs for women due to the settlement's physical location. Women often paid up to R650 in transport fees to travel to neighbouring towns to purchase sanitary pads or access services like *free* birth control or abortions at State clinics, with no guarantee that such products and

services would be available on their arrival. The same costly journeys ensued when women had to report rape, sexual assault, or domestic abuse at the closest police station. Issues concerning water, electricity, roads, transport, healthcare, and geographical location therefore ceased to be an inert reality for women. Rather, they conditioned women's everyday material and sensory experiences, politicising their bodies as they negotiated the lived space of the settlement, and informing what constituted urgent political concerns for women. This requires them to navigate a specific political configuration of power with the mining company, traditional authorities, and trade unions, who collectively constitute a major part of the political terrain in Marikana.

The refusal of mining companies to provide higher wages or housing to their employees makes capital central to the physical and political organisation of the space of the settlement. The platinum mine, now owned by Sibanye Stillwater, and Nkaneng are located on land under the jurisdiction of the Bapo baMogale, Tswana Traditional Authority. As such, on the one hand, the traditional authority grants mining rights to Sibanye who in turn pays them royalties, making the Bapo baMogale the business partner of Sibanye. On the other hand, however, the Bapo baMogale are also the local governmental authority which mediates social responsibility labour plans between Sibanye and mining beneficiary communities. That many residents of Nkaneng do not share an ethnicity with the traditional authority and are often considered non-local, puts a strain on the idea of a beneficiary community. This, in part, explains why the National Union of Mineworkers, as a non-ethnically circumscribed representative, occupied such an important position as a political role-player mediating the relationship between workers and the mine until 2012. After the massacre, the majority of the mine workforce joined the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Workers Union (AMCU), which now occupies a similar position as the NUM. The women's attempts to raise their concerns through an already complex political configuration are further strained by the historical constitution of this arena of political power as masculinist and male-dominated, which structures their contradictory relationship to the institutional.

Many women's relationship to mining capital is indirect and mediated through the male wage which in turn structures their intimate relationships with men. Asanda Benya (2015) outlines how men's work organised the material and

social fabric of many women's everyday activities such as cooking, cleaning, and eating times and affective work on the mines. For other women, the male wage informs certain transactional and intimate economies of discipline and affection, where men "look at us like we are pieces of meat and say, "listen to us, we buy your beers." As such, the materiality of many women's lives continued to be informed by the male gaze derived from the power of the male wage and relatedly the devaluation of women's unpaid work. This directly and indirectly informs women's relationships to union politics. The historically narrow focus of unions on wages and the workplace, the latter often excluding issues like maternity leave or sexual harassment, has direct effects on women who have begun to work underground. Because men see underground work as a male space, women are often subject to ridicule, abuse, or hostility (Benya 2013). Such gendered discursive limitations likewise inform how male union members police the boundaries of inclusion in a general political domain. For example, Thumeka complained that women often supported men's struggles, whilst men were single-minded about issues they deemed political, such as wages, union politics, or security, often excluding women from their meetings. Moreover, even when issues such as security were raised, the reference was often to the safety of property rather than women. This informed women's need to create their own solidarity networks and framed their demands on local authorities, such as the establishment of a satellite police station. Yet to make such a demand, women had to navigate not only an ethnically circumscribed traditional authority but also an authority made up of "old men who do not understand the struggles of the girl child" and who "do not listen."

Yet, even when the police were accessible, their behaviour towards women who reported gender-based violence was a far cry from their assumed social role of ensuring safety. Gabisile noted, "When women are raped, and they go the police – they will traumatise you. They will tell you not to bath, they will ask you what you were wearing, where are you, what were you doing – they actually try to blame you."

The women illustrate how what constitutes the political for women and men was shaped by their relationship to various institutions. Women's daily experiences are shaped by capital, State institutions, and organised politics, leading to gendered impacts on their relationships with friends, husbands, fathers,

and sons. This political economy of space shaped the gendered terrain of struggle, informing how "woman" emerged as an ideological category, organising women's collective practices in Marikana. As such, despite their split from Sikhala Sonke, Sinethemba continues to be involved in similar activities.

The Politics of being a Woman in Nkaneng, Marikana

At Marikana, women's organisational practices respond to their specific social locations and it is not coincidental that most Sinethemba women are within the 36 to 59 age group. Women in this age group trying to escape reliance on male wages, abusive marriages and relationships, or seeking autonomy, fall outside government-defined categories of youth and pensioner. For Thumeka, the use of "women and youth" together as vulnerable persons obscures the reality that "most development opportunities are directed at youth, cutting older women out of possibilities of better livelihoods." Sinethemba provides opportunities for women seeking to eke out a living from economic activities like communal gardens or acquiring skills in sewing and other crafts. However, it also provides a space of support and refuge for older women subjected to specific gendered practices of State and family institutions. For example, Sinethemba recently assisted a woman in her late forties, fleeing an abusive marriage together with her child, by offering financial and emotional support unavailable elsewhere. Lizeka Booi described how such support was unavailable for many women in their natal homes,

> [women]…have to feel grateful to have a man, then they are taken seriously. If you get divorced and you go home, they actually have a name for us, they call us return soldiers. Sometimes you will have to eat separately or even with the children.

The needs of its membership therefore inform the activities of Sinethemba as well as its feminist practices. For Thumeka, Sinethemba was not just about social and economic needs but also about providing "a space where women can have a voice." Rather than a unified or singular idea of voice, the space facilitates discussion, debate, and disagreement, where women collectively make sense of individual gendered experiences. This was specifically evident during discussions regarding abuse and counselling. For example, one woman

said women needed to be tough about abuse, because men were facing other struggles and needed love and understanding. But Gabisile challenged her, arguing that "to love [men] is not enough to change them because they often abuse those they love." Most of the women, however, agreed that men were often the subjects of abuse by other men but did not report it because they felt ashamed and were "afraid of the laughter of police", other men, and their wives. The same issues emerged regarding counselling. Thumeka and Gabisile who are trained trauma counsellors juxtaposed their experiences of men's silence during counselling sessions with their experiences of community meetings where men dominated in numbers and talk time. Because most counsellors were women and the majority of participants in individual and group counselling were also women, men often did not seek counselling despite the availability of a few male counsellors. Here too, as with reporting abuse, the threat of ridicule conditioned how counselling was regarded by men as feminine social behaviour. Although experientially different, women illustrated how forms of patriarchy functioning on rigid gender binaries subjectified both women and men, leading them to question and debate the constructed nature of gender and the making of both women and men. Having a separate space provided relief and solidarity, both material and discursive, allowing them to build and claim alternative public power and collective identity as the women of Marikana. However, this paradoxically conditioned their inclusion into institutional and organised politics.

Minding the Gender Gap

As with Sikahla Sonke's experience with the EFF, Sinethemba women are now publicly recognised and regularly invited to attend events on mining, develop-ment, and rights. Significantly, Sibanye often extends invites to Sinethemba to attend stakeholder meetings. However, this invitation is often premised on the assumption that the women appear as a recognised community representative who can merely 'endorse' social responsiveness plans. According to Gabisile,

> Sibanye just wants 'yes' people but as soon as people say 'no', they exclude you from meetings; as soon as they know the community is not happy, they move the meeting from Rustenburg to Johannesburg or Cape Town.

This attempt to manufacture consent is linked to specific bureaucratic modes of representative politics which rely on a translation of the political into corporate social responsibility. That women as a collective can be invited to give input into social and community services separate from wages, for example, isolates certain issues into a domain where women can supposedly have a voice. It illustrates how corporations benefit from the gendered boundaries of the political, using it as a mode of depoliticisation. The latter obscures how issues about housing, social services, and wages all form part of a system of economic production premised on material deprivation and cannot be so easily separated. In this way, identity-based rights politics can chime in with official bureaucratic attempts to subvert popular demands and power, allowing the institutional to recover the gap opened by feminist struggles.

For this reason, disagreements about how to make political demands can and do lead to division amongst residents, including women's organisations, because the material stakes for residents are high whilst corporate social responsibility plans are designed to thwart material demands and keep social investment low. Moreover, whilst Sibanye refuses to provide decent housing for its workforce, the eliding of gender and the domestic space in trade union discourses can coincide with the patriarchal logic of capital. For example, Thumeka juxtaposed how AMCU members in Marikana might exclude women from community meetings, but when AMCU held big public rallies or events in the area, Sikhala Sonke and Sinethemba were invited in an organisational capacity, because it was important to have *women's* "public" support. This is women's contradictory experience with institutional politics. Their gendered experiences often necessitate convening their own spaces outside these forms of politics, allowing them to claim public political power as women, but once this occurs, they may find their engagement with institutional politics confined to specific domains. This feminisation of a range of socio-economic issues contributes to maintaining the patriarchal order of things. When women take action and make demands to expand the political category, they reveal how patriarchal power structures function to maintain the lack of investment in the social sphere by capital in the neoliberal political regime, which has consequences both inside and outside of mining spaces.

Conclusion

This article read contemporary political subjectivities of black women in #feesmustfall and Marikana as part of a long history of black women's experiences with institutional and organised forms of politics produced within the broader history of the political economy of South Africa. I have illustrated how women's struggles in Marikana can be seen as continuous with those in the university by illustrating how women in both spaces critique the masculinisation and the policing of politics as a male domain. That women in Sikhala Sonke, Sinethemba, #feesmustfall and #RUReferencelist constituted themselves as separate collectives, therefore, alerted us to gendered power relations even within those struggles considered popular or subaltern. In both spaces, women's bodies became central to such gendered politics which invisibilised the work that women contribute to political organising. Against such an erasure, women's struggles visibilise a set of socio-economic issues that relate to body politics: rape, trauma, abuse, bodily safety, and access to reproductive health and services, revealing what is at stake in the separation of these issues from the political.

As such, rather than simply thinking about women at the margins of political structures, these events illustrate that it might be more productive to think about how their experiences with the institutional can structure their social location and shape their subjectivity as women. By considering struggles at the margins and the centre together, we gain an insight into how patriarchy as a dominant and hegemonic form of power informs certain configurations of patriarchal power that work together to produce and subjectify women in general *and* differentiated ways. These connections can call into question the boundary between what are considered explicitly feminist struggles and those that languish in the domain of women's politics. Informed by their bodily and material experiences, women's collectives are produced through the patriarchal logic of the institutional and organised domains of politics, which often determine when, where, and how women can find political expression through forms of representative politics and modes of organisation. Rather than absence, the article illustrates how the feminisation of these issues during normal times enables the masculinisation of politics and women's exclusion from the political even as they continue to be present. I have argued that what makes these struggles feminist

is not how the women define themselves, although this too may be present, but how they actively identify, examine, and contest the gendered nature of their experiences. These struggles open a space for thinking about feminism not as purely identitarian politics but as the basis on which to critique gendered power relations in society and make visible the normalisation of white, capitalist, and patriarchal gazes.

Notes

1. Sikhala Sonke means "We cry together" in isiXhosa and is the name of the women's movement discussed later in this article.

2. "Imbokodo" means rock in isiXhosa and is related to the slogan that symbolises the women's anti-pass march of 1956, "Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo'" (You strike the women, you strike the rock).

3. In the Cape Colony, African men could vote until 1936 and coloured men 1951, dependent on passing "a civilizational test", which included, property, income, and level of education thresholds.

4. The South African Native National Congress, the African People's Organisation, the All-Africa Convention, and the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses did not have women members in the first half of the twentieth century.

5. Sometimes translated to mean African chieftaincy or traditional leaders including royal houses.

6. For example, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union which organised both women and slum dwellers (see Bradford, 1988).

7. In July 1991, at the first African National Conference held after the ANC's unbanning in South Africa, women's demands for 50/50 representation on the NEC threatened to split the congress, causing Nelson Mandela to intervene and appeal for unity.

8. Note: the term women is intended to include transgender women in these remarks; however, as mentioned below, there was also a separate trans collective at UCT which also raised specific critiques about the erasure of their participation in RMF.

9. The two students were excluded from the universities and charged with kidnapping and assault amongst other charges (Solomon 2017).

10. In 2017, third-year student Yolanda Dyantyi was charged with kidnapping, assault, insubordination, and defamation and given a lifetime ban from Rhodes University. After almost six years, Dyantyi's appeal was upheld by the Supreme Court on the 29th of March 2022.

11. Nkaneng meaning "by force" or "with force" in Sesotho; and Inkanini in isiXhosa meaning stubborn determination, or resilience.

12. Sikhala Sonke means "We cry together" in isiXhosa.

13. Their friendship forms the narrative arc of the film about Sikhala Sonke, Strike a Rock, 2014 by Aliki Saragas-Georgiou.

14. Nomzekhelo previously had a surface job on the mine and was medically boarded off and Thumeka worked in a local store and lived with her daughter who had a job on the mine.

15. Members contribute fixed sums of money to a central fund at decided-upon intervals of time and receive the money, usually annually, on a rotational basis.

16. In a Cape Town shack settlement in 2016, a woman was raped and murdered on her way to the bathroom at night, precisely because of such everyday material conditions. (C Naicker. Research notes, January 2016).

17. Khanyile, Gabisile. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

18. Khanyile, Gabisile. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

19. Khanyile, Gabisile. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

20. Magwangqana, Thumeka. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

21. Booi, Lizeka. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

22. Magwangqana, Thumeka. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

23. Khanyile, Gabisile. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

24. After the massacre, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) began to offer trauma counselling workshops and training in Marikana.

25. All the women interviewed attended the group sessions.

26. Khanyile, Gabisile. Interview by Author. Notes. Nkaneng, 11 July 2022.

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