# WOMEN IN SOLITARY

## Stories of the female detainees in the SA Terrorism Trial, December 1969

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***For Veradya and Yovari***
***May you always know your strength.***

**Acknowledgements:**
To the women in the Trial of 22, 1969, I am forever grateful for your time and sharing.
Thank you to my supervisor, Lesley Cowling, for your inspiration, motivation and guidance. I could not have done this without you.
To my mother, Pat; dear friends, Leizl (for your painstaking edits) and Charl (for your input); media colleagues, photographers and editors; and Linah, for your support.
Thank you for your time and patience.

**Abstract**

In May 1969, 22 political activists, including Nomzamo Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and six other women, were detained at Pretoria Central Prison under the Suppression of Communism Act. Madikizela-Mandela, Venus Thokozile Mngoma, Martha Dhlamini, Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, Shanthie Naidoo, Nondwe Mankahla and Rita Ndzanga were held in solitary confinement and kept from their families for various lengths of time, although they were never charged. As 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of their detention, the stories of the remaining women have not been told collectively or in the context of their emotional experience, which varied greatly from that of the men. This project consists of two parts: a theoretical introduction and a long-form journalism narrative. The narrative highlights the stories of the women who fought in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, particularly those who were detained and tortured, in the context of the trial of May 1969, *The State versus Ndou and 21 others*. Using in-depth interviews with the four women who have survived, Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, Shanthie Naidoo, Nondwe Mankahla and Rita Ndzanga, the long-form tells their stories, delves into the emotional impact of their activism and their lives to date. The theoretical research aims to highlight the need for the female narrative and the lack of information about the women involved in the struggle against apartheid. The research shows how telling this story will contribute to the history of untold and intertwined female experience.

## Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND AIM

The purpose of this research is to record the history of female political activists imprisoned in the May 1969 Terrorism Trial, which saw the detention of seven female anti-apartheid activists – Madikizela-Mandela, Venus Thokozile Mngoma, Martha Dhlamini, Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, Shanthie Naidoo, Nondwe Mankahla and Rita Ndzanga – allegedly for plotting acts of terrorism against the State. It examines the emotional impact on their lives as a result of their detention of up to 18 months, and their activism in the struggle against apartheid.

My interest in this narrative began while reporting on the death of Winnie Mandela on 2 April, 2018. Initially, media internationally and locally reported that "the wife of Nelson Mandela" had died, reminding the world of her fraud charges, her troubled past and a wayward youth that included a spectrum of negative references – from guerrilla warfare to extra-marital affairs (see, for example, *USA Today* (Dorell, 2018), CBS News (2018), AFP, and others). One South African editorial by *City Press* editor, Mondli Makhanya, said in an editorial titled 'We must not want to be Winnie' (2018) that she was inebriated and with "not-so-good" people at the time of former president Nelson Mandela's release, and questioned why anyone would emulate her after her death.

However, in an article for The Media Online, researcher Kyle Findlay (2018) analysed some 700 000 tweets that showed a different narrative emerging online, on social media. He wrote that the conversation was dominated by left-leaning communities who saw Madikizela-Mandela "as a militant martyr who was not appreciated in her time and who was the victim of under-handed machinations, both by the apartheid government and by more moderate members of her own party, the ANC [African National Congress]". Findlay's analysis showed that the story of Winnie Mandela's life was re-written in just a few days. "If we weren't uncertain of what to believe before, we now have even more narratives to take into account. Her life has become a cipher – all things to all people. Will we ever really know the truth and, if it is ever finally laid before us, will we even recognise it at this stage?" he wrote.

Women, particularly female journalists, stood up against the pejorative narrative and demanded her contribution be recognised, see, for example, Hassim (2018),

Munusamy (2018), Msimang (2018), Mathope (2018) and others. Hassim (2018) wrote: “No other woman – in life and after – occupies the place that Winnie Madikizela-Mandela does in South African politics. The ANC could barely contain the nature of leadership that Winnie represented.” Hassim (2018) states that women in the ANC, the South African liberation movement and political party, were marginalised from its powerful decision-making structures. In addition, her behaviour was gender-stereotyped. “Unlike male leaders, her personal life was constantly under the spotlight (no doubt aided by a zealous security machinery that kept her under constant surveillance), and she was judged harshly and unfairly for her private choices. Although she was a masterful player of the familial categories of wife and mother, she felt reduced by them too.”

There were also suggestions that Winnie Mandela might have lived with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Du Preez Bezdrob (2011: 265) wrote: “It has been speculated that like so many South Africans traumatised by the brutality of life under apartheid, Winnie may have long suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and her actions ought to be understood in light of this.” In an interview with journalist Charlene Smith, Mathope (2018) wrote of Smith’s personal interaction with Winnie Mandela. “… She experienced profound Post-Traumatic Stress. It was never treated; instead, she was expelled to Brandfort [the Free State town where she lived under house arrest]”. These were not properly formed medical opinions, however. Writing in a paper entitled *Truth and Memory* for the Khulumani support group for people harmed by apartheid, Isaack (cited in Seidman, 2011) wrote “the political compromises made in the South African transition failed to address violence against women and have left women vulnerable and victimised”.

It is for this reason that I have chosen to focus on the female narrative of the struggle against apartheid. The women in this research were held in detention, based on their political activities, including “singing ANC songs or possessing ANC literature” (Mandela, 1984:97), but were never charged. My aim was to explore the stories of, and emotional impact on, the women from this particular time who were interrogated, kept in solitary confinement and tortured along with Winnie Mandela, or who lived in exile. In order to do this, I located and interviewed the women in as much detail as they would allow.

In addition, I explored the impact on their mental health, without making any medical assumptions. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2018) reports that there is a global mental health crisis, which has the greatest impact on women. Du Plooy (2018), in an article titled, 'Why talking about the TRC is still important 20 years later', reports that, in South Africa, there has been limited access to mental health care for those who were affected by apartheid. I explored their current battles with their emotional state and how their lives were affected as a result of the detention, torture and subsequent harassment by the apartheid state. By looking at a small group, although it cannot be generalised to the broader population of detained women, the research may yield important insights and descriptive detail that would not be possible in a big study.

My intention is that the narrative part of the research be published around the 50th anniversary of the trial, i.e. 2019.

## 2. RATIONALE

The apartheid era was a horrendous time in South Africa's history, which affected the citizens of the country at every level. As Mhlauli, Salani and Mokotedi (2015:203) note, apartheid was "a legalised system of racial discrimination that was influenced by the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism, an ideology that promoted Afrikaner nationalism. It was, thus, pervasive in that it was deeply embedded within the economic, social and political structure of the whole country".

Part of the strategy of the apartheid government was to prohibit non-white citizens in the worst imaginable ways. Mhlauli et al. (2015:206) describe how the ruling Nationalist Party government under apartheid implemented a policy of "divide and rule" by enforcing a series of laws. During the 1960s, which Mhlauli et al. (2015) call the "second phase" of apartheid, the oppressive government increased the police force and gave more power to law enforcement by passing the General Law Amendment Act of 1963. Mhlauli et al. (2015:206) wrote that the power of state control was even more "fortified and brutal." Its intention was to capture and silence those who were the driving force behind the liberation struggle, hence the Treason Trial at the end of which, the ANC leadership, including former president Nelson Mandela, were sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island in 1963.

The women in this study were arrested six years later, in 1969. This meant they were at the forefront of the struggle, while the male leaders were imprisoned. The liberation struggle in South Africa is well documented through the lives of its male heroes, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others, and there are innumerable books and accounts of the Robben Island narrative, see, for example, Desai (2012), Kathrada (2004), Mandela (1994), Schadeberg and Dyantyi (1990). However, Hiralal (2014) and Van der Merwe, Venter and Temane (2009) highlight that the stories of the women who remained outside, facing harassment, unlawful detention, torture and abuse, have often been side-lined for the mainstream narrative. An example of this is the O'Malley Papers, in which researcher Padraig O'Malley (n.d.) documented in great detail South Africa's history of apartheid and the years beyond. In particular, the women of the 1969 trial are not interviewed in much detail. In addition, research on the emotional and mental state of women involved in the struggle is as minimal as the research on the women's stories themselves.

Similarly, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Archive (2016) includes a video of the late Rivonia trialist Ahmed Kathrada shortly before his death in 2017, saying that his life partner Barbara Hogan, a former minister and detainee, had not told her story of incarceration and struggle. The Treatment Action Campaign (2010) published a tribute to Hogan saying: "When Barbara was appointed Minister of Health in 2008, most people did not know her. This tribute is written because she is a remarkable (almost anonymous) leader." This is true for many women, including female journalists, wives of imprisoned cadres, and the female struggle heroes themselves. Importantly, if they told their stories, they did not detail references to any attempts of seeking help for emotional impact. See, for example First (1965), Madikizela-Mandela (2014) and Sikhakhane (1977).

Many of the women who participated in the struggle are aged, others have passed on, but there are only a few who can share the story of what happened in their minds after living through a lifetime of harassment, gender-specific abuse, isolation and the resultant emotional issues that they won for standing up for their political beliefs. The motivation for this research is that their stories may go untold, or unsympathetically told, as Winnie Mandela's has been proven to be. Critics might

have forgotten, at the time of her death, what Winnie Mandela went through during detention.

"She spent 18 months in solitary confinement, naked, not allowed to wash, and not allowed out for exercises. She did not know what had become of her girls. When she would speak of this with me, her whole countenance would change. She was not allowed sanitary towels when she had periods, nor water or cloths to clean, and so the blood caked on her. She made friends with cockroaches. I've been in the cell at the Old Fort [one of the prisons] that she was held in. It is narrow with high, thick walls; it is oppressively dark when the door is closed, as it was for 18 months." (Smith cited in Mathope, 2018)

How did these detentions affect the lives of the women in the study?

They are in their 80s, with vivid memories of their time in prison, torture and solitary confinement, and the struggle that continued after their release. I attempted to find out what their lives have been like since the 1950s, when apartheid was imposed on the people of South Africa, their time in exile and their return to the country. In addition, their current day emotional state has been discussed.

Another result of this study is the path to healing. A good example of storytelling and its role in post-conflict situations, according to Dawson (2019:102), who observed in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, is that storytelling can add to peace-building. "Conflict transformation entails the imagining of 'new futures', but also requires a more complex understanding of temporality itself, to replace 'neat chronological categorizations' that consign conflict to 'the past', and obscure the need for 'multiple processes' of 'longer-term … constructive social change over time'." In line with Khulumani group's efforts, Dawson (2019) said that effecting change and peace-building involves the creation of "transformative platform(s): ongoing social and relational spaces' of popular participation, engagement, and mutual interchange in the public sphere". In summary, speaking about the past can help to create a better present and future, to assist in healing, which I hope is an additional outcome of the narrative.

## 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Apartheid in South Africa was formalised as a result of the election of the National Party government in 1948. Although apartheid as a concept of separatism existed prior to this, the laws and projects of this government such as the Group Areas Act of July 1950, the prohibition of mixed marriages etc., saw South Africa society divided along racial lines in all areas of life. The defiance campaigns by resistance movements that were spearheaded by the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress, Transvaal Indian Congress and others, saw a wave of activism in South Africa, often called the "struggle". In the 1960s, violent clashes with police against the separatist government, included events such as the 21 May 1960 Sharpeville massacre in which black South Africans were encouraged to not carry the pass book identity document that was required by law since around 1919. At least 70 people were killed by police for this act of defiance. Simultaneously, acts of resistance by the movements saw members of the political parties, particularly the ANC, banned, detained, placed under house arrest and, as The Presidency (n.d.) recalls, arrested on charges from carrying banned material to plotting acts of terrorism.

It followed that the leaderships of these organisations, including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others were arrested on suspicion of sabotage and as a result of the landmark Rivonia Trial of 1963/4, sentenced to life imprisonment.

Despite the leadership's imprisonment, the resistance movement continued. The Presidency (n.d.) noted in a press release, that in 1969, 22 people were arrested on 21 main charges, mostly concerned with membership of the ANC. Some of the charges included the alleged plot to obtain explosives and commit acts of sabotage. "Most of these men and women had been leading members of the ANC prior to its banning, the South African Congress of the Trade Unions, the ANC Women's League and the Transvaal Indian Congress."

Noting the activism in commendations awarded to the detainees of the 1969 trial, The Presidency (n.d.) stated: "The majority of these men and women were arrested in May 1969 and were held in solitary confinement for seven months until they appeared in court in December 1969. They were charged under the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950 (Act 44 of 1950) – renamed the Internal Security Act in 1976

– in a case known as 'State vs. Samson Ndou and 21 others'." The female detainees were Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Joyce Sikhakhane, Rita Ndzanga, Venus Thokozile Mngoma, Martha Dhlamini, Shanthie Naidoo and Nomwe Mamkhala (sp)."

The tribute on The Presidency (n.d.) website highlights the significance of this case. "[The arrest] was related to activities that took place a few years after the landmark Rivonia Trial. In the aftermath of the banning of the political organisations in which political activity was severely repressed, activists were driven underground or locked up in prisons. The activists constituted themselves into a powerful motor force for the regrouping of the resistance movement. Their actions inspired enthusiasm for organisation and mobilisation as well as for new forms of political formation and struggles."

Despite this award, the histories of the women have not been well-documented. Venus Thokozile Mngoma and Martha Dhlamini have died. The remaining four women are the activists, exiles and a journalist, viz. Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, Shanthie Naidoo, Nondwe Mankahla and Rita Ndzanga.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section draws on the theories of women's imprisonment, the relational studies of imprisonment and torture and how these methods were used by South Africa's apartheid state to reinforce its suppression of the population. Lastly, it explains why the female narrative is different from that of the men due to gender-specific forms of torture.

### 4.1 Mental Health Aspects

It is heartening to note how Gillian Slovo (2006:ix) recalled her mother, anti-apartheid activist and writer, Ruth First's imprisonment: "She wrote unflinchingly of the humiliation of being locked away, caught peering in desperation though her own peephole ... about the effects of the loneliness and sensory deprivation that eventually drove her to the brink. The book is a serious testimony to the distance apartheid South Africa was prepared to travel in order to stop a woman like Ruth who had chosen to keep her conscience clean in a society riddled with guilt."

Many women who were detained spoke of suicide, but not of any diagnosis or treatment. First (1965:149) wrote: "There was only one way out, before I drove myself mad ... I reached for the phial of pills and swallowed the lot." In addition, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (2014:25) wrote: "During the second week of April I just could not take solitary confinement any more. I realised it might go on for another year before we were charged. There was no sign that we were going to be interrogated again. It suddenly dawned on me that if I took my life there would be no trial and my colleagues would be saved from the tortuous mental agony of solitary confinement. The long and empty hours tore through the inner core of my soul. There were moments when I got so fed up I banged my head against the cell wall. Physical pain was more tolerable. I decided I would commit suicide but would do so gradually so that I should die of natural causes to spare Nelson and the children the pains of knowing I had taken my life."

While my research did not aim to diagnose any psychological illnesses, I delve into the emotional impact with the women in the interviews. The WHO (2018) said that women are twice as likely to develop PTSD, experience a longer duration of post-traumatic symptoms, and display more sensitivity to stimuli that remind them of the trauma. The WHO (2018) also reports that women are less likely to seek help. This seems to be true of South Africans who lived during the struggle for freedom, and particularly the women of the struggle, who had a unique experience (Seidman, 2011).

### 4.2 Imprisonment, solitary confinement and PTSD

A United States' study of prisoners (Hagan et al., 2018: 141-148) found that, among 119 participants who were incarcerated, 43% had a history of solitary confinement and 28% screened positive for PTSD symptoms. "Those who reported a history of solitary confinement were more likely to report PTSD symptoms than those without solitary confinement."

Additionally, Khulumani (n.d.) reported that therapy has not been a reality in the case of political detainees in South Africa, let alone the general public, and especially not amongst women. "Many people who suffered gross human rights violations in the struggle for freedom and democracy and who sacrificed to give birth to this

democracy still have not found repair or healing for the harms done to them during those times."

It follows that mental health aspects have not been diagnosed, let alone dealt with, but is evident in stories about detention and torture. The Mayo Clinic (2018) describes PTSD in an article listing symptoms as a "mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event. Most people who go through traumatic events may have temporary difficulty adjusting and coping, but with time and good self-care, they usually get better … Getting effective treatment after PTSD symptoms develop can be critical to reduce symptoms and improve function." It is also relevant (Mayo Clinic, 2018) that: "Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms may start within one month of a traumatic event, but sometimes symptoms may not appear until years after the event." The medical group lists the PTSD symptoms, generally classified into four types: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions. "Symptoms can vary over time or vary from person to person." It reports that PTSD symptoms can vary in intensity over time and can be triggered by reminders.

Through this research, I attempt to interrogate the trauma of the women, to highlight the impact on their lives of detention in their own words as a means of discovering the emotional impact.

### 4.3 Torture and solitary confinement as a strategy by the apartheid state

O'Malley (n.d.) wrote about the strategies developed by the apartheid state to contain resistance to the apartheid system such as detention, solitary confinement, torture (both mental and physical) and harassment. Further, O'Malley (n.d.) noted that apartheid era security police received torture and interrogation training the 1960s. "There was a marked shift to an approach in which teams working in relays used sleep deprivation and non-physical means such as standing on one spot or the 'hard/soft cop' routine."

A common thread in the stories of detention was the torture techniques of the apartheid government to extract information from detainees and to send a message of what the result of activism would be. O'Malley (n.d.) wrote: "With the government's introduction of the 90-day and 180-day detention laws, detainees frequently reported being mercilessly tortured, particularly if they were suspected of acts of sabotage. This was despite a blanket denial by the state that any form of torture was taking place. Notorious for interrogations that involved meting out torture was a special police unit called the 'Sabotage Squad'."

A number of these trained security police officers had raided Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia and arrested the leadership of Umkhonto we Sizwe that included ANC leaders, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Andrew Mlangeni, Elias Motsoaledi and Raymond Mhlaba. In addition, specialised training in "non-physical" interrogation was introduced around the period of the Rivonia Trial of 1963.

Markedly, there is evidence in the research O'Malley (n.d.) conducted post-apartheid for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up by the democratically elected government to address the wrongs of apartheid, that "a number of officers received further training in interrogation and counter-interrogation techniques in France in about 1968. Officers known to have attended this course include: TJ 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel, Major JJ 'Blackie' de Swardt, Hans Gloy, Roelf van Rensberg and Dries Verwey. Apparently, Swanepoel gained his notoriety after torturing some of his captives severely and elicited confessions that culminated in the Rivonia Trial".

The women were detained a year later, in 1969, which puts into perspective their treatment by security police.

The evidence reveals a strategy developed and used by the state to enforce apartheid particularly on political activists. It is also relevant because early discussions with the women, and analysis of Winnie Mandela's biographies, reveal that TJ "Rooi Rus" Swanepoel was one of the main torturers of the women who were detained in 1969.

The relevance of this information is that the women of the 1969 trial were never charged because they refused to give evidence against each other and were, therefore, exposed to lengthy and frequent torture in detention. They were placed under the

care of the security police. O'Malley (n.d.) wrote : "Lieutenant Theunis 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel was one of the most prominent members of staff in this infamous unit and his career, endorsed by the state, typifies the actions of the squad. It conducted interrogations throughout the country, employing methods such as applying electric shocks, brutal assault, burning, breaking bones, hanging the suspect upside-down from an open window in a multi-storey block and making him stand in the same position without sleep or food for long periods of up to 60 hours. Deaths in detention (20 men between 1960 and 1969 alone, and many more thereafter) were usually labelled as 'suicide' or 'died of natural causes'. At the inquests that followed the government was absolved of all blame."

In addition, Madikizela-Mandela's diaries from her incarceration, found after about 40 years, corroborate the stories of torture. She (2014:13) wrote: "Solitary confinement was designed to kill you so slowly that you were long dead before you died. By the time you died, you were nobody. You had no soul anymore and a body without a soul is a corpse anyway. It is unbelievable that you survived all that. When I was told that most of my torturers were dead, I was so heartbroken. I wanted them to see the dawn of freedom. I wanted them to see how they lost their battle with all that they did to us, that we survived. We are the survivors who made this history. They tortured us knowing that it was going to leak to the country and they wanted to test the reaction."

### 4.4 Gender-specific violence

Focusing on women in detention academically, Hiralal (2015) said female political detainees were treated particularly harshly. "The nature of women's incarceration, interrogation, and the impact on their personal lives highlights not only the gendered aspects of imprisonment but also the heterogeneity of women's experiences. Apartheid prisons imposed brutal and inhumane prison conditions that denigrated and humiliated women, thus becoming a site of humiliation."

Hiralal's research shows gender-sensitive methods, like strip searches conducted by male officers, being threatened with rape, political prisoners told their babies would be murdered in their bellies, being denied sanitary material and being taken away by police in front of their young children, then being kept away from them while their

fathers were also in prison. These were but some of the examples of gender-specific violence inflicted on the women. An example Hiralal (2015) described were how "pregnant women were threatened with drinking poison by their captors, another had her breasts slammed in a drawer, repeatedly. Others were made to stand for days on end, while solitary confinement was a norm. However, the mental health impact on the women today has not been dealt with sufficiently, as purposeful post-trauma of the apartheid state".

Similarly, Madikizela-Mandela (2014: 234) wrote how their children were used to torture the women psychologically and hinted at the result of this on her personality. "When I was in detention for all those months, my two children nearly died. When I came out they were so lean; they had had such a hard time. They were covered in sores, malnutrition sores. And they wonder why I am like I am. And they have a nerve to say, 'Oh Madiba is such a peaceful person, you know. We wonder how he had such a wife who is so violent?'"

Again, detailing the unique female experience, Madikizela-Mandela (2014) wrote about how the solitary confinement situation was specific to women. "The leadership on Robben Island was never touched; the leadership on Robben Island had no idea what it was like to engage the enemy physically. The leadership was removed and cushioned behind prison walls; they had their three meals a day." The women were given rations that were inedible and it affected their health, she wrote.

"In fact, ironically, we must thank the authorities for keeping our leadership alive; they were not tortured. They did not know what we were talking about and when we were reported to be so violent, engaged in the physical struggle, fighting the Boers underground, they did not understand because none of them had ever been subjected to that, not even Madiba himself – they never touched him, they would not have dared. We were the foot soldiers."

Writing about the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's failure of women, Seidman (2011) wrote: "How at the end of so much digging for the truth in the TRC, so many people found themselves still bleeding from open wounds." She found that women had "entrenched personal memories of the ongoing violations in the name of apartheid and connected these gendered apartheid violations with the

grim consequences affecting women survivors in the post-apartheid era. They explain that black women in South Africa as a group remain mired down in poverty, without resources, without economic security, with no way out".

Seidman (2011) also wrote that failures included that the TRC did not document gender-based violence against women. "It was simply subsumed under the heading of 'serious ill-treatment'. When women were interviewed by TRC statement-takers against their list of prepared questions used by the statement-takers, no questions about rape and gender-based violence were asked and if a woman spoke about being raped or experiencing gender-based violence, the statement-taker usually did not record it." Siedman (2011) added that although the TRC had evidence that women were subject to more restrictions and suffered more in economic terms than did men during the apartheid years, it failed to "recognise women as actors and activists in their own right - women who fought to defend their families, defend their lives and to defend political gains".

Hiralal (2015) interviewed women who do not appear in historical texts, some were ordinary citizens whose names are not well known. She wrote: "For many women political activists their prison experiences were an important chapter in their lives in the fight against the apartheid regime. The nature of women's incarceration, interrogation, and the impact on their personal lives highlights not only the gendered aspects of imprisonment but also the heterogeneity of women's experiences."

Hiralal (2015) said that apartheid prisons imposed "brutal and inhumane prison conditions that denigrated and humiliated women, thus becoming a site of humiliation'. Hiralal (2015) added that despite these conditions, women were far from complacent. "They negotiated their confined spaces through common sense, tenacity and a steadfast belief in their resistance and the justice of their struggle. The courage and sacrifices they made are important in giving greater visibility to both the tangible and intangible contributions women made in the liberation struggle in South Africa. The gendered prison narratives in this study illustrate not only women's contributions to the liberation struggle in their own right but also how the prison was another terrain of political struggle, resistance, confrontation, and negotiation by women."

Further, Hiralal (2014) highlighted the lives the women in this research led outside of prison. An excerpt from Hiralal's research which speaks to the effects on detention of spouses of activists is relevant to understand the post-detention experience. "The nature of banning orders, detention and imprisonment on Robben Island differed from spouse to spouse … [but] all the wives experienced high levels of stress, anxiety, and social ostracism in the absence of their spouses. Their narratives also highlight how these women individually coped in trying to hold the family together. In many ways they tried to maintain sanity amidst an insane political environment" (Hiralal, 2014).

One participant in this study, Rita Ndzanga, was imprisoned with her husband, Lawrence. A few years later, in a separate detention, he was murdered. The impact of her husband being killed in detention on her life is also explored.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

My initial research was conducted online, with searches for literature, articles, and scholarly works on the subject. It revealed a small number of academic works on women who were incarcerated in the struggle and a government website which made mention of awards received. The women in this study in particular, did not show up extensively in searches on the O'Malley papers, which is a comprehensive and important archive of the years of the struggle against apartheid.

While Winnie Mandela's story was recorded in iterations, and Joyce Sikhakhane's writing included some of her time in prison, the stories only make mention of the women involved in the trial, albeit as side stories or arbitrary mentions. There is little recent information on the women.

Books that give insight into the prison conditions of non-white women tell a different story from those of white women, for instance, *117 Days* by anti-apartheid activist and journalist, Ruth First (1965). First's prison diaries were used to compare the imprisonment of the women in this study. It was vastly different, particularly because their race meant different (i.e. inferior) treatment. In *491 Days* (2014) and *Part of My Soul Went with Him* (1984) by Winnie Mandela gives insight into the prison situation for female political prisoners of the period discussed.

For insight into torture and detention of women, the Truth and Reconciliation hearing transcripts (Truth Commission: Special Report, n.d.) include accounts by female activists including Zubeida Jaffer, Barbara Hogan, Shanthie Naidoo, Winnie Mandela *et al* which speak to the women's incarceration and which details the torture of prisoners, to understand what their time in prison entailed. There is no mention of mental health care, nor are there any detailed accounts from the women in my research whom were briefly interviewed among 20 000 others. Shanthie Naidoo, for instance, was interviewed for a few minutes in total, alongside her brothers who had lengthy testimonies.

For recent examples of storytelling around Winnie Mandela, a documentary, *Winnie*, by Pascale Lamche (2018), released after the former's death gave insight into disputed narratives. The film is described as follows: "Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is one of the most misunderstood and intriguingly powerful contemporary female political figures. Her rise and seeming fall from grace bear the hallmarks of epic tragedy. For the first time, this film pieces together and properly considers her life and contribution to the struggle to bring down apartheid from the inside, with intimate insight from those who were closest to her and with testimony from the enemies who sought to extinguish her radical capacity to shake up the order of things. Supremely controversial, Winnie is routinely represented as victim turned perpetrator. Her repeated demonisation in the media has been amplified abroad to such a degree that the passionate respect she elicits among those who still struggle in South Africa, seems a paradox. And that's what intrigues us.  How did this occur and more importantly, to what ends? " It is relevant to the research regarding how stories can be told with bias and to what purpose inaccuracies are allowed. The filmmakers claim her demonisation was a tactic of the security police.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

### 6.1 Primary Interviews

I used the biographical-narrative interview technique to get the women to share their stories in the most ethical manner, which does not introduce secondary trauma, but could be a method of healing as discussed in Theoretical Framework (Section 4).

The main narrative came from the intricate detail shared by the four women detained in the context of the 1969 trial. Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, Rita Ndzanga, Nondwe Mankahla and Shanthie Naidoo were detained at Pretoria Central Prison alongside Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. They are the last female survivors of the trial and the reason for choosing women is highlighted in the Rationale (Section 2). The detail included their early lives, to the time of detention, the actual detention – which is an important focus – and the impact on their lives since then. It was spread across several interviews over several weeks with each, as they allowed. Rita Ndzanga and Joyce Sikhakhane, were not keen to be interviewed extensively as they were not in good health.

Personal accounts:

1. Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin;
2. Rita Ndzanga;
3. Nondwe Mankahla; and
4. Shanthie Naidoo, all of whom are the remaining detainees at Pretoria Central Prison with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela as a result of the trial of 1969.

I made initial contact to discuss the narrative with the women, after tracing them via political networks of which they are still members, mainly the Nelson Mandela and Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Archive (2016).

Rosenthal (2003) describes the biographical-narrative method of interviewing, as letting the interviewee take the lead, without interruption: "... When one first conducts interviews and reconstructs life stories, one does not restrict oneself to parts or individual phases of the biography. This request to hear the interviewee's family history and life story is generally followed by a long biographical narration (i.e. biographical self-presentation), often lasting for hours. This so-called main narration is at no time interrupted by questions from the interviewers, but instead, it will only be supported by paralinguistic expressions of interest and attentiveness such as "mhm" or during narrative interruptions through motivating incitements to continue narrating, such as 'And then what happened?' through eye contact and other physical signs of attention."

While Rosenthal (2003) referred to storytelling as a means of healing when interviewing survivors of war, similar strategies apply to the traumatic and triumphant experiences of the women in the research. She said this "does not mean asking questions about opinions or reasons … it instead means encouraging people to narrate about phases in their life or particular situations."

Rosenthal (2003: 918) describes the interview process as three phases, the first described above. "In the interview's second phase, we first limit ourselves to internal narrative questions, meaning questions regarding that which has already been discussed. In the interview's third phase … we orient ourselves according to our own scientific criteria and pose external narrative questions regarding topics that interest us and have not yet been mentioned. We support the narrative process from difficult up through traumatizing experiences when these come up in the discussion." The methods described help the interviewee "construct stories and see to it that they can temporally narrate themselves out of these situations. We also round off the conversation by having the interviewee comprehensively tell us about secure phases and areas in life" (Rosenthal, 2003).

This three-phase method was used to conduct the interviews, over the period of time they allowed me.
These interviews were conducted during visits to the women in comfortable surroundings, which allowed them to delve into their past without reintroducing the trauma. I attempted to extract both historical fact and emotion from them. Because they are first-hand accounts, the women shared their stories from their memories.

The foreseeable problems with these interviews include access to all of the women, as they are aged and two were often ill. Being of advanced age, relying on their memory and recollection to be accurate proved difficult. However, I have secondary sources on facts of which they are unsure from historical sources, including their own previous interviews. The focus was on their experience, which is relevant from their personal perspective. My major concern was possibly introducing secondary trauma and inaccuracy, which is dealt with in the Ethics (section 6.3) below.

I intend for this research to be published around the 50th anniversary of the trial, which is approximately in May 2019.

### 6.2 Interviews with psychologists in the Khulumani Support Group

This group has been involved in the mental health support of victims and survivors of apartheid-related gross human rights violations in South Africa. The globally-recognised movement spearheads healing and memory, the struggle for reparations, and active citizenship in countries transitioning out of conflict. It has found that mental health has been neglected in the years since apartheid was abolished, particularly among women.

### 6.3 An interview with struggle-era journalist Rehana Rossouw, also author of *New Times*, 2017.

*New Times* is a semi-autobiographical novel by Rossouw, who covered the struggle as a journalist and who suffers from PTSD personally. Her insights on detainment and the psychological impact are important for the context of a female prisoner. Her current mental illness management, which was not afforded to the elder generation of the struggle, is an example and indication of the effects of detention by the apartheid state.

### 6.3 Ethics

Ethical considerations and approval protocol were observed. These are the personal narratives of the women. They were requested to fill in the ethics clearance form to ensure that the research has been explained to them and that they understand the research and its purpose; including a brief list summarising what they have been told and a clear statement about what the participant is consenting to, by becoming involved in the research.

The ethics committee recommended discussing the interviews with a psychologist to equip me to handle the emotional aspects of the interviews, which I did. My aim was to allow the women time between sessions to avoid additional trauma. When they felt uncomfortable, I approached them for alternate meetings and conducted myself in

the most sensitive manner possible. They were made aware that the purpose of the interviews is eventually for publication. The Ethics form is attached in appendices.

### 6.4 Narrative approach

The research is in the format of a long-form narrative, written as a multiple-part true-life story in the second-person or narrator's point-of-view. I intend that it will be published as an article or form the basis of a book. It will include an introduction which contextualises the trial and the role the women played alongside Winnie Mandela, as she is a link between them. However, the focus will not be on her specifically.

The four interviews with the women who remain are personal stories from the interviewees. Character descriptions are important because they bear visible and invisible scars from their activism and detention. I used literary journalism and saturation methods used by Wolfe et al. (cited by Kallan, 1975) as a means of putting the reader into their experience and head space at that time. The narrative includes a historical framework from the perspective of the women, which are intertwined but may have been experienced differently. I included factual historic references to the time from research mentioned in this proposal. It uses scene-by-scene recollection and dialogue from the conversations with the women held in present time.

## 7. CONCLUSION

My hope for this research is to do justice to the telling of this important part of South African history, with a spotlight on the emotional impact of apartheid which might have been neglected in the process of rebuilding the country. When the stories of these women are published, I hope it will encourage others to pursue their past and experiences on a psychological level to ultimately help heal and build a better society.

## 8. NARRATIVE

# WOMEN IN SOLITARY

## Stories of the female detainees in the SA Terrorism Trial, May 1969

**Shanthini Naidoo**

**2019**

## *The Trial*

In December 1969, 22 men and women stood together at the Pretoria Synagogue after eight months of detention without trial. They were the scaffolding of the anti-apartheid movement – a motley collection of activists, joined together by a common cause. They must have made a pathetic picture, some in the same set of clothes they'd worn for months after being pulled out of their homes at ungodly hours by the apartheid era police force, the Security Branch, and lumped together in Pretoria. Dishevelled and dispirited, they might have borne scars from the operatives' newly-honed French interrogation techniques, invisible ones from the mind-games learned to extract confessions about conceived "terrorism plots" against the apartheid government. The operatives called them guerrillas, spies and terrorists, but the 22 were freedom fighters, trade unionists, messengers, pamphlet distributors and social workers trying to support the oppressed South African population.

There were seven women amongst them: Nomzamo Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Martha Dhlamini, Thokozile Mngoma, Rita Ndzanga, Nondwe Mankahla, Joyce Sikhakhane and Shanthie Naidoo.

The Synagogue in Pretorius Street was repurposed as a court of apartheid. The Byzantine building had lost all sense of God; even the stained-glass windows were boarded up to remove evidence of devotion or beauty. Police, armed to the teeth, stood outside with machine guns. Female spectators, who were not allowed to carry handbags into the building, lined them up outside.

Inside, constables armed with automatic pistols at the ready, sat behind the rows of accused. In worn-out clothing and in possible ill-health from poor food rations or lack of medical care and blinking in the light after being kept away in freezing dungeons, the prisoners would have been shadows of their former selves when they had been arrested months before as soldiers of the resistance movement.

They might have wondered who their fellow captives were and where they were from. Perhaps they would have recognised voices from hushed, stolen midnight discussions. Many were from the Eastern Cape, some from Gauteng, and all were

gathered by the security police who had tenuously linked them, some as accused and others to testify against their comrades.
Amongst them was Winnie Mandela, considered then, the mother of the nation after the earlier arrest and imprisonment of the male leadership of the African National Congress.

Nondwe Mankahla (2018), one of the 22, recalls how on that day in 1969, she was interrupted during her morning exercise and not given time to dress for her court appearance. “I must have looked like a mad woman, unwashed and in my old dress. I had nothing on my head. Luckily I had plaited my hair,” she laughs wryly, 50 years later.

But these strangers somehow knew what they had to do to avoid prosecution. They would have to survive detention and be released to do the work of the banned ANC and its allies.

First to testify was Shanthie Naidoo, 32 then, involved with the trade unions and detained as a state witness. She was pulled out of bed on a cold morning in the Doornfontein, Johannesburg home she shared with her family. Detained, tortured and made to stand on bricks for five days to solicit intelligence from her, her hallucinations were used as evidence of terrorist plots. “During interrogation, I had said something in my confused state… about flying, and they took that as evidence. It was nonsense. I had never flown, never left the country, but they were looking for anything they could to imprison us,” she recalls.

A third-generation activist whose grandparents were involved in the resistance movement, Shanthie’s family had gone through arrests and detentions several times before. She agreed to testify after many days of interrogation, but on that December morning, she knew what to do. The state prosecutor, JH Liebenberg, must have fumed when she declared to the judge: “I have two friends amongst the accused. I don’t want to give evidence because I will not live with my conscience if I do.” Threatened with further imprisonment, she said: “I am prepared to accept it.”

One line, uttered in defiance, caused the case to crumble.

The next witness, Nondwe, who was 33 at the time, had consented to testify only to stop the beatings during her interrogation at the Sanlam building in Port Elizabeth – which was to be the venue of black consciousness movement leader, Bantu Steve Biko's murder years later.

After months in solitary confinement, she too refused to testify. "I do not wish to give evidence against my people," she said in court.

The prosecutor was admonished. "What kind of witnesses are these?" the judge, Justice Simon Bekker, asked, threatening contempt of court charges.

Without a chance to feel the sunlight and breathe fresh air, the witnesses were thrown back into solitary for several months further.

"We were thrilled. The trial collapsed because we refused to testify. After the Christmas recess, they said they were discharging everybody. But then they detained us for another 90 days under the Suppression of Communism Act. Eventually, they released us in 1970," recalls Shanthie.

Ma Rita Ndzanga, who would have been 33 then, remembers the day with fresh anger. Along with her husband Lawrence, a co-accused in the trial, she was forcibly removed from their home in Soweto. Her young children watched their parents leave in the raid in the early hours of the morning and would remain alone until an aunt arrived later in the day.

"We [referring to the detained 22] didn't know each other," Ma Rita said, "and when they called Shanthie to testify, we thought that was it. They thought she would give in because she was Indian, and she might have wanted to go home. But she refused. Then the woman from Eastern Cape [Nondwe] also refused."

The lack of evidence meant no trial, no convictions and no imprisonment.

The 90-day detention without trial law, however, was a loophole. The idea was for the 22 and others to be broken, for their resistance to cease. The group was interrogated at will, to uncover plots and plans against the government, fed the bare minimum

and kept unhealthy but alive. The detainees' spirits were low. "The freezing loneliness made one wish for death," Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin testified years later at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, set up by the democratically elected government in 1994/5 to address the wrongs of apartheid. "I keep on harping on this, because I do not know if people realise what went on when the Boers wanted to kill peoples' intellect." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1997).

The government of the time did not bank on the strength of their convictions.

The trial, *The State versus Ndou and 21 others* of 1969, may not be as widely known as the landmark Rivonia trial of 1963/4 which saw the leadership of the ANC imprisoned for nearly three decades. Many of the names of the detainees are not as familiar as Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada and others… yet the Trial of 22 changed the course of South African history and the struggle for liberation in its own right.

While three of the women mentioned above have died, four of them – Rita Ndzanga, Nondwe Mankahla, Joyce Sikhakhane and Shanthie Naidoo – are in their late 70s and 80s, quietly living ordinary lives in South Africa, despite the heroism of their early years.

### *2018 – She dies*

On 2 April 2018, when Winnie Mandela died, South Africa was reminded of her time in solitary confinement. In search of her cell, I visited Pretoria Central Prison on 6 April with a media contingent there for another, similarly solemn, purpose. The occasion was the anniversary of the death of young revolutionary, Solomon Mahlangu. His family was reliving the 1979 hanging… murder of the 22-year-old.

At 4am on the cold, dewy morning, members of the media gathered, chatting about the stories that had surfaced around Winnie Mandela's death and the impending funeral arrangements. After walking the 39 steps Mahlangu took to his death by hanging, Winnie Mandela was in my mind. While her imprisonment would have been several years before Mahlangu's hanging, she would have heard the cries of criminals

and activists alike as they walked to the gallows close to the women's prison. It was a warning to her and other political prisoners.

I imagine how she felt, in the dark, cold space. The suicidal thoughts, the lack of medical treatment that might have contributed to her eventual demise, from kidney failure, and in prison, how she would have blocked thoughts about her children from her mind. The thought of two young girls – like my own – who were starved in their parents' absence, was heartbreaking. Her banishment to Brandfort, in the ironically named Free State, away from her support structure and social circle must have tormented her. Labelled a terrorist, her neighbours were either afraid of her or scornful of the dangerous woman locked away in her meagre house.

Yet, she rose and grew into a world-renowned figure of liberation, albeit sidelined at times by the organisation she served so passionately. And then, in death, her very human behaviour was remembered unkindly by some.

When she died, my thoughts went to how her prison experience must have contributed to her emotional state thereafter, her every action in life determined by the role she had to play while the leaders were kept away. They may have been imprisoned, but she was on the frontlines of the decades' long battle. She wrote, in diaries discovered years later: *"When I was in detention for all those months, my two children nearly died. When I came out they were so lean; they had had such a hard time. They were covered in sores, malnutrition sores. And they wonder why I am like I am. And they have a nerve to say, 'Oh Madiba is such a peaceful person, you know. We wonder how he had such a wife who is so violent?'"*

*"The leadership on Robben Island was never touched; the leadership on Robben Island had no idea what it was like to engage the enemy physically. The leadership was removed and cushioned behind prison walls; they had their three meals a day."*

*"In fact, ironically, we must thank the authorities for keeping our leadership alive; they were not tortured. They did not know what we were talking about and when we were reported to be so violent, engaged in the physical struggle, fighting the Boers underground, they did not understand because none of them had ever been*

*subjected to that, not even Madiba himself – they never touched him, they would not have dared. We were the foot soldiers."*

After she died, questions about her life – and detention – were left unanswered. What impact did it have on her as a woman and as a mother, as a politician who was tasked with leading the resistance movement on the ground? Organising the banned ANC comrades and cadres pushed the country slowly to democracy, after the movement would first bring the country to boiling point, burning and bleeding.

Her role as a nation builder was recognised, but eulogies were delivered in a tarnished, diminished urn by international and local media. *The Sydney Morning Herald* called her "mother, then mugger, of new South Africa". *The Economist* called her a "dangerous woman". "Nelson Mandela's wife" was mentioned by several international publications. The *City Press* wrote about the anticipated arrival of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, and how Winnie left their Soweto home at 2am, with her "lover at the time, Dali Mpofu". Photographs of her in military regalia accompanied obituaries.

From being called the mother of the nation, she became a drunk, a philandering guerrilla. Her legacy was debated, blackened by falsehoods, including rehashed stories of her role in the murder of alleged informer Stompie Seipei, which she was acquitted of in 1997. It later emerged that the stories around her during the struggle was a strategy by the Security Branch to smear her name. True or not, her relationships and moral character were questioned, she was judged for being a woman who did what she needed to do, to help rescue the country from its oppressors.

It seems an unjust contradiction to the manner in which many other struggle heroes have been remembered. Winnie Mandela's pivotal role in getting South Africa to democracy was described along with the scandal of her financial woes and love affairs; considered shocking despite the reality that she was a young political "widow" for three decades. In truth, political imprisonment resulted in myriad South African families experiencing financial and personal difficulties, evident even today.

At the time of her death, young women revolted against the slandering of her name, taking to social media and editorial after editorial saw a fight against a narrative that skewed the focus from her activism to her moral character. A group of young, female journalists at the *City Press* took on their editor, Mondli Makhanya (2018), who said that women should not want to emulate Winnie Mandela, and had reminded the country of her "less than sober state" at the time of Nelson Mandela's release from prison. He wrote: *"The biggest mistake we will make is that we will try to understand her in black and white, as either the object of our affections or a figure of hate. We should neither see her as a villain nor a saint. She was just an ordinary human being whose heart was hardened by suffering and whose soul was numbed by torture. We should not elevate her to the status of a role model who we should emulate, as many have been doing since her death. None of us should want to be Winnie Madikizela-Mandela."*

A war of words began. Women from all corners of the world questioned why her legacy was told through a patriarchal lens.

It was as if there were a collective, separate mourning for the woman who, in 1969, was grabbed by police while her two young daughters tugged at her skirt, crying. At the time her husband, the leader of the movement, was in prison. Millions of people looked to her for guidance. She faced daily harassment for her unrelenting defiance of those in charge. Unable to move or socialise freely as a banned person, the Security Branch turned her friends into spies, made her paranoid about those around her and followed this up with detention, isolation and torture.

The Trial of 22 was mentioned in eulogies. Ma Rita spoke at her funeral. The country was reminded that about 50 years before, these 22, including the seven women, were tortured by the apartheid government's Security Branch, held in solitary confinement, without sight of their families, for days, weeks… up to 18 months for some, deprived of sensory experiences. We can guess what effect this might have had on Winnie Mandela, but what about the other women?

There are hints and allusions to post-traumatic stress experienced by those involved in the struggle for liberation. It was a long, drawn out fight that spanned generations in its effect. But the specific focus on the women in this trial is because history tells us

that female experience of political activism and detention was vastly different from that of the men. Gender-specific violence, emotional torture – even the manner in which they are remembered – is important in understanding the past and present South Africa, and its collective mental state.

The activism of women in the struggle against apartheid was vital. If there is truth in the fact that she had love affairs, that she was a substance abuser who committed fraud and encouraged guerrilla tactics, was there a consideration of why and what had led to that behaviour?
Women took on central political roles where gaps were left by imprisoned male leaders. They took on additional political roles to their personal ones, abandoning the societal expectation of motherhood and nurturing, or in spite of it. These mothers, daughters and sisters who contributed and fought on the streets, even after their release, are important.

Their bodies and minds were tortured in unimaginable ways, their own children used as collateral against them. Joyce Sikhakhane recalled how an Afrikaans toddler, the same age as her son, Nkosinathi, was brought in by her capturers, to torment her into submission. They wanted her to admit to "heinous, treasonous acts"... sabotage, plotting against the state. In fact, her role in the struggle was as a journalist and collecting funds for political families destroyed by the government.

As the sun rose over the prison on the morning of my visit, the chills I felt were not from the freshness of a new day. The women who were kept at Pretoria Central Prison were detained to be broken. Every detail of their time in prison was malevolently concocted. From the beautiful gardens they could see out of the cracks of their cell windows, with manicured grass lawns and roses on one end... to the gallows on the other. They were purposely placed close enough to see freedom and hear their comrades and common criminals alike, wail while walking to their deaths.

They kept their minds busy by counting ants, sewing and re-sewing the hems of their skirts, folding and refolding their meagre linen, to keep their minds away from what they did not know: who in their families was dead or alive, whether they'd eaten for the day or if their children were doing their homework.

This is a story of the women who chose to get involved, their prison experience, and how they managed their personal lives while building and contributing to a resistance movement that is known around the world – even if they are not. As 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of their detention, the stories of these women have not been told collectively or in the context of their emotional experience.

They may not have known then, but hopefully we do now, how surviving detention and the Trial of 22 enabled them to pave the path to democracy.

### *Finding the Women*

Searching for records of Winnie Mandela's time in prison, I find that most were documents were destroyed. There is little information about the trial, but four of the seven women who stood beside her are still alive. While Martha Dhlamini and Thokozile 'Venus' Mngoma have died, Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, retired from journalism, lives on a smallholding in Pretoria. Shanthie Naidoo is also retired, in Johannesburg. Ma Rita Ndzanga is in Soweto, retired from politics but an active veteran, while Nondwe Mankahla lives in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth with her daughter.

### *Martha and Thoko*

Many of Martha Dhlamini and Thokozile 'Venus' Mngoma's stories have gone with them to the grave. They were older than the others and would have been in their 90s today.

While the two remained active in their community, Alexandra Township, there is little information about their lives and detention. Former president Thabo Mbeki invited Martha to a women's day event in 2006.

*Mbeki said in his address: "Martha Dhlamini remains to this day a freedom fighter, having refused to be broken by the detentions and the banning orders that the apartheid regime thought would destroy her determination to see the women and people of our country liberated from the yoke of racist oppression."*

He recited a speech she made in Alexandra at a public event. *"I became actively involved in politics in the late '50s. We organised women in the potato boycott [against the abuse of potato labourers in Bethal]. In the late '50s we participated in the anti-pass campaign as women. We organised demonstrations in town under the leadership of Lillian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph. We were arrested and taken to No 4 prison. Nelson Mandela was our legal representative. We were discharged. I was arrested again in 1960 when the government swoop (sic) the whole country. I was taken again to No 4 prison. In 1964 I was put under the banning order (sic) for 15 years by the Minister of Justice John Vorster. I was ordered to report at Bramley police station every Monday between 7am and 5pm. I was not allowed to have visitors or to attend any gathering. When my first born got married, I went to Pretoria to ask for permission to attend the wedding. When [activist] Florence Mophosho left the country, I was ordered to leave with her but, because my children were too young, I did not go."*

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Thoko Mngoma, meanwhile, was a founding member of the Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw), an organisation that advocated for the rights of women. With Dhlamini and other stalwarts, Fedsaw organised the leaders of the historic 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria against the apartheid pass laws.

She also helped to form the Alexandra Women's Organisation (AWO), after the African National Congress and the leaders of Fedsaw were banned in 1960. Under AWO, women would secretly convene at Mngoma's house, hiding from the Security Branch. These would have been actions monitored by the apartheid police that led to her arrest in 1969.

In 2012, a plaque was unveiled in memory of Mngoma, at a Marlboro clinic. According to the City of Johannesburg's official website, residents of Alexandra came in their numbers to honour the woman considered by many to be "the mother of the community, an organiser and a revolutionary".

## *Meeting Shanthie*

Shanthie Naidoo, 83, agreed to meet me once she had rested after the funeral proceedings. At her pretty, yellow, single-storey Mexican-style home in Lombardy East, she introduces her husband, Dominic Tweedie, whom she met while in exile in the UK. Her garden is dotted with plants and flowers, carefully tended. She's smart and materteral, a feminine skirt and blouse over her diminutive frame. With a youthful sparkle in her eyes, she stops to put on cerise lipstick before putting her bag over her wrist.

"Take care of Shanthie," Dominic says, his English accent faint after 20 years in SA. His retirement as a secretary for the Congress of SA Trade Unions has not left him idle. His days are spent updating a social media version of what he calls a "Communist University," a database of historical and current teachings around communism.

Shanthie chooses a nearby tea garden for the meeting. A green oasis in the east of Johannesburg, she retreats here for the peace while also adding to her collection from the nursery.

Over tea and scones, she shows me the booklet recently written about her family, part of an exhibition at the Apartheid Museum. Her grandparents; her father, Roy; mother, Ama; sister Ramnie; brothers Indres, Murthie and Prema, were all activists. At the time of Shanthie's arrest, Ramnie and her husband, Issy Dinat, an underground activist for the banned SACP, had fled to the UK to escape testifying in the trial of another freedom fighter, Bram Fischer. Indres was serving 10 years on Robben Island for detonating a bomb. "The home in Doornfontein was an open house … if Winnie or any of the banned comrades had an interview with the international press, they would meet there." The Mandela children stayed with the Naidoo family to attend school for a time.

The youngest of her family, Shanthie says she didn't grow up playing dolls and houses. "We used to play 'meetings' as children. My brother used to give a speech about how 'white people brought us to work on sugar plantations and now they won't let us taste it'. He was five or six. It shows you what kind of home we come from. As a

family we sit having dinner and talk about issues. The struggle is something the family had been involved in since my grandmother's days. Our parents and siblings were all in the movement."

"My grandfather was active in the Transvaal even before Gandhi came. At the age of 19 he petitioned Paul Kruger. And then there were women who marched across the border who went to organise the workers on coal mines and sugar cane fields. The aim was to bring them out of strife. At that time, three people, including my grandmother, were arrested, with the children. So it was not a question of us getting involved, it was how to get involved."

Her mother was widowed in 1953, but was a political widow long before, as Shanthie's dad was often detained for his role in the Transvaal Indian Congress. Yet Ama Naidoo never dissuaded the children from their country duty. "It was difficult for her to see her children detained and tortured. She used to go from prison to prison looking for us, they were never told where we were, but she gave us all the freedom to participate," Shanthie says.

At any given time her brothers would be banned, living in the same house but never allowed to be in the same room, ridiculously.

In the 1960s, Shanthie worked at a book store but was also a trade unionist and would help distribute contraband material. The family, friends and acquaintances were better defined as comrades. It was a crime for them to associate as the ANC and its allies which they belonged to were banned in 1960. Defying banning orders and attending meetings anyway, she would later learn that her movements were monitored from around 1967.

The Security Branch came for her on June 13, 1969, a few weeks after she had read of Winnie, Ma Rita and Joyce's detention. "I was in bed, at home in Rockey Street. It was a normal day, I was going to go to work at Vanguard Booksellers. It was Friday the 13th, if I remember. They came in and in front of my mother, said: 'Pack your bags, we are detaining you under the Terrorism Act.'"

“I didn’t think I was a terrorist,” the petite woman says with a smile. “Then again, your life is political activism, and I knew that Joyce and Winnie and Rita were detained a month before me. It was in the papers. So maybe it was not too much of a surprise. There were informers… we later found out they went to our neighbours. They saw who was coming and going.”

The officers said they wanted her to give evidence. “I packed a few things, grabbed an extra dress or two, underwear. It was winter, I took my overcoat with me luckily… It was so cold on the cement floor. I eventually used it as a pillow.”
“Prema, Murthie and the whole family watched. When the police come, it’s not one or two, they would never come on their own. There are quite a few of them but they didn’t do anything to hurt me. My brother asked, ‘Can she take books?’ We found a *Reader’s Digest* or two and they said it was okay. When we went to the Fort [the women’s jail in Hillbrow], they took them away.”

“I took a small bag with me, but I never saw it for months. They put me into a single cell, with a jug of water. The cells were so, so cold. We were given buckets [for ablutions]. The family brought winter underwear, but I never received it,” she says.

She closes her eyes and smiles grimly, recalling the gaol, remembering incredulously how people who were doing good were treated so badly. “There were mats… blankets to sleep on.”

Most female political prisoners started off at the women’s prison. Now a historical landmark at Constitutional Hill, it was the lesser evil of what was to come.

“I didn’t feel so isolated at the Fort. There were lots of women, fruit sellers, people in for [contravening] pass laws; you could hear voices. I was there for two weeks. After that I was taken to Pretoria.”

Driven by male warders in “a big car”, she arrived at Pretoria Central, where the façade of the women’s section comprises a high rock wall with a single metal door in it. She was put into the grey, drafty jail cell. She didn’t know it then, but it would become her home for over a year.

“I was completely isolated. That was really, really difficult to cope with. The family didn’t know where I was. I knew my mother would be fretting. I imagined that she

would keep going outside wondering whether I was coming back, you know. You're alone and your mind just wonders… to everything. You think of your whole life. When I ate, I thought of my brother, Indres, [who was already in prison on Robben Island]. He was a vegetarian, but they didn't care. He had to eat to survive. We all did," she says.

"Solitary confinement is terrible, terrible," she stresses the point by squeezing the tissue in her wrinkled hands. "Even now, I don't like to be alone if Dominic has to be somewhere. Sometimes I would think, 'they had better interrogate me'. At least there was contact. I didn't have anything to read or anything of the sort. So you exhaust yourself, you do exercise. You can't sleep, so you want to make yourself really tired. I would march and march. And I would do my prayers in the morning," she says, remaining a devout Hindu today.

This is how Joyce, Nondwe and Ma Rita knew Shanthie was nearby. "She would make a noise, Shanthie, singing her prayers early, early in the morning. They [the warders] would tell her to be quiet, but she didn't," laughs Joyce.

### *Meeting Joyce*

Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, 77, is probably the most well-known amongst the women. A multi-award winning author and journalist who worked at *The World, Drum* magazine and the *Rand Daily Mail* at the height of the resistance, her book, *Window on Soweto,* published by International Defence and Aid Fund in 1975, detailed the fight against the apartheid government. Her recollections at the TRC in 1995 were heart-wrenching, told in fine, grim detail.

She was only 21 when she was detained.

"I got into my work because of my mum. Family background counts a lot … how you were brought up. My mum was very fond of us and she was so loving. Even when she encouraged me to travel for work, [and after the trial] to go into exile, when she said she will look after the kids, I could trust her. She was very, very loving.

"Mum had been a teacher, but she stopped and decided to be a seamstress, so she could be with the kids when they got home from school. The person who was a bit… if

I had to find the words… difficult, was my father. He was a womaniser. He was married but had other women, side chicks," she laughs.

Ironically, she says her wayward father paved the way to a friendship with Winnie Mandela, who was her social worker while she was a student battling through her parents' divorce.

Influenced and impassioned by the work of the ANC, Joyce's "terrorist activity" was travelling around the country collecting funds for the families of the politically displaced, through the church. At some stage she met with Nondwe in the Eastern Cape. This brief meeting might have sealed their fate together. She knew Ma Rita and Shanthie from the unions. And so, they were branded terrorists in common.

*Transcripts from the TRC hearings in 1995.*
*"They said I was a terrorist, because as an investigative journalist for a Johannesburg morning daily newspaper, I endeavoured to inform the world about the brutal effects of apartheid on the Black South African communities. After working hours, I had attended to the welfare and educational needs of political prisoners and their families. Both work had been done in the full glare of public scrutiny. The newspaper feature stories were read openly by everyone and the correspondence between the prisoners and the outside world passed through the hands of the prison staff. It was during the course of interrogation that I learnt that the Special Branch not only monitored the press and prisoners' correspondence, but had informers and applied censorship on information. They were not satisfied with the draconian powers they had of controlling information. Like jackals hunting at daybreak they had to claim a pound of flesh on those of us who were determined to expose the naked brutality of the apartheid system."*

For our interview, we meet at a mall near the Pretoria small-holding she shared with her husband, Scottish orthopaedic surgeon, Dr Kenneth Rankin, until his death in 2011.

Engaged a month before detention, their relationship was illegal under the mixed-marriage laws and piqued the attention of the Security Branch. Dressed in

comfortable shoes and a smart blouse and skirt, she says her artificial knee gives her trouble but she is well enough to drive herself in her little pepper-white Mini Cooper. A mixed berry smoothie is her mid-morning request. She can't tolerate gluten, she says. It's anyone's guess what the prison meals would have done to her back then. "Those starchy meals," she shakes her head, adding that it is a wonder she didn't develop kwashiorkor.

She has a tic, a hum in her voice, I wonder if she's aware of it. Pausing between thoughts, it comes up, a little 'hmm'. She reminds me to repeat questions, because she has become forgetful. "After detention you continuously… you continuously have that," she points to her temples. "You are never 100% mentally. Also you have to excuse me because of mental block, one suffers from that."

Her memories are vivid, despite her feeling unsure of her memory, and her laugh is frequent and easy.

She says she was prepared for detention, having studied the journalist and activist Ruth First's memoirs about her political imprisonment in 1963. The comparison was lacking, sadly, because Joyce was an African female whose treatment was by far inferior. Also, in the short years since Ruth First was detained, her capturers had learned advanced interrogation techniques in France and Algeria. It may sound sophisticated, but these methods were nothing more than sleep deprivation, intimidation and threatened waterboarding.

"Ruth's was the first study which looked into torture by mind-breaking. It won't address the physical torture which we [the 22] went through. In terms of mental health, the very purpose of detention was to wear down the mental capacity of a detainee. You are in solitary confinement. You don't communicate with anyone, not even the wardresses. They just came and brought you the plate of corn, on a plate and bucket of galvanised iron. They would just open the door and put down the dish without saying anything. You were lucky if they greeted you," she said.

She knew that her journalism and missionary work collecting funds around the country was considered a crime, but not that it would be as unforgiving as the regime

made it out to be. The 2am wake-up she received as part of a raid, was "rude and unpleasant".

*From the TRC hearings:*
*"By pouncing on you in a deep sleep they meant to deprive you of a vital orderly function. They started the anxiety machine immediately and your trauma began at two a.m. As the five Special Branch officers, at gun point, whisked me away at dawn from my mother's house to the solitary cell via the death row cell in Pretoria Central, I was convinced that I would die in their hands leaving my three-year-old, Nkosinathi, an orphan.* [She was a single parent at the time]*."*

*"Being forced to abandon my baby son, Nkosinathi, was untenable torture. To crown it all, during a torturous interrogation session at Compol Building, a three-year-old Afrikaner toddler was brought in to remind me of Nkosinathi. They thought I would break down and accept their communist conspiracy interpretation of what I was involved in. They also wanted me to accept the offer of being turned into a State witness. Despite the agonising presence of a toddler I refused to be chiselled into an instrument of apartheid's evils, intelligence and security design. True, I was longing to be with my son, just to cuddle him, but the price to pay for that was worth our cruel separation. It was worth the strains to gain freedom for all South Africans, but then just opposed with the will to survive, torture by mind-breaking wormed itself within me, enveloping me with feelings of guilt."*

The guilt was not only for her child, but her partner. She was due to go into exile days before her detention. A month before, she and the Scottish doctor became engaged. Because the Immorality and Mixed Marriage Act made living in South Africa impossible, they made plans to leave, and he went ahead of her. She considers the act of detention another personal blow against her by the regime.

Joyce has recorded her story in iterations. But she still frowns, remembering.

"It's written a lot about how small the cells were, 1,5m by 4m. I would try to walk. If there were ants, you were lucky. There were ants in my cell… you started counting the ants, observing the ants' behaviour and character. I don't remember anything to read. Bibles… but they took them away also. I don't remember anything else to read [in over a year]."

She closes her eyes as she remembers something nasty. “Menstruation, after some time [mine] stopped. It seemed all your body functions were different. I don’t know, if it was the food.” She wrote how women were denied sanitary material, bleeding through their clothes and onto their sisal mats. Three mats were bed, sheet, blanket and pillow – soiled. Some women were made to stand during their menses.

At the TRC, she said this bodily function was used against women to increase their agony: “*In detention I was determined to continue to be counted with those who stood for humanity. In the clutches of the Special Branch I had to suffer indignity in order to survive. For example, as a woman you dreaded the commencement of your menstrual period, because it became so public under the notice of your interrogator, who were all Afrikaner males. You had to ask them for sanitary pads. With your menstrual flow they made you stand untenably as punishment. The feel and smell of the sticky blood as a reminder of eminent slaughter at the hands of your torturers. One other woman, Lulu Gwala, was given no pads. She wrapped herself in a blanket that absorbed the blood and made her sticky and smelly.*”

The mind games were meant to wear them down, far worse than the physical conditions. “I just remember the lights were bright, one light hanging down so you can’t sleep,” she says. It made her twitch involuntarily.

“The first day they brought you in, they made you pass the condemned cell. You saw the gallows and the hanging. Then I was told to strip and go outside. There was a shower outside, and the water was cold.”

*At the TRC she said: “Commissioners, it is very rare that you hear that in Pretoria Central there was a death cell for women. Black women were hung at Pretoria Central. The ghostly solitude of the night would be broken by the hollow clacking sound of galvanised iron chamber pots falling on cement floors. The loudness of that noise would be intermingled by agonising screams of women and babies. Minutes later you would hear gruelling bark of dogs, grunting as if they were tearing someone into pieces. The shuddering noise would gradually die down. You would hear the sjambokking, the hard (sic) rendering scream of the women. Again, these women, the women’s section in Pretoria Central, was very much alike to what the male prisoners tell us when they tell you of the singing of men going to the gallows.*

*With the women's section it was women who were being beaten, babies screaming. This was happening all the time at night."*

She says the solitude was unimaginable. "We were lucky if we saw others. We had to protest to get our rights [to exercise for 30 minutes a day or receive legal counsel]. I remember the first time in detention, so I was separated from everyone, I didn't know of other detainees except Shanthie," Joyce said.

"It wasn't because she was allowed, but she would sing in the early hours of the morning. I picked up that's Shanthie. The wardresses were white Afrikaner, we never saw another black person."

She remembers one occasion when she saw others, comrades, and the joy of getting together. "When we were on trial they would release each of us from the individual cells and put us in Winnie's cell, which was a bit bigger than others. One time we refused to move away from the cell and the prison warders called reinforcements. They came in with Alsatians to force us out. The only thing we could do was strip naked, all of us stripped and then they left us for a while. Otherwise the Alsatians would have attacked and torn our garments. If you were naked they wouldn't be able to bite… "

Joyce said in the many years under apartheid, politically active women were routinely arrested, detained and that it was common for young girls to come back pregnant. She was terrified of being gang-raped in the torture seasons.

### *Meeting Ma Rita*

The main road in Senoane, Soweto teems with cars and taxis, children going home from school and wandering dogs are interspersed with street sellers. Anyone you ask can point out the home where Ma Rita, as she's known, lives. At 86, she's frail but there is fire and fight in the retired parliamentarian who served under three presidents.

She's busy on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at veterans' meetings and community projects and guards her time fiercely. Questioning our interview, but agreeing to a brief meeting, she scolds: "I think on three or four occasions, myself and my husband

had to leave small children here in the house, and did anyone think of my children, these children at that time? They did not."

The first wounds of apartheid were inflicted on her as a young girl, and they sparked her political awareness. She points with a frail finger, to a photograph in her lounge. "There is my father. You see that old man with the hat on? That is the only photo we have in this house… this one. They took all our photos, the security police. A lot of our people lost their things…"

The forced removal from the family home in Mogopa village in Ventersdorp in the North West was a trauma that she remembers easily, decades later, even how she was as tall as the tyres on the truck that came to raze their homes. "My father was going to be removed from his house and they bundled him into a car. We were not there, but we left our cattle in the kraal and they took all our furniture. We had so many cows and our furniture [that remained] was all broken. When my father went to get his money [compensation], it was so little."

She went to school in Sophiatown near Johannesburg but had to leave in Standard 8 (now Grade 10) to help support the family financially. Her first job was as an administrator at the Brick and Tile Workers Union. As it follows, working with unions throws a person into the political sphere at grassroots level, and so her activism began.

In 1955, Ma Rita worked at the Railway Workers Union, as a secretary responsible for collecting members' fees. She met Lawrence Ndzanga, who was actively involved in recruiting members for the union around the country. They married and moved to Soweto, where they would soon be known as organisers for meetings of the ANC. It was also then, that she met Shanthie and her brothers, who were involved in mobilising unions at that time. Joyce and Winnie, also active residents in Soweto, were friends.

Her home today is renovated and comfortable. "When we got here it was veld, there was nothing. Then he [Lawrence] got a truck and brought me corrugated irons. We made a little shack and we slept there. Then the next day there was a bigger shack. That is where my second child was born. There was not even a toilet, let me tell you. Ma Tshababala was down the road, I ran to that place to relieve myself. She said, 'Here if you want a toilet, take your receipt and go to the municipal office and go get a

bucket'. The lives we led. Really man, we suffered. I had to work. How much was I, as a black person, earning at that time? Nothing, next to nothing. We survived, and we built the house," she shrugs.

Banned persons since 1964, the couple was monitored closely and were obvious targets for of the raids in May 1969. "News travelled very fast. The government knew we were involved with the trade unions, and the activities we were organising. Once you go in politics, you can't go out. In the evening people would gather here after work. We would talk to people and they would put in their registration to be members of the party. When the security police came to your house and started harassing you, you know the next thing will be detention."

She was to remain in prison for six months without a single change of clothing and was then given an additional year.

Sitting at her dining room table, she shows how young her children were when the couple were arrested. "Our kids; three boys and one girl. They were small children," she emphasises. "Those apartheid police had no fear, no shame to take the father and mother, and leave small children like that. My sister had to come and stay with them [when she heard about the arrests, later in the day]."

"What could they do, when police take their father and mother? As a mother, you will cry, cry… like any mother would feel when they leave small children at home without any one taking care of them."

Fifty years on, the pain is still fresh and her mind goes back to the days. She repeats: "I left small my babies. Nobody cared about them. Not even the Anglican Church came here. I'm telling you, it was hard."

She recalls that the spurious charges were obvious even to them as laypeople. "Our lawyers made sure they separated the charges. We didn't know how to use guns, so they couldn't put us together with others, like one who they said was a guerrilla [Samson Ndou, the first accused]. Then when they said we are dismissed, we thought we were going home. They detained us again. We didn't even go to get our bags. They said somebody will bring them to us, but they didn't. That was the life we were used to in this country."

Joyce said that Ma Rita suffered the most, if there was a scale to compare. She was beaten viciously by interrogators.

“I was in my 30s then, but I can feel it now. If I move, I’ve got pains. I am ill. In jail, there were doctors there they would take you if you were sick, but we took what they gave. What can you do with a Panado? Those matrons would give you your tablets when they want to. We got sick. I had high blood pressure. When you are in detention you stay alone, the whole day you sleep. You do get sick, but nobody knows. And you wake up. They give you a tablet when they feel like. If they are off work you won’t get a tablet. They didn’t care, and they did what they like. You know, I fell on bricks [during interrogation]. Those bricks which were set there on purpose, even now, I have pains.”

Her son, Gadifeli attends our meeting. He mentions that he has a sister, but that two of his brothers passed away in the early years of democracy. Their father, Lawrence Ndzanga, died in detention in 1977, and Ma Rita, also imprisoned during the Soweto uprisings in 1976, was only released after his funeral.

She says “some of the scars are so deeply rooted,” shaking her head.

This is also why her speech at Winnie Mandela’s death was a strained, impassioned one. “They who speak ill of those who are late, they are mad. I worked with Winnie for many years. She was in trouble, just like any other woman, like any other young girl [in the movement]. With her husband away, she had her children and she was struggling just like me. I don’t know why people can say such things about people who are late,” she scoffs.

“Winnie was not a bad person. To remember where we come from and where we are now, that is important.”

### *Meeting Nondwe*

There is a familiarity about New Brighton township on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth. I work out we are not far away from legendary actor and activist John Kani’s home. The township has often been mentioned in the theatre and dramas that depicted the

early days of the struggle. The Eastern Cape was the heartbeat of the resistance movement, after all.

Nondwe 'Brysina' Mankahla's home is off a dirt path, dusty with the white sand typical of the area. Outside her gate, a neighbour sells a man a glass of beer, despite the sun making an appearance barely a few hours prior. Her house is humble but well-appointed and impeccably tidy. Greeted by her daughter, Phila, who is in her 50s, I am told that the family is mourning the death of Nondwe's eldest daughter, Nombuso, who died – seemingly from alcoholism.

A spritely, chubby Nondwe, 84, can't believe it has been 50 years since her detention when I remind her. It was one of two imprisonments that marked her life as an activist, and as a mother, she says.

We drive to the peaceful PE beachfront, the famous wind whistling in the early morning. She points out a grocery store she worked at in town, and the Sanlam building where she was interrogated, infamously the site of interrogations that later resulted in Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko's murder.

"I worked as a cleaner at the technical college, because I couldn't get an education… I fell pregnant at a young age. In the 1950s it was fashionable, in a way, that young people became active in the ANC. In 1955 we had celebrations around the signing of the Freedom Charter. We protested against Bantu education and the *dompasses*. We were always collecting together to raise funds for the movement. I used to distribute pamphlets and notices for meetings, and after work we would have our meetings," she says articulate and clear.

"There was a [liberal] paper called the *New Age*. The movement needed this paper to get out, everywhere," she gestures widely with short, stocky arms.
Her activism started out as a form of employment. "After work on a Wednesday and Friday I would go to New Brighton station to sell the *New Age*, collecting the money for our activities. On weekends, we would have rallies."

She found full-time employment at the printing and publishing company that was producing the *New Age, Fighting Talk* and the *Pondo Revolt*. This was of course

another illegal act under the apartheid laws, as she was aiding in the distribution of banned material. “We would get bundles from Johannesburg and I was distributing during the rallies,” she says, casually, of the brave act that informed comrades about the progress of the struggle, updated them on detentions of comrades, ultimately intended to garner support and inspiration for the cause.

Nondwe was detained for the first time in 1963 – along with her mother, Nellie – for a year, as an awaiting trial prisoner. With four young children supposedly in the care of their grandmother, she was surprised to see Nellie in prison. “I got a fright. I asked who was with the kids, and mama said, ‘God will be there’.”

She would recall later in an interview that the time in prison in the Eastern Cape stretched on, but at least she was not alone. In a light moment of remembrance, she says the political prisoners created a “rugby match” by passing ants a crumb of pap to play with.

She and her mother were released, but their political work continued.

Then on May 31, 1969 the Security Branch knocked on the door of the supermarket she worked at. “First they came and told me: ‘We would like you to work with us. We have some guys who mentioned your name.’ I asked ‘What, how can I work with *you*?’ They said I must testify. Hey, I couldn’t say no or yes,” she claps.

“Shan [Pillay] who was my boss, he said ‘Brysina, you must be careful.’ He knew I was in jail previously and he gave me a job, even though the Special Branch was after me. He told me not to answer them and they must come back after I can think about it.”

They arrived in their heavy boots and khakis, a few days later. “When I refused, they said ‘We are taking you for further questioning.’ I thought to myself, this is goodbye. I went home to collect a few things to change. My dresses, some underwear. I don’t remember having a coat, a jersey maybe. They took me to police cells in Walmer. They won’t let you spend more [than a few] days in the same place. They take you place-to-place so people don’t notice you. At midnight they took me to Sanlam building and asked me, and asked me, and asked me questions.”

She pauses, she appears fatigued from reliving the time.

“They asked me if I know someone, showed me photos, asked me about meeting Joyce. You can’t say you don’t know. They don’t like that… they start to shake you up. There was a box, like a trunk. You climb on it, then onto some bricks and you stand on those bricks until you tell them what they want to know. They know everything, but they want to get it from you to use as evidence. I refused. They didn’t get anything from me,” she says proudly.

“After two days they took me to Humansdorp. If you are in those cells, nobody can see you. Nobody knows you are there. The commandant gives you food. Then you get a bucket of water and a toilet bucket. Sometimes they leave you for the whole day, or two days. You can’t sleep. Sometimes they would come at midnight to wake you up, to make you talk.”

The Security Branch officers would slap and beat her with open hands, to not mark her with evidence of their violence, she says. “They show you photos. That’s where they caught me, I was in a photo with some people who were banned… Samson Ndou, [the first accused in the trial] I once met him before we got arrested. They said ‘Now, we got you’. They said I must testify that this guy was trained as a guerrilla, he was dangerous. I just agreed to avoid more beatings. They went to my mum’s house and said she must pack enough things for me because I am going away for a long time. I didn’t see her or my kids, I only saw the suitcase later.”
She met battered and bruised SA Communist Party members in the vans they would share on the long journey to the Transvaal, as Gauteng was known then. “They took us to Pretoria. At the cells they separated us. You don’t know who is next door. It could be a criminal, but we were next to each other, in solitary confinement.”

I ask if she was afraid, leaving her four children and her mother. “We didn’t think of being scared. We didn’t know anything, we just went to the prison,” she shrugs dismissively.

The cells were grey, cement. Cold came in drafts from under the door. There was mesh over the small window, and a bright light – or no light for others.

“What did I do for a year? *Sjoe*. In the morning, I would do my exercises and my loo, then after wash myself in this bucket. I had to get soap, I had a toothbrush and toothpaste sometimes, but that would get finished and you don’t know when you would get it again. Then, I would wash my clothes and fold them neatly. If you put the clothes under the blanket and sit on it, it would take out some wrinkles. Before the loo bucket comes out, the breakfast has been there waiting.”

“Some days, they take away the bucket early, other days it is with you when you eat. You don’t see anything or anyone. I don’t know who took the bucket. The room was so small, and we were supposed to have time to exercise but we didn’t get that. Not a single day, did I see anyone else. Their plan is that nobody must know who you are,” she says.

The international community frowned on South Africa’s detention and treatment of political prisoners, and expected them to be treated better than common criminals. “Every second week a judge would ask, ‘What is your complaint?’ He would try to speak English, Xhosa and Zulu. After four times of telling him, I said ‘I’m not answering anything’ and just looked at him. Eventually I said, ‘I’ve been telling you, I don’t get exercise, I don’t get anything from my people, no visits. My people are far away, not even a letter arrives. Why must I say I’m all right?’” she says.

That resistance was futile, she would learn.

“During the day I walked, up and down the cell. It’s small, [1.5 by 4m]. One time I found two pins. I took a piece of thread and tried to crochet. Then, I would undo it and do it again. We had more than a year of this, only interrogation in between and once or twice to the Synagogue for the trial.”

Sitting down to a meal of chicken and vegetables with the smell and sounds of the ocean nearby, she speaks about the conditions of health and nutrition.

“Food…” she shakes her head. “Pap in the morning, mealies for lunch, pap and veg [in the] evening. If there was meat, you just saw a hole [in the starch], the meat was gone before it got to you. Whether it was Christmas or not, we didn’t know. Once when I was in detention in PE we got a raisin bun for Christmas. But that was our

food every day. If I don't want to eat, I still had to eat. If there is a worm in the vegetables, or sand, I still had to eat. First you see a worm and get *naar [nauseous]*, then you just move it to the side, or you could eat it," she laughs.

The women say the solitude and loneliness was far worse than beatings, putrid food and unliveable conditions. The only time the detainees could communicate was in the early hours of the morning, or late at night. Despite thick doors and cement separating them, they could hear each other. Some shared recipes. "There's a carrot cake recipe I still use today," she quips.

After a time, there were clues about other political prisoners interspersed in the prison community.

"I heard someone going in and out the whole night, the women prisoners said she was in hospital. Then she was transferred next door to me and I heard them say, 'Winnie, Winnie Mandela are you okay?' so I knew it was her. We would speak, sitting against those walls. She went to hospital often. We spoke about the children, often. It was heartsore, so we spoke about who was around, who was arrested, or in exile. I told her about my work with Govan Mbeki in PE."

The mental warfare was not lost on her either.

"There were some people next door. Three sets of women sentenced to death, I was next to them. One had killed her husband and the other two had killed their employers. I heard their cries as they went to the gallows. Every time there was a priest to let them pray, but he would say: 'You are going to die. You did this.' How do you think it feels to be there, next door, knowing we might be next to go the gallows?" she asked.

### ***Swanepoel***

A malevolent figure hovers over the stories of the political activists in South Africa. In historical evidence around the detention and interrogation – torture – of political detainees, and for the women of the Trial of 22, the name of the bulbous-nosed, red-faced architect of the Special Branch operations elicits a physical reaction.

*Swanepoel.*

TJ 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel died in Roodepoort in 1998. His moniker, Red Russian, was due to his flushed appearance.

The vivid memory of his interrogations live on in the minds of his victims. Shanthie often has nightmares of him, and Joyce uses breathing techniques to calm herself if a memory returns. Nondwe remembers that he travelled to Port Elizabeth to question her. And while Ma Rita dismisses him with a wave of her hand, her experience of him was the cruellest.

Evidence at the TRC revealed that after 1960, a special squad of police officers received intensive training in interrogation and counter-interrogation techniques. This coincided with the torture methods and statements elicited from witnesses in the Rivonia Trial.

Swanepoel had led the team of security police that raided Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia and arrested the leadership of Umkhonto we Sizwe that included Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Andrew Mlangeni, Elias Motsoaledi and Raymond Mhlaba, among others.

The apartheid government credited him for "breaking" what it considered a communist threat to South Africa, which could have added to the meaning of his nickname. Former presidential spokesman, Mac Maharaj wrote of how Swanepoel tortured him for months in a brutal manner that indicates the vile nature of the man. A favourite torture method was to make his foe stand naked at the edge of a table in a room known as Die Waarheid Kamer [The Truth Room], handcuffed behind him, with his private parts on a table. He would hit the genitals hard and repeatedly, with a blunt object until the detainee fainted. Mac Maharaj did not crack, incredibly, and joined the ANC leadership on Robben Island.

But worse was to come.

Swanepoel and his squad were retrained in Algeria and France, around 1968. Researcher Padraig O'Malley (n.d.) wrote that the officers known to have attended

this course included Swanepoel and his cohorts, Major JJ 'Blackie' de Swardt, Hans Gloy, Roelf van Rensberg and Dries Verwey.

The women were detained in 1969, which puts into perspective their treatment by Swanepoel and his team. Shanthie recalled: "Indres [her brother] was arrested in '63. Swanepoel was just a sergeant at that stage. By the time I was detained, he was a major and he was trained abroad by the French. The French were really brutal to the Algerians…"

His newly-honed skills included sleep torture. Shanthie says: "I don't recall how many times I saw him. He was one of the interrogators, but he was the worst. There was one time, they drove me somewhere by car. They wouldn't even tell me where. Later on I worked out that they took me to Pretoria to the Compol building…"

The notorious building in Pretorius Street was the home of the Security Branch. While much of the unit was moved to nearby Wachthuis in 1967, one floor was dedicated to the branch, and many detainees of the time recall torture sessions – interrogation as it was called.

"He was the person who interrogated me. I get nightmares about that man, even now. I dream and eventually try to go back to sleep but not often can you go back to sleep after remembering those days. You don't know if it's real. It's so vivid," Shanthie says quietly.

She pauses, her voice simultaneously sweet and grated. "They made me stand on bricks for five days without sleep. On the fifth day, he got someone… one of the officers, to push a chair towards me," she gestures.

"By this time, I had lost touch with reality. I was hallucinating about flying in a plane. I'd never left the country, I'd never flown, but they took it as evidence of some terrorist activity," she says with a wry smile. "I must've been talking aloud. They gave me something to drink and I slept in a camp bed that Friday night. When I got up it was like the floor wasn't there. I don't know what it was that they gave me."

"When you in the situation you cry. You think of everything. You pray," she says, with a furrowed brow.

There's silence for a short while, a breeze rustling the bougainvillea tree nearby.

O'Malley (n.d.) wrote: *"Swanepoel was one of the most prominent members of staff in this infamous unit and his career, endorsed by the state, typifies the actions of the squad. It conducted interrogations throughout the country, employing methods such as applying electric shocks, brutal assault, burning, breaking bones, hanging the suspect upside-down from an open window in a multi-storey block and making him stand in the same position without sleep or food for long periods of up to 60 hours. Deaths in detention (20 men between 1960 and 1969 alone, and many more thereafter) were usually labelled as 'suicide' or 'died of natural causes'. At the inquests that followed the government was absolved of all blame."*

The relevance of this is that the women of the 1969 trial were never charged because they refused to give evidence against each other. They were therefore exposed to lengthy and frequent torture in detention.

Nondwe consented to testify – although she didn't follow through – after being slapped, beaten, kicked. "But never where it will leave physically visible scars".

The brick torture was a favourite.

Joyce's face turns sour when she remembers. "I was interrogated by Rooi Rus Swanepoel, in the Compol building… that torture house,' she snorts. "There were bricks on the floor and a small desk. He pulled out a pistol from a drawer. And he pointed at me and said 'You stand on the bricks.' I did, but you can't balance. It was sort of two bricks for each foot, so you just wobble. They kept asking, 'What is it you are doing?' and there wasn't anything one was doing. I was raising funds for families of political prisoners through the Anglican Church. There wasn't much else. I would collect money and distribute it to those families, the money was in envelopes. I don't even know how many times I repeated this and how long it was. These things are so frightening, that you don't know the time, *neh*. What tells you of the time? You so scared you are going to be shot."

She had gone into further detail at the TRC. *"Today, some of those same apartheid ideologues, the Coetzees, the Bothas, the van Wyks, the Swanepoels and others who*

*brutalised the majority of South Africans in order to maintain power and control have retreated from the State apparatus. Anchored in the sanctuary of their lavish homes and farms they watch with cold satisfaction as we, the survivors of apartheid, are battling to make South Africa a home for all its people, the brutalised, the unemployed, the poor, the unskilled, the semi-skilled, the professionals, all and sundry…"*

Ma Rita's experience was documented in a paper by the International Aid and Defence Fund in May 1970.

*"I was taken to a room at the back of Compol Buildings. Major Swanepoel called me by a name. I kept quiet and did not reply. Other Security Police continued to question me. Day and night is the same in this room because of the thick heavy planks covering the windows. I remained standing. It was late at night. One policeman came round the table towards me, and struck me. I fell to the floor. He said 'Staan op" [stand up] and kicked me while I lay on the floor. They closed the windows. I continued screaming. They dragged me to another room, hitting me with their open hands all the time. In the interrogation room they ordered me to take off my shoes and stand on three bricks. I refused to stand on the bricks."*

*"One of the white security police climbed on a chair and pulled me by my hair, dropped me on the bricks. I fell down and hit a gas pipe. The same man pulled me up by my hair again, jerked me, and I again fell on the metal gas pipe. They threw water on my face. The man who pulled me by the hair had his hands full of my hair. He washed his hands in the basin. I managed to stand up and then they said: 'On the bricks!' I stood on the bricks and they hit me again – while I was on the bricks. I fell. They again poured water on me. I was very tired. I could not stand the assault any longer. I asked to see Major Swanepoel. They said: 'Meid, jy moet praat' (Girl, you must talk)."*

The squad would tell the detainees they were being sold out by their comrades, that others had accepted payment and gifts and had relented to their demands. Joyce said later that the psychological profile of the detainees was well known to the squad. "They studied people. For instance, they would ask you very personal questions during detention and you wondered where did they get this information from. Then

you realised later on that they have actually been making a profile of you and they would use it to get information from you."

It went on for days, as the torturers took shifts to watch the women stand.

The torture bricks feature in several interrogation sessions, apart from Winnie Mandela's. It is believed that her prominence in the country and the international eyes on her as a figure of the struggle, saved her from some forms of torture.

She was allowed to sit, but not sleep. For five days, the officers would bang on the desks and shout to wake her. Her heart condition and international profile might have spared her, but she was mentally anguished – told she was earning money from her activism to buy fashionable clothes, that she was causing her comrades to receive the same interrogation for lesser deeds than hers. While she asked for the charges to be placed solely on her, they did not relent until statements were taken.

Despite it all, the case was dismissed.

Lawrence Ndzanga was similarly interrogated, and accounts of his detention mentioned that he was allowed to use the bathroom.  He was not to survive his subsequent detention and torture a few years later.

For years after, Joyce says, the hundreds of detainees would bear emotional scars of their torture. Some who survived, later committed suicide. She says how people could be turned into monsters easily while their torturers went free. She said it was secondary torture post 1994, for those policemen to watch how the political heroes of the time unravelled in the new South Africa.

*"It is not only your intellect which is important in your life, it is also emotions, your relationships with other people, how to deal with these people. That is why I am saying that enduring race which I was in, fighting for change in this country, I think, was a price to pay for the separation with my son. I was not going to break down. That is another way they dealt with us."*

Of Swanepoel, she wrote: "*He did not stab, he did not put the electrical shocker on, you know, sexual parts of his victims, but he was behind those menials, the men who did that. He was the paymaster of those people. People who fell* [off the bricks]*, it was not just a question of falling and dying at the hands of the enemy, it was also at what they turned you to become later on. Others have become monsters, okay. That is part of falling and that is what the enemy enjoyed and that is what they are enjoying today, people like Johan Coetzee, you know, Swanepoel… ask those people why did they turn people into this. I think they will find the answer there."*

The TRC heard further evidence that Swanepoel was the central figure in the anti-terrorist unit, *Koevoet*. His reign was long, and in 1976, it was Swanepoel who was called out to Soweto when riots broke out.

His testimony read to the TRC gives clues to his malicious mind. *"By the time we got to Soweto everything was in flames. It was chaos. It was a tragic scene to look at – cars being burnt, people being killed. Everything was chaotic and completely out of control. We had far too few men available for the situation… Eventually I landed up, after a couple of days, in charge of riots all over Johannesburg – Soweto and Alexandra. I made my mark. I let it be known to the rioters I would not tolerate what was happening. I used appropriate force. In Soweto and Alexandra where I operated, that broke the back of the organisers."*

More than 451 schoolchildren were shot and killed by police.

In July 1998, a report in *The Times,* London, recorded that Swanepoel, aged 70, had died "quietly at home". He suffered no recourse for his deeds.

*"Swanepoel lived quietly in retirement on his pension still paid by the Mandela Government in [Roodepoort] an outer suburb of Johannesburg. He made no move to seek amnesty from the Truth and Reconciliation commission. One of his former victims who wished to bring charges against him discovered however that Swanepoel's career may have taken its toll, for by his sixties he was already suffering from premature senility." – The Times, London.*

### *Release and thereafter…*

The women were released between April and September of 1970.

Nondwe recalls travelling in the third-class carriage of a train back to PE. “I was thinking that I might die in jail. I thought I’ll never see my children. In the first prison [her earlier detention], I really thought of them. But when you volunteer yourself… [in Pretoria] I had to try my best to forget about them. When I was released, they told me to stop ‘your nonsense of going in and out’ [of jail].”

She was so afraid of being rearrested that she got off at a station before the final stop and walked home. “I found my sister-in-law who is a nurse, she took care of me. I sat down, then I started to shake. I couldn’t sleep, and I was just shaking all the time. For two or three months, I was talking and shivering, shaking. I couldn’t hold anything. I had to see the doctor. They felt it was a lack of nutrition. I had to take multivitamins and eat healthy food like cheese and lettuce on brown bread, which was expensive but I think my body was not nourished.”

She tears up remembering seeing her children after 18 months. “My children, they didn’t know me. I left them when they were very young… when I remember, that’s when I get hurt. I don’t like to talk about it,” she stops to wipe her tears, for those young children who couldn’t recognise their mother. “It was sad when I came back. Now, they know me,” she exhales.

Nondwe doesn’t regret her time to the cause, but she said she knows the impact it has had on her children. She was not attached to their fathers, and they were cared for by her mother and her sister, who had kids of her own. She believes her own scars are not as significant as their emotional ones. It may have contributed to her elder daughter’s death.

But, from 1970, she got back into life and work and spent the rest of her working life caring for them.

She says it was difficult to find work after being released. “People were scared, if you went to jail for politics. I didn’t get a job straight away, but the Black Sash

[movement] helped us. My children, they questioned why we were not okay after I came back. I couldn't do much to educate them." Yet, there were two teachers amongst them, and her daughter, Phila worked for the provincial government.

"Since the trial, I spent my life working for my kids and my mum, mostly at a hardware store. Only now, life is normal, when I reached my 60s. We don't meet our comrades often. In 1994, I saw Joyce; and Madiba and Winnie visited. We had to laugh together after a long time."

Fifty years on, I ask Nondwe how she feels about her contribution.

"My kids also want to know why I'm not up there with the others [politicians]. I don't care," she said dismissively. "I didn't do it to be famous. I think my strength comes from knowing that everything is over. Really, now we are free. Young people don't know about the really bad times. I'm not here for compensation. What comes up, is what comes up."

Joyce and Shanthie went into exile after the trial, albeit under differing circumstances.

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Shanthie says: "When they sent me home, I couldn't sleep for two nights. And then I couldn't stop talking. I remember… it was getting over the loneliness. After having nobody to talk to and nobody to say anything to, being cut off. There might have been a war going on outside, you'd never have known. That was the first and only time I took something [medication] to help me sleep."

After a time at home, she decided to leave the country. "What kind of life was this? I was kept in Johannesburg [by the banning orders]. You couldn't be in the company of more than one person at a time. Your friends are banned, who do you communicate with? I'd applied to leave the country previously and while the British dilly-dallied, I was detained."

For a few months, Shanthie faced legal wrangles to join Ramnie as the Security Branch was after her brother-in-law to testify in another trial.

“I applied for an exit permit and I had this permission to go to England. By law they were not allowed to refuse you, they had to… but by banning I was restricted to Joburg so I couldn’t do anything with the permit. The lawyers were also handling [PAC leader, Robert] Sobukwe’s case, but we lost. There was no way they would have let a leader of a movement go. Eventually, Helen Suzman [the only progressive activist in the white National Party parliament] campaigned for me separately, and that’s how they finally gave me permission.”

“It was weird because you know you’re not going to see your family again for a long time. I was lucky my sister was there. We had friends in Finchley. In a way, it was like the SA community getting together, we were all anti-apartheid people.”

As a young girl, unattached and working with the International Defence and Aid Fund, she says: “Actually the place grew on me. It’s an internationality about London. We were an active organisation and my specialty always is political prisoners, so we were busy”.

There are photos of her outside of South Africa House, in a warm overcoat, long-haired with dark kohl around her eyes. “We would sit outside and fast for 24-hours, make a noise until someone listened. It was the end of the Vietnam war, and there were protests, there was the Greek junta, and of course we campaigned for South Africa.”

One of the campaigns was an attempt to halt the hanging of the young soldier, Solomon Mahlangu, 22, which failed. A lawyer was dispatched, but his hanging was moved to two hours earlier. “What a waste of life that was,” she says.

Shanthie met Dominic Tweedie, a reporter for the *Morning Star* on a boat trip to Calais organised for activists. They married in Tanzania and the pair moved back to SA after 1994. She said she was fortunate to find work at the University of the Witwatersrand, in the education policy unit. “It was part of the work I was doing in England. Dominic joined Cosatu where he spent many years as secretary.”

Integration was not easy, even at family level. “Coming back was difficult. When I left, our family was living in Doornfontein, they were in Lenasia then. There were

brothers getting married, and new sisters-in-law. To build relationships again was difficult. We felt we were imposing, overcrowding people, before we found our home. Also, we had the freedom of movement in England… travelling by train at night and so on, that we still don't have, you feel restricted."

Their time now is spent quietly. She is an accomplished cook and gardener, proud of her nieces' children whose photographs are all over their home. She didn't have any children of her own, saying she married too late in life.

Democracy is an ongoing development in her eyes. She recalls joining a neighbourhood pottery class and meeting women her age who knew little of the struggle against apartheid. "I was quite disappointed, but we knew there was a lot of work to be done to rebuild. It is still not quite done."

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Meanwhile, Joyce's escape to exile was a dramatic one. She was not granted permission, but was told to leave surreptitiously, by the ANC in 1972.

"The first challenge when I had to leave the country. The ANC sent a woman, Dolores Godfrey. My mum said: 'Why don't you go?' I thought if it is false, I am a dead woman. But you know, seeing you're not being able to do anything with yourself as a banned person, I considered it. I'd been a journalist but I was restricted, I couldn't work. I said to this woman, 'I need to think about it' but she said we didn't have time and they would come back in a few minutes; that transport has been arranged. That's one of the very difficult decisions I had to take because I wasn't sure what would happen. She said we will go through Swaziland. Suddenly they were taking photos, changing my name. I would be Sheila, and she gave me a wig and makeup," Joyce titters at the memory.

"From there, I realised it was dangerous. From Swaziland we had to drive through Mozambique and then fly from there to Germany. I just said 'well, if anything happens, it will happen'. I was 23. You've given yourself to fate and luck."

Arriving in Germany, she said "the first thing which surprised me was to see white men doing manual work. Carrying dustbins and the like," she chuckles. She and Dr

Rankin were reunited, married and lived in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Scotland and England. In 1975, she submitted her manuscript for *Window on Soweto,* published to raise funds for the movement.

While she says she was functional and of sound mind to work and write, she sought psychological help before her children joined her in the UK. “I started therapy when I was in Scotland. By then, I was known because I was speaking on anti-apartheid platforms as a former journalist and campaigning against apartheid. You feel you have to resist falling into pieces, it’s your duty to do that. This was during apartheid times; you can’t let the enemy be happy by falling to pieces. Although I would get depressed, especially when the kids hadn’t joined me, you can’t make the enemy happy. It was a resistance. The person who demonstrated that the most was Winnie, you see. She would talk about it… just before she died she was saying that. She really was very strong.”

She recalls a Zulu song that helped keep the exiles’ spirits up.

*Sobashiya Abazali Ekhaya*
*We left our parents and went to other countries/fighting for freedom.*

“I didn’t see my children for long periods, five years probably. Bob Hughes, who was a member of parliament in Britain, he handled that and demanded that the South Africans in exile should be allowed to have their kids to come and join us. If they didn’t he would raise it in British parliament the South Africans are holding my kids hostage.”

“I think because I was involved in anti-apartheid movement it was challenging to be away from them, but I felt I was doing meaningful work. You always thought about those at home which are oppressed, and until they are free you are not free,” she says.

Of the women, only Joyce seems to have received formal therapy. “I did go for counselling because really the best counselling is when you are chatting. It’s when you are speaking that you release the tension. The therapist is trained to be empathetic and draw the ill feelings from you. After a session you feel okay, for several days or months. You go again when you feel distressed,” she said.

She adds that the TRC hearings were helpful in debriefing. She gave detailed testimony about her capturers, some who were granted amnesty, and she has forgiven them. “In the ANC the message was that the people are not our enemies, it’s the regime. The apartheid regime.”

It helped when the family moved back to Pretoria in 1994 – close to the Kalafong Hospital where Dr Rankin worked. “My husband liked open spaces. We bought a two-hectare plot and initially I was really afraid.  He said: ‘You surprise me because you believe in people. Who’s going to hurt you here?’ We were fine. There was only once incident when Ken and I were cycling together. We had a tandem bike,” she smiles at the memory.

“Someone, a neighbour, pulled a pistol from his waist. ‘This is why I was afraid,’ I told Ken.” She laughs: “That was the end of riding the tandem. Real right wingers are dangerous, but the majority of our neighbours are okay. We were happy.” Dr Rankin died in 2011, but she continues to live on the smallholding. Her four children are contributing to SA society, in business, technology and in the medical sphere, her son Marc, has followed in his father’s footsteps.

When she does have trouble with her memories, she does her breathing exercises. “I’ve got to do mental exercises. You breathe and you release. I was advised in a therapy, to breathe through them. You allow them to happen. You accept them because they will always be there.” She waves her hand in front of her face, eyes closed. “They’re there but one tries not to be bitter because you will be on the path to destruction. What you want to avoid is that they control you, because then you will get mad. You think of something else, other than memories. I find that I have to acknowledge them.”

“There were many who did lose their minds…”

Joyce testified at the TRC hearings that, post-1994, criminal behaviour and societal ills might have come directly from the trauma of living under the apartheid regime.

*From TRC transcripts in 1995*: *"26 years have since passed since I was among a group of seven women subjected to torture by mind-breaking by the apartheid Security Police and yet I often find myself back in the dungeons of solitary confinement, ready to take away my life for no explicable reason. This all happens without any conscious thought on my part. I hate it when my mind brings those terrifying memories, but my mind just does it for me. It was orchestrated to destroy me."*

*"Today as I move around in the workplace I realise that I am not the only, I am not alone in my ordeal. Countless of fellow South Africans who survived apartheid incarceration are in constant battle within themselves to continue to live and work. They are on guard, refusing to succumb to the dictates of the mind-breakers who knew the long-term devastation, devastating effects of their psychological warfare against the freedom loving South Africans."*

*"A number of wives of political prisoners were either detained in jail several times, torture by mind-breaking itself develops paranoia and brings into dominance those destructive aspects of behaviour which, under normal circumstances, can be kept under control or done away with. As a result, detainees or prisoners are set against themselves, but also on each other."*

*"Outside the prison environment family and community relations were destroyed, because the former detainees or prisoners could not cope with a normal family and community life or had been turned monsters against the very cause their lives had been devoted to."*

*"The devastation of torture by mind-breaking had a multiple effect on the children of the women victims. The children were thrown in the streets to fend for themselves. Some swelled the ranks of the liberation movement, the unlucky ones turned tsotsis [criminals]. Therefore, a political statement not only indicting the successive apartheid Government, but also rooting the cause of racism to the colonial era would focus all the other TRC deliberations within the historic perspective."*

She added that gossip and rumours plagued women in the movement, similarly to how they followed Winnie Mandela.

"*Between mid-1964 and 1973 I remember that when travelling in trains, buses and at the work place, smear campaigns about the wrongdoings and the plight of the wives of jailed political leaders was rife. We should ask ourselves why is it that such a good person, such a person who was a fighter, why is that person a monster today and we should put the blame where it belongs and we should assist our former Comrades who have fallen. You do not fall just because you die and you are buried. This, the apartheid machinery of torture by mind-breaking was aimed at totally ruining you even if you are alive. Even better when you are alive, because they set you as an example.*"

Shaking her head, she adds that Ma Rita was one of the many she thought of when she wrote her statement to the TRC. "Rita Ndzanga, she really suffered, that woman. She lost her husband, he was tortured to death in detention [in 1977]. She was detained and couldn't even attend his funeral. And then two of her sons died, after 1994."

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Despite her difficulties in life, Ma Rita said: "In the country, right now, we never lived like the way we are living now. We have got lives, really. We wanted our dignity back."

She worked for many years in the democratic government, as a parliamentarian. She dismisses any consideration of psychological help. "I didn't have any counselling. I only went to a doctor when I felt pain or if I didn't have tablets. I still take tablets. If you see my arm when I fell [after she was dropped onto the bricks and gas pipe], I could feel the pain from here," she gestures to her forearm. "Sometimes I can hardly pick my hand up. It's painful. Nowadays, I am tired. People think we are all right and don't want to associate but it is because of those sicknesses. That all, it comes from detention without trial." In 2004, Ma Rita was awarded the Order of Luthuli by President Thabo Mbeki which commemorates contributions to South Africa in the struggle for democracy, building democracy and human rights, nation-building, justice and peace, or conflict resolution.

## *Conclusion*

The women were tied together by the trial, but for the most part, went on to live separate lives after it ended.

In 2017, they were awarded national honours, the Order of Ikhamanga (Silver) by the South African government for their contribution to the country. At the ceremony in Pretoria, they spent time with each other briefly. For some amongst them, it was the first time they had seen each other in decades.

They would meet again shortly after, in April 2018 at Winnie Mandela's funeral.

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There were many who fought, who were jailed, tortured, their lives derailed by apartheid and the fight against the regime. But this trial, in particular, could have changed the history of South Africa. Had the witnesses in the trial testified, Winnie Mandela and other key figures; such as renowned photographer, Peter Magubane and Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin, who recorded so much of the country's history, would have been jailed and essentially disabled.

Perhaps the Soweto uprising of 1976, the riots and micro-revolutions, many, many protests and pickets, bloodshed and unflappable organising which led the country to the brink of civil war, and finally democracy, might have come about in a different way.

Yet now, in their homes, these women live ordinary, quiet lives.

At another visit with Shanthie and her husband Dominic, they share a vegetarian lunch with me – a fresh green salad, curried potatoes and a bean stew are delicious. She shows me photographs of her grandnieces and nephews which adorn the lounge, amongst the potted plants she coos over. The floors are polished to a shine. Their days are restful. She sometimes spends her time visiting her sister, Ramnie, who returned from exile with her family post 1994, too.

I wonder: If someone passed her at the nursery, adding plants to her collection, would they guess how her defiant line changed the course of a country's history?

Nondwe and Ma Rita attend veterans meetings and otherwise go about their latter days. Ma Rita's son visits for her delicious oxtail, but if he's later than 3pm, he turns away from her gate because she rests in the afternoons. The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Archive (2016) prepared a booklet on her life at her recent birthday celebrations. An unassuming affair, she scolds that it was not as well-attended as she expected and reminds me that there may not be too many more of those.

Nondwe, despite her spritely nature, watches the goings on in the political sphere earnestly. Frowning at incidents she considers bad politics, she says: "All these young guys of the 1980s and 1990s, they don't care and they don't know. They have never been in jail, arrested or been in solitary. If they knew, they would care more about their freedom. Look at us, we are free today."

As Joyce prepares to leave our meeting, I ask her about how she feels about the state of South Africa. So gently, she says: "Democracy will always be a challenge. In SA the racial divide is so deeply entrenched. On the other side, power has made some people corrupt. There is still a lot of work to be done, economically and more. But I always think, we must look to the good people, and there are so many."

We go into a book shop, and she mentions former intelligence minister, Ronnie Kasrils' book as one she has on her reading list. She says: "It is useful to go back to the reasons we all did what we did, *neh*?"

I say goodbye, and she smiles warmly. Watching her walk slowly to her car, she looks like anybody's *gogo* in her comfortable shoes and smart beret. Who would guess where those feet had walked before. ✊

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*Appendix A*

*Participant Information Sheet*

Good day

My name is Shanthini Naidoo, and I am a journalist with the Sunday Times. I am also completing my Master's research at the University of the Witwatersrand.

My research project is a look into the lives of the women who participated in the Trial of 22, in May 1969, their experiences during detention, and life since then.

I invite **Ma Rita Ndzanga** to be an interviewee in the narrative project. She is one of the four remaining women who were detained as a result of the trial who is alive today and a struggle stalwart who sacrificed a great deal for South Africa's freedom. I am focusing on women in my research because of the significance of female activists in the struggle against apartheid which I believe has not been adequately represented.

This is a free and voluntary exercise which will entail interviews with me at your convenience. There will be photographs taken of you, if you agree.

You may share whatever memories, experiences, current feelings that you feel comfortable with. I see no risks or harm to you, apart from recalling painful memories.

Please contact me should you have any queries and I will send you a summary of the research, which will eventually be used for publication.

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