

Spaces of Intersection: An Intimate Look at Black Women's Narratives of Township Life - **Neha Saini** (University of Singapore)

In the current landscape of apartheid studies, a revival of debates on the government's efforts of memorialising apartheid era narratives has problematised the disjunction between public reality and official national narratives (Simon Ebert 2023)(Heather Hughes 2023). Ebert identifies that "the symbolic landscape of South Africa is influenced by a narrative that bears no relation to the self image, identity and personal or collective memory of many people and groups" (p.53-55). Ebert's criticism echoes Tamara Shefer's (2010) call for greater attention to narratives that speak to intersections of race, class and gender in an effort to focus on "'normal stories' - the common place, the ordinary articulations of living gender and sexuality in and through apartheid" (Shefer, p.384,393).

Situated at the intersection of race, gender and class, Black women experienced some of the most profound forms of oppression and had their presence limited on the "narrative and political battlefield" (Gready 2003, p.10). The systemic suppression of Black women's narratives and their exclusion from public discourse (Daymond, 2013, pp.98) necessitates a comprehensive study of Black women's narratives to illuminate their voices and challenge dominant narratives that do not account for their intersectional experiences. With Black women's exclusion from the public sphere during apartheid, the spaces they inhabited were "'round the corner' or even 'in their houses' – whatever is placed (socially and spatially) where it can conveniently be ignored" (Barnard, 2007, p. 48). This paper focuses on Black women's narratives of townships, a space shaped by intersecting oppressive forces of race and class in the landscape of apartheid, paying particular attention to Miriam Tlali's anthology of short stories, *Footprints in the Quag* (1989), and Fatima Dike's play, *Streetwalking and Company Valet Service* (1991).

Centering on the interplay of orality and spatiality, fundamental theoretical dimensions in cultural studies, within Tlali and Dike's texts, this paper scrutinises how the township space shapes the lived experiences of the central Black women characters. Specifically, it explores how these characters navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender in their everyday and intimate lives within the township setting. Through the act of self-narration, the writers' literary imagination of the township sheds light on aspects of the 'ordinary' often disregarded in nation-building efforts that focus on the 'spectacular' (Ndebele 1986) and in doing so, they

unravel the “tense and illuminating knot of meanings each space signifies for the Black woman existing in apartheid society” (Baderoon, 2014, p.177) at the challenging intersection of race, gender and class.