

# Celebration, preservation and promotion of struggle narratives with a focus on South African women of Indian heritage

**Authors:**

Kogie K. Archary<sup>1</sup>   
Christina Landman<sup>2</sup> 

**Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Private Researcher, Durban, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Christina Landman,  
Landmc@unisa.ac.za

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The relevance and value of oral history practices and principles and its impact on community history gives credence to its relationship with the liberation struggle. The liberation struggle heroines that formed the cohort of interviewees for this research were members of the South African Indian community. This interview- research process provides a platform that allows the veteran South African female of Indian Heritage to reflect almost 50 years later and be a part of the celebration, preservation and promotion of struggle narratives. The women who were interviewed for this research shed light on celebrating political achievements, whilst remembering and recalling the educational, material and economic assistance from international sources. Furthermore, these women referred to the preservation of South Africa's unique heritage as, South Africa is united in its diversity. Promoting the values of the liberation struggle by sharing her anecdotes, honouring the cadres, relating experiences, retelling tales and sometimes possibly reliving military camp days completed the oral history interview process and eventually added to the body of knowledge that already exists and partially filled the gaps that exist.

**Contribution:** From a multidisciplinary religious perspective, this article contributes to the historical and social-cultural discourse on liberation theology within a paradigm in which the intersection of social sciences and humanities generates a transdisciplinary contested discourse.

**Keywords:** oral history; communities and the liberation struggle; reflective memories; post-apartheid South Africa; celebration, preservation and promotion of struggle narratives.

## Preamble

South African History Online (SAHO 2019f.) states that since the turn of the century women in South Africa became significant agents in challenging the apartheid regime. Even through the devastating effects of apartheid on the status of women, they never lost sight of the fact that change can only be effective by annihilating the apartheid system (SAHO 2019f.). Men and women of colour joined forces in the fight for their rights, and against being mistreated and oppressed by the system (SAHO 2019f.). In 1993, the author graduated with a Master of Arts in Orality – Literacy Studies from the University of Natal. This was still an apartheid country even though the new dispensation was on its way. However, the author's interest in Oral history stemmed from her youth as this interest in capturing the experiences of others saw her, at just 15 (in 1980) taking a few small steps at high school to address the school population on the reasons why we should join the liberation struggle as students. Natal Indian High schools took their cues from students at the University of Durban-Westville and Congress of South African Students (COSAS).

In 1980, the author and her classmates were asked to leave the classroom by fellow radical students. It was exciting as the students did not know what was happening. The teachers stood aside as they could not openly support the students but they could also not stop the students. Upon reaching the school grounds, the leaders insinuated that if identified, they could be suspended. The author decided to speak and it was her first political speech and coming from a small Indian town and an apolitical family did not help. She was a Durban – Westville university student from 1984 to 1987, and during this period the common experience was that Indian students boycotted, were on the run from riot police with rubber bullets and tear gas whilst Caspirs<sup>1</sup> with machine guns were a common sight whilst exams were back to back. It was a really

1. Four-wheeled military vehicles used for transport of troops.

**Note:** Special Collection entitled Social Memory Studies, sub-edited by Christina Landman (UNISA) and Sekgothe Mokgoatšana (UL).

difficult time as student politics was vibrant as they resisted strongly and sang songs with the theme 'Liberation before Education'.

The author began teaching in 1988 – mainly Afrikaans as a teaching subject – a forced choice if you wanted to be employed – and just one class of History. In 1990, she was founder chairperson of the Gender Desk of the Natal North Coast Region of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). During most of this time, her interaction and reaction in the main was within the Indian community. She witnessed some Indian leadership at work at the grassroots level. Within her portfolios she began working with the African National Congress (ANC), Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and attended meetings in Johannesburg in the run up to the 1994 elections. She was then mandated by the Verulam branch to attend the 49th Annual General Meeting of the ANC in Bloemfontein in December 1994. It was the first Annual General Meeting of the ANC since the unbanning. It really was an unforgettable experience as she had an opportunity to speak and be photographed with the great icon himself, President Nelson Mandela.

The author has harboured a great interest in oral history and history as she embarked upon further oral history studies, and for her PhD research, she interviewed over 100 respondents who were associated with the Maidstone Mill and attached estates. The interdisciplinary research which included Industrial, Organisational and Labour studies witnessed the author investigating culture, communication, power, leadership and changing management in a new democracy, as well as recording the histories of individuals and families that were associated with these estates which formed a part of the multiracial community, even though this was a designated Indian area.

In 2010, South Africans of Indian origin celebrated the 150th Anniversary of the Arrival of Indians to the then colony of Natal. In her role as the Public Relations Officer of the 1860 Indentured Labourers Foundation Verulam, the author researched family histories of the mainly Verulam community, which were compiled into a 104-page publication entitled the 'GIRMIT'. During the writing and research process, the author was reminded of modern slavery meted out to the Indians from 1860 to 1910, when India finally halted Emigration to the colony after receiving damning reports. However, on the contrary, many Indians chose to stay in the colony and build a new life for themselves away from India, as they believed that the opportunity was here in South Africa.

This oral history research has made it possible for the author to investigate what women of Indian origin in South Africa have experienced, politically, during the struggle years, especially from the 1960s until they returned from exile in the 1990s.

## Methodology

The oral history interview methodology was utilised. Three females were interviewed. Dr Sinthi Qono (interviewed on 11 September 2012) was identified as she lives in the same area where the author grew up, and it is known that she was one of the Simon David Family children that went into exile. Upon approaching her, the author was able to identify the other females as suitable respondents for this research. During the oral history interview, the respondents brought alive the past whilst living in the present, yet, simultaneously contemplating the future in terms of her role in society. The second respondent, Mrs Rajes Pillay (interviewed on 18 September 2012), the unsung surviving uMkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) (MK) madam soldier, had her legendary, yet simple, story to tell. Finally, Mrs Urmilla Singh (interviewed on 22 September 2012), the humble and compassionate civil servant who was part of the mass mobilisation within the country, shared her adventurous tales as well. The dynamic and intelligent academic, Dr Qono, who had semi-diplomatic status, also brought alive her vast experiences across the continents. All of the respondents were over 60 years of age at the time of the interviews and they were able to triangulate the relevance and value of Oral History practices and principles that give credence to its relationship with the liberation struggle. This correlation between oral history and its ability to connect oral historians with individuals to create avenues for collection of authentic and primary data adds to the existing body of knowledge on the contribution of South African women of Indian heritage to present-day South Africa. The author prepared a questionnaire beforehand. This research instrument was used to gain insightful information in terms of their experiences during the struggle times. The duration of the interviews varied. None of the interviews were tape-recorded as the respondents were satisfied with answering questions and the author writing them down. The author did not want to tape-record the interview as she was not sure as to the reaction of the respondents as the theme of the research was centred around liberation politics, and this could at times be sensitive especially if the veterans did not feel appreciated by the system after the sacrifices that they made.

## Conclusion and recommendations

From the interview with Dr Qono, when she was asked about South Africa as she reflected on what comes to mind especially from the sixties to the nineties, she divulged that being 'placed in racial ghettos meant that one went to a racially/ethnic divided school, worked in a similar situation and life in general was concentrated likewise'. In light of her comments on 'racial ghettos', it is prudent to note that in a public lecture on 02 August 2019, Pregs Govender stated that 'Steve Biko united us across apartheid's ghettos of "African", "Indian", "coloured", "non-white" as black people fighting apartheid brutality and its strategy of divide and rule' (Swingler 2019). For Dr Qono, '... post-apartheid was completely different. Most of them with jobs were finding themselves in mixed situations. However, for those who

were jobless and poverty stricken life was the same.' In conclusion, Dr Qono responded by saying that:

'Out of the country I was better off than most exiles and refugees. In Germany, where my first two children were born, we lived as semi-diplomats, so life was happy. I went to Lusaka, Zambia with my children who were 7 and 8 years old. As a single mother without an extended family, life had its problems. We went to Dakar in Senegal three years later. Here again, we were semi-diplomats and life was good. For the children, however, changing schools, languages etc., was not easy for them. Back home, the first year was traumatic, looking for a job, house, etc. for five people was difficult. Today my three children and I are well and happy.' (Female, retired lecturer)

Dr Qono's third daughter was born in Senegal.

However, what saddens Mrs Pillay as she reflected on the country, especially from the sixties to the nineties, is the rate of crime and all atrocities committed against mainly women and vulnerable young children as well as fraud and corruption in our democracy. She believes that this was never the culture of the ANC and is appalled by what is happening. Her vision is that 'we should become united as a South African population. The barriers to this at the moment are the crime, corruption, lack of resources and the world recession.' Today, Mrs Urmilla Singh is a member on the board of the Dr Monty Naicker Commemoration Committee (MONACC). Mrs Singh is a tourist guide, operating as Tours of Remembrance in the Durban area and her tours relate actual happenings that took place and she pinpoints actual locations to her tourists.

South African Indian women took their place in the resistance struggle and even though the exiled veteran MK comrade played her part and sacrificed to ensure they delivered, the Indian lady in her saree (a 7-metre length of material – wrapped/draped around a woman's body) walked the distance and that resistance gave momentum and support to the liberation struggle as a democratic South Africa was envisioned. This venture of looking at what South African women of Indian origin have contributed in terms of the liberation struggle, life in exile and mobilising from within was interesting to research as it was to put together.

## Introduction

Three oral history interviews were conducted with three South African women of Indian heritage who were card-carrying members of the ANC. The South African Native National Congress (SANNC) was founded by John Langalibalele by Dube in 1912. According to SAHO (2019c), the constitution of the SANNC had several basic aims centred around defending and uplifting the black people of South Africa. In 1923, this organisation, SANNC, became known as the African National Congress (ANC). Dr Sinthi Qono, Mrs Rajes Pillay and Mrs Urmilla Singh were interviewed on 11 September 2012, 18 September 2012 and 22 September 2012, respectively, at their homes. Women,

in most societies throughout the world, over time, have been involved in struggle issues. Indian women in South Africa are not new to this phenomenon and women in general 'as a group, are specially targeted to get involved in specific protest campaigns whilst special upliftment programmes were also initiated to improve their positions' (Clarkson 1997).

## The first interview was with Dr Sinthi Qono

### Dr Sinthi Qono

Dr Qono was interviewed on 11 September 2012. She was born in Pietermaritzburg but matriculated from Verulam Secondary School. She moved to London but has also lived in Germany, where her two daughters were born. She then moved to Lusaka, Zambia and finally to Senegal, where her youngest daughter was born. During her time in exile and between continents, she completed her doctoral thesis. According to Dr Qono, as she understood it, Oral History is a concept, where

'[I]t is people who are unable to document their life experiences but remember it to relate to whomever. It is important because there are millions of people around the world who are unable to document vital social and political experiences which could contribute to genuine histories in their respective countries. In South Africa, its importance is just as vital.' (Female, retired lecturer)

### Communities and the liberation struggle

With regards to 'Communities and the Liberation Struggle', she ventured:

'Broadly, in the South African struggle for liberation, leaders come from all over the country. Each of the leader's communities from where they originated were obviously proud of their contribution. Most leaders however, did not see themselves as representatives of their community of origin but leaders of the entire country. This was the case in all race groups, as well as in most African countries. So, as we are talking about the South African community, these leaders inspired all South Africans interested in liberation, needless to mention that Nelson Mandela did not inspire only his own countrymen but peoples around the world, placing him among great leaders such as Castro, Lenin, Che Guevara, etc. Leaders such as A. Sisulu, L. Ngoyi, women of the Naidoo family in Johannesburg, E. Gandhi and many others, just as our male leaders, have shown great leadership and have inspired the nation across the gender line.' (Female, retired lecturer)

During the interview, the author enquired about leadership in the Indian communities during the struggle days, why, how and what was done and Dr Qono responded by saying:

'There was a great urgent need to do so. For centuries we have been oppressed and exploited. This was done on two levels. The mobilisation of the masses nationally and secondly, campaigning for support internationally. Both were equally difficult. Nationally, the liberation fighters had to face the wrath of the apartheid regime and on the outside, while the socialist countries,

Russia and India were of vital help; it was not easy mobilising the rest of the world.' (Female, retired lecturer)

### Cultural heritage

During the discussion it emerged that individuals in respective areas were bound by their cultural heritage, as culture played some part in defining communities at that time and so Dr Qono mentioned that:

'Communities would most likely have celebrated their religious rites, birthdays, 'successes', etc. but for the vast majority of the African population there was little to celebrate, especially if we take into account the homelands.' (Female, retired lecturer)

On the issues of religion and spiritual beliefs and the role these played as well as conflict within families, friends and how they were resolved sparked the remark:

'The political system being so narrow and sectarian, it was obvious this would filter down into households. Religion and culture would have been encouraged negatively to suit the divide and rule system.' (Female, retired lecturer)

In Germany, she 'experienced tolerance and acceptance as locals lived in harmony'.

### Liberation fighters

The seventies proved to be 'a very bleak period for liberation fighters in and outside the country. For me personally, I was living in a socialist country. It was the best time of my life.' During the seventies, – there was a vacuum in the ANC leadership as many were imprisoned. During the eighties:

'This decade saw hope. In the country, the UDF was formed and politically and militarily there were gains. Personally, I spent this decade in Senegal where my husband was a semi-diplomat.' (Female, retired lecturer)

According to Dr Qono during the nineties, 'Exiles had or were returning. For the country there was great jubilation. Political leaders and parties were unbanned. After some resistance, stability (politically) was in sight.'

On the aspects of Celebrating, Preservation and Promotion of Struggle Narratives, the author enquired 'What experiences from the old days gives you reason to celebrate?' and she responded:

'We were no more segregated. However, the fall of the socialist countries meant that South Africa was not going to embark on a socialist orientated path. This gave me no reason to celebrate. Everything depended on the political will of the country, the region and continent. Corruption, fraud and self-enrichment is the order of the day, while some socio-economic progress has been attained.' (Female, retired lecturer)

As far as personal or group political achievements were concerned she intimated that:

'In a democratically elected SA there was little group activity outside of government. My branch elected leader did nothing to interact with members in our ward. Personally, as a lecturer at

Durban University of Technology, I feel I achieved some progress in influencing students to think progressively.' (Female, retired lecturer)

On the issue of educational, material and economic assistance from international sources, there were many gains, which were expressed as such by Dr Qono:

'During the struggle it was the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union that helped liberate the colonised countries. Decolonisation was almost complete due to their support. India, China and Africa were also great helpers to those countries that had still to be liberated. The people of Western countries had organised themselves into anti-colonial and apartheid organisations and were a formidable force against their countries' support of colonialism and apartheid.' (Female, retired lecturer)

### Heritage

With reference to the unique heritage where South Africa is united in its diversity, it emerged that 'Statues must be preserved in museums. Museums exist in all provinces depicting our past. More needs to be done.' On the point of 'What do you view as pertinent to promoting the aspects of the struggle?' Dr Qono was of the opinion that:

'We have created public holidays around key events. Some go into months e.g. Mandela's Birthday 18 July – not as a holiday per say but public service time out – 67 minutes as a tribute to Nelson Mandela to engage in community outreach projects, Women's Day. These days must be taken more seriously. Talks, debates, breakfasts, luncheons must filter down to the man on the street and not only universities, TV Talk shows, etc. Councillors and ward leaders must play a role. Again the key to promoting these aspects depend on the political will of our leaders.' (Female, retired lecturer)

### The value of the struggle narrative

Penultimately the author enquired about the value of the struggle narrative. On sharing anecdotes, honouring the cadres and relating experiences, it was agreed that 'This is of paramount value. These must be documented, made into school and or children's books. The struggle must never be forgotten.' Finally, on the issue of 'Retelling tales and sometimes possibly reliving military camp days', it was acknowledged and realised by the author and respondent that it was a 'sensitive' issue. Dr Qono had made available some photographs that are part of her historical collection that reflects the preservation of a collective South African past.

### The next respondent was Mrs Rajes Pillay

#### Mrs Rajes Pillay

Mrs Rajes Pillay was interviewed on 18 September 2012. She grew up in Kimberley in the Northern Cape. Her dad had five daughters when his wife died whilst being pregnant with the sixth. Mr. Pillay, a man of Indian origin from the Tamil-speaking community, then remarried and Mrs Pillay's mother came from Pietermaritzburg. Mrs Pillay was born in 1944 and was one of the eight children and her parents worked really hard in that community to raise them. Mrs Pillay's sisters met

their partners by arranged marriages and were even married off from the age of 16. Her parents ran a fresh produce business. They supplied the local markets and this was extremely difficult as the Afrikaner market master gave them a very difficult time with prices and with the business. For the author, personally, what was interesting is the fact that there was this Indian community living in an Afrikaner stronghold and they made a success of being there.

Initially, the interview revolved around Mrs Pillay and her early years growing up in Kimberley. Her earliest memories of the area were interesting. She recalled that:

'[T]here was a Hindu temple in the area and all weddings, festivals such as Deepavalli (a festival of lights) and religious activities took place here. It was a meeting place and all gathered to help with whatever needed to be done e.g. such as making fresh flower garlands to adorn the bridal couple and / or used to beautify the temple and the statues that were inside. Ladies gathered to make sweetmeats (savoury and sweet tasting, mainly sugar coated edibles) which are tasty Indian desserts that were handed out to friends and family. Communal living meant that all helped, attended and participated. These gatherings were happy times but they were far and few in between as this was a very small Indian community.' (Female, retired lecturer)

Of interest though was 'How did this community arrive here?' It was established that:

'[T]he diamond mines were an attraction and this resulted in South Africans of Indian origin venturing here and then becoming a part of a multiracial community where even the Chinese had already set up home.' (Female, retired lecturer)

### A multi-racial community

From a young age Mrs Pillay was part of a multi-racial community and this is where she 'started becoming aware that there were differences in how people interacted with each other'. She went

'[T]o the local co-ed coloured school which had a Christian ethos. I walked to the Perseverance Primary School with Muslim, Malay and coloured children. During the break we were given soup which was prepared by Mrs. Dudley. It was while I was a pupil here that I became aware of differences. There were Indian and African teachers and I thereafter attended the William Prescott High School. The Indians in Kimberly became a part of the Liberation Struggle which was part of a nationwide struggle.' (Female, retired lecturer)

In the mid-fifties, her father was given a 30-day permit to travel to Durban, and if he was not back in the stipulated time, the Afrikaner policemen would be waiting for him. Mrs Pillay, at that point, around 11 or 12 years of age, started hating them as she could see and experience what they were doing. In 1961, the Chinese were given White status. They could now freely travel to Stellenbosch and other areas but Indians were not permitted to do so. Dr Letele, who was a recognised face in the unity movement during the fifties, worked very closely with her father, and this was the reason that her father was targeted

by the security forces. They had 'many visitors to their home and their house was a hive of activity. Many prominent politicians visited and even stayed over.' The senior Mrs. Pillay

'[P]repared food and entertained as this household became a meeting place for comrades passing by. This hospitality was extended to all in the struggle. The Muslim taxi operator, Nordine, transported the visitors to and from the homes of the different activists.' (Female, retired lecturer)

Mrs Pillay and her siblings were a part of this, as they 'had to give up their beds and sleep on the apple boxes in order to put up the comrades'.

### London

In 1958, Mrs Pillay left for London. Reflecting on the past, memories that come to mind are some of the decisions that they took. 'I was 13 when my father died. My mother had to take charge of the family and the business. It was very difficult especially in those times.' It was decided that Mrs Pillay and her brother will travel with their mother to England. They lived there for 3 years. She completed her post high school education in London. Whilst she and her mother were in London, they met Dr Yusuf Dadoo.

Senior Mrs Pillay was

'[A] professional in the Tamil language which she taught for a short while in the International Language School in Kensington, London. However, due to no formal school education, she did not enjoy this stint there and left, returning to South Africa with my brother.' (Female, retired lecturer)

In 1963, Mrs Pillay was 19 and studying towards her A Levels. In London, student meetings were held in her flat. She met Brian Bunting, who had emigrated around the same time. He was the editor of *Seshaba*, a magazine of struggle literature. In London, she felt the 'international impact' of apartheid, especially when she went to Foyle's Bookstore. In 1967, she returned to SA and wanted to use and continue her education and became a member of the Student Representative Council (SRC) of the Natal Campus. She had 'foreign student' status. Mrs Pillay was friends with Paul David's sister, Phyllis Naidoo, who was married to M.D. Naidoo, whose individual and combined contribution must be remembered. Coincidentally, Paul David and Phyllis Naidoo are Sinthi Qono's siblings.

### Liberation struggles

Mrs Pillay became friends with Abdul Khalek Docrat, who was an immigrant from Rangoon in Malaysia, and it was during these times that she became aware of the 'mechanics' of what took place. She engaged in reading, and together with George Sewpersadh, they got books from the outside to promote literary studies in liberation struggles. From 1967 to 1972, she worked for Republic Bank where she unionised staff. However, there was very little that the unions could do at that time, as they were not as powerful as they are today. Docrat, who was with the National Union of Distributive

Workers, worked with her. In 1972, she worked for Game, and despite her workmanship, she was overlooked for promotion because 'she was very political'. She spoke to staff at different levels about what was happening in the country. Eventually, she left Game to work for a bottle store. It was whilst she was here that the security forces followed her because they had records of her from her student days. She was now instructed by the ANC to leave this job or be faced with imprisonment. She left. During this period, she was an underground cadre in touch with the ANC.

The ANC was in need of certain logistical support and she was sent money via a courier. One of the couriers later turned out to be a spy. During 1974 and 1975, she was introduced to the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference. At this time, she met Sam Moodley, Leela Pillay and G.R. Naidoo, who was editor of the *Post*. She came into contact with Reuben Philips, a senior Anglican Church leader, as it was believed that the church could and should help. She became involved in raising money for the 'affected people', as comrades were called and she completed other work that was assigned to her. She worked with Ebrahim Ebrahim, Mac Maharaj, Sunny Singh, Poomani Moodley and Tim Naidoo, to name just a few. She was tasked with getting press releases for the activists who had been released from jail as Mrs Pillay was in contact with the *Leader* and *Graphic* newspapers.

### Giving evidence

Mrs Pillay mentioned that Poomani Moodley was arrested and forced to give evidence against Billy Nair. She attended open house meetings with the likes of George Naicker, Hassen E Mall, Phyllis (who left for Botswana in 1977) and M.D. Naidoo. Mrs Pillay is one of those veterans that literally ran around trying to get financial assistance from the Grey Street businesses and other places. She worked with the Black Consciousness Movement and had to be underground until she physically left the country. It became her task to get maps, money and distribute pamphlets. She used the excuse of doing work and other chores in favour of women's organisations to get around.

### Leaving South African shores

In 1979, Mrs Pillay left our shores. As she reflected, what came to her mind was 'fear', as she recounted the days to her leaving. She just got 'the call' in 1979 to leave. She and her accomplice arrived at the meeting place only to find blaring sirens of the police. She now found herself on the run again and was forced into hiding. Two weeks later, they left with no clothing or food, except for two oranges, and managed to get a lift with a furniture removal truck that took them safely to the border. She vividly remembers that around 02:00 they were scared and tired, as they passed the Pongola border, which was a common border. They hid underneath the furniture and arrived at their destination only to find that the car that was meant to pick them did not pitch. They had to walk and she admits she was lucky to be alive at the end of it, because if you were spotted, you

would have been shot by the Swazi defence police. It was a 12 h walk from the Swaziland border to Manzini. The difficulty was that there was no water, no food and no protection from the elements. They walked through the rain. They walked and walked over the *koppies*<sup>2</sup> not knowing if they would reach their destination and her companion did mention, 'Well if we don't make it, at least we tried'. It was a treacherous path that they walked but her conviction was strong.

Upon arriving in Manzini, she made contact with Comrade Stanley Mabizela of the ANC and he attended to matters. She reported to the police station and was questioned by officers. Her photographs were taken. She could not say much, as any information ventured by her would be used to the detriment of the struggle. She stated that she was harassed by the South African Security Service and was 'wanted by the police' and needed refugee status. It was granted, but she was advised that being an Indian female she would be better off if she stayed on the mission station where there were other Indians. She moved in even though there were only men living there. Here she met Joe Pillay, Ivan Vis Pillay and Krish Rabilall. It was very difficult as there was neither special food nor attention. Mrs Pillay met Bishop Zwane of the SA Council of Churches Leadership and he introduced her to Moses Mahbida, who found her a job for R80 a month in Swaziland. Whilst she was in Swaziland, she was involved in refugee counselling amongst other tasks. Her family travelled to where she was living for her wedding. She was involved fulltime in ANC work. She was paid enough to get by, and whilst in exile, she worked with Shadrack Maphumulo and Judson Khuzwayo. She was part of the refugee committee. In 1981, she was instructed to leave to Angola for military training, and when that training was completed, she returned to Swaziland.

### The Angolan government

According to Mrs. Pillay:

'In 1983 .... I was deployed to fight against the forces of the Angolan opposition political movement, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) on the Eastern Front, at a time when UNITA was in political and military alliance with the South African Defense Force.' (Female, retired lecturer)

Further to this, she stated that:

'[...D]uring the course of these operations, many MK troops came to the conclusion that no serious struggles were taking place in South Africa and that their lives were being wasted in Angola in a civil war. They wanted to be sent back to South Africa to fight. When they demanded a national conference of the ANC to discuss this and other issues, including their demand for democratic elections for the ANC's national executive committee, this was not accepted by the leadership, headed by OR Tambo.' (Female, retired lecturer)

Mrs Pillay was a part of the struggle, where the Angolan people, unlike the Portuguese colonists, positioned their

2. An Afrikaans term for small, isolated hills.

offence on three fronts (SAHO 2019d). Mrs Pillay mentioned that, 'the Angolan government was at the heart of the struggle'. When she had an accident, she returned to Angola for treatment. Here she was admitted to the Cuban station, and under them, she was in the special unit organisation for women – it was a treatment centre as they were in a 'war situation'. Her hand was becoming gangrenous and she mentioned, 'I lifted my arm up in Amandla stance, with fist clenched and asked for my hand to be saved'. She was in this Cuban unit in Angola for 6 months and even though her hand was saved, the scars are still visible.

In 1985, the situation became rigorous in Swaziland with the bombs attacks and there was a fear that people like Mrs Pillay, who had refugee status, may be targeted as it was feared that they may be shot. She left Swaziland in 1985, as many refugees were withdrawing because of the situation there. The Mozambique-Inkomati Accord was signed and the bargaining chip was the ANC (SAHO 2019b). She was in Zambia from 1985 to 1990. Whilst here, she was unemployed. She met other refugees who were in exile for much longer. She did voluntary work for the ANC such as attending meetings, welfare work, collecting money and distributing food and clothing.

### Post-apartheid South Africa

Upon returning to Post-Apartheid South Africa, she found that the country had changed so much. Technological innovations were a part of everyday life. She adjusted to life back home by being a part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She is now at home in Reservoir Hills.

## The next respondent was Mrs Urmilla Soni Singh

### Mrs Urmilla (Nee Soni) Singh

Finally, the author spoke to Ms Urmilla Soni, now Mrs Urmilla Singh, interviewed on 22 September 2012, who did not leave the country but was part of the masses that mobilised from within the borders and travelled internally. Mrs Singh came from a conservative Gujarati (her ancestral home is in Gujarat, India and Gujarati is the spoken language) family and grew up in Durban – Fountain Lane in the Grey Street area. Her parents did not know much about her involvement in the struggle.

In the eighties, she was part of the formation of the Durban Central Residents Association (DCRA) and also part of the Branch of the Natal Organisation of Women. She was a female activist that faced harassment from the police. Once, they were in a car, and the police ransacked the car looking for arms, but did not find any, as they were so well hidden in the panel of the car.

### Thokoza Grey Street Women's Hostel

Mrs Singh also worked with the Thokoza Grey Street Women's hostel and remembers running for her life from this institution. There was an informal women group that

met here and they exchanged language skills, teaching each other, and when the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporters realised who they were, they began chasing them whilst wielding whips, and throwing urine bottles at them.

### Mass mobilisation

Mrs Singh was part of a group that would put up posters and she would hear jibes from mainly Indian neighbours such as 'you are not caught as yet' and 'you are still running around'. The State of Emergency was declared and enforced in 1986 in South Africa (SAHO 2019e). Being in possession of banned pamphlets signalled grave danger if caught by authorities. Sections 28 and 29 stated solitary confinement and if the internal security found you, there was no pity, according to Mrs Singh, who worked in a medical clinic in Lorne Street for Dr Jeewa. Dr Jeewa was tacitly supportive, as he knew what was going on but turned a blind eye. She distributed pamphlets. These were picked up (collected) by the local university, University of Durban – Westville, student leaders from her place of work. When interviewed on 22 September 2012, Mrs. Singh said, 'Iqbal Sayed created The Durban Central Residents Association which had no office nor administration facilities. He gave support by "sit ins" when comrades were arrested' and Mrs Singh was also a part of this group. She was 'involved in house to house visits, the women's league and responsible for transport by using her family's vehicles'. In the same interview, she mentioned, 'decisions and recommendations of the Weekly Activists Forum were taken to Natal Indian Congress and United Democratic Front'. At night she and her cousins Hershella Narsee and Geetha Narsee put up posters. The Activists Forum held open meetings in David Landau in Overport, which was supported religiously by the regulars.

### The Cradock Four

The Cradock Four Garden of Remembrance has been established in memory of the Cradock Four Heroes. According to the National Heritage Council (2019), they were Matthew Goniwe and Fort Calata, both school teachers and activists, Sparrow Mkonto, a railway worker and unionist, and Sicelo Mhlauli, a childhood friend of Matthew Goniwe, who was with them simply to catch up with his friend. According to Rhodes University (2017), Canon James Arthur Calata joined the ANC in 1930 and later that year was elected as their provincial president for the Cape – holding this position till 1949. Port Elizabeth, later a strong Congress centre, established its first ANC branch through his efforts. In 1936, he became Secretary-General of the ANC and was instrumental in having the autocratic Pixley Seme replaced as president, first by Z.R. Mahabane in 1937, then by A.B. Xuma 3 years later.

According to The Cradock Four (2020), the township known as Lingelihle was one of the earliest to introduce street committees. This was performed under the guidance of Cradock Residents Association (CRADORA), where some 17000 residents were divided into seven zones. Approximately 40 activists were allocated to these areas and held meetings in

each zone to elect officials and each household reserved the right to vote for their street representatives. This liberation movement became known as the G-Plan or Goniwe's Plan. The Cradock Four were members of CRADORA, which was affiliated with the United Democratic Front (UDF), which was established on the 20th of August 1983. The UDF, with its affiliates, embarked on a national democratic struggle to dismantle apartheid in its totality (SAHO 2019a). The TRC was in favour of reconciliation, but the family members of the Cradock Four were 'less interested in reconciliation and apt to favour traditional criminal prosecution' (Corliss 2013:274). Mrs Singh and her girl cousins attended the Cradock Four Funeral in 1987. She travelled by bus but had to tell her mother that she was going to a conference in Johannesburg. In the bus, they sat in 'FEAR' as it was a very different cultural experience. They were the only Indian females attending the Cradock funeral as the country was in a state of emergency. Mathews Goniwe was one of the fallen heroes, and these Durban Indian girls were gutsy and committed enough to board the bus despite such difficult situations where they put themselves at risk. It was a very different experience driving through the Transkei and on route police stopped the bus. One of the comrades refused to hand over a chain with a pendant of Africa that he was wearing and so the security police impounded the bus and refused to let them go. It was cold and snowing and all passengers were huddled together to keep warm but eventually they were released.

### The state police and the national liberation struggle

Locally, Mrs Singh was also responsible for distributing pamphlets at the bus stop. She recalled being followed by state police, and the bus driver saved her as he took the pamphlets and threw them away. The police did not arrest her as she did not have anything on her. Despite the state police being so harsh on the politically active citizens, she remained loyal to the struggle but adds that she was one of many South African Indians who played a part in the liberation struggle as the struggle was a multi-racial struggle. At the turn of the century, and indeed in 1923, when the SANNC changed to the ANC, ordinary *South Africans took the decision that the country will rest on four distinct racial pillars – the Africans, Coloureds, Europeans and Indians* (Bhana n.d.). The social structure of each *racial* group obtained a clear understanding of the problems of the national *liberation struggle*. Mrs Singh, Mrs Pillay and Dr Qono, who are South African women of Indian descent, were individuals who were part of the national liberation struggle and thus they were able to contribute to research that focussed on the Celebration, Preservation and Promotion of Struggle Narratives with a Focus on South African Women of Indian Heritage

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## Authors' contributions

K.K.A. (70%) and C.L. (30%) contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript. C.L. provided direction.

## Ethical consideration

The respondents were informed timeously of the aims and objectives of the project. They consented and it was clearly stated that the information received would be for research and academic purposes. The respondents were comfortable and all of the interviews took place at the homes of the respondents.

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