

Emily Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth and South Africa's Liberation Struggle*. Woodbridge: James Currey (hb £75/US\$115 – 978 1 8470 1263 0; pb £19.99/US\$29.95 – 978 1 8470 1362 0). 2021/2023, 250 pp.

Emily Bridger challenges the historiographical status quo in this award-winning book on young women's participation in South Africa's liberation struggle. She does this in various ways. Bridger refutes the notion of a romanticized freedom movement that privileges the activities of the African National Congress (ANC), the country's oldest nationwide Black political organization. She denounces the party's domination during the apartheid era by showing the involvement of other political bodies, such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). Bridger uses 'history from below' to show the complexity of the movement and the diversities of township resistance. As she explains:

This book is not only concerned with what female comrades did, but equally with how these now middle-aged women reflect on and recall their time as activists: how they reconstruct their pasts; relate their personal experiences to collective histories of the struggle; and insert themselves into a historical narrative from which they have been excluded. (p. 4)

Bridger places her protagonists within key historical moments by charting the historiography and by engaging in oral history. She uses all these intellectual avenues to explain when and why her subjects rebelled.

Bridger inserts women into a conversation heavily dominated by the actions and the profiles of male figures. She asks: where were the young women in 'key moments in South Africa's liberation struggle – the 1976 Soweto Uprisings, the township revolts of the 1980s, and the transition conflict of the early 1990s' (p. 3)? Seven chapters and a conclusion make up this book. Bridger supports her overarching arguments with oral history, comparative history and memory studies. Like historian, journalist and author Jacob Dlamini, Bridger argues that people experienced apartheid differently.

Young women joined the struggle for different reasons. Sometimes school played a large role in fomenting their activism. Educational institutions exposed them to debates, organizational bodies and other forms of politicization that differed from the male-dominated streets or soccer fields where the men cultivated comradeships. 'For most female interviewees, their recruitment into the struggle was not marked by a single event or motivation but happened "little by little"; many first joined the Student Representative Council (SRC) and campaigned against problems specific to schools, such as the continued use of corporal punishment and the lack of school supplies' (p. 56). Others wanted a better life than the one that existed under apartheid. 'I was joining the struggle because of my heart and commitment that I was having, and the . . . way we were treated when we were growing up' (p. 59). Militarism also drew young women into COSAS and other organizations. Comrades' singing, dancing and marching in the streets lured prospective members (p. 59). While Bridger shows how these sites fostered their subsequent engagement, the question of homosocial space is not explored. Young women's interaction and intersection with men produced their defiance rather than engagement with female-centred spaces.

Narrators recall many things, in particular the trauma that they experienced. Yet, while Bridger highlights rape, torture and abuse, she does not include death in this analysis. Death offers another trajectory for analysing childhood in a nation under siege such as South Africa was under apartheid. Because the apartheid regime prohibited or inhibited funerary rites, Black South Africans found other ways to grieve.¹ The author could also have paid more attention to the politics of ‘welcoming’ – namely, the reception these young women received into the movement by both men and other women.

Lastly, Bridger’s balanced account introduces an important concept she defines as ‘struggle femininity’. Young women challenged hegemonic gendered assumptions or emphasized femininities to create an ‘oppositional, militarized femininity that defied social expectations and limitations of girlhood’ (p. 14). They exhibited their bravery, aggression and willingness to use violence or die for the struggle. These female activists also challenged sexual violence, flouted parental concerns, and defied constraints imposed on girls’ behaviour (pp. 14, 15). They wore trousers instead of skirts and dresses, sought male company, and participated in collective action and political violence in male-dominated spaces (p. 15). Men represent the mainstream in this monograph; however, there is no parallel space that describes how young women cultivated alternatives to this dominant paradigm. Instead, Bridger seems to paint ‘struggle femininity’ as a viable theoretical option only when it is juxtaposed with male-centred notions of gendered resistance.

Bridger’s *Young Women against Apartheid* is an exercise in research, historiography and ethics. Bridger takes readers on her journey to find narrators, to understand the ideology behind women’s and men’s participation, and to show how they selected the information they revealed. She honours the collaborators’ choice of disclosure, which is important in the establishment and maintenance of ethics. Thus, this book is a must-read for its historiographical value but also for its adherence to the protocols of oral history.

Dawne Y. Curry

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, USA

Email: Dcurry2@unl.edu

doi: [10.1017/S0001972023000700](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972023000700)

Victoria Bernal, Katrien Pype and Daivi Rodima-Taylor (eds), *Cryptopolitics: Exposure, Concealment, and Digital Media*. New York NY: Berghahn Books (hb US\$135/£99 – 978 1 80539 029 9). 2023, vii + 245 pp.

The use of technology to map human populations, though not new, gained ascendancy in the post-9/11 era. This was when biometrics and fingerprinting became major markers of border control by political regimes around the world. Agamben once described this process as the political tattooing of the body by the state in ways that turn the political body into a criminal body constantly under surveillance.

¹ Dawne Y. Curry (2012) *Apartheid on a Black Isle: removal and resistance in Alexandra, South Africa*. New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan.