



OSPEAK



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Women Together Are Strong



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LETTERS

Dear SPEAK

My first few days here in Durban were both bliss and misery. Exciting for it was a new place, but most frustrating from experiences with men. As I normally walk to my office, I would be stopped by more than five guys on the way. This was frustrating for it was obvious that these guys are just whiling away their time, or in fact enjoying the frustration they cause you by telling you nonsense. There were the days I wished I could get extra-strength, then surely I would have given at least one of them a good hiding.

Their behaviour is quite insulting and very undermining. They don't care what type of woman you are - old or young - they could just stop you and tell you what they think of women then they would be glad to see the expression of disgust on your face.

I had the limitations of the language for I didn't know Zulu quite well and I would really wish I could put some of them in their rightful places. Trying to ignore these remarks wouldn't help for I would hear what they say and by the time I arrived at my destination I would be very cross with myself for not having taken the bitterness out of my system. And you can believe me, I would be miserable the whole day in the office.

Ladies please let's unite, let's show the world that we love ourselves, respect ourselves and do want to be respected and treated as humans. How long are we going to take these insults? Surely no-one would liberate us except us. Now let's start today. Tomorrow will never come. Start today and set the ball of liberation rolling.

Yours in Sisterhood, Badu

DEAR BADU, WHAT YOU WRITE ABOUT IS SOMETHING THAT WE AS WOMEN MUST WORK TO CHANGE. WE AGREE WITH YOU THAT ONLY WE AS WOMEN CAN WORK TO CHANGE THIS SO THAT WE MAY BE TREATED AS PEOPLE AND NOT AS SEX OBJECTS.

WE ARE OURSELVES !

" When we were still small children, we all played together with boys with no problems. All of a sudden when we were about 11 years we were told to behave properly and stop playing or hanging around with the same boys. Now we are nearing 20 years and are expected to be steady with a man ready for marriage. And it is the same people who see it as being wrong to be friendly with boys and call us names if we do who expect this."



This was one comment from a group of school girls who had invited SPEAK to have a discussion with them about their problems as young women. The girls talked about their own lives but what they said is true for girls everywhere.

THE GIRLS FELT THAT THEIR PROBLEMS HAVE A LOT TO DO WITH THEIR UPBRINGING

"Exactly, it is our upbringing. I once visited a house where there is a 6 year old boy. He asked me if I was a boy too, as I had jeans on, and I agreed. Immediately he started playing rough games with me. He suddenly asked why I was not hitting back if I was a boy? Already he had the idea that boys are strong", said one girl.

"We are brought up to believe that boys are superior to us and we should obey and leave them to bully us. If we fight back to boys and win fights we are seen as not being real and ideal girls. We are expected to be submissive and subservient. If a boy hits you, you are told that there must be a reason for him to do so. Our parents are the ones who encourage them."

"Some of us are locked up immediately we come back from school, and, once at home, are not able to move. The minute those who are locked up get a chance, no matter how little, they use that time to do all kinds of things and they overdo them. Obviously they can't behave like those girls who are allowed some freedom and whom their parents trust to some extent, for these with some freedom don't think of having sex with their boyfriends each time they are together, unlike those

WE ARE OURSELVES !

who are caged at home. Some of us go to the extent of pretending as if they are going to school when they know they're going to see their boyfriends.

Most parents tell us that they will throw us out of their houses and force us to leave school, should they find out that we are in love with some boys."

"Our parents don't tell us the truth about life and what happens to our bodies. They just fight and swear at us. Usually they call you when you've done something that worries them or they could have already seen you with a boy. Then, when it is already late, usually you're already pregnant, they say: 'Yes, that serves you right. You've got what you wanted from boys. Now that boy is at school and you are going to stay home and look after this baby.'"

THE GIRLS SPOKE OF THEIR PARENTS AND PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION

Also, how did our parents meet? Does it mean that they never had relationships with one another before they married? Since they say sex is bad and terrible and if, therefore, they

didn't sleep together, how did we come to be born?

Asking our parents about sex is out for most of us. It is common to find girls much older than us, yet knowing nothing, and therefore will have to look for information, good or bad, by themselves, or find themselves in trouble. It is not all of us who are lucky".

MUCH AS THE GIRLS SAW FAULTS WITH THEIR PARENTS, THEY DIDN'T EXCLUDE THEMSELVES

" But some parents do talk to us earlier. We can't and should not put all the blame on our parents all the time - they are our scapegoats now, Some things we do because of our fault."



WE ARE OURSELVES !

Some of our mothers have told us everything and it is now up to us to decide whether to chose our mothers ways or do our own thing.

Sometimes we leave ourselves to fall pregnant to fix up our parents. Even amongst the girls who are locked up there are those who rebel and do their own thing. This is because the final decision lies with us.

There could be many causes of these problems with our parents. Our parents could be finding it difficult to communicate with us and probably we too will have the same problem with our daughters.

Some of us do not trust nor believe what our mothers tell us, they too never do.

Then those will do a thing to prove whether what their mothers tell them is the truth.

But, as our mothers are mothers, they can't rule our lives. It is not that we are rude or anything. We know that our mothers have some expectations about us, but because these are our lives, we own them, we lead the style and kind of lives that suit us and our personalities.

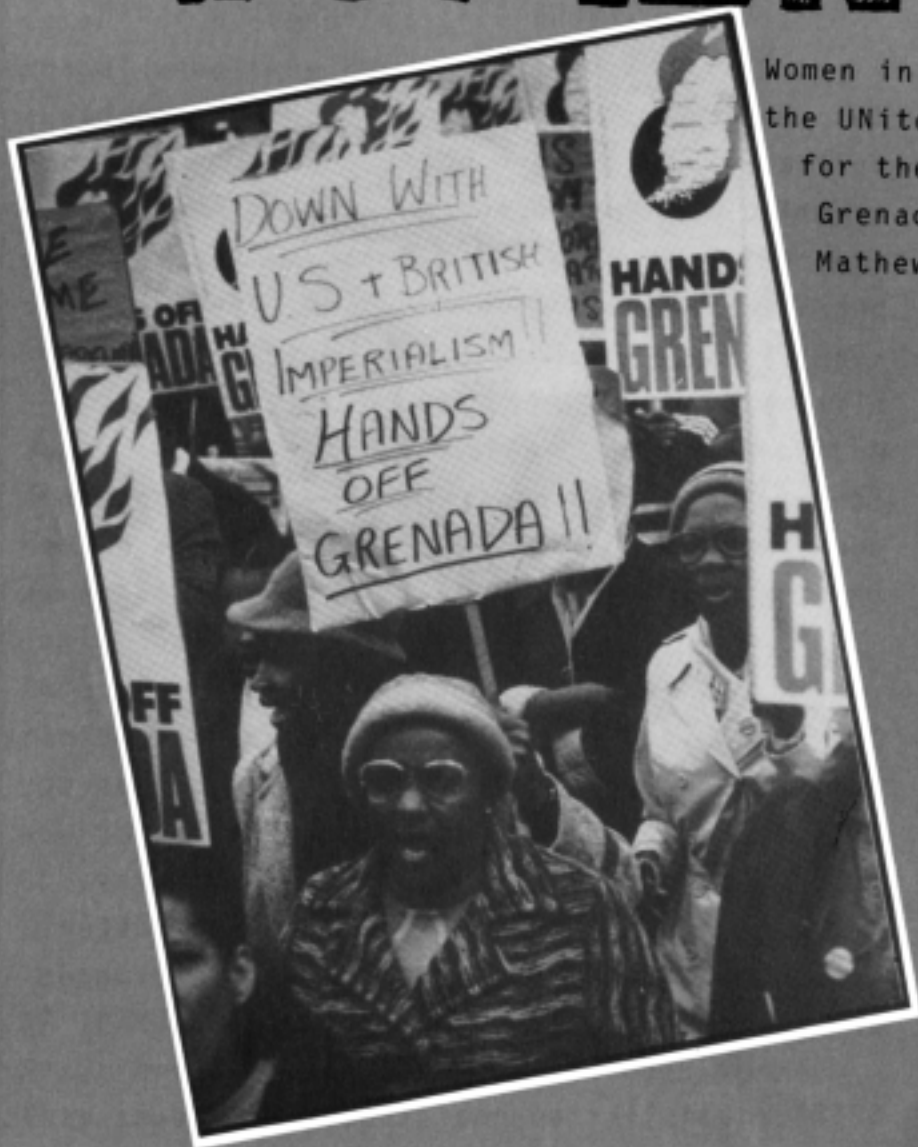
We, young girls, have to have strong backbones in this world to survive. We need self-control and respect. They can preach to us as much as they can, but everything finally depends on us.

Our mothers advise us sometimes about what not to do and we tell them it is O.K. But, the minute we get to our rooms, we just forget about all that because these are our lives. We've got to do what we feel like, no matter what they say. We are not our parents' image. **WE ARE OURSELVES!**

SPEAK would like to hear from other young girls and mothers of what they think about this debate. Please write and tell us!



WOMEN FIGHTING



Women in London protest against the UNITED STATES of America for their actions in Grenada, 1983. (Jenny Mathews/Format)



Asian women protest against racist laws in London, 1981. (Val Wilmer/Format)

EVERYWHERE

These women are part of a group of 50 women learning to read and write.

They run a communal plot to raise money for their class. They live on Wedza communal land, Mashonakind, East Province (Kate Truscott).



WHERE

Photos for 'Women Fighting Everywhere' are from calendar produced by Kali Designs for Greenwich Black Womens' Group. London. 1985.

SWEEPING THE STR

In October 1984 the women street sweepers of Kwa Mashu decided that it was time that they did something about their low wages and bad working conditions.

They had been working for Port Natal Administration Board since 1981. They had spoken to their induna about their low wages. All they heard from him was "A letter has been sent to Port Natal". Nothing happened.



The women decided to go to the union. They were not union members but one of them remembered going to the union when her husband and her 16 year old working daughter died.

She talked to the other women about going to the union. She said: "I went to the other women. I met them at the station, on the streets - I had to walk and take the taxi to meet all of them. Most were afraid. They said they had no money to go to town. So seven of us went to the union office. We came to the office on that Thursday afternoon and we found the organiser. We told her our story. She was glad to see us.

She said that she was proud to see women coming together with one problem. She said she would take our case with care as it was the first time she saw women in the office in the way we came. She said even domestic workers don't earn R52.00 a month, although they also have problems.

OUR PROBLEMS

There are altogether 200 to 300 of us who work sweeping streets. 28 of us work in the hostels and clean public toilets. Before 1981 men did this work. They were paid R200.00 a month. Women were started at R43.00 a month - and now it is only women who sweep the streets. The only man now working is the induna. When we took these jobs they told us that the job was for one to two hours

WOMEN'S STREETS OF KWUA MASHU



in one street. We thought we could do washing or other jobs for extra money when the two hours were over. But the job is now from 9am to 2pm. We work 5 days a week. We get no sick leave, no holiday leave. When we are sick the induna says we must sleep on the road. We get no Workman's Compensation. We don't get adequate protective clothing.

Our job is to pile rubbish up for the trucks to pick up - juba boxes, old cars, bottles, tins - all these things. We work in two's and two of us have to clean two streets. We have to burn some of this rubbish. It is almost always windy and this makes it dangerous. We have to duck the flames. One woman was badly burnt when her dress caught alight. Her underclothes stuck to her and she had to be rushed to the polyclinic and from there to the hospital.

Sometimes we have to carry pieces of scrap cars

and furniture. One woman broke her teeth when a studio couch she and her partner were carrying slipped from their hands. Another woman lost her sight in one eye through an accident while working.

They give us gum boots, gloves and a little bib-like a baby's. They don't give us overalls. We are given a rake to rake up the rubbish and then we pick these up with our hands.



After we went to the union the union wrote to Port Natal and wages were put us for the first time in November 1984.

When the other women saw the 7 women who went to the union still had their jobs they were no longer afraid.



We are still fighting for higher wages, overalls, holidays and sick leave. We meet every Saturday about 40 to 50 of us to discuss and also to sing and dance traditional Zulu and Pondo dances. We have acted out a play and we took part in the May Day meeting, where we danced.

Most of us are elderly. We are widows or our husbands have left us. We are the sole supporters of our families, often we care for our grandchildren as well. We have to work to get food to eat. And so that our children don't get Kwashiokor. Some of us worked in factories before but lost our jobs, mostly through retrenchments. When we went looking for work at factories they said: "We don't want old ladies and fat women - we want young ones - those who are fat can't run".

It is worse for us because we are women. But we are determined to fight our problems. Now all the women are in the union - WE ARE NOT AFRAID!



VICTORIA MXENGE

Victoria Mxenge was brutally killed outside her home in Umlazi on the 1st August, 1985. Four men shot and axed her to death. The news of this terrible murder has horrified, shocked and saddened people, especially those who knew and worked with her.

Victoria was involved in many organisations. She was an executive member of the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), treasurer of the United Democratic Front, and treasurer of the Release Mandela Committee. She was a lawyer for the treason trial in Pietermaritzburg.

Victoria's husband Griffiths Mxenge was assassinated in 1981. The murderers have not yet been found. Their three children Mbsa, Viwe and Nomhle have suffered the loss of both parents in this terrible way. Both Victoria and Griffiths were involved in working for a better society. Griffiths spent some years on Robben Island.

To protest against Victoria's death the Natal Organisation of Women organised a placard demonstration on Durban's streets. Meetings were called by UDF and other organisations in the townships as well as at the University of Natal. A speaker for NOW, Nozizwe spoke about the great loss that comes with Victoria's death. She spoke of Victoria as a woman, experiencing many of the problems that women go through in apartheid society, and said that these problems will end only with women uniting together to fight them.

Over the past few months many who have worked against apartheid have mysteriously disappeared or died. Victoria's death follows closely on the deaths of four UDF and Craddock Residents' Association leaders - Mathew Goniwe, Fort Calata and Sicelo Mhlawuli and Sparrow Mkhonto who were also brutally murdered, and comes at a time when the government has declared a state of emergency in most parts of the country. There has been unrest in many townships all over the country because of things like unemployment, retrenchments, low wages, high rents. These problems have continued for a long time. The government makes no attempt to change things in a meaningful way, but rather brings the army and the police. This has led to violence all over the country.

AUGUST 9 WOMENS DAY



A GROUP OF WOMEN LED BY LILLIAN NGOYI TAKE PETITIONS AGAINST PASSES FOR WOMEN TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ON AUGUST 9, 1956. OUTSIDE 20,000 WOMEN STOOD IN PROTEST. THEY HAD COME FROM ALL OVER SOUTH AFRICA TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD.

This is how we lived

In these painful times of trouble and unrest it is important to remember that it is the government that has caused these divisions between everybody. It is the government that has forced us to live in separate communities, that has emphasised differences between, and has given privileges and special treatment to some just to try and divide us. SPEAK was told the following story by a woman who lived in Durban before Group Areas. The happy past she talks of also reflects the kind of future we should all be fighting for.



I have lived all over Durban - Musgrave, Overport, Silverton, Mayville and Cato Manor. There, all races lived together with no problems. We used to make 'isiqatha' to sell like we do here in the townships and there was never any violence.

I came to Durban to stay with my mother so that I could go to school. We stayed at Dunbar Road at Mayville renting from an Indian family. In this area there was just no distinction between races. I can't even mention things about the 'coloured people' as we were just one. There were a lot of inter-marriages between African and Coloured people and those marriages are still solid, some of them moved here into Clermont and even now it is only because you have asked me that I think of them as being Coloured.

We stayed closely and freely with all our Indian neighbours. We all had big families and used to sleep together with them on the floors like one family. We shared what food we had in times of trouble. We were a close community sharing our times of happiness and our sorrows together.

As children, we all engaged in the same games and also mischief. We mixed English and Zulu and some Indian language - our own mixed language. A cousin of mine spoke one Indian language fluently. She was dressed by our Indian friends on her wedding day.

Though we attended different schools, they were directly opposite one another and we'd play together during break times and were taking the same bus to and from school. We were not aware that we looked different from one another until we were told to move out of Mayville. It was so painful when we were forcefully separated from one another by the Group Areas Act.



SKIN LIGHTENING CREAMS



Ochronosis is the name given to the damage to skin caused by skin lightening cream.

Ochre - means the yellow green pigment that forms in the deeper layers of the skin. This happens only with the use of bleaching creams which contain a chemical substance called hydroquinone. Unfortunately this causes permanent and irreversible damage - no matter whatever is applied thereafter.

When women apply these creams to their face the skin is bleached and appears whiter than other parts of the body. Then with being in the sun the skin becomes darker black, velvety and patches appear on the face and the neck.

It takes about 3-4 years of using these creams before this very bad result occurs. Women often seek the help of their doctors or chemists who may prescribe cortisone cream to dampen down the inflammation (swelling and redness). But these creams unfortunately may produce even more harm. Pimples develop, redness of face, stretch-marks, hairiness and bleeding under the skin.



The black patches can be seen on this woman's face and around her neck.



This woman has developed very bad pimples from using cortisone cream.



This woman has dark velvety patches on her neck from using skin lightening cream.

In the past few years skin specialists have tried to get this chemical, hydroquinone, removed from these skin lightening creams - however these creams with the chemical in them are still sold widely.

The main reason for selling these dangerous skin lightening creams is for making profit. Many women use these creams to lighten their skin, but some women may not even know that it bleaches the skin - they merely use it as a facial cream.

Because of the advertising that women see and the things they are told, they become unhappy with the way they are - they try to change themselves. That is why women with straight hair perm their hair and those with curly hair - straighten it out. White women want to tan and Black women want to be white - and often do permanent damage to themselves.

WARNING

Don't buy medicine for a damaged skin from just anybody, e.g. a nurse you know, simply because its cheaper or easier to get. These remedies are no better than those from chemists or ordinary doctors.

GO TO THE SKIN SPECIALIST AT HOSPITAL.

Creams to Avoid



Here is a list of skin lightening creams:

Snow White		
Karoo	Ambi	Hollywood
He Man	Mister Artra	Look of
Hi Lite	Dolly Lo	Nature
Super Rose	Kool Look	White Mink
Bu-Tone	Bright 'n Lovely	Cuti-Cura

An alternative safe cream is Boots E45 cream.

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SPEAK COLLECTIVE
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MAY DAY 1985

FIRST MAY 1886

NISE MALANGE

WHO AMONG THE OPPRESSED WORKERS CAN FAIL TO IMAGINE THIS DAY?
WHO AMONG THE WORKERS WHO ARE FACED WITH RETRENCHMENT AND HUNGER
CAN FAIL TO KNOW?

THIS DAY IS THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR DAY.
THE STORY ROLLS UP OUT OF THE OCEAN,
OVER THE MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS,
FROM AMERICA TO NEW YORK - FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO CHICAGO
AND NOW IN AFRICA.

THE CRY WAS FOR AN END OF EXPLOITATION.
END TO SLAVE WAGE AND CAPITALISM,
END TO LONG HOURS AND ABUSING OF YOUNG CHILDREN,
A CRY WAS EIGHT HOURS FOR WORK, EIGHT HOURS FOR REST, EIGHT HOURS
FOR WHAT THEY WILL.

TODAY 1ST MAY 1985 IN SOUTH AFRICA
MILLIONS OF WORKERS ARE OUT OF EMPLOYMENT,
MILLIONS OF WORKERS ARE FACING RETRENCHMENT,
MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE DYING OF HUNGER.

THIS IS THE DAY THAT WORKERS MUST RE-ORGANIZE THEMSELVES,
THIS IS THE DAY FOR UNIFICATION OF THE WORKING CLASS, FROM
UNSKILLED TO ARTISAN,
THIS IS THE DAY THAT WORKER ORGANISATIONS MUST UNITE AND PASS
THE RESOLUTION:

"THAT FROM THIS DATE, MAY 1ST 1985, THERE WILL BE NO FOSATU
NOR CCAWUSA - NO GWU NOR FOOD AND CANNING - NO SAAMU
NOR CUSA.

ALL WORKER ORGANISATION MUST COME TOGETHER AS ONE AND FIGHT THE BOSSES."

THE UNDERPRIVILEGED, THE UNEMPLOYED, THE OPPRESSED, THOSE LANGUISHING
IN JAILS AND IN EXILE, WE WANT TO SEE THEM WITH FACES
CHERISHED WITH JOY.

I SALUTE THIS DAY OF THE WORKERS!



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