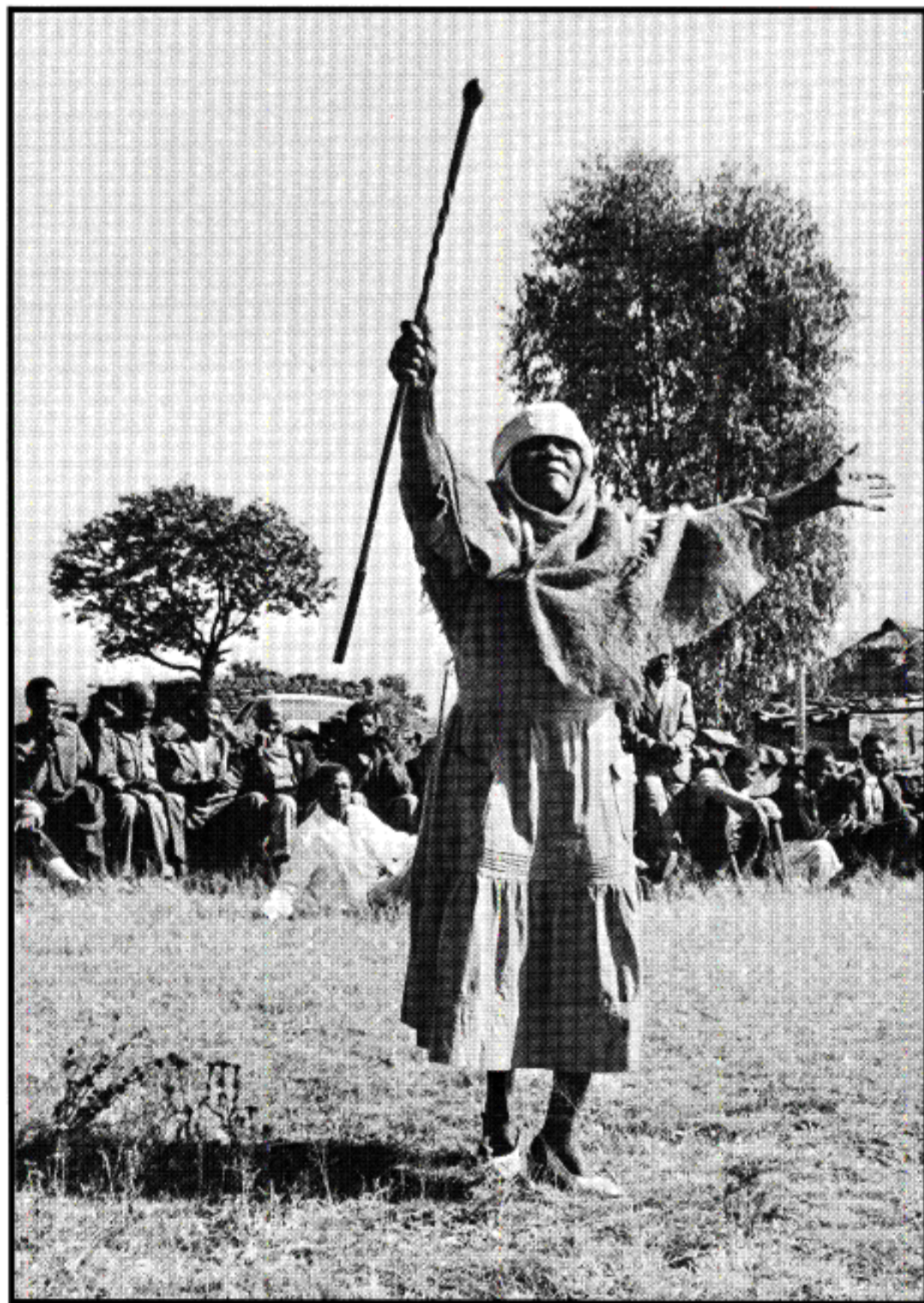

Volume 34 Number 2 September 1991

SASH



W O M E N A N D G E N D E R

**RACISM AND SEXISM: AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE
IN QUEST OF OUR OWN VOICES
PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN:
THE ECONOMY · THE NATAL CONFLICT · EASTERN EUROPE**

SASH

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Gill de Vlieg



Gill de Vlieg

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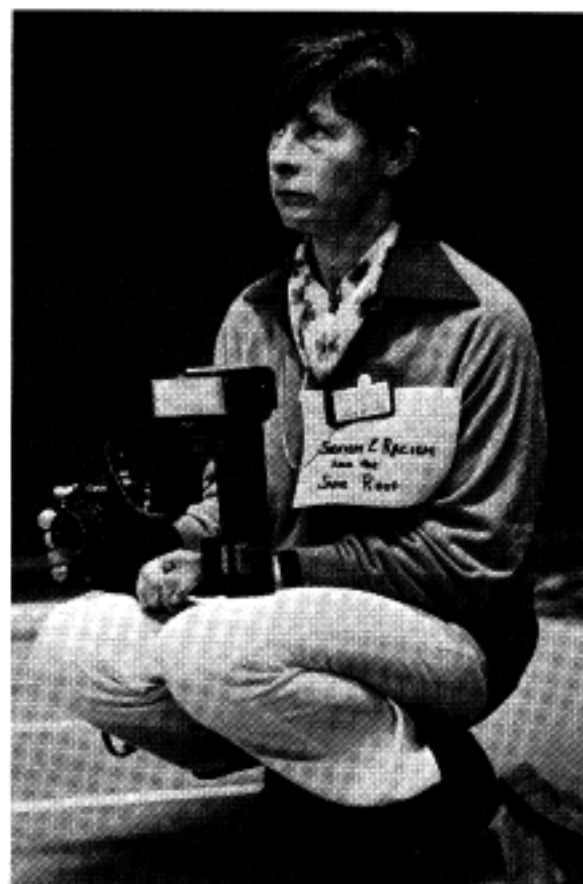
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SASH magazine

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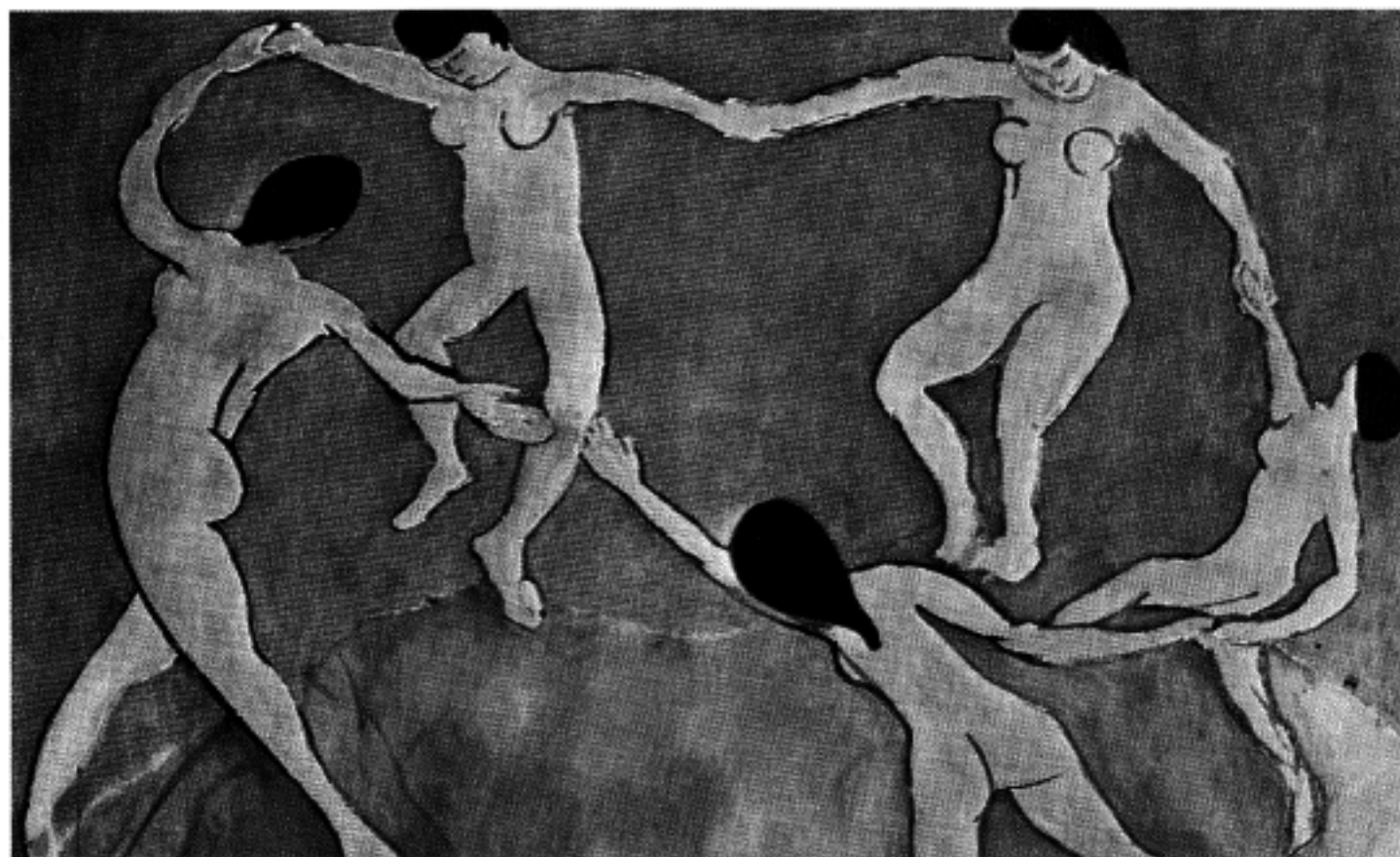
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editorial

It is four years since SASH devoted an issue to a focus on women (August 1987). In that time the political environment has been shaken both locally and internationally. There have been shifts in political attitudes that only the reckless would have predicted. Yet our focus on women and gender in this issue is picking up more or less where we left off four years ago. We find ourselves still in the position of having to make a case for a feminist approach. Essentially this approach rests on an acknowledgement that social attitudes, economic practices and existing legislation combine to place profound limitations on the options open to women. The same complex combination of attitude and practice imposes different but significant limitations on men.

At a time when our society stands poised to be reshaped in constitutional negotiations, the feminist enterprise – aimed not at promoting sectional advantages for women but rather at transforming social relations – gains a particular urgency. While the ground has shifted under us it has also been turned for a new season's work. The agreement reached at the 1990 national conference, that the Black Sash would address the question 'How will this affect women?' in all the areas of its work, has made it possible for members to develop a changing consciousness in institutional and personal contexts.

We believe that this shift, towards increasing sensitivity to the political implications of skewed gender relations, should continue. We believe that it is necessary to acknowledge that organisational work for equitable gender relations is an essential part of the broad human-rights thrust embedded in Black Sash activities. Far from diluting its traditional commitments, such work will deepen and strengthen them.

Our social position as white women places us in a position of tension and strange opportunity. We are part of the problem, by 'belonging' to the oppressor group in our society, and yet we also suffer oppression. This situates us uniquely to exert a creative influence – if we are able to reach a constructive understanding about the need and means to transform gender relations.

Authors in this issue go some way towards making this possible. We encourage you to explore what might be unfamiliar but illuminating territory in preparation for the tasks that lie ahead.

Sarah Anne Raynham birga thomas Shauna Westcott

'The family, parenthood, and equal rights within the family shall be protected.'

CLAUSE X, ANC CONSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES

In a statement regarding the position of women in a future South Africa, which will come to bear on the relation between 'woman' and 'family', Albie Sachs has said that 'the basic right underlying all other rights is the right of women to speak in their own voices, the right to determine their own priorities and strategies and the right to make their concerns felt'. This sounds like an aim whose realisation would entail liberation, but in fact a profound difficulty starts here, which proceeds from the anxiety that one's 'own' voice is not necessarily readily available to a woman pushed and patted into shape not only by varieties of patriarchal decree but also by a set of rigidly enforced political and ideological polarisations.

How, to spell out the problem, does one know when women are speaking in their 'own' voices rather than speaking from assigned subject-positions?

In the contemporary reading of democracy, the ability to make a mark on a ballot paper is taken as a sign that one is speaking in one's own voice. And so of course it must be, for there is no politically decent alternative. Yet it is still the case, as trade unionist Connie September says, that 'in elections you often see women pushing men for the positions. In discussions, women listen to the men rather than participate in debates.'

Political articulation has been male-dominated because of an intricate combination of many women's double role as working women and mothers/wives, and their conventional reluctance to question this difficulty, coupled, of course, with sharp resistance from men to political participation by women. Even in predominantly female trade unions such as the South African Textile and Clothing Workers' Union (Sactwu), women shop-stewards sometimes have to fight at home with their husbands for the right to assume a political role (the Sactwu legal department has had to deal with a number of divorces arising out of these differences).

Some women trade unionists talk about having to take up their conventional domestic duties as if they had no other role in the world. In a recent interview, Boitumelo Mofokeng notes that politically vocal women are *redefined* by domesticity: 'Outside, we stand up on platforms, but at home, some of us go back to typical African tradition, we are submissive, passive, non-existent. I cannot relate to my husband or my brother the way I do to other men out there.'

not at home: in quest of our own voices

This is an edited extract from a paper by Dorothy Driver titled 'The ANC Constitutional Guidelines in Process: A feminist reading', forthcoming in a Ravan Press publication entitled 'Putting Women on the Agenda'.

The major theme explored here is the difficulty facing women attempting to find their own voices among the compulsions of patriarchal structures. Another is the tension between the Western feminist view of the family as a site of struggle and the South African feminist view of the family as a site of resistance against apartheid.



Dorothy Driver

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However, it is not easy to speak openly about such things. First of all, as a spokesperson for the Federation of Transvaal Women said, 'in South Africa there is a sensitivity in the area of asserting our rights for the emancipation of women because it forces us to challenge age-old customs which many women themselves respect'. Secondly, as Boitumelo Mofokeng has said: 'I can best describe the struggle of black women against their husbands as an internal one: against male domination, male exploitation. But to stand up on a platform – it would be like hanging your dirty linen in public.'

Thirdly, along with transgressing conventional codes of behaviour, open discussion of domestic strife is also felt to signal one's participation in the process of humiliation engendered within racism: men have a hard enough time without women adding their particular attack. Thus, black women who speak out against male domination are readily labelled 'white'.

This is expressed in the following way by a woman cited in *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference*, edited by Kirsten Holt Peterson: 'In South Africa the question of Western feminism encroaching into the minds of the African women is a very, very sensitive question, particularly for the African man. Anytime you ask him to do something, to go and fetch the child today, or something like that he says: "Look, you are already a feminist. You are a white woman and a feminist." It is thrown in your face in the same way in which communist is thrown into the face of the blacks in South Africa.' Apartheid's oppositional categories – black versus white – are taken up as weapons by those eager to fuel anxieties that feminism *causes*, rather than results from, division.

Under such conditions, then, by what process may such women come to speak in their own voices?

Feminist critics have argued that one achieves voice – or attains subjectivity as an individual – at the point where one recognises the ways in which one has been subordinated by a political system, and thus made to fit a political category at odds with one's own experience of and aspirations in the world. In the South African context, the individual subject is organised by means of categories of race, class, gender and age, each of which acts as a potential means of subordination or marginalisation. It is important to

recognise that these are not experienced separately from one another; as different axes, they intersect in their constitutive capacities.

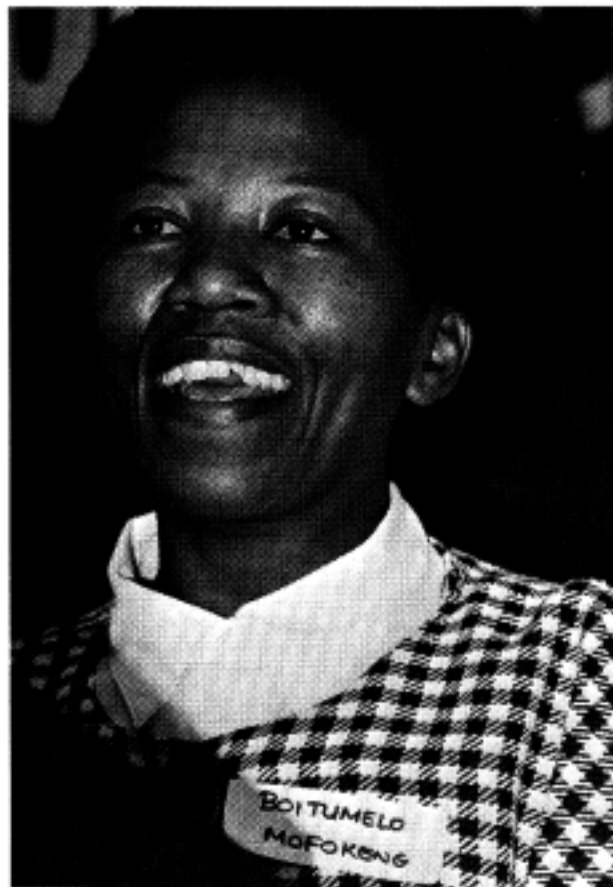
For instance, just to speak of gender and race, a black woman's experience of racism is often different from a black man's, to the extent that the experience of sexism intertwines with, and adjusts, the experience of racism. Similarly, a black woman's experience of sexism is different from a white woman's. This means that one's subjectivity, in so far as it is an articulation of one's social construction, is different depending upon one's particular race, class and gender position. Black men do not inhabit the same subject position as black women; nor, by the same token, do white women. Hence the importance of including issues of race and class in any feminist struggle.

When Emma Mashinini offers an oblique justification for identifying herself with a black South African working class rather than women in general, she is in fact clearing a space for the expression of problems unique to black working-class women. In *Strikes have followed me all my Life*, she writes: 'White mothers in this country do not have to suffer anxiety over what we call breadline problems. Breadline problems are questions of who will care for the children when their mother goes to work.'

Black women – mothers, in this case – experience a peculiar combination of racial and gender oppression: they go to work rather than stay at home because the fathers of their children are poorly paid; they cannot afford to pay home-help; they do not have easy access to creches; they cannot expect their husbands to share child-rearing duties.

Yet Christine Qunta, writing in *Women in Southern Africa*, negates the intersections of race, class and gender when she says, 'I take the view that we are Africans before we are women.' For her, and others who make this choice, race and gender exist as *separate* categories by which the subject is constructed, parallel rather than intersecting. That the axis of race often or generally takes experiential priority over the axis of gender should not be disputed, but what should be addressed is the way the experience of racism is used to occlude, rather than complicate, the experience of sexism.

In the case of black women, as Qunta's comment reveals, political necessity seems to offer a choice: between being 'black' and 'feminist', between being aware of one's social position as 'black' on the one hand and 'woman' on the other. Any call for a national struggle that excludes gender subordination, as well as the greater emphasis in the ANC's constitutional guidelines on reparations to do with race rather than gender, helps produce the self-denying choice being identified here. It also helps propagate the erroneous and politically



problematic notion that feminism is exotic to Africa.

Nevertheless, it must be said that the assertion of subjectivity on the part of a black South African woman will often require her assertion of difference from the selfhood that has been constructed for her by a white, middle-class feminism. If one or other form of patriarchy (black or white, urban or rural) functions as the dominating order against which a black South African woman wishes to define herself, so too can Western feminism be seen as part of a dominating order or symbolic system against which self-assertion needs to be voiced.

In other words, it is not just with reference to racist and patriarchal structures that Trinh T. Minh-ha writes in *Women, Native, Other: Writing, postcoloniality and feminism*: 'You who understand the dehumanisation of forced removal-relocation-re-education-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality your voice – you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.'

Still, it seems crucial, as the existence of this paper suggests, that whatever contributions (white) feminist academics may be able to make should not be refused out of hand.

Feminist theory is not monolithically 'Western' but is continually being formulated in debate between 'third world' and 'first world', or 'east' and 'west', striving to break down the binary thinking on which systems of oppression and exploitation subsist. At the same time it recognises the historical complicity of white South African women with imperial power, and what Gayatri Spivak, in her book *In Other Worlds*, calls the 'epistemic violence' perpetrated by Western/white feminism's systems of 'information retrieval' and of classification, the term 'third world woman' being the prime example.

One possible contribution this theory-in-the-making can offer to the discussion of gender in South Africa is to encourage debate on the West's 'epistemic violence'. The aim would be to approach with greater sensitivity and honesty the question of the subjectivity of women in South Africa, looking at the intertwining categories of race, class and gender (as well as age, marital status, and whatever others are felt to be important), a debate which should, finally, make it possible to speak of the black South African family not only as a site of resistance against the strategies of apartheid and capitalist exploitation, but *also* as a site of struggle for women against patriarchal domination.

Discussion about the family conventionally draws on two separate discourses: feminist discourse (which addresses the family as a site of struggle) and nationalist discourse (which addresses the family as a structure at risk under

apartheid and its aftermath). This essay suggests that an overriding problem exists when black South African women feel they have to choose between one or the other discourse in terms of which to represent themselves: 'we are Africans' or 'we are women'. In either case, one part of oneself is silenced – in the first case, one's status as a black woman with a different set of experiences from black men, and in the second, one's status as a black woman with a different set of experiences from white or Western women.

What is needed is a different discourse, in terms of which a different subject position is constructed, so that women may articulate themselves as, non-contradictorily, black women, while at the same time recognising that even this composite concept will need, sometime, to open itself to scrutiny.

It is of course true that many women may not feel themselves to be divided in the way being suggested: I am talking about the public articulation of self, and about the discourse which makes this articulation possible. If the discussion is to be about emancipation for women, and women's voices, it must be the argument of this paper that women's voices cannot emerge as their 'own' without interrogating the *various* structures by which they have been defined.

This is why the ANC position on the family poses a problem for women. The family is a signifying system *par excellence*, for it defines 'men' and 'women' in specific ways. Women become seen as wives, mothers or daughters, whereas men are readily seen simply as men. (The relative *positions* assigned to men and women are universal ones, while the precise *content* to these positions is historically and culturally specific.)

The structure of the family depends on women being simultaneously subordinated and idealised as mothers, and on a forced separation between the social/public/economic and private/domestic spheres. Men 'naturally' straddle the two spheres, but women must dash frantically from one to the other, pretending, all the while, that they are really 'domestic'.

While the social construction of women starts with the family, women continue to be produced in one or other signifying system (newspaper reports, films, novels, letters to 'agony columns', political pamphlets and so on), in terms of their apparently fundamentally domestic nature. The ANC constitutional guidelines itself constitutes a signifying system; its clause on the family threatens by its very presence to restore the division between the domestic and the social that women *in fact* are challenging, and to reinsert 'woman' in a signifying system which centres on the family and its conventionally gendered positions. If women's voices are to emerge as their 'own', through questioning the structures that define

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Ruth Mompoti,
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'Not only is she a
soldier, she is
also a mother ...'



Gail de Villeg

them, the elevation of the family in political discourse needs questioning too. The continuing political enforcement of a link between women and the family militates against that interrogative process.

So, whatever adjustments need to be made in the guidelines to the position of women need to be made without protecting that primary context within which 'woman' has been socially defined. This does not mean that the family will or should dissolve; simply that the rights of men and women should be legislated for without recalling and dignifying the social institution by which the *sociologically* irrelevant fact of 'sex' has been transformed, and distorted, into 'gender'. The risk of entrenching or restoring patriarchal structures is simply too high.

People have argued, as for example has Ruth Mompoti, that as women and men fight side by side in the struggle, men 'begin to lose sight of the fact that we are women'. After independence, they will not be able to turn round and say, 'Now you are a woman.' But how far were we from independence, one wonders, at a recent ANC rally in Mitchell's Plain, when Nelson Mandela, Alfred Nzo, Joe Slovo and other men were introduced to the audience as 'comrade', while Ruth Mompoti was called 'mother'?

People have also argued that material changes to women's conditions will usher in their emancipation. But material changes, although they are crucial to people's everyday survival and well-being, and ultimately to power relations between groups once separated by race and class distinctions, do not adjust the relative positions of women and men, as long as discourse (not only political discourse and legal discourse, but also the discourse of everyday life and the media) continues to define 'man' and 'woman' as *socially* significant distinctions (rather than neutral in the manner of, say, black-haired versus brown-haired people). Material changes do not shift existing social structures and processes of signification.

Nevertheless, on the topic of processes of signification, it should be noted that black South African women's discourse *has* defined the concept of 'mother' in such a way that it is forcefully distinguished from the meaning conventionally held in British and American culture.

I am not talking about, say, Ruth Mompoti's definition of the role of a freedom fighter in motherly terms: 'Not only is

she a soldier, she is also a mother – she brings soldiers into the world, she looks after these soldiers, she receives these soldiers, she is responsible for their maintenance and their welfare.' This definition maintains a distinction between soldier and mother, and keeps the mother in the caretaking role that regulates her activities and stance throughout social and domestic life.

I am talking instead about a tendency in recent writing by black South African women, one of whose particularly significant contributions has been to define the mother as an active, angry, political figure, in sharp contrast to the patriarchal representations of the mother handed down through a Western, Christian tradition. In other words, recent black writing has helped produce a shift in contemporary discourse, whereas the European tradition of femininity – however widely it may diverge from actual, individual behaviour – still dominates conventional thinking for many white men and women.

Tapping into this new thinking, over the last few years Shell has placed an advertisement (for petrol and service stations, presumably) in the *Weekly Mail* and *South* which masquerades as an advertisement for human rights – 'Everyone must enjoy human rights' – and figures the ideal of human rights by means of an image of mother-and-child which contradicts the standard Christian iconography of the Madonna-and-child.

While Shell's child sleeps peacefully, swathed against the mother's back, the mother looks determinedly into the future, looking away from the child and thus signifying herself as (cognitive and political) subject independently from the world of mother-and-child.

Although this advertisement inhabits a world which still places the burden of responsibility on the mother, and although the conjuncture of a human rights issue and capitalist advertising is a particularly unpalatable one, the representation of the mother as a figure not bound to her child in the meekness of self-sacrifice but as a figure *both there and elsewhere*, in both the domestic and the social, the private and the political, offers to South African feminism a potent figure for change, and a welcome relief from the representation of women handed down through a Western tradition.

Yet, while this difference is recognised and celebrated, it must in turn be opened to scrutiny for the part it plays in positing the familial, however defined, as women's fundamental and original sphere. □

Dorothy Driver lectures in the Department of English at the University of Cape Town, and is a member of the Black Sash Cape Western region.

A few months before Namibia gained independence, a Swapo mass rally was held in Rehoboth. As usual, the meeting started with a revolutionary exchange of slogans between chairperson and audience. This is how it went:

Speaker: A vote for Swapo ...

Audience: ... is a vote for democracy!

Speaker: A vote for Swapo ...

Audience: ... is a vote for freedom!

Speaker: A vote for Swapo ...

Audience: ... is a vote for equal rights!

Speaker: A vote for Swapo ...

Audience: ... is a vote for women's rights!

A macho voice rose above the audience, shouting: 'Not a fuck! Now you're going too far!'

This is the issue I wish to address here. Why don't people in general and in the liberation movement in particular give a 'fuck' about women's rights?

The struggle for a non-racial democracy in South Africa has focused primarily on the abolition of apartheid. It is only recently that 'non-sexist' has been considered an important adjunct to this slogan. This does not mean that there has been a concomitant change in attitude and consciousness with regard to women's rights. Many feel that gender discrimination is secondary, and that racial discrimination is more abhorrent, and hence in more urgent need of abolition.

Unless we see these two systems as equally evil and interlocking, the abolition of apartheid will merely mean that a white patriarchal government will be replaced by a black patriarchal one. And this is certainly not the vision I, as an ANC Women's League member, have for a new South Africa.

I think it is important to draw parallels between racism and sexism to show how both systems have contributed to the dehumanisation of men and women in society; and to show why we need to work together to transform our society into a truly non-racial non-sexist democratic South Africa.

The similarities between racial and sexual discrimination emerge when one looks afresh at certain basic questions which clarify the nature of this unholy alliance:

- 1 What is discrimination based on race/sex?
- 2 What is the opposition to these forms of oppression called?
- 3 How has this opposition been controlled?
- 4 What are the forms these controls take?

Human-rights lawyer John Dugard defines racial discrimination as 'any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on *race, colour, descent* or *ethnic origin* which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'.

racism and sexism: an unholy alliance

Black Sash members need little persuasion about the dehumanising aspects of racial discrimination. However, the equally destructive aspects of sexist systems are less easily recognised. Rhoda Kadalie makes the connections between racism and sexism and argues that the struggle for women's liberation must not be diluted by rationalisations of its 'secondary' importance.

Apartheid has been resisted most vehemently since 1948 precisely because it has had the effect of damaging, 'nullifying' and 'impairing' the humanity of the majority of the people in South Africa. Moreover, on a structural level, black people have been denied basic human rights through racial discrimination on three interrelated levels, as Dugard points out:

'a) ... unequal allocation of basic rights in the political, economic, social or cultural field on the grounds of a person's *race, colour, descent* or *ethnic origin*.

'b) Less favourable treatment of a person on the ground of [his] *race* in respect of the provision of services, facilities and employment.

'c) Segregation or separation which engenders a feeling of inferiority or humiliation among members of a *racial group* subjected to such separation.'

When we substitute *sex* for *race* in Dugard's definition we get a system equally detrimental to society, namely, *sexism* - defined by Paula Rothenberg in *Racism and Sexism: An integrated study* as 'any attitude, action or institutionalised structure which subordinates a person or group because of their sex'. Through sexism women have been the recipients of unequal resources in the political, social, and economic fields; they have been treated less favourably in the provision of services, facilities and employment; they have been made to feel inferior and not fully human, while men are identified as the norm.

Betty Reardon, quoted by Rothenberg, defines sexism as a 'belief system based on the assumption that the physical differences between males and females are so significant that they should determine virtually all social and economic roles of men and women. It holds that not just their reproductive functions are determined by sex, but that sex is the factor that rules



Rhoda Kadalie

... all men
benefit from
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women, in the
same way
that all
whites benefit
from the
oppression of
blacks.

their entire lives, all their functions in society and the economy, and their relation to the state and all public institutions and especially to each other. Sexism is manifest in all forms of behaviour, from subtle gestures and language to exploitation and oppression, and in all human institutions from the family to the multinational corporation.'

Why is it that when sexism, a system which discriminates against half of the world's population, is fought with equal militancy as was apartheid, women are branded as sexually frustrated, divisive, unhappy, spinsters and the like? Why is it that the struggle against apartheid is seen as a more worthy and justified cause than is the struggle for women's liberation? Why is the 'F-word' resisted even by women who have more to gain by it than without it? The reason is that *feminism*, unlike *national liberation*, is concerned not only with the removal of all forms of inequality, domination and oppression through the creation of a more just social and economic order, *but also with the achievement of women's equality, dignity and freedom of choice through women's power to control their own bodies and lives inside and outside the home.*

This latter aspect has always been treated as secondary because the oppressor is identified as existing within and among us. The activist as oppressor is too close for comfort. Feminism has been dismissed not only by men in the struggle but also by many activist women who have for a long time blamed apartheid for robbing their men of their dignity and masculinity. Hence, the abolition of apartheid has meant for a long time the restoration of male pride, dignity and masculinity to black men.

This partly explains the tendency within the democratic movement to see the liberation of women as being secondary to, and contingent upon, national liberation. In addition, black women have tended to say that it is easier for white women to fight against sexism because they do not have to fight for a roof over their heads, or for a living wage, or for the right to live with their husbands, or to save their children from starvation, and so on.

However, black women in democratic organisations have recently come to realise that they have much to lose in ignoring the contributions feminists have made. They are beginning to accept that only by engaging creatively with issues feminists are raising will they become empowered to deal with the different forms of

male domination they are experiencing in the home, the workplace, the church and in political organisations.

Women have also begun to realise that many post-independent countries have not granted women the equality they have fought for for many years alongside men in the liberation struggle. Now that a post-apartheid South Africa is a not-too-distant reality, women in political organisations have increasingly had to confront men publicly about their chauvinism, their lack of respect, and often about their total disregard for women.

I am reminded of a recent experience I had while doing a workshop with a group of black students at Khanya College on 'Racism and Sexism'. There was complete unanimity among them on the issue of racism in South Africa. When parallels were drawn with sexism, however, the hostility between the men and women took seconds to emerge.

Some of the responses from the men sounded like echoes from Nazi Germany. Without batting an eyelid some male students were giving biologically reductionist reasons for the justification of sexism. Comments such as:

- women have smaller brains than men;
- their maternal instincts are biologically based, hence it is their duty to look after children;
- god ordained women to be inferior;
- women want to be beaten as a show of love from their men;

were unashamedly flung

about in the classroom.

Of course, when women tried to point out that a lot of racist behaviour was premised on similar biological assumptions, such as:

- blacks have smaller brains;
- it is in their genes to be servants;
- blacks belong in the homelands;
- god ordained blacks to be inferior;
- blacks love to be oppressed;

all hell broke loose, to say the least.

Similar reactions were forthcoming from some first-year white male students at the University of Cape Town who insisted that

- if apartheid goes, the analogy between racism and sexism will hold no water – forgetting that racism predated and will post-date apartheid!
- Women are biologically weaker and hence are incapable of top executive jobs.
- Women want to be oppressed and ask for it.

Why is the struggle against sexism more difficult than the struggle against racism? Be-



'Comrade Secretary is OK, and I don't even mind Comrade Mama, but I'm not going to put up with "Comrade Dishwasher!"'

cause all men benefit from oppressing women, in the same way that all whites benefit from the oppression of blacks. To quote Albie Sachs – patriarchy is the only truly non-racial institution in South Africa, and it is not in the interests of men to share their power for this would undermine the authority they have enjoyed for centuries.

Equality with women means that men give up their own centrality and power base. But men will not easily relinquish these because, as Kate Millet points out, 'it is men who occupy the institutions of power, the military, the industry, technology, political office, universities, etc. So that it is very difficult for them to comprehend the world of the ruled, the underdog, the oppressed.'

Equality with women means that men give up their privileges in the same way whites will be required to give up some of their privileges. The system of male domination has a very definite material basis which is derived from women having to be responsible for the housework, the bearing and rearing of children and for servicing the needs of men. In addition, men benefit from having women relegated to inferior positions in the labour market.

Although men themselves are divided hierarchically according to class, race or ethnic group, they unite in their shared relationship of dominance over women. What is more, they depend on each other to maintain this domination, and it is in the institution of marriage that men best exercise control.

This control is essentially of three kinds:

- 1 Men control women's labour power in various ways. Men are usually given first preference for certain types of jobs; women's work is usually paid at lower rates than for men; women are often also regarded as the shock absorbers of the economy in that when labour is needed in an economic crisis, women are as easily recruited as they are made redundant during times of recession.
- 2 Men control the sexuality of women. In marriage this control becomes more explicit in that women are required not only to service the needs of men, but also to be responsible for child-bearing, child-rearing and housework.
- 3 Men control women through violence. This control is manifested in many ways: sexual abuse, domestic violence, battery, rape and often murder.

This power to control women is embedded in

social structures such as the state, religion, culture and education. That is why feminism is such a formidable task, because it compels women to deal with the various and specific ways in which they are controlled and kept in subordination by men.

Feminists believe that the following measures are necessary to end the subordination of women:

- 1 the abolition of the sexual division of labour;
- 2 the sharing of the burden of domestic labour and child-care by parents, the family and society;
- 3 the removal of all kinds of institutionalised forms of discrimination;
- 4 the attainment of political equality;
- 5 the establishment of freedom of choice over child-bearing;
- 6 the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.

In all of these areas women are subordinated differently in different societies, across the race, class, ethnic and cultural divides; the responses of men are also different across these divides. Be that as it may, male domination is a universal phenomenon and therefore needs to be opposed on all levels.

But why is it difficult to oppose male domination?

Because, unlike other relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed, the relationship between men and women is often based on the concept of

love, which complicates the politics of the relationship and makes it difficult to object to male domination. This notion of romantic love is embedded in the politics of domination, and subordination is made more tolerable if exercised under the guise of love.

The exploitation of women is often preceded by 'romantic' statements like 'if you love me, you will iron my clothes, cook my food, have my children, lay down your life, be my slave', *et cetera*. These are the foundations upon which exploitative male-female relationships are based.

'Love,' says Shulamith Firestone, 'is the raw fuel of the male cultural machine. Blinded by love, women give up their resources for their men.'

Yes, love does cover a multitude of sins! □



I've just discovered I've got a mind of my own — and already I've been driven out of it.

... unlike other relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed, the relationship between men and women is often based on the concept of love, which complicates the politics of the relationship ...

Dare I hope, dare I dream in sisterhood?' was the question asked by African National Congress (ANC) activist Gertrude Fester in a poem during the first session of the 'Building a Women's Alliance Conference' held at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) early in July.

The poem was one of a number of 'cultural items' interposed between brief introductions from spokespersons of the 22 organisations which sent delegates to the conference. The 'items' were as diverse as the organisations represented – ranging from the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) to the Business and Professional Women's Association and the Volks Kerk of Africa – and as warmly received.

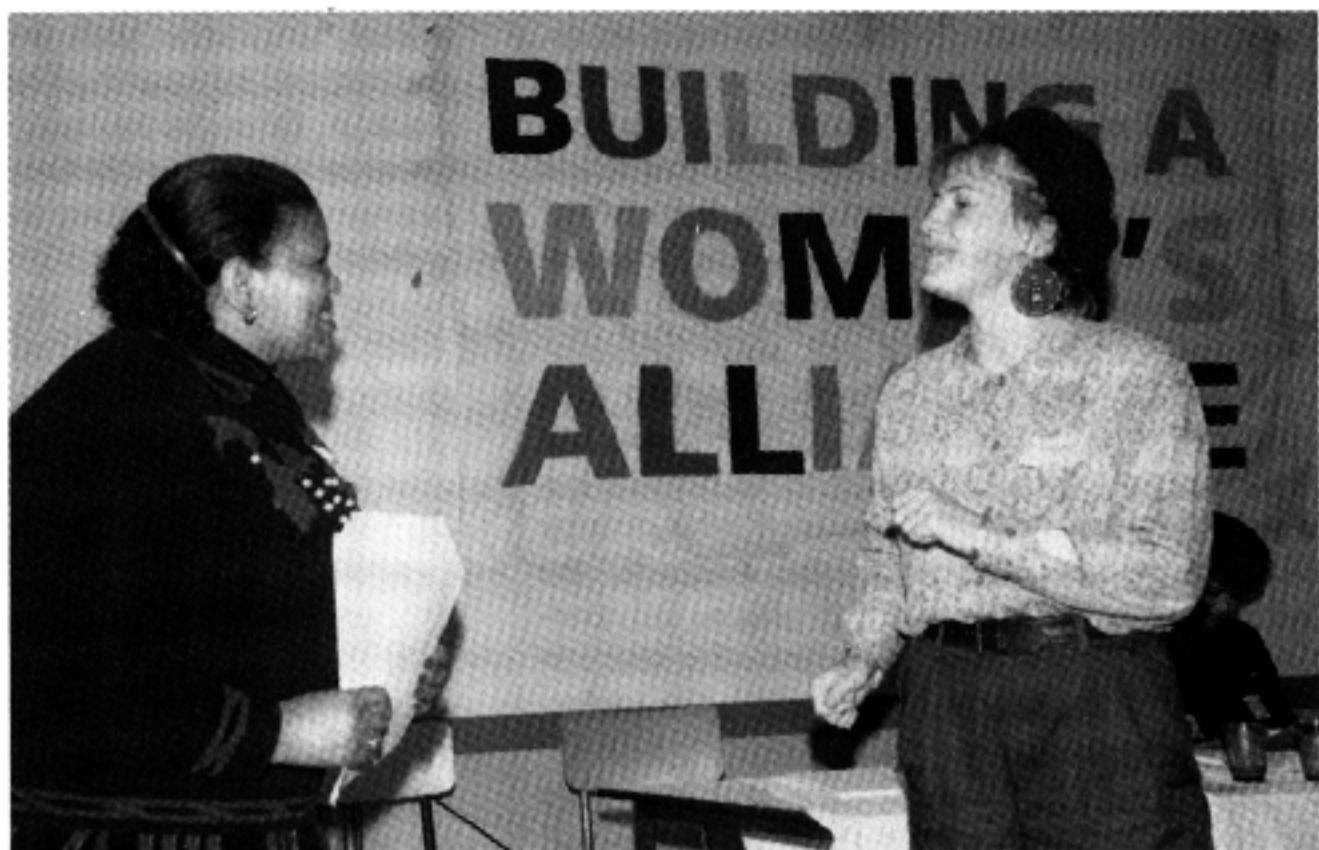
Warmth was a keynote of the conference, despite or perhaps because of the weather outside, both literal and metaphorical. It was freezing cold and raining solidly except – and this was interpreted by some as a happy omen – when delegates had to process through the elements to other buildings for lunch or meetings in small groups.

On the metaphorical front, a low-pressure area had moved in from Durban, in the wake of the ANC's rejection of the Women's League demand that women should have a 30 per cent representation on the National Executive Committee.

Expectations had been high, in view of support at branch and regional level, that the ANC would give substance to its declarations on paper in favour of non-sexism. The let-down was enormous and Women's League delegates to the alliance conference were angry.

'Maybe our strongest allies will be the Women's Alliance. Maybe together we can be strong,' their spokesperson said, while another thought the funniest thing she had heard for a long time was 'one man, one bullet', a play on the Pan Africanist Congress slogan.

In an hilarious sketch about the



towards an alliance of women

In pockets across South Africa there is work-in-progress towards creating the basis of a future national structure uniting women's organisations. A regional conference in the Western Cape was one site of such activity. Two Black Sash representatives record their impressions here. Carol Smith, member of the organising committee, took the pictures, and Shauna Westcott, a delegate to the conference, captures the flavour of the event in text.



Left to right: delegates from NAMDA, Die Volkskerk and AZAPO. A striking diversity of women agreed on the need to focus on women's rights and women's issues, and not to duplicate the work of other political organisations.



early years of the ANC, one member of the Cape Town central branch of the movement noted that the Women's Charter was drawn up before the Freedom Charter. 'That's probably where they got all their ideas,' the other remarked – which nearly brought the house down.

Some felt, however, that the ANC decision might have served a purpose in helping to unite women in an understanding of what we are up against. Napoleon declaring that 'women are nothing but machines for producing children'; Johnson opining that 'nature has given women so much power that the law has wisely given them very little'; Mandela lamenting on his release from prison that 'it is not a nice feeling for a man to see his family struggling, without security, without the dignity of the head of the family around'; and the ANC conference decision on women all declare the ancient and continuing aim of the patriarchy: the maintenance of male dominance.

But feminist theory was not the purpose of the Women's Alliance conference. If warmth was a keynote, so was tolerance; the quest was for a basis for uniting women. So if the congress-affiliated delegates deployed '*amandlas*' and '*vivas*' with restraint and humour, so the Women's Bureau delegate said mildly: 'I'm afraid we have a rather conservative image which we are trying to break,' and the delegate for the Methodist Women's Auxiliary spoke of their aims in terms of 'consolidating the power of love rather than the love of power'.

The main work of the conference took place in seven commissions on Saturday afternoon: labour and the economy, health and welfare, government and political power, families and children, education, violence against women, and legal and constitutional issues. The aim was not to make policy but to arrive at recommendations which delegates could take back to their organisations for discussion.

Among the more striking recommendations was one from the commis-

Top: discussion in a commission session.

Middle: two pictures showing audience responses during plenary sessions.

Bottom, left to right: delegates from the Black Sash, the Domestic Workers' Union and the SACP.

sion on violence against women that 'the Scriptures which show women in an inferior light should be rewritten by women'; and one from the commission on legal and constitutional issues that there should be an annual award for the government department that does the most to promote non-sexism.

Recommendations from the commission on families and children included that 'housework should be shared by men and women – if not, it should be valued and paid for'; that single women, lesbians and gay men should be allowed to adopt children; and that women should have the right to choose contraception and abortion.

The commission on labour and the economy called for pre-school facilities in all communities and workplaces; recommended 'a state programme to encourage involvement of both parents in child care', and suggested 'reduced hours of work to create jobs for those without work'.

The commission on health and welfare recommended that the current practice of removing children from homes where they are the victims of abuse should be substituted by the removal of the perpetrators of abuse. They also recommended that 'all cultural and religious practices that are oppressive to women should be researched and changed'.

These were a few of the more radical proposals emanating from the commissions. The overall import of the recommendations was summed up at the end of the conference in a press statement to which all delegates agreed (and which most reporters misquoted):

'The conference agreed that it is vital to build a Women's Alliance to work for the emancipation of women, and to unite organisations around this goal. The alliance will work for legal and constitutional changes to protect women against discrimination and exploitation. It will work to educate and empower women to take their rightful place in society. It will campaign to change sexist attitudes among men and women.'

The statement reflects a consensus among delegates that the alliance should focus on issues that unite women. A rider was added during the conference in terms of a recommendation that contentious issues should be aired and discussed in regular alliance forums. Another important area of

'The conference agreed that it is vital to build a Women's Alliance to work for the emancipation of women, and to unite organisations around this goal. The alliance will work for legal and constitutional changes to protect women against discrimination and exploitation. It will work to educate and empower women to take their rightful place in society. It will campaign to change sexist attitudes among men and women.'



agreement was the recommendation that the alliance should lobby for government adoption of the United Nations Charter on Eliminating all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and that the alliance should campaign for a Women's Charter and for an end to violence against women.

Hard times lie ahead for the alliance, not least the difficulty of extending a regional initiative into a national structure. One suggestion was that this process should be facilitated by organisations with national structures, like Black Sash and the Women's League. This could be a constructive path, if the Western Cape experience of work in the Fedsaw alliance is typical.

Launched in 1987, Fedsaw involved representatives from a number of organisations notably the United Women's Congress (UWCO), the Black Sash and Rape Crisis in joint campaigns, festivals, marches, and other initiatives aimed at putting women's issues on the political agenda. This long, low-key process culminated in the decision to dissolve Fedsaw in the interests of building a broader alliance. However, it was the

hard work and experience of the women involved in Fedsaw that resulted in the Alliance conference and it is their spirit that will be crucial to success in the process of building an alliance.

But we also have a secret 'cultural weapon', forged in centuries of having to make do and having to make light of things that are bitter.

A hint of its nature gleams from the following exchange which took place while a long line of delegates trailed across the campus in quest of unlocked rooms to meet in: 'What a pandemonium for stalwarts to stand in the cold!' – 'What an undermining!' was the reply.

Dare we dream of sisterhood? Dare we not? And is it a matter either of daring or dreaming? □

Shauna Westcott is a freelance journalist and a member of the Black Sash Cape Western region.

AN INVITATION TO DISCUSSION

whither women's rights in the black sash?

Tessa Graaff expected to hear widely divergent opinions when she questioned some members about the Black Sash's role regarding women's rights. There was a glimmer of contentiousness in these responses but the full-scale debate still lies ahead.

Clearly, there is no consensus within the Black Sash on developing a focus on women's rights. The magazine committee felt that it would be interesting to canvass a range of opinions on women's issues in the hope that it might generate debate within the organisation. We approached a number of Cape Western members to set the ball rolling and asked them a single question: 'What should the role of the Black Sash be on women's rights, in the wider context of human rights?' The following responses were received.

‘An important aspect of Black Sash work is its diversity. One of the areas of concern is women's rights, both as a concern standing on its own right and as part of the general Black Sash commitment to human rights. It is significant that a number of Black Sash members are concentrating their energies on working for women's rights. Black Sash advice offices have already committed themselves to looking at the concerns of women, particularly, in all aspects of their work. Whether we conscientise ourselves, and the wider public, through women's rights, human rights, racial oppression or other issues, what matters is our increasing awareness, the importance of process and the need for praxis. We must act to bring about conditions in South Africa that we would like to see.’

‘Black Sash aims include "the constitutional recognition and protection by law of human rights and liberties for all". "All" means that women and men shall enjoy equal human rights, as laid down in the United Nations and other declarations that are now recognised in international law.

If the Black Sash adheres to its

aims, it is bound to champion women's rights. It would be inexplicable, except as a reflection of middle-class complacency, if the oldest, best informed and educated group of women in the field of human rights did not do so.

The Black Sash should network with women's-rights groups nationally and internationally. We should aim to empower oppressed women in all sectors to discover their own voice. In so doing, our methods and style should reflect women's special capacity for warmth, nurturing and concern for others. Our attitudes should help men to appreciate that the Black Sash is not anti-male, but anti-domination, and that in respecting women's rights and sharing their burdens, men can only advance alongside women towards full humanness.’

‘The Black Sash was formed to fight for the rights of all South Africans – particularly freedom of movement, speech, ownership of land and property, freedom to choose the education of the parents' choice, etc. I feel that in taking up women's rights *specifically* the Black Sash is in danger of becoming a feminist organisation working for its own rights, instead of those of everyone including specifically black women's rights.

Knowing that women are the equal, if not the superior of men I feel that it is quite unnecessary to concentrate on women's rights – rather encourage *all* South Africans to realise, and fight for their human rights. The Black Sash has taught us women what our rights are, as *people*, not as *women*, and now we must educate everyone, male and female, black and white how to be a full person realising their full potential. Feminism is a very selfish, introspective, self-centred cult – there should be

no place for it in the Black Sash.’

‘I believe that it is essential for the Black Sash to look at human rights in terms of gender. We have a long and proud history of fighting racism in South Africa – but in the transformation to a more just society it is important to address sexism as well. As is the case with racism, so also where discrimination and oppression is based on gender, the dignity and humanity of both the oppressor and the oppressed are impaired. Feminism as I understand it is a philosophy of liberation that aims at a society in which both men and women are free from all oppression.

Worldwide, the experience has been that in order to address systematic and structural discrimination against women, a general commitment to human rights may not be enough. That is why, some thirty years after the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the world body accepted a bill of rights for women: the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.’

‘The Black Sash should approach all its work in a gender-sensitive way. Women's rights, their position in society, and similar aspects ought to be emphasised in the framework of our human-rights concerns.’

‘I do not think that enough has changed in the country for us to be able to afford to stop being a political pressure group. I am not happy with the emphasis on women's issues because I think it can too easily distract our energies from the main battlefield. Basically, although I agree with what the women's group stands for, that is not what I joined the Black Sash to "do".’ □



what's missing from equal-opportunity programmes?

The route beyond tokenism in employment practices is not without pitfalls. Linda Human describes models of advancement for those suffering the effects of discrimination and oppression. She proposes that advancement in the workplace requires corresponding transformations in the world of management.

The terms 'black and female advancement', 'affirmative action' and 'managing diversity' are labels employed, somewhat euphemistically, to describe the process by means of which blacks and women (primarily white women) are provided with the opportunity to participate fully in the organisations and societies in which they work and live. Behind these terms, however, lie a number of issues which cause many people a great deal of discomfort. Such terms or labels are designed to cloud these issues.

For example, when we talk 'black or female advancement' to what extent does this, when taken to its logical conclusion, imply 'black or female control'? And what is meant by 'black' and 'female'? In practice, it has meant 'black men' and 'white women', hence offering 'black women' little advantage or opportunity.

Does affirmative action lead to tokenism and a lowering of standards? Do people really believe that, in managing diversity, no culture is inherently superior to another? These are sensitive but important questions which do not go away when we change the label attached to attempts to advance other than white males. What we have to do is to sift through these labels and issues, so that we understand what it is that we are doing, before we commit ourselves to making our programmes work.

It would appear that in the past, in both the United States and South Africa, the development of black people and women was conceptualised simply in terms of putting knowledge and skills into the so-called disadvantaged and then expecting them to function in a white male world which remained fundamentally unchanged. In some instances this view persists today. The implicit assumptions of this 'black and female advancement' model were that blacks and women currently do not have the wherewithal to succeed in the

public sector spheres such as business and government other than in low status, menial or service roles.

Therefore, to change this, different strategies were proposed to allow blacks and women entrance to management and decision-making structures within the public sector. The plan was to develop education and training programmes aimed at blacks and women and then to place them into existing organisational structures. If, despite training, they still failed to perform satisfactorily, the assumption was that they were lazy, stupid or innately unable to deal with the demands of the public sector. I would disagree wholeheartedly with this position.

White male management

Our experience in South Africa tells us that to conceptualise development simply in terms of education and training of blacks and women is simplistic in the extreme. This is not to say that such programmes are not important. They are. Equally important, however, are the expectations, prejudices and people-management skills of white male managers. The attitudes of white male management toward the development of blacks and women impacts significantly, and generally negatively, on their performance in the workplace.

A better way to conceptualise the process of development is to use the psychological success model of development. This model hinges on matching what is required of an individual with their skills and talents. It also requires an environment which provides constructive ongoing support and feedback to enhance self-confidence and job performance.

In other words, the process of development is a process of setting realistic goals and moderate risk-taking in line with *individual* strengths and weaknesses (not those assigned to *groups* of people). This process has been retarded in South Africa. Racist



Linda Human

and sexist attitudes have impacted on both the expectations people have of themselves and the expectations of them held by white male management. Such negative expectations and stereotyping of people impede the process of development. They have a profound bearing on levels of self-confidence and on the opportunities afforded to certain groups.

What managers believe

Development is a process involving a complex interaction between the individual's perceived ability, his or her motivation and the way s/he is managed. If the person is managed badly, either because the manager is poorly skilled, or is not held accountable for the development of people, or most importantly, if the manager believes that blacks and women are intrinsically less capable than white men, it is highly unlikely that the subordinate will succeed.

Unless this latter point is addressed, equal opportunity programmes will inevitably fail. Telling white male managers that all races, sexes and cultures are equal, and that they should respect diversity, is not enough. If we do not address their negative expectations, most fundamentally their belief that blacks and women are less capable, and highlight for them the effect of these expectations, real change will not be possible.

In the United States, the new move in enabling participation is called 'managing diversity'. This stresses the need to regard all cultures as equal and to accept cultural diversity. In the South African context, such a concept needs to be regarded with caution.

A reinforcement of cultural differences would be problematic in South Africa. While there are a number of reasons for arguing this, the most important is that apartheid has created or reinforced an 'us' and 'them' syndrome, with black culture looked

down upon as inappropriate to the business world. We have also seen a proliferation of 'black advancement' programmes based on the understanding that blacks as a group have certain deficiencies which will need to be overcome before they function effectively in the business world.

These activities have reinforced the stereotype concerning black underperformance and have also reinforced the tendency to judge people on the basis of group stereotypes instead of on the basis of individual capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. While it is important to have an informed understanding of and respect for cultural diversity in South Africa, this should not preclude assessments of individuals on the basis of their own strengths and weaknesses. To move too quickly to the less threatening process of 'managing diversity', rather than first instituting affirmative action or positive discrimination, would leave some fundamental issues unaddressed.

In South Africa, we cannot gloss over the existence of pervasive racism and sexism. These issues must be tackled, however uncomfortable the process might be. They must be countered at a broad political and social level. This will involve structural changes, such as abolishing discriminatory legislation. But racism and sexism must also be seen as the prejudiced actions and attitudes of individuals.

Factors affecting opportunities

To summarise: in South Africa, as elsewhere, factors such as education and background affect the opportunities of many black people and women to obtain meaningful work. Further, however, a second set of factors impact on their development if they are lucky enough to gain entry into the public sector in a meaningful manner. These factors include an inferior or less relevant education, stereotypical

negative expectations and their marginal position both in the broader society and in the workplace.

Racism and sexism can lead to an internalised negative expectancy on the part of white male managers which, in turn, can lead to demotivation, a reluctance to try hard, a withdrawal from competitive situations, and the feeling that 'I haven't got what it takes' on the part of black or women employees. This ultimately reinforces the notions of negative expectancy.

The 'internalisation of inferiority' is not a 'black' or 'female' phenomenon. Rather, it is a downward psychological process propelled by negative expectations which erode the personal self-concept and self-confidence of the individual. This process can be accelerated when persons are appointed to inappropriate positions on the basis of tokenism rather than merit.

Transforming institutions

The argument that abolishing apartheid legislation will not ensure social justice is neither new nor profound. This is only the starting point, albeit an essential one. It is only when the institutions and organisations that make up the public sector are transformed from the exclusive domain of white men, to ones in which all people can participate equally, that we will have succeeded in this aim. Understanding that this transformation means more than simply replacing white men with blacks and women, is an equally essential part of the developmental process. □

Linda Human is professor at the Centre for African Management in the Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town, and a member of the Black Sash, Cape Western region.

what do the numbers say?

Debbie Budlender and Carla Sutherland provide a guide to reading four statistical graphs which reveal aspects of women's economic status in South Africa.

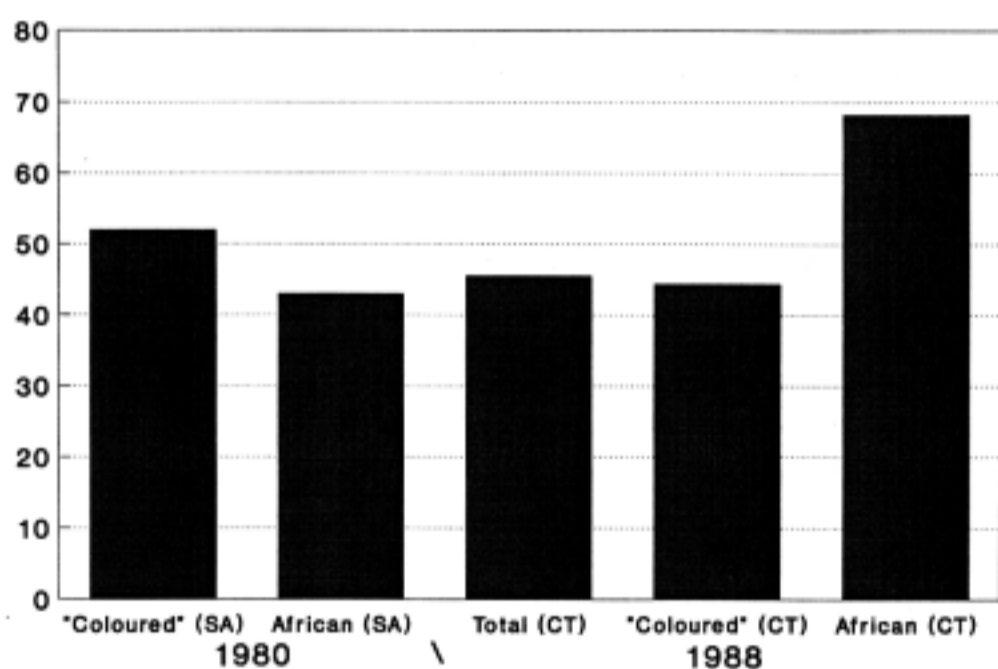
When one looks at the statistics, women lose out on virtually every indicator related to well-being. What is even more disturbing is that the discriminatory effects compound each other, rather than being merely additive. So the cumulative effects of race, class, gender and region put African women at the bottom of the pile in education, the economy, politics, the family and virtually every other aspect of society.

We have chosen a few graphs illustrating examples of measures affecting women's economic well-being, which is an area affecting their life-chances in many other spheres of their existence.

SINGLE MOTHERS

Percentage babies born out of wedlock in South Africa (1980) and in Cape Town (1988)

Women have to support others as well as themselves. In 1980 over half the 'coloured' children born in South Africa and more than four out of ten African children were born to single mothers. A more recent figure for Cape Town puts the number of African children born to single mothers at nearly seven out of ten. In the graph opposite, the pattern is shown as percentages of children born out of wedlock.

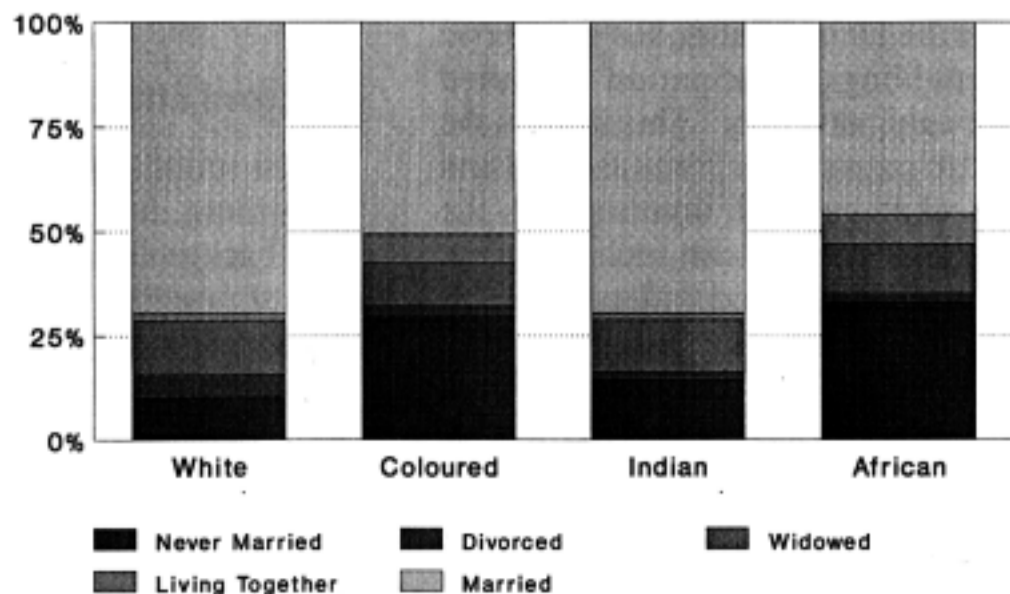


excluding TBVC areas

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Marital status of adult women (1985)

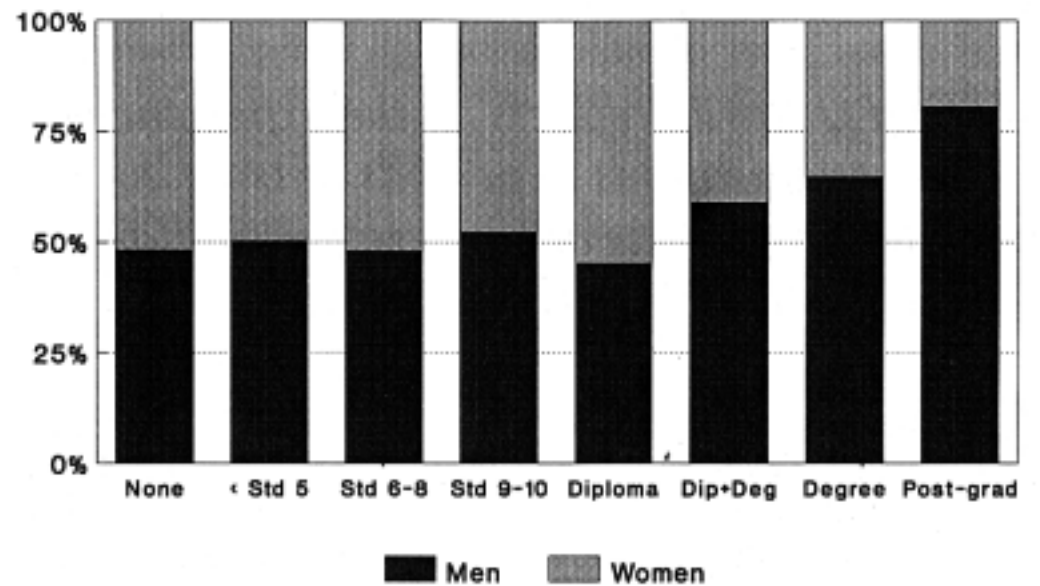
It is clear that the majority of South African women need to support themselves economically. Even those with male partners are usually unable to support themselves and their families on the low income which these men earn. But many women cannot rely on income from partners. The graph opposite shows clearly that fewer than half of adult African women and just over half of 'coloured' women were married in 1985. The percentage of female-headed households is almost certainly higher than this as many married couples are not living together.



LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Gender composition at different levels of education

Despite their need, women's capacity to earn decent money is severely constrained. One factor affecting earnings is the level of education. The discrepancy between black and white educational levels is well known. The differences between the genders is less publicised. The graph reflecting gender composition shows that there is little difference in the number of men and women who have matric level. However, at the tertiary level there are slightly more women than men with diplomas – chiefly diplomas in the low-paying professions of nursing and teaching – and many more men than women with the first and post-graduate degrees providing access to better-paying jobs.

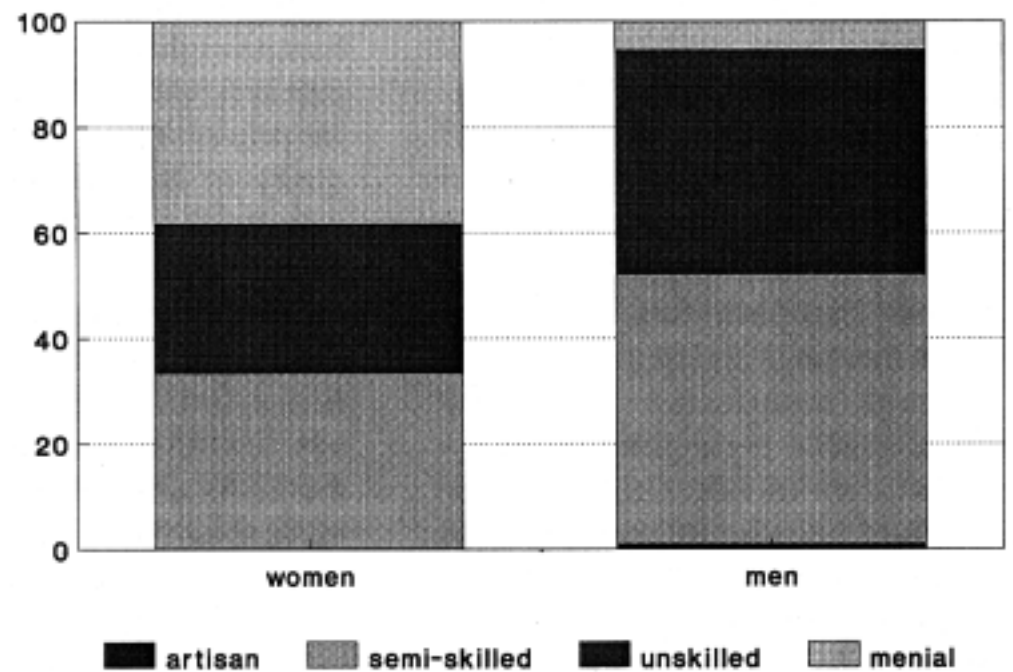


excluding TBVC areas

WOMEN'S WORK POSITIONS

Women and men in different jobs

Within the economy women predominate in certain sectors and industries such as clothing, textiles and services, where wages are generally lower than those in male-dominated spheres. Within each sector and industry, women predominate in the lower-paid and less pleasant jobs. The final graph shows the division of the male and female African workforce in artisan, semi-skilled, unskilled and menial posts. Over the last twenty years both men and women have tended to move out of the unskilled category of work. But while men have moved up into semi-skilled categories, women have moved down into menial jobs.



We cannot generalise about women. Not all women are African. Not all women are working class. Not all women are rural. Not all women are single, with children, illiterate, and in a low-paying job. What the indicators do say, is that for almost all women there are very many fronts on which they can demand more equal access to the 'goodies', both for themselves individually and for women as a whole. □

This guide is extracted from a 50-page booklet Women and the Economy by Debbie Budlender. It costs R4,00 and is available from CASE offices, or by post by writing to:
20 Alfred Street, 7925 Observatory
or
P.O. Box 32882, 2017 Braamfontein

Human-rights organisations in periods of transition

Marina Ottaway reflects on the experiences of human-rights organisations in periods of transition in Africa, and identifies areas of concern for similar organisations during the South African transition.

Human-rights organisations in South Africa have probably entered one of the most difficult periods in their history. While freer to operate than in the past, they face a very difficult problem in redefining their role in view of the changing situation. The experience of other African countries points to some of the problems bound to arise in a period of transition.

Human-rights organisations dealing with African countries responded very slowly to the changes brought about by independence. One interesting – and discouraging – example was offered by Algeria. The Algerian war, which lasted from 1954 to 1962, produced widespread human-rights violations, particularly in the form of torture of political prisoners and suspects by the French army. This gave rise to considerable protest in France and other European countries; innumerable meetings and demonstrations were held, manifestos issued and books produced highlighting the horrors of torture in Algeria. Soon after the country became independent, the first rumours circulated about the use of torture by the new government – using not only the same methods, but the same apparatus left behind by the French paratroopers. The groups that had denounced torture before independence were slow to react.

The main problem was not double standards, but disbelief – how could the tortured become the torturer so quickly? When too much evidence piled up to be dismissed, the newness of the country and the lack of experience of officials were seen as extenuating circumstances. And in any case, how could liberal organisations turn against a movement that had conducted a just struggle for so many

years? So the torture continued. Perhaps it could not have been stopped even by strong denunciations. But we will never know, because early on nobody tried.

It is tempting to write off the example of Algeria as the result of inexperience. In 1962, liberals were all convinced that the end of colonialism meant the beginning of democracy. But after fifteen years of single-party regimes and military *coups d'état* around Africa nobody harbours such an illusion.

Nevertheless, when Mozambique finally became independent in 1975, human-rights groups were again reluctant to face up to the evidence that once in power FRELIMO was becoming guilty of human-rights violations. It was easier to believe that political dissidents were being 're-educated' than to accept that they were being held in concentration camps. By denouncing *frelimo*, furthermore, one would appear to side with the South African government. As a result, few attempts were made to arrive at an accurate picture of what was happening to human rights in Mozambique until fairly recently.

Several lessons can be derived from these examples. First, all organisations need a watchdog. There may be good guys and bad guys, but even good guys will not stay good for long if there are no checks on them. Ahmed Ben Bella was not Emperor Bokassa. Samora Machel was not Idi Amin. But human-rights violations occurred in abundance. What keeps democratic countries respectful of human rights and democratic process is not an abstract commitment to ideals, but the existence of watchdog institutions. Even in countries with a long democratic tradition the government needs

constant watching, as Nixon's Watergate scandal proved in the United States.

In the abstract, these lessons are obvious and easy to accept. In practice they are not, and this is why we see the same mistakes being repeated in country after country: human-rights organisations which were quick to denounce violations by the old regime, and even took considerable risks in doing so, cannot bring themselves to denounce the misdeeds of the new regime until quite late in the game. There are many reasons for this.

It is very difficult, psychologically, to accept the evidence that the group one supported earlier is guilty of transgressions, and even more difficult to say so aloud. It is much easier to wait, to make excuses, especially when the rumours are not confirmed, and they are read as being the propaganda of the opposition or disinformation spread by security agencies with their own agenda.

Psychologically, it is also very difficult to run the risk of being perceived as part of the reactionary opposition. Who wants to be in that camp, after all? This is not purely a psychological problem. Political organisations opposed to a certain group will use all means at their disposal, and an honest, careful study of human-rights abuses can be turned into a weapon used not to protect human beings but to further an abhorrent political cause. There are no easy answers here.

A third problem is the swiftness of the transition. No matter how many years or decades it took to put an end to the old system, the end always comes very quickly. One day an organisation is the opposition, the next day it is the government or part of it. One day it is the group that defends individuals against the government, the next day it has turned into the government against whom individuals need defending. By turning its attention too strongly to the misdeeds of what is still an opposition group, a human-rights organisation can contribute to delaying the transition. By waiting too long, it can contribute to the establishment of a pattern of violations that becomes very difficult to end, as happened in Algeria and Mozambique.

Organisations in South Africa will undoubtedly face all these problems soon, but they may be better equipped to handle them. First, there are well-

established, competent human-rights groups in South Africa itself. This was initially not true in most African countries. Second, there is more information about problems encountered in other transitions where the victims turned into offenders, where the organisations that fought against oppression turned into oppressors. This should make it easier to accept that it can happen here, too, and that it is necessary to be on guard. Finally, a very active international network of human-rights organisations is now in place – organisations such as Amnesty International and Africa Watch can supplement the efforts of internal organisations, possibly providing the greater psychological detachment that is the luxury of outsiders.

But there are also some facets of the South African situation that may complicate the transition. The most striking appears to be a tradition of dual membership in political organisations and a lack of sensitivity to the problem

of conflict of interests arising from it. Democratic Party members join the African National Congress (ANC), while others talk of joining the National Party. The ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) are totally interlocked, providing an endless topic of discussion for political columnists, but contributing nothing to political clarity. Journalists join the political parties about which they have to report professionally. Civic-association leaders join the ANC while proclaiming the need for independent civics. And members of human-rights groups join organisations that need monitoring for possible violations. In all these cases, the assumption appears to prevail that a person can compartmentalise oneself, acting in one capacity one day and in another the next. This is a dangerous illusion that distracts attention from the inevitable conflict of interests arising from dual membership.

The structural problems built into

the transition process are difficult enough and do not need to be complicated by adding a conflict between defending human rights and furthering the goals of a specific party. Both human-rights organisations and political parties have a crucial role to play in a democratic country. Being active in one is not a superior form of civil commitment to being active in the other. But as South Africa finally approaches the end of apartheid, the illusion that the two roles are compatible can facilitate the repetition of the Algerian or Mozambican experience. □

Marina Ottaway is the author of many books and articles dealing with independence politics of African countries, including Algeria and Mozambique.

independent monitoring group established

The Black Sash Transvaal region initiates a working alliance in response to the violence.

On Thursday, 11 April 1991, representatives from various human-rights groups, churches, and non-governmental organisations, came together to discuss a co-ordinated response to the violence. The initiative came from the Black Sash and was born out of a general concern and a need to act in some manner which would assist in bringing about peace. Information on what different groups were already doing, was shared and groups discussed their different responses to the violence up until that date. What emerged was that efforts at monitoring, research and relief, were taking place; that there was a general lack of person-power which was affecting each organisation's ability to make a positive contribution to monitoring; that duplication was taking place and that there was a need for co-ordination between the groups.

Those present agreed to establish a working group whose main long-term aim would be to bring an end to the violence and whose interim aims would be to monitor, facilitate dis-

cussion (especially at the time of crises), and collect information. Relief work and publicity and information dissemination were two other important areas of work also identified.

The ultimate objective of the alliance is to establish a culture in which peace and justice is a right -- a culture of human and civil rights which includes the right to peace, tolerance and democracy. This will be done through example and in the manner in which all parties are treated alike. All communication emanating from the group will take this into consideration. In these efforts the group will reject oppressive peace, i.e. peace which is brought about through massive state repression involving states of emergency and other repressive measures.

A 24-hour telephone-monitoring service which is staffed by volunteers is already operative and field monitoring is being phased in. The group is also in the process of setting up an office and developing the resources it believes are needed for it to operate effectively.

To ensure that the objectives of Peace Action are understood and utilised, a liaison committee was set up to meet with political parties, the police, unions, and civics. Most of these meetings have taken place and the group has received a positive response.

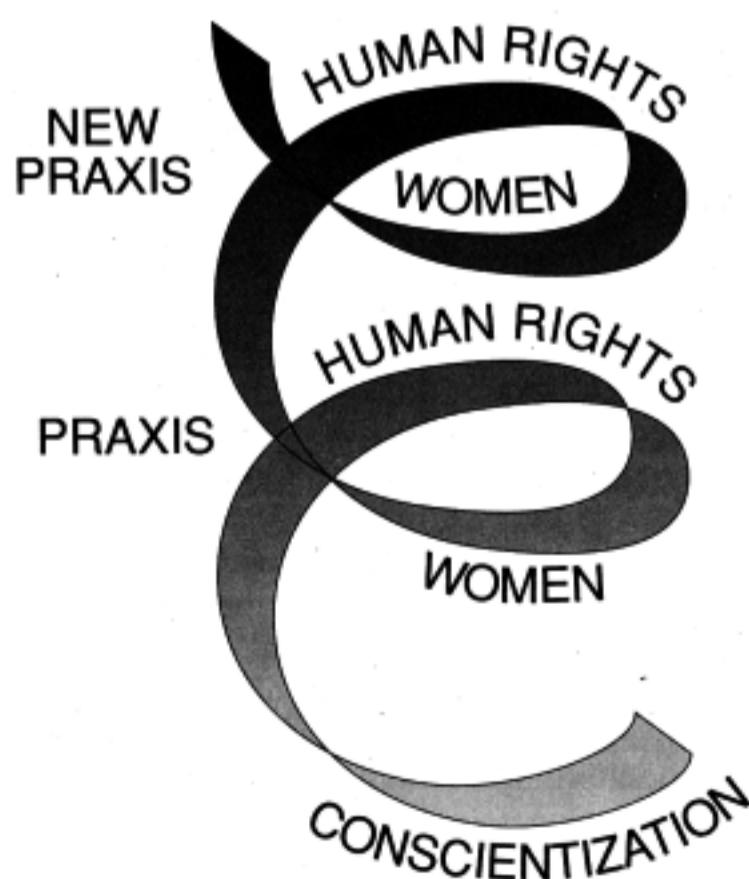
The Black Sash Transvaal region has a sub-committee working on this issue and it meets regularly. Apart from attending regular plenary meetings of Peace Action, Black Sash members also serve on its subcommittees. One of these, publicity and information (also known as the media committee), is being convened by the Black Sash. To date, energies have gone into the establishment of the actual structures and monitoring service. Black Sash hopes now to assist in creating a campaign which will give the group an identity and promote peace on a broader level. □

Laura Pollecut

liberating praxis and the black sash

Two interests prompted Denise Ackermann to do her doctoral research on the Black Sash: one, her interest in women's commitment to social justice; the other, her theological concern with praxis, the continuous process of action/reflection.

In these edited extracts from her thesis, she outlines her feminist Christian perspective before evaluating the Black Sash's praxis in these terms. This article only hints at the complexity both of the thesis' themes and of the challenge posed to the Black Sash.



I belong to that category of women which refuses to accept a split between being a Christian and a feminist, despite the fact that Christian praxis and feminism are often irreconcilable. Allowing such a split would be to acknowledge a dualism in my existence which would be damaging both to my faith and to my personhood. It would also mean allowing patriarchal norms to define my reality. I cannot leave my feminist awareness at the door of the church or the theological faculty and become only a Christian woman or only a theologian. I am both all the time.

The topic of my research arose from the situation of interrelated oppressions in South Africa. Our country is rightly infamous for the perpetuation of racial (and consequently also class) discrimination. At the same time, however, sexist oppression has been practised at all levels of our society.

The need for a liberating praxis in our society is obvious. But who is involved in a praxis that is liberating and what is being done? My search for it within religious institutions proved disheartening, and as I believe that the community of faith can and should be addressed by the actions of those 'outside the camp', my search shifted to the Black Sash.

This raised important questions. What is liberating praxis viewed from a feminist theological perspective? Why has the Black Sash, largely a group of white middle-class women, pursued a vision of social justice in practical terms for over 35 years? What are the actions of the Black Sash communicating and to whom?

This article will barely touch on the theological themes of my thesis and will confine itself to my research on the Black Sash. However, research can be a glib exercise unless one mentions the inherent tensions found through it.

Feminist liberation theology emerges from a critical consciousness that acknowledges the social contradictions that shape both our personal lives and our collective existence. As a white middle-class woman this must lead me to acknowledge my place in my context as being at the same time both oppressed and belonging to the oppressors by virtue of my whiteness. This situation produces its own tensions.

There is also an inherent tension in a feminist stance that values the liberation of all people and yet needs to address women's oppression specifically. There is further a tension between the emphasis on the particularity of my context in South African society and the inclusive, holistic and liberating impulse of feminist theology. As a white woman I yearn for the liberation of all women and all people in this country. Yet, I know I cannot speak on behalf of anyone other than what I would term my own constituency, namely other white middle-class women. Nonetheless, I believe that there are places where white and black women

will be able to celebrate liberation together as we find common bonds in our shared oppression and praxis and in our longing for justice, love, equality and peace.

The route taken towards analysing Black Sash praxis thus begins by taking women's experiences as a point of departure. It's clear, though, that our life contexts cannot be viewed in isolation. The personal is political, and the political personal. While we cannot escape social contradictions, the challenge is to lay claim to women's experience in our context.

One may well ask 'which women, which context and what experience'? Women everywhere are separated by race, class and economic status. In South Africa, the separation of people has achieved an institutional depth and breadth which is agonisingly unique. Women's place is determined from birth by race, sex and economic class. For many white women, this means being part of the powerful privileged minority, both politically and economically. Yet we suffer sexist discrimination. For most black women, it means race, sex and class oppression, which relegates them to a context of total discrimination and oppression.

For white feminists this means acknowledging our place in the complexity of the South African situation and our complicity in oppression. For instance, the racist exploitation and domination of multi-ethnic women by white women is a well-documented example of such complicity.

Lack of insight and understanding of white women's role in the oppression of black women still enables those of us who may not be overtly racist to cling to our hegemony of theory and practice, often expressed in the phrase 'but of course we want the black women to join us'. Understanding our complicity is, however, only the first step. The next step is to engage in active struggle to end racist and classist domination.

In this process we acknowledge that our role is one of support and not of leadership, of identification and not prescription. False notions of sisterhood based on faulty analysis and clichéd notions of bonding need to be rejected.

The intersecting of class and race in South Africa is a complex issue. Afro-American Bell Hooks clarifies the further links with sexist oppression. 'Sexist oppression is of primary importance not because it is the basis of all other oppression, but because it is the practice of domination most people experience, whether their role be that of discriminator or discriminated against, exploiter or exploited ... Racism is fundamentally a feminist issue because it is interconnected with sexist oppression. In the West, the philosophical foundations of racist and sexist ideology are similar.'

The founding of the Black Sash can hardly be seen as an event in which white women

crossed barriers to join with black women against oppressive legislation. It did, however, mark a turning point in the political awareness of certain white women.

According to its constitution, the Black Sash pursues its aims by 'non-violent and peaceful' means. This resolve has characterised its actions throughout its history. The question is what this means in practice.

There are a variety of ways in which the Black Sash sets about achieving the aims it has set itself of promoting justice and human rights and of furthering political education. The organisation enables by running advice offices, protests, learns and informs through a variety of publications. Today it would, in my view, be valid to add 'monitors' and 'trains' to this list.

The Black Sash also forms alliances in the form of working relationships with a number of like-minded bodies. It does so in the belief that by adding its voice to others, increased pressure can be brought to bear for non-violent fundamental structural change in South Africa.

The above activities form the working basis of what I have called Black Sash praxis.

My research focused on the following questions: What is the Black Sash communicating? What are their values, views, goals? What views on humanity underlie Black Sash praxis? What does the fact that they are a group of women communicate? Does the Black Sash offer a model for liberating praxis?

I interviewed different groups of Black Sash members in four phases of research. Some of the early research findings were that critical, pivotal, involved and essential praxis constitutes the essence of the Black Sash.

Human rights appear to be the central value system that both motivates Black Sash praxis and provides the vision towards which it is working. This is in accord with the aims of the Black Sash as spelt out in its constitution.

The term 'praxis' can justifiably be used as there is a measure of reflection taking place. However, there is a tension in the organisation between an overt feminist praxis and what is understood as a human-rights praxis. Among some members interviewed there was confusion and even a measure of fear as to the real meaning and relevance of a feminist stance.

Not all respondents understood that human rights are also about women's rights. Despite this tension, a significant number of women interviewed want to main-

For many white women ... being part of the powerful privileged minority ... means acknowledging our place in the complexity of the South African situation and our complicity in oppression.



Denise Ackermann

The reality of women's oppression by men ... seems to lie at the core of reasons articulated by members of the Black Sash for the exclusion of men from their organisation.

tain the present character of the Black Sash as an organisation of women only and are in favour of the furthering of women's rights.

Despite its human-rights stance, there are inherent contradictions in the Black Sash in regard to its composition: members' experience of a situation is rooted in a particular culture and tradition very different from that operating in some Afrikaans circles.

Reaching out to the Afrikaans-speaking section of the white community was raised as a concern by a number of those interviewed. Perceived stumbling-blocks had to do with language, ideological difficulties and general misperceptions. An Afrikaans-speaking member recounts how upset her mother was at her membership of what she viewed as a terrorist organisation. 'My kind, plant hulle nie ook bomme nie?' Another comment was: 'Ek begin nou glo dat Sash hulle eiesoortige Engelse gees wil behou.'

In my interview with members, *conscientisation* surfaced in two guises. In the first, many respondents described how moral outrage and anger and a growing awareness of injustice became a process of conscientisation, leading to the desire for change. This is experienced as a prime motivation in their membership of the Black Sash. Commitment, as a step following conscientisation, is clearly detected in the dedication of Black Sash members to the organisation and its goals.

Secondly, once the link between women and poverty was pointed out, respondents overwhelmingly affirmed the Black Sash's need to be involved with women's issues.

A press statement issued after the 1990

National Conference recorded the agreement that the question 'how will this affect women?' would be posed in connection with all Black Sash endeavours. This represents a first and important step towards addressing *women's issues* as part of the Black Sash's agenda.

Another fact that emerged in my research was that women in the Black Sash find their membership of the organisation affirming to themselves. This is expressed in a number of ways as empowering, challenging, educative and growthful. Does this mean that their experience of the Black Sash as affirming, is linked to the fact that it consists of women only? Once again the spectre of exclusivity appears.

Men as victims of apartheid benefit from the Black Sash's human-rights praxis. They are, however, excluded from sharing fully in that praxis and, therefore, arguably from an activity which may be as affirming to them as it is to women. Fears expressed by respondents about men 'taking over' are directed at white middle-class males who are clearly members of the oppressor group.

Most women interviewed were suspicious of the motives and behaviour patterns of men. The reality of women's oppression by men surfaced in the research and seems to lie at the core of reasons articulated by members of the Black Sash for the exclusion of men from their organisation.

Another problematic concept for the Black Sash is the *question of solidarity*. How can privileged middle-class whites authentically show solidarity with oppressed black people? It involves struggle, risk and commitment. In this respect, I met with moving acts of solidarity on the part of individual members of the Black Sash. However, it is doubtful whether the Black Sash as an organisation can be said to be in

key definitions

Some brief explanations for a few key terms used by Denise Ackermann:

Conscientisation means 'making conscious' and alludes to a process of discovery of self as oppressed which leads to the desire for change and the search for affirmation and wholeness. It leads to a critical consciousness whereby people enter into the historical process actively.

Feminism is used here to spell out a commitment to women's struggles against oppression. I define feminism as the commitment to the praxis of liberation for women from all that oppresses us. Feminism does not benefit any specific group, race or class of women, neither does it promote privilege for women over men. It is about a different consciousness, a radically transformed perspective which questions our social, cultural, political and religious traditions

and calls for structural change in all these spheres.

Feminist liberation theology

A feminist theology is more profound than the search for equality in religious structures. Churches which have allowed women in at every level as full members have kept their patriarchal nature intact.

Feminist liberation theology aims at the liberation of all women and all men, and the transforming of religious structures. This means that male hierarchies should no longer be held normative in determining people's worth. Ultimately, feminist liberation theology is concerned with men's conversion from sexism.

solidarity at all times with those who are oppressed. Its very white middle-class and privileged character militates against such unconstrained solidarity.

This leads in turn to the *basic anthropology* (views on humanity) at work in the Black Sash. There is no one view of humanity. Members exhibit a diversity of views on what it means to be human in their descriptions of how they view the praxis of the Black Sash. The anger and moral outrage at what is being done to people under apartheid legislation strongly suggests an anthropology that values the dignity and worth of people. To what extent, however, does a *relational anthropology* function in the Black Sash – those transformative understandings which want not only a newly integrated self, but a newly integrated social order?

Relational views in the Black Sash

Clearly, the Black Sash's concern with a human-rights ethos in which the desire for justice is central, reflects the opposite of an alienated and apathetic stance. Clearly too, its stand against racism further emphasises an awareness of relationality. However, the sexually exclusive nature of the organisation does raise the issue of exclusivity which is incompatible with a relational view of humanity.

Within the organisation itself there appears to be a high degree of relationality. The repeated affirmation by many members of close friendship, of bonding and sisterhood, affirm this view.

A number of questions are pertinent in this regard. Firstly, how much is this 'internal' relationality an expression of women's needs? Secondly, what does the resistance to feminism, the women's group and, in some instances,

lesbian lifestyles, say about the kind of relationality sought or expressed in the Black Sash? The recent interest in and concern for the environment emanating from the women's group in Cape Town is a further step towards relationality.

Finally, is the relationality which functions to a fairly high degree among members in the organisation a relationality of the like-minded with regard to culture and language?

This raises the issue of *Afrikaans-speaking women*. It is arguably easier to express concern for your neighbour who is either like you or who is far less privileged than you are, than to express relationality towards those who differ culturally yet belong to the same class and oppressor group as you do. Stereotypes about Afrikaners are dangerous and the Black Sash will need to examine its own prejudices in this regard. Liberating praxis cannot afford to be discriminatory.

On the other hand, and in retrospect, the organisation is far less homogeneous than appeared at the outset of my research. It is a measure of the relationality among members that a variety of different opinions, political persuasions, beliefs and ways of being are tolerated and accepted.

The Black Sash places a high premium on *informing through communication*. In the perceptions of those spoken to, informing as unrestricted communication and liberating praxis go together. To know is to do and, conversely, to do is to know.

The Black Sash values the free and unre-

Stereotypes about Afrikaners are dangerous and the Black Sash will need to examine its own prejudices in this regard. Liberating praxis cannot afford to be discriminatory.

Liberation simply means 'to set free'. Those of us working within a feminist perspective believe this cannot be localised within a particular class or group.

Liberating praxis is the ongoing struggle against oppressive structures that exploit people and rob them of their full humanity. It aims at realising alternative social structures and relations which will foster the values of the 'kingdom' of God.

The personal is political!

This slogan encapsulates the belief that there is no valid dichotomy between the private and public arenas. In fact, their maintenance as separate spheres assists in perpetuating domination because of excessive preoccupation with personal morality at the expense of a social conscience.

Patriarchy denotes the legal, economic and social system that validates and enforces the sovereignty of the male head of the family over its other members. It describes by implication woman's subordination to male figures in her personal, societal and religious experiences.

Relationality is the expression of love for self and neighbour as well as the result of praxis directed towards this goal. Relationality is the opposite of alienation.

I find myself questioning those who see the need or inclination for relationality as peculiar to women. The fact that women articulate this need could simply stem from their existential reality of being the Other. If relationality is the opposite of alienation, men need it as much as women do in order to find their authentic selves. □

Th only valid reason for an autonomous women's organisation to constitute itself as such is to fight for women's rights against sexism. The notion of feminist separatism as an interim strategy and an expression of affirmative action is necessary and self-evident.

stricted exchange of views and information, and its committed stand over the years against censorship testifies to this commitment. Freedom of speech as a basic human right is both a respected ideal and operational within the Black Sash.

To return to the problematic nature of exclusivity in the Black Sash referred to previously, several points need to be noted. Its 'whiteness' is inherently part of its history. Linguistic and cultural factors also present barriers to the participation of Afrikaans-speaking women, who again may find the praxis too radical!

The *middle-class* character of the Black Sash is again partly due to its historical development, not unconnected to its 'whiteness'. There is, however, evidence that members, in recent times, have become more sensitive to the issues raised by class distinctions, largely due to challenges posed by younger members within the organisation.

The *English-speaking* nature of the organisation was not so evident at its inception and is to be regretted; it is to be hoped that change will take place in this regard.

The real problem lies in the insistence of the Black Sash since the outset on remaining an *all-women's organisation*, while at the same time claiming to be a human-rights organisation. From a feminist perspective these two points of view are incompatible. The only valid reason for an autonomous women's organisation to constitute itself as such is to fight for women's rights against sexism. The notion of feminist separatism as an interim strategy and an expression of affirmative action is necessary and self-evident.

The Black Sash has as yet not aligned itself with the above perspective as an explicit aim. It would seem that the connection between human rights and women's rights has not yet been fully understood. Considerable ambivalence is shown with regard to realising the implications of liberating praxis by women for women.

What is clear is that more members of the Black Sash call themselves 'feminist' than had been anticipated. However, there is a measure of resistance against the Black Sash coming to be seen as a feminist organisation. This is thought to detract from its human-rights thrust.

Feminism as the commitment to the praxis for the liberation of women from all that oppresses us is not distinct from human rights. The tendency to rank and stratify human rights has resulted in women's rights not receiving the attention due to them. An increased understanding in the Black Sash about what the term 'feminism' actually implies in practice may

help to alleviate some of the fears expressed by members.

I do agree with one respondent who felt that the Black Sash is far more feminist than it cares to acknowledge. The question of men who support feminist principles, however, remains a niggling question for the Black Sash.

There is a need for the Black Sash to involve itself in more thorough social analysis. Such analysis must engage critically with the organisation's own nature and aim in the South African context. The challenge to the Black Sash is to examine its tendency to exclusivity.

The interdependence of individuals, of communities, of society and of humanity with the environment, means that our interests in survival, and consequently our rights as well, are interdependent. Moreover, an honest critique of one's social and economic status informed by good social analysis, enables one to understand better not only one's own experience, but also to locate this experience within the dialectic of oppressor and oppressed in the South African context. Lastly, a more profound analysis of human rights and women's rights in particular, will help the Black Sash to direct its liberating praxis in the uncertain times ahead.

At present it appears that the profile of the Black Sash is changing and that the organisation is in a state of flux. Since more members of the Black Sash are working women than ever before, the structures of the Black Sash and its methods of working are being challenged to accommodate the needs of these women.

In conclusion, the central concern of the Black Sash with praxis directed towards justice, freedom, equality and sharing stands as its monument over a period of 35 years. Whatever constraints its own history has placed on its composition and development, whatever labels and baggage it has carried and whatever inconsistencies in regard to its concepts of human rights are apparent, its deeds speak louder. It

**Silent protest stand
in 1955, the
founding year of
the Black Sash;
four women stand
in symbolic vigil
outside the
Raadsaal
Bloemfontein,
marking the
announcement of
the dissolution of
the senate. The
Afrikaans wording
on Black Sashes is
a reminder that the
English-speaking
nature of the
organisation was
not so evident at its
inception.**



has communicated what a press commentator described as 'a quality of humane practicality that makes it a model for any human-rights organisation'.

Theologically speaking, the praxis of the Black Sash is consonant in a number of respects with the implementation of the values of the 'Kingdom of God'. It is justice-centred and its praxis involves caring for one's neighbour in a tangible way. Its actions are directed towards freedom, equality and dignity for all in our context. The ideals of peace and wholeness are present in the organisation's hopes for the future.

Liberating praxis involves dedication and risk, both of which are present in the Black Sash. The belief that human rights are worth working and risking for because they hold the promise of a better future for all in this country, holds in tension both the 'already' and the 'not yet' reminiscent of the 'Kingdom of God'. The Black Sash communicates liberating praxis.

A challenge to women and the church

The Black Sash's praxis challenges white middle-class women, and indeed all middle-class women. It provides an effective answer to the perennial question: 'But what can we do?' To black women who are less privileged, it may hopefully have communicated something about a human-rights ethos which cares about justice and equality for all people. To white women of conscience, it has communicated that praxis for freedom is a convincing way to begin to overcome the actuality of being an oppressor.

I have critiqued the Black Sash for its inconsistency in wanting to remain both an all-women's organisation and a human-rights organisation, but in the light of what might be termed its 'latent' feminism, it is justifiable to assume that it is open to a feminist analysis. In terms of such analysis, it is communicating the

possibility of solidarity and sisterhood as one of the fruits of liberating praxis.

Given the great differences between women's experiences in our context, some feminists are tempted to discard the idea of sisterhood as a political reality. Thus the women of the Black Sash, in fact all women, are challenged to analyse their situations of oppression and to ask whether there is not greater effectiveness in the struggle for equality and justice in a bonding together in sisterhood. The growing interest within the Black Sash as regards women's issues augurs well for the development of the notion of sisterhood.

I would suggest that such bonding needs to be based on a commitment to a feminist liberating praxis. The Black Sash has come a long way towards demonstrating what women can do when they bond together for a political aim. Even if its agenda does not move further in a feminist direction, it will already have served as a model for women seeking solidarity.

I believe that the praxis of the Black Sash communicates something to all churches in South Africa. Communicative praxis is a dialectical event. Christian actions are formed, informed, corrected and challenged by the actions of people 'outside the camp' which are inherently compatible with the values of the 'Kingdom of God'.

The single-minded application of a human-rights praxis by the Black Sash mirrors something of the quest for justice based on values that embody caring for one's neighbour. Their record in the struggle for liberation is one which the church might well envy. Their present engagement is one which the church could emulate.

The fact that this concrete struggle for justice expressed in liberating praxis is carried out by a group of women, may be a more difficult message for the church to decipher. It challenges the male-dominated hierarchies of the church to examine their own paucity of praxis.

The skills, dedication, quality of leadership and originality of praxis of the Black Sash make a mockery of the stereotyped views of women which still permeate church thinking. □

Whatever constraints [the Black Sash's] history has placed on its composition and development, whatever labels and baggage it has carried and whatever inconsistencies in regard to its concepts of human rights are apparent, its deeds speak louder.



Denise Ackermann is a theologian and senior lecturer at the University of the Western Cape. She joined the Cape Western region of the Black Sash after completing her research.

The concept of women as victims would seem to be empirically substantiated especially in periods of crisis such as we have with the Natal conflict. A consultation of monitoring records yields a dismal, gory and heart-rending catalogue of items like: 'woman (54) attacked and stabbed to death by a group of people'; 'comrades stabbed to death a 70-year-old woman'; '60-year-old woman burnt to death when petrol was thrown over her by a group', '14-year-old girl abducted; body found with stab wounds'; 'two women were killed inside their house'.

It is especially the very young and the very old women who have been victims. Young women's education has been interrupted. They have been vulnerable to rape. Indeed, rape is so commonplace in the townships that it is seldom reported. Not only do youths rape the women of the opposition but, as happens in all wars, the cult of machismo flourishes; there is general brutalisation, and young women are objects of pleasure and contempt.

Understandably, there are many single mothers. Of the many old women in displacee camps, who have lost their homes and all of their possessions, some have the responsibility of looking after the young families of dead sons or daughters.

But Debbie Bonnin rightly insists, in a draft of a paper entitled 'Women in the War in Natal', that the women have not been merely victims but also agents who have contributed to the war dynamic. While not active perpetrators they have been a powerful force in the war even if only by keeping things going at home.

Bonnin quotes Wendy Annecke in her listing of various new tasks women have taken on: searching for missing relatives; protecting sons and relatives in hiding; defending their homes and possessions; looking after the injured and, if necessary, taking them to hospital.

Bonnin further speaks of women's boldness in defying the bans on funerals or vigils and in defying police orders, for example in order to attend to a wounded comrade. She notes that women have more leeway than men in verbally

women in the natal conflict

Women are not only victims of the Natal conflict, writes Fidela Fouche, but also agents who use their considerable power within the patriarchal framework to further the war dynamic. However, she also discerns the faint beginnings of a challenge to these values.



Woman's Day rally, August 1989, Edenvale, Pietermaritzburg

Aron Mazel

abusing the police (is this because even the police have deeply ingrained inhibitions which make it unlikely that they will mete out the same degree of violence to women as to men?).

Further, women on both United Democratic Front/African National Congress (UDF/ANC) and Inkatha sides have been known to cheer and ululate to encourage their men to join battle. The women - largely middle-aged women - who have been agents rather than victims, have found themselves empowered by the conflict situation, having taken on responsibilities and developed capacities which in more tranquil times might have lain dormant.

While young women are largely victims of the war, some - a roughly estimated one in 20 - young ANC women are pro-actively involved with Umkhonto we Sizwe and with

organisations like the Congress of South African Students (Cosas). The women of Inkatha, it seems, are more exclusively engaged in purely supportive roles. It has been claimed that such cohesiveness as remains in the war-afflicted societies is ascribable to the strength of the women.

Bonnin says that the high number of marches and protests in the Pietermaritzburg area - she lists 21 - suggests a very high level of organisation amongst the women. But these have wrongly been termed peace marches, she claims. Although the ultimate aim might be peace, each of the marches has had a specific goal - usually a protest against police activity - which is only one in a long list which needs to be met in order to bring about peace.

In applying Posel's categories of power and authority, Bonnin concludes that none of the women's marches and protests challenge men's authority. The women, however assertive and defiant, retain their feminine gender roles and do not transgress into the realm of masculine gender roles.

Bonnin observes that, far from challenging male authority, the women tend to make their complaints through the powerful men of their community. Their tendency both to exploit and simultaneously submit to their men is shown also by the fact that at least some of the marches were led by a man.

And yet there have been women's peace rallies. On these occasions, with women calling for peace, there is a tacit note of resistance to the war waged by men. War is a patriarchal value and women rallying for an end to war are asserting their own values against those of patriarchy.

Possibly we can discern here the beginnings of a feminist consciousness which calls not only for equality but also questions patriarchal values. Marxist and socialist feminism can help us recognise and encourage the dialectic between black - and other - women's profoundly conditioned subservience to patriarchy and their assumption and development of their own powers until they are able to challenge patriarchal authority. □

Women taking the initiative: Pauline Stanford and Jabu Ngidi, NUMSA organiser and shop-steward respectively, addressing a Women's Day rally.



Aron Mazel

Women's power, men's authority

Fidela Fouche examines the claim that the urban Zulu woman's situation can be regarded as a special case from a gender perspective. She argues that all women are prey to the tension between theory and practice as they struggle to extend women's power beyond the constraints of men's authority.

In her paper 'Women's powers, men's authority: Rethinking patriarchy' presented at the Gender Conference (30 January to 2 February 1991) in Durban, Deborah Posel points to what she sees as a contradiction between the growing socio-economic, social and political independence of urban African women and their continued widespread acceptance of patriarchal norms. There are many female-headed households, many women choose to avoid marriage, and women often take the initiative in organising marches and protests. Yet patriarchal ideology continues to be deeply entrenched. Posel quotes C. Campbell's observation that although men 'tend to play a more marginal role in family life than their wives ... township ideology still holds fast to the notion that men should take the lead in family decision-making'.

Posel believes that explaining this 'dialectic between female resistance to and acquiescence in their subordination' is central to an understanding of gender relations in South Africa. She questions whether orthodox notions of patriarchy can go far in making sense of the empirical contradiction and argues that the existing body of feminist theory is 'unable to penetrate this enigma'.

Both structural marxist feminists and radical feminists see male domination as a monolithic relationship in which women are wholly the victims

'... women's responses to patriarchal norms [are] a mix of acceptance and rejection, compliance and rebellion'

of oppressive gender relations. Neither accords women powers of their own and neither would therefore be able to account for the contradiction between African women's thorough socialisation into patriarchal values, and their simultaneous economic, social and political independence.

The theoretical problem remains of how to account for 'women's responses to patriarchal norms as a mix of acceptance and rejection, compliance and rebellion'.

Posel discusses a further kind of marxist thinking – socialist feminism – which rejects the determinism of structuralist marxism and has the concept of 'struggle' take over from 'structure' as the principal analytical tool. She agrees with Belinda Bozzoli's recognition that there is no single pattern of struggle but rather a 'patchwork quilt' of patriarchies, a variety of kinds of patriarchal relation patterns.

Posel concedes that Bozzoli's argument is an important advance on the structuralist marxist and radical feminist alternatives, but still does not see it as making sense of urban African women's simultaneous submission to patriarchal norms in some respects and their rejection of these norms in other respects. She concludes that the radical feminist, structuralist marxist and socialist humanist feminist theories do not provide the theoretical tools necessary to explore the 'contradictory' nature of urban African gender relations.

Posel accepts Bozzoli's 'crucial point' that gender relations are rooted in struggles in which both men and women exercise power and she proceeds to develop her own distinction between 'different types of power and how these differences shape relations between men and women'.

It is by distinguishing between 'power' and 'authority' that Posel seeks to make the contradiction she observes in Zulu women's thought and behaviour understandable. In patriarchal society men have authority: women have power.

Power 'can be loosely understood as the capacity of an individual or group to further their interests in the face of actual or potential resistance from others. Authority is a particular type of power: it is power which is *legitimised* in terms of the hegemonic ideology of the society in question – power which is therefore defined by the law, dominant media and other key socialising institutions, as right and just ... authority is power which is publicly and formally represented as legitimate' and which is 'grounded (in some degree) of consent on the part of the subject of that authority'.

Men monopolise authority

In patriarchal societies men monopolise authority over what are considered to be 'important' issues while women are granted the power to decide on less 'important' matters like choosing their children's clothes. Men's authority both enables and constrains women's powers, and in exercising their powers women prop up men's authority. Women, for example, often achieve their aims, possibly by resorting to subterfuges, but without challenging men's authority.

Posel identifies two different types of struggle: struggle in which women seek to extend their powers without

challenging men's authority, and struggle in which they contest men's authority. In the first case we have struggle *within* the patriarchal framework, in the second a rejection of patriarchal norms. Posel concludes that perhaps there is no contradiction in black urban women's situation, and that black women as bearers of power who do not contest patriarchal authority may be acting consistently.

Posel's distinction between authority and power gives us a conceptual scheme which helps illuminate black South African women's relationship

... The power-authority model, while elucidating black women's situation in South Africa, is equally applicable to the relations between men and women elsewhere in the world.

to patriarchy. In the South African liberation struggle, as in other struggles against colonial oppression, women in supporting their men have harnessed their powers to a struggle in which they identified with their men's liberation rather than their own.

Admittedly black women will benefit from national liberation. Their enfranchisement will be a great step towards freedom from racial oppression. But it will not free them from patriarchal oppression. Their power will remain largely contained by men's authority.

But I think that the power-authority model, while elucidating black women's situation in South Africa, is equally applicable to the relations between men and women elsewhere in the world. The case of Zulu women should not need special elucidation, as Posel would suggest.

Women elsewhere exercise their power without necessarily antagonistically confronting patriarchal authority. It is especially understandable that there should be some tension between a theoretically held position on patriarchy and a succumbing to it in practice; an open defiance of oppressive patriarchal structures at a political level but a subservience at a personal level to the authority of male employers, husbands, lovers; a tendency to placate rather than defy.

Even in countries where feminist consciousness is highly developed, women will to some degree – inadvertently or deliberately – exercise their powers within the framework of patriarchal authority. The potency of gender socialisation is such – it operates at so profoundly unconscious a level – that resistance will, almost inevitably, be inconsistent especially in a society where there is not yet a consistent feminist programme.

'Contradictions' forge bonds

'Contradictions' in urban African relations seem to me scarcely 'enigmatic': indeed inconsistency and ambivalence are common features of human thought and behaviour, men's and women's. Although 'white' feminism has seemed, to black women involved in the struggle against oppression along with their men, to be a luxury they could not afford in the face of the more immediate pressing needs for political liberation, rapport is possible.

The 'contradictions', far from setting urban black women apart in a category distinct from women elsewhere in the world should help to forge a bond. All women have been subjected to gender-stereotyping; feminist women have resisted this subjection but not necessarily with complete success.

Further, just as the power-authority schema elucidates women's relationship to patriarchy not only in black South African society, but everywhere, so to claim that existing Western feminist theory cannot elucidate gender relations here is misleading. Not only is it strategically more important now for black and white women to become aware of what they have in common rather than of what distinguishes them from each other, but historical differences are in fact far from insuperable.

Radical and marxist feminists in viewing women as wholly or primarily victims of oppressive gender relations are to a great extent right. But so are the liberal and socialist feminists who recognise that women are also agents. □

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letters from eastern europe

Bronwyn Brady, Black Sash member and ex-fieldworker in Grahamstown, kept a record of her impressions during an extended working visit to eastern Europe.

These extracts from her letters fall into three parts. In the first she draws parallels between eastern European and South African experiences from her base in Prague where she is pictured above. The second on page 33 records an interview with Olga Havel, subsequently censored. In the final extract the interview is cast into a new perspective as a 'minor pawn' in a system of power plays. All are drawn together in her closing reflections on the position of women in Czechoslovakia (see p. 35).

Berlin was a good place to start eastern Europe in earnest. The two worlds, east and west, are side by side, and still quite distinct from one another, and you are continually confronted by the contrast, rather than relying on memory. The first thing to notice is how much like South Africa Berlin feels. The air is full of an all too familiar tension, and it was quite unnerving being thrown back into it. People and ideas are automatically radicalised in the west. Capitalism is enormously aggressive.

On one point all Germans seem to be in agreement, and that is that unifi-

cation came too fast. I haven't met anyone who says that there shouldn't be a united Germany, but easterners feel that they have been bought out by a system they do not necessarily want, and westerners feel that there ought to have been a referendum on both sides before anything else.

The housing crisis in Germany is being vigorously addressed. The state is raising massive pre-fabricated concrete apartment blocks, not much prettier than the ones 'the communists' put up after the war, and horribly reminiscent of similar developments in England that are now being demolished.

The people's option is to squat. In the east, there is .. much a shortage of housing as a superfluity of bureaucracy, and people will often find an empty flat, find out the rent number, and move in.

For older people in eastern Germany, change is something of a nightmare. Life-savings and pensions were devalued overnight as the currencies were balanced. The ownership of many buildings is now in dispute, and people are facing eviction and homelessness. Prices have gone up and salaries have not. Unemployment is growing as uneconomical enterprises are shut down. The massive west German social-welfare system is being extended to the east, but I don't think that charity was the object of the revolution. When I left Dresden to travel to Prague, people were queuing at pharmacies because west German manufacturers had refused to sell their products more cheaply in the east, and there was an estimated supply of two weeks' worth of medicines left.

Prague

Now that I am living right in the centre of Prague, I am getting more of a feeling of what it is like to be an ordinary person in Czechoslovakia. It is not as expensive as one might think. Our building is old, and not in a great state of repair, but it is still state-owned and we pay state prices which have not yet gone up. Some flats nearby, though, are just a room with running water. My friend Anna speaks darkly of the gypsies who live in the building, and who make it worse than it already is.

To my alarm, even the best Czechs are instinctively racist, and the gypsy 'problem' provokes intense debate. Mostly the racism is part of a genuine sense of the otherness of black people. For a long time here you never saw any foreigners at all, unless they were east Germans, and you certainly never saw any black people. I was in the theatre a couple of nights ago, and a group of black Americans came in to see the show. It was a mime, done by a group of French clowns, so there were a lot of children in the audience, and mothers were pointing the Americans out to their kids and explaining that there were people in the world who weren't white.

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I live comfortably on my salary as a second-language English teacher, but it must be nightmarish trying to provide for more than one person on a salary of this size. Marie, who is married, says that food for a family of three for a month costs one basic salary. Therefore, to survive, *every* adult has to work. And now with the onset of privatisation and retrenchment, people are beginning to experience real hardship. Disgruntled people often say, 'It was better under the communists.' I don't know about better, but I am sure that it was easier. Freedom is not an easy thing to deal with.

Prague is becoming for me a symbol of the national mood. Above all, it is a city of contrast. It is exceptionally beautiful, and very ugly. It is reckless with hilarity and sunk in gloom. It is quiet orderly symmetry, and loud chaotic discord. These things are evident in the physical make-up of the city, and even more evident in the people. And in the people you feel more keenly the mixture of desperation and courage that seems to underlie these extremes.

In his first national address in November 1989, Václav Havel spoke of Czechoslovakia as a house in need of renovation. In 1990 he said that it had become clear on close inspection that the house was not a house at all, but a ruin, and was going to have to be completely rebuilt. This massive reconstruction is testing to the limit the imagination, courage and endurance of a nation all but spiritually exhausted.

In his 1978 essay *The Power of the Powerless* Havel examined the nature of dissent within the east-bloc countries. He concluded that the solution for a posttotalitarian state is not the adoption of democracy. What is needed 'is the rehabilitation of values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, love'. This sounds almost naïve until one notices the degree to which the opposite of those values is inherent in this society. So I have realised how radical, in fact, his approach is. And how difficult. And I can't help thinking of home, and the desperate juggling of systems and possibilities going on, perhaps to the exclusion of the welfare of the individuals who lie at the heart of it all.

Of course there are exceptions.

There is a vibrant community of people attached to the university and to the theatres and art world who are full of all those things – trust, openness, responsibility and love – and who exercise them in their daily lives. Anna, Rudolf and Vladimir, for instance, who have adopted me with such ease and generosity, who take time out of their lives to guide me through the maze of bureaucracy and form-filling associated with registering to live in Prague, who take me to the theatre and to movies; and Andrew, who has a car, and who plots weekend excursions to castles and mountains, and Iva who went to work in Germany and left me her skis.

The environment – natural and political

Vladimir is a landscape architect, who has just been made responsible for an awful industrial area of Prague. His most recent problem centres on a building near a factory which emits by-products from a process involving chrome. The walls of the building are stained bright yellow, and residents have complained that this is not healthy. Now Vladimir is involved in analysing samples of plaster from the building, and thinking of ways to get the factory to clean up its act. Stories like this are common.

There is a real fear among people of environmental hazards. Both Iva and Anna, who are 23 and 24 years old, think that it is probably too late to contemplate having children. They have both lived in and around Prague all their lives, and feel that they have now absorbed too many teratogens to make the risk (of congenital malformations) worthwhile.

And in between the politicking, protesting and worrying, we continue to breathe the air and drink the water – or at least the beer that is made from the water. One of the things that is often discussed over the beer is the revolution. For many people it still has a ring of unreality to it. They can't believe that it really happened. Others are sceptical about gracing it with the name 'revolution'.

Apart from the extremists, however, I don't think that there is anybody who would wish the revolution undone. The first thing people will tell you they are glad of is the chance to

travel. A friend spent half her savings on books. She says that the best thing about the new order is being able to choose, being able to take personal responsibility for her life again.

For people like the foreign minister, Dienzbeer, it means release from manual labour as a stoker, and the chance to take his rightful place as a leader in society. For people like Anna, who studied law and felt unable to practise it under the old regime, it means that she can finally do what she is best qualified to do. There has been an unleashing of human potential that is very exciting. I hope that the same thing will happen at home.

But while some potential has been unleashed, there is not enough expertise to go round, and there is a kind of national unease at the presence of so many ex-communists in the current government. There is, however, no other way, power having been so closely concentrated in so few hands for so long.

So far, from his neutral position as president, Havel is doing an extraordinary job steering through a very emotional issue. Even he, however, is having trouble containing the potential witch-hunt for the estimated 10 000 spies and informers of the previous regime, many of whom still hold public positions. They are at the moment being strongly urged to resign voluntarily.

Bringing cheer to our TV screens last night was the Miss Czechoslovakia competition. It had me in fits of rage and despair, of course, and everyone else took a perverse pleasure in earnestly totting up the scores and debating the merits of the contestants just to annoy me.

Apart from the feminist angle it seemed to be a programme designed to show the worst of the west. The cheap glitz, the big prize sponsorship from the casinos that have sprung up in the cities – one had the feeling that hovering just around the edges was a burgeoning pornography industry. One did not have the feeling that hovering around the edges behind them was a women's movement. It sent me off to bed thinking again about the problems of 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'.

□

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Olga Havel or Havlová, to use the correct Czech designation, is reputed to be a difficult, cold woman who has little patience with the press and who suffers fools not at all. She is also something of an enigma, surrounded by rumour. It was thus with some trepidation that I found myself ringing her doorbell on a fine March afternoon.

A young man led us upstairs where Jana Novotná, my translator friend, was required to produce her identity document. We were told that we were being 'cleared', and we waited in a large entrance hall. This flat was once home to the Havels, but they were persuaded to live at Prague Castle by anxious security officials. Now there are piles of cardboard boxes tottering dangerously, a wheelchair, a glimpse of a computer-filled inner room, posters of underground musicians and folk singers, and a large terracotta urn with the names of Havel's plays painted on it, and a ribbon in Czechoslovakian colours tied around it with a rakish bow.

It is from this flat that Havlová now runs the Olga Havel Foundation, or Vybor Dobré Vule (VDV), literally translated as the Goodwill Organisation. It is essentially a humanitarian organisation which aims to help the estimated one million people in the Federation of Czechoslovakia who are physically and mentally handicapped, old, or for other reasons unable to care for themselves.

The organisation consists of Havlová, ten other committee members, and about one hundred volunteers. They have an enormous task. In the words of the foundation's policy statement: 'Hitherto, long-term social policy has put them into isolation, pushed them out of our sight into institutions and institutes, where often the basic conditions for dignified life, nursing staff, and proper equipment are missing. We have all become used to separating the helpless, afflicted and old from the healthy and young.'

This small group of people is working against what Havlová has elsewhere referred to as the destruction of society. Immorality, she says, was a

Olga Havel: citizen, woman



Czechoslovakia's 'first lady' Olga Havel responds to Bronwyn Brady's questions about women. There is an unspoken second story too ...

way of life, and now it is necessary to try to undo the attitude that equates 'good' with 'stupid'. This intention to influence society and its current thinking lies at the heart of the VDV.

But I wanted to talk to Havlová not so much about VDV as about women in Czechoslovakia. The word 'feminist' is defined in Czechoslovakia much the way that Virginia Woolf defined it in *Three Guineas*: '... a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete'. Unlike Woolf, however, women here do not go on to assert that they suffer fundamental injustice on the grounds of their sex.

International Women's Day passed without a murmur. It is, it seems, associated with communist rule and is remembered chiefly as a day free from

work on which men went out to the pub and came home reeling. Havlová herself, from the little that can be gathered about her life, has lived with fierce independence, working in the theatre and as a tram driver, and keeping clear of the publicity surrounding her husband. As you will see, however, my attempt to discuss women met with short shrift.

When Havlová appeared she was so unlike the image I had conjured that I could only stumble through an inappropriate greeting. She is a tiny woman, slim and graceful, with a cloud of white hair around her head. She wore burgundy velvet trousers and was brisk and energetic. The nails on her right hand are battered, and it takes a while to realise that the tops of the four fingers on her left hand are missing.

What happened? I don't know. I was firmly instructed not to ask any personal questions, and it is obvious from the steely grey eyes that this is not an injunction to be disregarded. We settled at the end of an extremely long table, she with her dog at her knee and her cigarettes to hand, I with my questions.

What do you think that women's role ought to be in Czechoslovakia at this time?

I don't like questions about women very much because I think that in the first place everyone is a citizen, and after that a woman or a man. That is my opinion.

Do you not think that women as citizens have different attitudes and responses to situations?

Well, I don't know. I don't want it to sound banal. I simply think that women's point of view, men's point of view ... Women should, of course, play a more prominent role in events, but it depends on whether women are interested in doing something or not. That a woman should do something for the sole reason that she is a woman is, I think, really restricting. And the 'women's question' in general as well. Take the example of motherhood. A woman as a mother usually has a different relationship with her children

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from that they have with their father. But the man should have the same relationship with the children. Sometimes this really works. The man is present when the woman gives birth to the child, and so on, so knows what it is like. I think that men should participate more in the rearing of children.

I know that Czechoslovakia has some excellent legislation protecting the rights of women. But in reality there is a wide discrepancy between the ideals of the law and what happens in practice.

Yes, that's true.

You have strong views on communal and social responsibility. But with VDV you have shouldered an enormous task.

Yes, but I want to say that it is not only my work. I try to involve as many people as possible. The experience with [drawing up] Charter 77 showed that it is good when more people get involved. After the revolution, many organisations were founded by handicapped people themselves. Before the revolution there was an ineffective organisation, The Union of Handicapped People. But now the handicapped themselves, or the parents of handicapped children, have taken the initiative, and we co-operate with those organisations.

In South Africa it is often argued that the state has long abrogated its social responsibility to the majority of its citizens, and that it should now accept that responsibility. Private organisations should not do what the state ought to do. Has anyone

ever confronted you with this argument?

Now we are all in the same boat. We are creating a new state, in opposition to the previous totalitarian system, so we are in a bit of a different position. I hope that the issue of welfare will be addressed by legislation, but I know that even in well-developed countries, charity organisations play an important role because no state has ever been rich enough to solve all its problems. For example, money is given to the army. The recent war in the Persian Gulf has played into the hands of those who say it is necessary to modernise the army. It is a vicious circle. Although the military industry provides jobs, and it gives jobs to thousands of people, it is a closed circle. And I would like to add, for example, that a public poll recently showed that half the population think it is better to have a higher living standard and an unhealthy environment than to have a lower standard of living but to improve the environment. It was almost fifty-fifty. People want money and will bear the consequences; and perhaps not them but their children. It is a very strange phenomenon, and goes to show that it is necessary to explain over and over that health is more important than money.

How much disability do you see that is a direct result of environmental influences?

The worst situation is in northern Bohemia, and in the Ostrava region. Here women are directly affected. And of course there are problems in Slovakia as well. The situation is really alarming.

Particularly what sorts of problems do women experience?

Their reproductive organs, especially, are damaged, and they have no opportunity to have healthy children.

You have said that VDV should play a watchdog role in parliament, keeping an eye on legislation, especially economic legislation. What is your opinion of current economic reforms?

(Olga Havel subsequently refused to allow the publication of this response.)

You have spoken of a need to establish advice centres for people. How is this work progressing?

There are already some centres like that, and there are people who want to establish more. Many specialists are involved in this work, but of course the process is very slow. For instance, public opinion is against people who are addicted to drugs. Many people see addicts not as ill people, but as criminals.

A growing problem in Prague is homelessness. What are your opinions on this?

As far as I know, the Salvation Army takes care of homeless people in our country. It is a Dutch group which runs a soup kitchen every night on Prague's main station.

(This was an edited response and so was not subject to further questions.) □

the story behind the interview

Bronwyn Brady's covering note about her interview with Olga Havlová

I am profoundly disappointed with the result, because my juiciest bits were cut. Havlová wanted to see what I'd written, so I took in a copy to her office, only to be told that she was in Luxembourg. I left the material there anyway and then called the next day to see if something could be

done. I was told that no one had looked at it yet, but I could come and fetch it in about an hour. I duly did so and got home to find what I consider a radical editing of the material.

Not wanting to publish an interview with Havlová's secretariat, I wrote to ask if she had in fact sanctioned the changes herself. Here the vagaries of language came into play, and I had a tense correspondence with Tatounová, her private secretary. This led to an acrimonious telephone call from her in which I was

told first that Havlová had consulted with Otká Bednárová about the contents of the interview.

When I pointed out the physical impossibility of this the story hastily changed to one of a phone-call – did I not think that this was possible? Indeed it was possible, but was it probable, is the question still in my mind. Anyway, between 10:00 and 11:00 on Tuesday, 19 March, Havlová was telephoned in Luxembourg and discussed my interview, and the results you have before you.

prague women on my mind

In closing reflections from London, Bronwyn Brady focuses on the position of women in Czechoslovakia.

My departure from Prague was a lot more precipitous than I – or anyone else – anticipated. I fell foul of the rapidly-changing legislation, and after haunting the local police station for two weeks, the authorities decided that the best they could do for me was a week's exit visa ...! Anna was as appalled at the suddenness of my departure as I was, and she and Rudolf and Vladimir feasted me royally. And I cooked them boboetie and yellow rice! They saw me off at the airport with tears, and a shirt that reads *Prague on my mind*. And that's very much where it is. The experience of living there has been enormously valuable, and I have yet to assimilate it fully.

Prague confirmed my commitment to feminism as a way of life which is a middle way between the two dictatorial, patriarchal systems of capitalism and socialism. It also brought home to me forcibly that the worst thing about poverty is the spiritual deprivation you suffer, or are made to suffer. It is quite possible to survive on very little, and to live a life of quality, as long as you have self-respect and a sense of worth, and access to a community who can give you these things, or help you build them. It is this community that has been broken in eastern Europe. As people have been disallowed and deprived of responsibility for their lives, a massive spiritual corruption has set in, and this is part of what makes eastern Europe so vulnerable to exploitation by the west.

I landed in London right as the G7 summit started, and my head is spinning as I find myself plunged into the wealth of argument and thinking that is available to me here – and to the

level of which I have become unused.

London also provides a useful vantage point for reflecting back on the position of women in Czechoslovakia. The two things from which women suffer most in Czechoslovakia are the economy and the environment. Under socialism it was a crime not to have a job, and women were allowed two or three years to be at home with their infant children. Now it is an economic necessity to have a job. So, contrary to

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their western sisters, most women in the east would like the opportunity to stay at home. This is also because women are expected to shoulder the full burden of child-care and home management, along with a job, and most of them are perpetually exhausted.

Society remains profoundly patriarchal, and in discussions with my women friends and students, it was very seldom that any of them would criticise their men. Men's work is still seen as inherently more valuable and important than women's work, and housework and childcare are *definitely* not men's work.

Legislation has played into the

hands of this societal system. Women are marvelously protected under existing laws in Czechoslovakia: they are equal to men in all respects. Unfortunately, there has never been any kind of monitoring group to check on the application of that legislation, and so women have never been paid the same as men, or treated the same as men, and they have had to do twice the work. An interesting piece of legislation is in family law, which makes men and women equally (of course) responsible for the maintenance of children. This has led to the situation where women are taken to court and jailed on their husband's evidence for failing to support their children.

Environmentally, women suffer from the exposure of their bodies to teratogens, which often means that they cannot have children or that they risk having deformed children. And it means that women often have care of children who are ill as a direct result of the environment. One of the most frightening things I heard was the proposal by environment minister Vavrousek made during the debate on the first major environmental legislation passed in CSFR since the revolution. It deals with the disposal of waste, and he was discussing additional legislation about breast-feeding and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). These are present to such an extent in meat and dairy products in Czechoslovakia that he suggested a new test for mothers, which would indicate to them whether or not it was safe for them to breast-feed their babies.

There is now a plethora of women's

organisations in Czechoslovakia, although most of them are attached to particular political parties, and are *de facto* catering committees. Other groups organise very much around women-as-mothers-and-wives. One group, whose name belies them completely, is the Prague Mothers. They are women who have organised around the environment, and they are extremely vocal in challenging local government and industry on their environmental performance. The social work department at Charles University is in the process of establishing a women's studies course, but for most people the notion of 'women's organisation' or 'feminism' still implies women who wish to do without men, without children ... all the stereotypes you can think of.

Women are represented in parliament, both federal and republican, but sorely under-represented. And all three parliaments being as overworked as they are, issues that are perceived as 'women's' are pushed to the backburner. And on the whole women deputies are part of the system, operating in patriarchal ways, and playing the power games of politicians. I discovered eventually that my interview with Olga Havel was the victim of one such power-monger. It transpired that Havel had not even heard of the incidents around it, and never saw the subsequent letters I sent to her challenging the censorship. It all fitted into a series of inter-organisation power-plays, and my interview was a minor pawn ...!

The situation is, of course, much more complex than I have represented: much as women in South Africa who are oppressed have special coping mechanisms and have a separate culture from men, so Czech women cope with their oppression by exercising solidarity with one another in a separate culture, which, in Czech anyway, is reflected in the language. Women have a slightly different vocabulary from men, and definitely different tones and speech rhythms. They are strong and vibrant and valiant, and taught me a great deal.

Home is still very much in my thoughts, but more and more I empathise with Virginia Woolf's statement in *Three Guineas* that 'as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.' □

demanding a place under the kgotla tree

The Transvaal Rural Action Committee has been documenting the position of rural women in the western, northern and south-eastern Transvaal. TRAC's report gives voice to this 'silenced majority'.

Although African women in rural areas have borne the burden of family responsibility and labour since the introduction of the migrant and wage labour systems, there has not been a concomitant increase in their power and status within the home and in society in general. In the words of a woman from Driefontein: 'It [a woman's position] is very bad, a woman cannot own anything at home. She is the one who is looking after those things all the time. She is the one who is taking all the responsibility at home. Men, they only come from time to time. So women are the ones who must own the things at home. Even if it is not like that, it must be equal for both.'

Indifference to women's betterment is illustrated by the lack of consultation by husbands on domestic issues; by denial of access to land for gardens or crops by chiefs; and by the hostility of village elders to projects initiated by women to alleviate their burdens – for example, shared childcare and income-generating projects.

Access to land

The greatest problem facing rural women is their lack of legitimate access to land. Traditional systems of land tenure enabled families to claim land from the greater community, and granted the male head of the house-

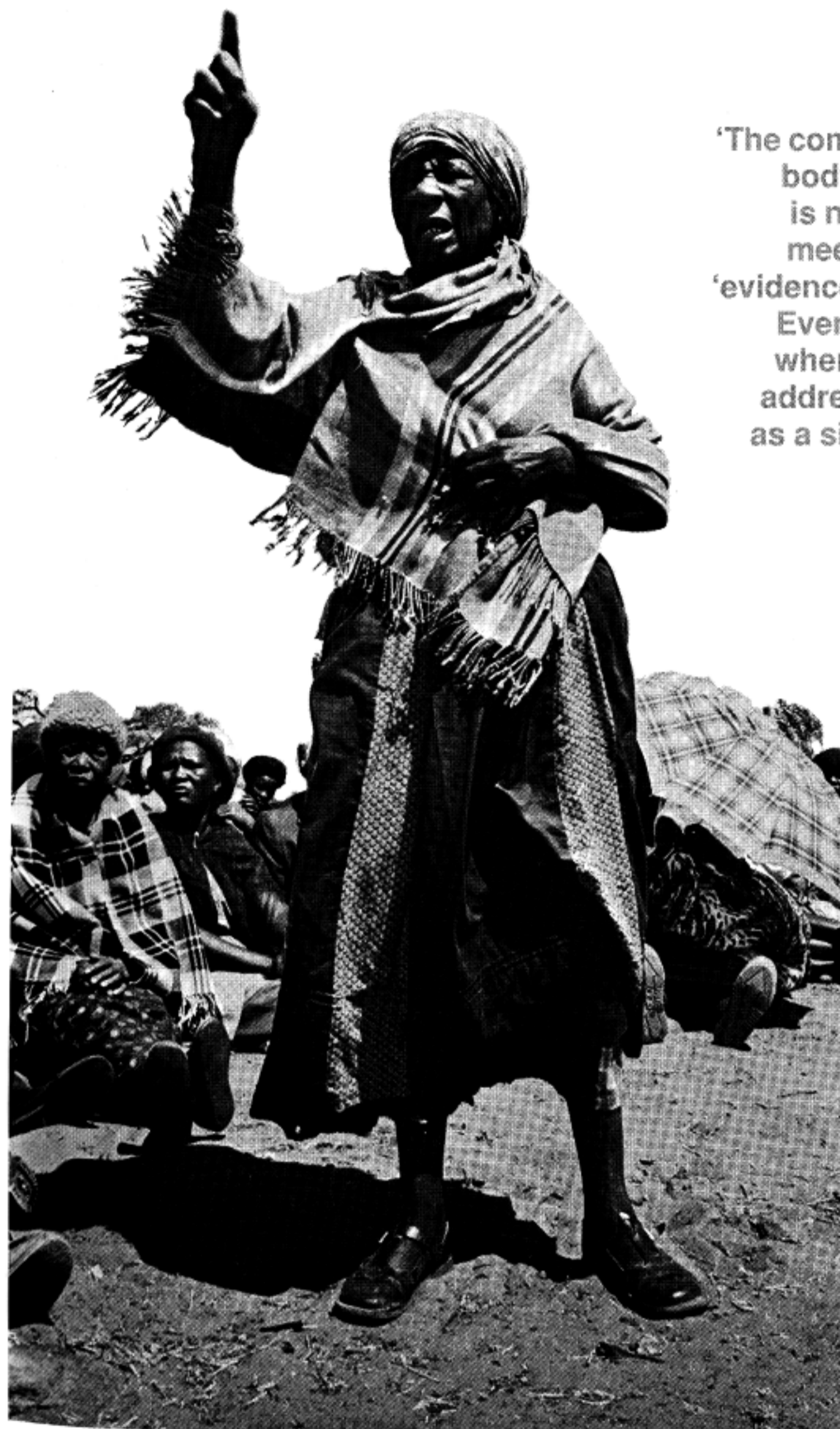
hold certain powers in community decision-making.

The breakdown of traditional household and community organisation has left women in an invidious position. Their assumption of responsibility for land management has not resulted in any formal status in decision-making. They are merely perceived to be operating on behalf of their husbands and not in their own personal capacities.

Women interviewed are primarily involved in three types of land ownership and occupation:

1) *Freehold land*: access to land purchased with title deeds, by individuals or collectives, prior to the restrictive land laws of 1913 and 1936, has not necessarily meant greater security as many have had to battle with the government to resist black spot removal to various 'homelands'. However, freehold has entailed some benefits. Legal title to the land, determined by property law, technically guarantees occupation and, within this law, rules of inheritance apply. Women married under South African law are able to inherit land owned by their husbands and acquire full legal rights to the land.

However, most marriages are still enacted under African customary law which does not entitle women to inheritance. Women are considered minors throughout their lives. Without a will stipulating otherwise, the sons



'The community's decision-making body is the kgotla ... A woman is not allowed to attend kgotla meetings unless called to give 'evidence' at a disciplinary hearing. Even then, she may only speak when asked to do so, and must address the kgotla on her knees as a sign of respect for the men.'

of the landowner will inherit the land. Thus, on her husband's death a woman can become homeless. If she is allowed to remain on the homestead, a male relative will represent her family and interests in the community, and she will be subordinate to him.

Women in rural communities are slowly challenging their powerlessness in freehold tenure. Some interviewees with rights to land stated that they intended to leave the land to both male and female offspring.

2) *Trust lands*: under this form of land tenure, the South African or homeland government controls the land. For individuals, there is far less security of tenure. Chiefs allocate the land. Women are especially vulnerable as they have no rights to land under the regulations governing these areas. A woman living on trust land said: 'An unmarried woman is not allowed to have a site. If she has children, she'll have to wait until her elder son is of age to get an I.D. and have a site to build a house registered in her son's name ... I think it is really disgusting. A single mother is not allowed to have a site to build a house for her children ... We don't approve of it because if you're not married it is not your fault. Marriage is God's gift.'

Although some chiefs allocate sites for old or unmarried women out of sympathy, this is at their own discretion. Upon their husbands' death,

Braklaagte woman speaking at a kgotla. Her bearing illustrates a striking contradiction to traditional norms. Shifts in the attitudes of rural women are increasingly being brought about by the struggle around land issues and emerging forms of organisation (see 'Rural women's movement', page 49).

many widows are left homeless as their sons evict them.

3) *Rural townships*: the regulations governing land allocation in these areas are the same as those in urban townships which are administered by a black local authority.

Access to power

Until recently, unmarried women were not eligible for housing sites. Women were forced to produce marriage certificates in order to get on to the waiting list for a home. If the male head of household died, his wife was liable for eviction. As a woman from Huhudi put it, '... the government would kick you out of the house because you are just yourself in the house, you haven't got a man, and they say you can't afford to pay rent'.

In traditional African society a woman's role is defined in terms of her husband, their children, and his family. Men are assumed to be the thinkers and the decision-makers in all spheres of society.

In traditional African society ... men are assumed to be the thinkers and the decision-makers in all spheres ... Increasingly women are becoming dissatisfied with this exploitation ... women demand their dignity back – it was removed by their own husbands.

Increasingly, women are becoming dissatisfied with this exploitation. A woman from Mogopa said: 'It is well known that men get their dignity from their wives - this should be a two-way process. Women should also be given recognition as important people in the community. Women demand their dignity back - it was removed by their own husbands.'

'The community's decision-making body is the kgotla, which comprises male family representatives elected by extended family networks.' The kgotla advises the chief regarding allocation of land, resolves petty disputes and metes out punishments for offences. A woman is not allowed to attend kgotla meetings unless called to

give 'evidence' at a disciplinary hearing. Even then, she may only speak when asked to do so, and must address the kgotla on her knees as a sign of respect for the men.

Although serious crises of forced removal or incorporation have brought the voice and actions of women to the forefront of their communities' responses to these situations, this has not shifted the traditional power structures. In the trust lands, the government's regulations have entrenched the chiefs' power, thus reducing the flexibility of a system which might otherwise adapt organically.

Many women spoke of their urgent need for greater material security and access to power. Young women ought to have independent access to land. A lack of land may force a woman to marry, and remain with a man despite being abused. While a 'good marriage' remains the highest expectation mothers have for their daughters, they are deeply concerned about the vulnerability of married women in the event of desertion by or death of a husband.

There is a complex inter-relationship between access to land, political and domestic power, and rural women's self-esteem. Access to land is an important factor in this power equation. Women who have legally recognised rights to land are able to assert some degree of power at a local political, as well as domestic level. However, traditional value systems still dictate both men and women's consciousness about themselves and their roles: '... Rural women think that their opinions aren't any good. The way their husbands treat them, they think they are nothing. So they have nothing to say ... it's hard for people to break that down.'

Women articulate clear demands for change, beginning with an improvement in the quality of their lives through the provision of better water, lighting, childcare, education and health facilities.

They desire a marital contract which gives them power within the relationship and the household. Women, whether married or divorced, widowed or single, need political recognition in their own right. Within their families, women's right to a home should be legally sanctioned. Women want equal representation on local political power structures such as the kgotla. Women must gain power in order to encourage the participation of

other women in the political process. They accept the existence of chieftainship, but recommend that chiefs encourage and support women's organisations.

Lack of security in relation to land inhibits their ability to assert themselves, both in the domestic and in the political sphere. Women state unequivocally that entitlement to land should be independent of their relationship with men.

The future

Rural women's access to land and power has been noticeably absent in the debate surrounding land issues, and in the recent government White Paper on land reform. Once again, the needs and aspirations of women are being subsumed in the broader (and to some, more important) political and communal issues of the land question.

Women must be part of the process of policy formation, and their needs must be reflected in the content of new government policy. A priority for po-

Women must be part of the process of policy formation. We must ensure that rural women's concerns are heard in order to guarantee a gender-sensitive policy which includes and reflects their actual needs and aspirations.

litical and development organisations is to promote democratic, representative women's structures, especially in the rural areas. We must ensure that rural women's concerns are heard in order to guarantee a gender-sensitive policy which includes and reflects their actual needs and aspirations.

As a woman from Huhudi said: 'They [rural women] are the women of South Africa, they are waiting to see what will happen in a new South Africa. They wish to reach the new South Africa. Then they would like to hear the voices of the women in the new South African law.' □

the hidden burden

Sue Middleton, Julia Segar, Rosemary Smith and Glenda Morgan participated in an Albany region project which revealed the impact of the detention of activists on the women left behind. Their record of this project brings the experiences of a particular group of women into view.

Between 25 000 and 40 000 South Africans are estimated to have been detained during the second State of Emergency, declared on 12 June 1986. In the Eastern Cape – an area that has come to be characterised by poverty and economic depression – it is estimated that 1 200 had been detained by the end of January 1988.

During these large-scale detentions the Albany Black Sash, together with the Grahamstown Dependents' Conference (DC) (a working division of the South African Council of Churches), was involved in monitoring and debriefing 200 ex-detainees. This included documentation of the circumstances of detention, diet and health care in prison, and the psychological effects of detention.

The women left behind

Through this debriefing work it became clear that it was important to look at the coping strategies that people used both inside and outside prison. It also became evident that the burden of coping often fell on to the shoulders of women. While there were a few women detainees, the vast majority of activists detained were male. It is perhaps an index of women's subordination in South African politics that the majority of activists are men.

We aimed to shift the focus from the detainees to those women who were left behind. We hoped to address, in some small way, the problem articulated by Cheryl Walker: 'the absence from the historical record of women's voices, most pronounced in the case of black women. This weights

research towards organisations, events and individual lives that are documented, and creates a bias towards institutions with records ... [or] major eruptions or disturbances, and the experience of middle-class literate women. In the case of the great mass of women, documentary silence may be erroneously equated with historical passivity or, even worse, with historical insignificance, so that women simply disappear from our view of the past.'

This project was a group effort, undertaken by members of the Albany Black Sash. After drawing up an interview schedule, we embarked upon a process of consultation with communities from which the interviewees were drawn. This took about two months. Our final sample consisted of 24 women living in Grahamstown, Bedford, Adelaide, and Fort Beaufort.

The common denominator among the women was that they bore a major burden of responsibility and stress when their kin were detained.

Financial hardships

Most of our interviewees confirmed that detention had brought extra financial hardships because of the removal of a breadwinner or contributor to household income. Furthermore, detention brought a number of hidden costs – many of which are not quantifiable.

In many instances, children had to be taken out of school as the family could not afford the fees and related expenses. Many women tried unsuccessfully to find jobs – not surprising

given the desperate state of the economy in the Eastern Cape. Financial hardships were felt even more acutely by those in the smaller rural towns. Several families were faced with the loss of their houses as they struggled to pay for rent and services. Other accounts also fell into arrears:

'He [the detainee] helped a lot with money, food and clothes – it was serious when we lost him. I couldn't pay rent. By that stage I was out of work so the girls had to stop school. They never got standard 10. Even now we are still out of work. When he was detained he got three months' pay. Nothing after that.'

A less obvious cost borne by relatives of detainees was the food, clothing and pocket money taken to those in prison. Visitors to the jailed detainees felt guilty if they were unable to take parcels to them – some informants did not visit their loved ones because they had nothing to take to them. Other women opened accounts at clothing stores in order to purchase items for those detained, and were still paying off the debts at the time of our interviews.

Mention must be made of the role of the DC in mitigating these sufferings. Many reported receiving financial aid from DC, including transportation to and from the jails. These trips in minibuses had a positive psychological aspect in that relatives shared their sorrows, and sang and prayed together.

The financial burdens did not necessarily disappear when detainees were released. Aside from the problem of unemployment, medical problems

and their associated costs – both material and emotional – had to be shouldered by the families of the returning prisoners.

Emotional burdens

While it is to be expected that the physical and mental scars of detention remain with the ex-detainee, little attention has been paid to the emotional sufferings of the women left behind. For many women, the detention of their loved ones brought added responsibilities in the form of support for children and grandchildren, keeping families together, and dealing with authorities ranging from police to lawyers, prison warders to store managers.

Most women said that children became more difficult, common responses being loss of appetite, over-dependency and clinging, reluctance to play, a desire to stay indoors, and fear of or increased aggression towards the police.

For most women, family care meant hiding their true feelings and, above all, not giving the detainee any cause for anxiety during visits. Although most suffered from anxiety and stress themselves, they endeavoured to hide these feelings in public. Bad news at home and family problems were not discussed with detainees:

'I kept a cheerful face and hid problems. I inspired the DC Kombi passengers with hymns and prayers so they would not weep and upset the detainees.'

'I pretended I was happy. I was always worried but I didn't want [the detainee] to worry about me.'

Anxiety was clearly exacerbated by the police harassment experienced by a number of women. This ranged from repeated pre-dawn house searches, to difficulties in getting permits for jail visits, to inquiries as to whether the detainee was free when s/he was still incarcerated.

A feature of detention during this period was the regularity with which detainees were moved from one jail to another. All but two of the detainees we learnt about spent time in more than one jail and almost half were imprisoned in three different jails. Often relatives had difficulty in finding out where detainees were being kept. Harassment also took the form of withholding this sort of information, or deliberately misleading individuals as

to the whereabouts of their relatives.

Visits varied in frequency – for most they were permitted twice a month. Half the women said they had difficulty getting permits and many had to wait several weeks. Women in Bedford said they were told that permits were only available in Grahams-town, which involved them in expensive journeys, while Grahamstonians often had to make several trips to Port Elizabeth to get permits.

On the whole, jail visits appear to have been traumatic episodes in themselves. The physical condition of detainees usually gave rise to anxiety and the fact that physical contact was not allowed was particularly painful.

Most of our interviewees said that correspondence with detainees was possible, but difficulties arose from the delays in receiving mail and the high level of illiteracy or semi-literacy amongst the women. Although the detainees would write letters which the women could have read to them, they themselves could not reply. Enclosures such as cards and photographs were usually not passed on to detainees. The long delays in receiving letters added to anxiety and in many instances caused practical problems when detainees made requests unbeknown to their relatives.

After the release

Most ex-detainees that we learnt about suffered from sleeping problems, depression, and mood swings, and many drank heavily. All seem to have experienced some form of post-detention trauma which has placed further burdens on the family.

Women faced with this moodiness and nervousness responded by 'nursing' them, or trying to joke them out of their poor spirits. Many reported that they themselves felt depressed and frightened, and two reported that their relationship with the ex-detainee had broken down entirely.

On a more positive note, many of the women felt that the situation had obliged them to face enormous difficulties and they would be better equipped to cope with crises in the future. They felt stronger and more self-confident, having been obliged to deal with officialdom – getting permits, negotiating accounts, seeing lawyers – in a way that they had never

done before. These responsibilities had led to personal growth.

Destabilised communities

The women we interviewed are undoubtedly strong and many have come through the detentions toughened by their experiences. However, it became obvious to us that detention is not only an assault on the individual and his/her political organisation, but also destabilises whole communities by crippling families and personal relationships. Although some counselling has been provided for the ex-detainees, little provision has been made for those women who shared some of the mental torture of detention, and who in many instances still bear the emotional and material responsibility for individuals and families affected by detention.

The small-town scenario is particularly grim. Even more than in large centres, women were isolated, impoverished, and cut off from information. In places like Fort Beaufort, Adelaide and Bedford, access to permits, lawyers, and to the jails themselves was exceptionally difficult and costly.

In addition, it seems that families of detainees in small towns were sometimes abandoned and ostracised by fearful friends and relatives. There is a tendency when discussing small rural towns to romanticise notions of solidarity and community, but it is important not to take them for granted. Women and their families in those towns often appear to have been the most isolated.

For people in this situation, the church has been an undeniable source of support and solace. This is an important point in view of the fact that half of the interviewees were not themselves involved in political organisations – and, if anything, the detention experience discouraged them from joining such organisations.

While the dark days of the State of Emergency are now behind us, crisis and repression are unfortunately not yet over. We feel that the information presented here gives some insight into the multi-faceted face of repression and the ways in which individuals have coped. We hope too that this material both highlights the vulnerability of women and affirms their strength. □

REVIEWS

Death by Decree: South Africa and the Death Penalty

compiled by Theron, Sloth-Nielsen and Corder
(Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty and Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town, 1991; 46 pages)

According to the preface, this booklet 'attempts to provide facts and points of view about the death penalty, both generally and with particular reference to South Africa. The intention is to stimulate informed debate about the use of the death penalty, while not denying that it is an emotive issue.'

It complements and brings up to date the Black Sash's 1989 research project, *Inside South Africa's Death Factory*, and should be extremely useful as a text for study and discussion by people without legal training, equipping them to argue for abolition.

It considers the moral and practical aspects of capital punishment, the question of its deterrent capacity and its irreversibility. It outlines the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1990), gives facts and figures for South Africa and other countries, poses and answers a number of queries, but skirts the difficult question of alternative 'ultimate' punishment. There are excellent quotations, notably from (outsider) Justice John Didcott, and from (insiders) Breyten Breytenbach, Hugh Lewin, and Jeremy Cronin.

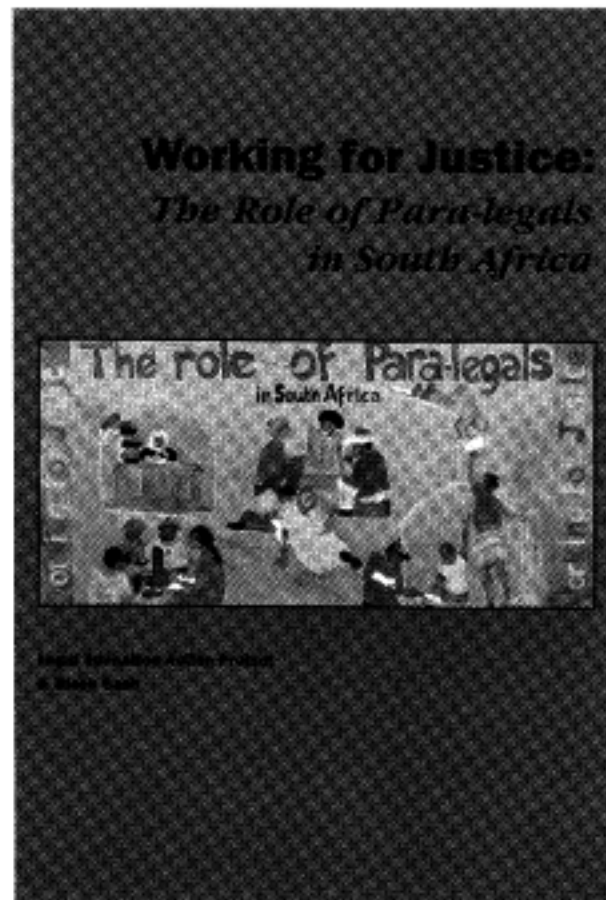
All this is so good that it seems ungenerous to carp, but there are blemishes. One is the unfortunate style employed in the 'User's Guide' and the glossary, which is embarrassingly reminiscent of the Department of Education and Training or the Department of Public Works. Moreover, the glossary, though full, contains some slipshod definitions.

Despite minor flaws, however, this is a booklet all abolitionists (lay or legal) should have on their shelves, ready for reference or for lending.

As Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King, notes in this

booklet: 'An evil deed is not redeemed by an evil deed of retaliation. Justice is never advanced in the taking of human life. Morality is never upheld by legalised murder.' □

Nancy Gordon
(Cape Western region)



Working for Justice: The role of para-legals in South Africa

(Legal Education Action Project and Black Sash, 1991)

The rise of advice offices and para-legals in the last decade has been one of the significant contributions to increasing access to the legal system.

Black Sash and LEAP played a leading role in the training of many of these para-legals. Often working in extremely difficult circumstances during the state of emergency, para-legals managed, frequently at great personal loss, to provide advice, and access to justice to many members of their community who are correctly described in the foreword to this book as not feeling part of the legal system.

The lifting of the state of emergency allowed an opportunity for the work of para-legals to be assessed and their future to be debated. This book is a result of the conference organised in July 1990 by LEAP and the Black Sash

to start that assessment.

It is a valuable contribution to the debate on access to the legal system. Penuell Maduna, a member of the African National Congress Department of Legal and Constitutional Affairs, points out in his opening address reprinted in the book that 'the issue of justice is at the very heart of the struggle' waged against the 'apartheid monster'.

The first half of the book provides many arenas where para-legals can contribute to that struggle for justice. Papers reprinted from the conference draw on differing experiences in different southern African countries.

Amy Tsanga points out that para-legals emerged for the first time in Zimbabwe only after liberation. Clement Daniels points out that in his recently independent Namibia para-legals predated independence. As a result, the para-legals in the two countries appear to have very different relationships with the state.

The South African experiences scattered through the book show South African para-legals emerging in periods of extreme repression having an antagonistic relationship with the state authorities. Unfortunately, no article in the book draws any conclusions from these different histories, but valuable insight for future training is provided by the collation of the different experiences in one collection.

The second half of the book provides useful resource material. It sets out goals and discussion topics for para-legals working in different areas, for example advice offices, trade unions, universities and law firms. It also contains an update in an extensive contact list which para-legals working anywhere would find extremely useful.

The book ends with a promise of an updated para-legal manual due to be published in the later half of 1991. Together with this book, the manual could provide the necessary fuel to ensure that in future all will feel part of the legal system. □

Steve Kahanovitz
(Legal Resources Centre)

REVIEWS

Black Sash – The beginning of a bridge in South Africa

Kathryn Spink (Methuen, London, 1991)

Reviewing a book about ourselves is difficult. One starts with a whole lot of resentments – ‘that is wrong’; ‘that is not what we are like’; ‘it was not like that’.

One instant turn-off for me is the sub-title ‘The beginning of a bridge in South Africa’. The bridge idea is part of the whole concept of group identities which we have always rejected but I suppose it is a concept well understood in the ‘civilised’ West and we must put up with the needs of the publishers to sell the book.

Having said that, it is a very good book and I hope members of the Black Sash will read it. It tells our history in relation to the issues of justice we have been concerned about and it is frank and honest about some of the most difficult debates we have had about affiliation, violence, universal franchise, *et cetera*.

In the first chapter Kathryn Spink says: ‘... perhaps the most pertinent question of all was whether it was warriors or peacemakers that were most needed, and how well an organisation of just over 2 000 qualified for either role’.

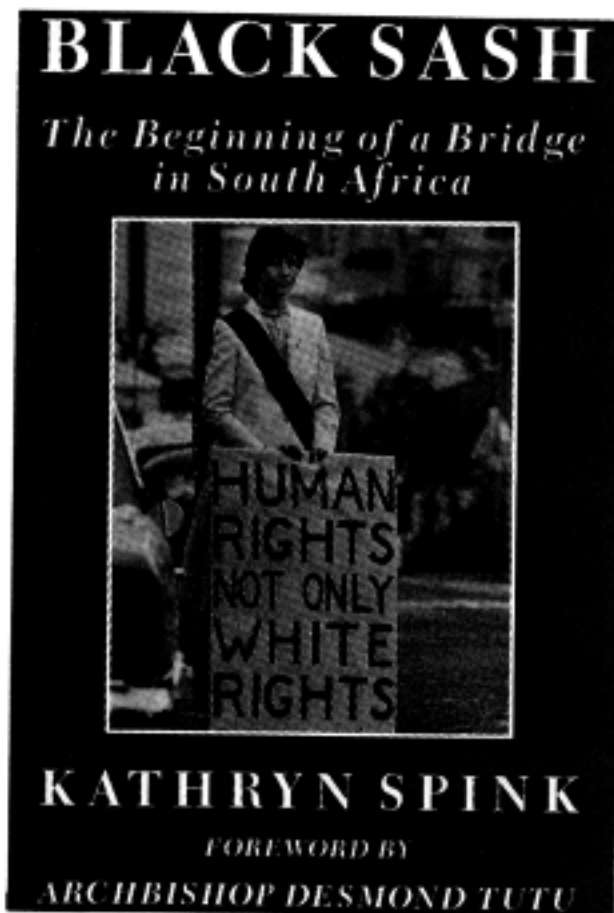
She says we have had a long tradition of *fighting* for human rights and asks whether our sympathy for the suffering victims of injustice, of the ‘structural violence’ of the apartheid state, has so entrenched us in a position of opposition to the Nationalist government that a less confrontational role for the future will not be feasible.

I was asked to read and review this book in the first week of July 1991 – the week after so many of the bills repealing apartheid legislation were signed by the state president and became law.

I do not feel less confrontational than I did last week. The repeal of the land acts and the Group Areas Act leaves 87 per cent of the land in the hands of the small white minority. Only those who are wealthy will ben-

efit from the deracialisation of the land.

Seven million people in South Africa are without adequate shelter – and we define ‘adequate shelter’ as the basic minimum of security of tenure, shelter from the elements, privacy and affordability – no more than that.



Only one in ten new entrants to the job market will be able to find employment in the formal sector; the unemployment rate is running at 40 per cent; 66 per cent of the black population of South Africa is under the age of 27 and have had no meaningful education.

The Population Registration Act Repeal Bill is the shortest and most simple piece of legislation I ever remember in my years with the Black Sash. It repeals race classification but then decrees that ‘anything done in terms thereof shall for the purposes of the provisions of any Act, remain in force as if the repeal had not taken place’.

Well, that means the continuation of the ‘own affairs’ system of government we protested about in 1983/84 with all its ongoing inequalities and gross injustices.

Apartheid is not dead and most of us will not live long enough to unveil its tombstone.

I remain confrontational. These are all issues of justice and there is great danger in the demand that we accept confessions of guilt, whether couched in religious terms or in the secular

confession that ‘apartheid is an experiment which failed’.

There are huge issues of restitution, restoration and reparation which we have to address.

Spink spent many days and months with us. She reminds us of our history and of the history of this country during the past 36 years.

I do not always find myself in agreement with her conclusions but her book is a most important one. It is honest and careful and accurate. We can learn a good deal from those who look at us from outside and we need to thank the author for the new insights she has given us.

It is good for us to be put under the microscope of a dispassionate observer but there are miles to go before we sleep. □

Sheena Duncan (Black Sash advice offices co-ordinator and member of the National Executive)

A Harvest of Discontent: The land question in South Africa

Mike de Klerk (ed.) (Idasa: Cape Town, 1991; 274 pages)

The land question is likely to prove the most difficult issue confronting any democratic government in the future South Africa, for the long and complex processes of land dispossession that stretch back to the beginnings of European settlement in South Africa, lie at the heart of the South African dilemma. The myriad problems of poverty and lack of resources that face black people today grew directly out of those processes.

Yet in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries black people proved incontrovertibly, as recent research has amply testified, that they could be skilled, adaptive and competitive commercial farmers, despite considerable obstacles. Indeed, during the early years of the mineral revolution, much of the commercial farming undertaken on white-owned farms was performed by black tenants; hence the recently repealed 1913 Land Act, which sought to segregate land ownership and also to prohibit independent

REVIEWS

black farming on white-owned land.

The act, with several later laws, has led to massive forced dispossession and displacement. Merely repealing the laws clearly does not mend the massive social and economic damage done to black people.

Aware of the need to address these issues as a matter of urgency, a proliferation of agencies has been seeking to address our somewhat inadequate understanding of the complex realities on the ground. With more resources than most, the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa was quick into the field, organising a workshop on the subject in March 1990. The resulting publication, comprising twelve of the chapters presented there with an introduction by Mike de Klerk of the University of Cape Town's School of Economics, reveals starkly the dimensions of the task of reconstruction that lies ahead.

First, we are introduced to the ecological dimensions of the problem by botanist Richard Cowling. There are four papers on questions of land ownership and tenure, ranging across landholding systems in African and 'white' areas. The maze of legal issues is introduced in two chapters by lawyers. Finally, five chapters deal with production options for the future, covering development and upliftment policies, and alternative ways of reforming landholding and the organisation of production (such as co-operative organisation).

The range of disciplines and fields of expertise amongst the contributors shows how multi-faceted the problems are. The mass of issues raised cannot be fully considered in a review; but those wishing to develop an informed perspective on this core question for the future should read the book. □

Tim Keegan

*(Department of History,
University of the Western Cape)*

States of terror: Death squads or development?

(Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989)

STATES OF TERROR

Death Squads or Development?



Throughout the Third World, grassroots social and economic development projects firmly based in the community are a threat to the political status quo. Not only do they bring material benefits, they also empower working people politically. In this sense they are truly revolutionary.

This collection of case studies shows how conservative governments have reacted violently to crush such popular movements in South Africa, the Philippines, Central America and Haiti. The South African chapters are written by Peter Harris and Mark Phillips. Harris's section describes how the regime's crisis of legitimacy has led to the use of 'black on black' violence, which he illustrates by reference to the actions of Inkatha, warlords and police in the Natal war. Phillips refers to the Crossroads 'burnout' of 1986, 'the largest, most rapid and most violent single forced removal in South African history', conducted by vigilantes with police collusion. Phillips sees 'violent stability', based on vigilante action, as an essential part of apparent reform which is a mixture of material im-

provement and authoritarian control.

In the Philippines a succession of vigilante groups have maintained close links with the military and the rich and powerful. The government claims their growth is spontaneous but there is considerable evidence of forced recruitment. Other echoes of the South African situation are the use of 'indigenous weapons' and the violent retribution meted out to those who try to use the law against vigilantes. As in South Africa, the church is often a target where it stands up for people resisting evictions and the destruction of community projects.

This book is well produced and readable. It is based on a conference held in London in 1988 and this might explain why it is unbalanced geographically. For instance, chapters on Mozambique and Sri Lanka would have increased the possibility of comparisons. This is compensated by a report on the conference panel discussion, which included the South African political commentator Mzala.

Two important trends emerge from the book. Firstly, it highlights common factors behind death squad activities in the six countries described. Low-intensity conflict (LIC), winning hearts and minds (WHAM), national security, and fanatical anti-communism appear in each case. So, too, do shadowy forces promoting capitalism and conservative politics. The possible influence of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is mentioned, but not developed.

Secondly, the panel discussion highlights the vulnerability of the poor to material bribery and manipulation by powerful vested interests: vigilantes are usually poor people themselves. Ultimately, when faced by crises of legitimacy, governments have privatised terror for economic and political reasons. Liberation movements are rightly criticised for neglecting the popular organisation and education necessary to counter vigilante violence. Too often it has led to the diversion of development aid for rehabilitation, while conservative elements have used their resources to implement counter-development. □

Christopher Merrett

(associate member)

LETTERS

a route to corporate analysis

Margaret Nash, Claremont, responds to the National Conference issue:

Congratulations on the National Conference issue of SASH. It makes lively and informative reading and confirms the ability of the Black Sash to be directly involved with apartheid's victims (advice office clients, rural communities, squatter settlements) and produce hard data on the basis of such involvement. That is a real strength.

Conspicuously lacking, however, is the element of corporate analysis, interpretation and evaluation. For example, the section on 'violence holds centre stage' cries out for corporate assessment, however tentative and provisional, of 1) the responsibility of the state and 2) the role of the Black Sash – briefly commented on by Ros Bush in the closing paragraph.

Maybe the six conference statements referred to on page 42 supply the 'sense of the whole'. If so, why were they not included in the magazine? If not, are we to conclude that in the face of so many contradictions and so much disinformation, the Black Sash is content to leave interpretation and guidance to the media controlled

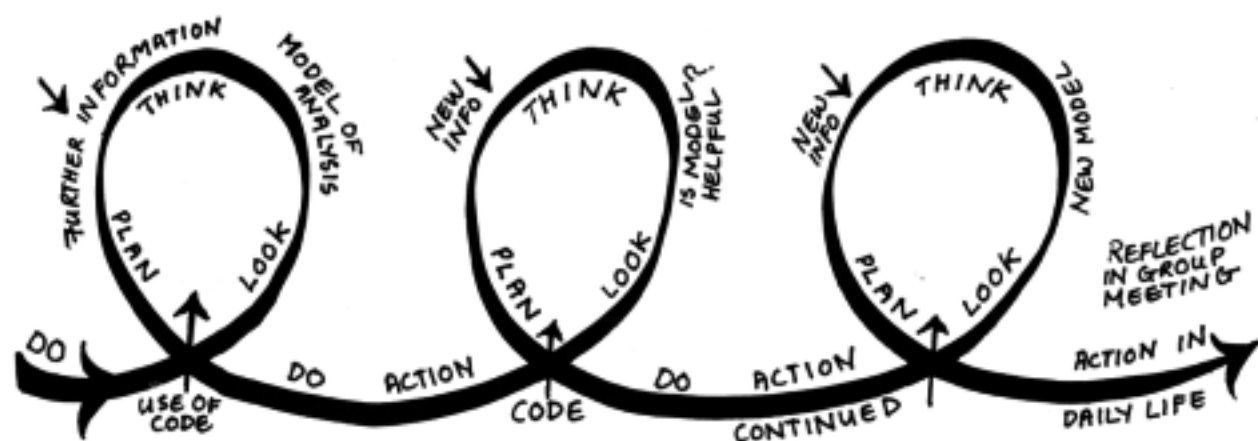
by the same old firms – Apartheid (Pty) Unltd, now Reform Inc. under managing director F. W. de Klerk, and the JSE Big Five?

I do not say the Black Sash should be telling members and others what to think. But we do live in a period of confusion in which all of us are struggling to read between the lines and discern what is going on beneath the surface. National conference provided some of the needed data. It seemingly did not provide much sense of shared insight arising from reflection and debate on the data.

Can the Black Sash move beyond

protest and alleviation into real human-rights action with fellow South Africans for development and transformation towards the fruits of justice, peace and democracy in our 'tree-logo'? I believe it can, but only if we engage in the 'do-look-think-plan' cycle depicted in the diagram below. □

The conference statements did not supply the 'sense of the whole'. As statements they did not have the status of resolutions and were omitted due to space constraints. (editors)



Adapted from *Training for Transformation* (vol. 1, p. 60) by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel

an apology for the nuclear establishment?

Mike Kantey of Earthlife Africa (Cape Town) responds to 'The case for nuclear energy' by Andrew Kenny (SASH, January 1991):

I have been asked by various branches throughout the region to write to you expressing our concern regarding your feature on the joys of nuclear power. Our concerns may be expressed as follows:

- 1 Nuclear power is inherently dangerous, as the holocaust of Chernobyl has shown.
- 2 Nuclear power is heavily consumptive of both energy and money, as is demonstrated by the collapse of the British industry in the face of privatisation.
- 3 There never has been, and can never be, a permanent solution to the urgent problem of high-level

- waste disposal.
- 4 The history of nuclear-power production is intimately and inextricably tied up with the production of nuclear weapons.
- 5 The centralised production of electricity is not conducive to energy equity.
- 6 Uranium is a finite resource and does not promote sustainable development.

We therefore dismiss everything that Kenny has written in his article. We consider his writings an apology for the nuclear establishment and an integral part of their renewed campaign to win back public opinion after

the holocaust of Chernobyl.

Speaking personally, I find it deeply disturbing that an organisation of such lasting integrity as the Black Sash can fall victim to such a cheap shot on the part of the nuclear establishment. I have always thought that it was cognizant of shifting debates within the international women's movement for world peace and justice. Within that vibrant tradition has come the most militant opposition to nuclear power and nuclear destruction, as witnessed in the sustained protest at Greenham Common, the work of Leonie Green Caldecott, the Hibakusa movement, and countless others.

Is it not time for the Black Sash to rejoin the global struggle and propagate the clear vision of a society without domination, exploitation or

LETTERS

violence? Or will they remain subject to masculine technology – including that of media manipulation? □

SASH aims to encourage stimulating debates (editors)

wrongly sashed

Eleanor Mathews, Gillitts, writes:

I read the SASH magazine from cover to cover, and find it extremely informative. I want to point out though that the little cartoon Sasher, shown in the conference issue (May 1991), is wearing her sash over the wrong shoulder! □

Amanda Low demonstrates her independence at every turn! (editors)



getting Amanda Low right

Gus Ferguson writes:

Amanda is, at the present, as you may know organising a grass-roots coir and lace-making collective in Male* in the Maldives.

She is delighted with the latest SASH but is a bit miffed that her surname was given as Louw.

I must point out in her defence (she is as you know a bit too touchy) that she does love the coincidence that Amanda Low is an anagram of Womandla.

Yours truly
Gus Ferguson
Awomanensis to
Ms Amanda Low

*FeMale □

We're thoroughly miffed at ourselves for the slip. (editors)

NEWS-STRIP

Mary Burton visits Banjul, The Gambia



The visit of several South Africans to the UNESCO *Workshop on Human Rights Issues for a Post-Apartheid South Africa* signified the opening of the door for South African human-rights organisations to the African Commission on Human Rights in Banjul. Pictured at the workshop from 18 to 21 June are Mary Burton, Mahmond Ourabah (deputy director ILO), Marjorie Thorpe (UN Special Committee Against Apartheid) and Badawi El Sheikh Ibrahim Ali (member of the OAU African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights). □

Port Elizabeth volunteers

There have been heartening developments in three areas of our work:

1 Regular courses for voluntary workers are being held in the Cape Eastern advice office. Running for four Friday mornings, they aim to demystify the work of the office for new volunteers and increase counselling skills and knowledge for the more experienced.

Workers are made aware of how the offices are a vital part of Black Sash and are asked to look at the 'wider perspective' of the cases they are involved with. Through role-plays and group discussion trainees become part of solution-finding. Telephone techniques and interviewing methods are explored and specific problems identified and discussed.

A need for an in-depth look at improving the writing up of case histories has been identified and this was workshopped on 12 July.

The need for volunteers is advertised on a regular basis in the free

press, and we have been gratified and surprised by the response from the public.

2 Black Sash organised a stand to bring Children's Day to the awareness of the P.E. public on 1 June. Many organisations were invited to participate and placards bearing such slogans as *Violence maims children* and *Children need peace* lined busy Cape roads on that Saturday morning.

3 Janet Cherry has been appointed as research worker for Black Sash (Eastern Cape). She will be putting her considerable research skills to work analysing and identifying trends in the vast amount of new and already existing information in our office. The Black Sash office is the only one of its kind in P.E. that has operated since 1985, and we feel her contribution will be extremely valuable and make it more possible for us to focus on particular issues. □

*Judy Chalmers
(Cape Eastern)*

NEWS-STRIP

Northern Transvaal involvements

stay of execution

On 18 June 1991 the capital punishment working group orchestrated, together with a range of other organisations, a picket in front of the Chancery of the Republic of Bophuthatswana. This was to call for the commutation of the death sentences of Lucas Molekwa and Adam Mashele, two prisoners in Rooigrond Prison who were to be hanged the following day.

Isie Pretorius, and Marje Jobson, were allowed inside the chancery to present a plea to the ambassador's representative. We were very well received, and the representative both promised to pass the letter on to the Bophuthatswana officials, and requested permission to thank those outside who had expressed their concern. There was excitement when we found out the two men were granted stays of execution. The action was carried out in conjunction with other efforts by Lawyers of Human Rights, and we followed up our venture with letters to president Mangope, various ambassadors in Cape Town and a press statement. □



Black Sash members Marje Jobson and Isie Pretorius form part of a picket calling for death sentences to be commuted and for the abolition of the death penalty, in front of the chancery in Bophuthatswana.

new booklet on domestic work relationships



Paid domestic work occurs throughout South Africa but there are many workers and employers who do not know their rights or how to solve problems arising from this work. The Black Sash has produced a booklet to assist people in getting to know their rights and to give ideas on how to address problems related to domestic work.

Written by Penny Geerdts, *Masisebenzisane - Let us work together* is directed at workers and employers in the hope that they will be encouraged to work together to make their relationship a beneficial one for both sides. The booklet can be ordered through the Pretoria Advice Office, P.O. Box 9383, 0001 Pretoria at R6 per copy. □

indemnity for some Upington trialists

There were tears of joy and of disappointment when most (but not all) of the Upington trialists, people who had become friends through visits over the two years and a day that they had been on death row, received indemnity and were allowed to walk from prison.

Getting to know such sincere and good people who had suffered so much was a privilege. We have much to thank them for. □

*Isie Pretorius and Kerry Harris
(Northern Transvaal region)*

NEWS-STRIP

news from Natal Midlands

stand with a triple focus

On Saturday, 29 June, along with all other Black Sash regions, we held a stand to mark the end of apartheid legislation and, more importantly, to focus on the need for ongoing protest against current discriminatory practices.

Sixteen women gathered outside the city hall and divided into three groups. The first acknowledged areas of South African life about which we need no longer protest – group areas, population registration, pass laws and land acts. The second highlighted social and political issues over which there remains great concern – segregated education, the Internal Security Act, homelessness and the existence of bantustans – and the third called for some solutions, including setting up an

interim government, restitution of land and a single education system.

We realised afterwards that, unlike other Black Sash regions who in many ways were reclaiming their public terrain, Natal Midlands, through the support of a sympathetic magistrate, has been standing every month during the past few years.

Our stand on 6 July focused once again on the plight of black pensioners. It highlighted the present inequality of pensions between different racial groups and called for an end to apartheid in pension payments and the immediate implementation of parity. □

Sixteen Black Sash members standing outside the Pietermaritzburg city hall



Albany workshop on violence against women

Between 13 and 20 April, Carla Sutherland, Cape Western member and researcher for the Committee of Inquiry into Sexual Harassment at the University of Cape Town, visited the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at Rhodes University.

Despite running numerous workshops and seminars at the university, Carla found the time to give a talk to the Albany Black Sash on women in the economy, and to run a joint Black Sash-ANC Women's League workshop on violence against women. This

was Albany's first joint venture with the ANC Women's League and it proved to be a great success. Attendance was good, with the numbers equally divided between Black Sash and Women's League members.

The workshop seems to have been enjoyed by all and it generated a lot of enthusiasm for more joint activities in the future, specifically co-operation in a campaign on violence against women. □

Sue Middleton and Glenda Morgan
(Albany region)

constitutional focus for women's group

Members of the women's group, which is one of our most stimulating groups, agree that our current project 'Women in the new constitution' is an extremely exciting and rewarding one. We have brainstormed around areas of life particularly pertinent to women – such as health, family, reproductive rights, and legal status – and we are now examining each in detail with a view to the protection of women in future legislation. At the same time, we are encouraging other women to start similar projects by talking about the group on every possible occasion. □

Jenny Clarence
(Natal Midlands region)

Trudy Thomas joins new Border committee

Medical pioneer Dr Trudy Thomas is back in East London after an absence of four years. She took up the post as principal medical officer at the Duncan Village Day Hospital after completing a course in community health at the University of Cape Town.

She was also elected co-chair of the Black Sash Border region in June.

Before Thomas left East London, she headed the community health department at Cecilia Makiwane Hospital in Mdantsane.

In an interview with the *Daily Dispatch* on her return, Thomas said that in a future South Africa people would want to know what the conditions of health care would be. They have no illusions that it is going to be easy, she said, but they will fight for these things until they get what they consider a human deal.

The rest of the Black Sash committee in East London are: Jenni Horn (co-chair), Val Viljoen (treasurer), Mandy Jones and Janine Gould (secretary), Louise Childs (spokesperson), Marietjie Myburg (magazine representative), Sue Power, Nora Squires, Sally-Jane Murray. □

Marietjie Myburg (Border region)

NEWS-STRIP

Obituary: Ruth Coplans

Ruth Coplans, Black Sash member since early days, was latterly precluded from much Black Sash activity by her own and her husband's poor health. Nevertheless, she remained a staunch and generous member whose warm personality will live in the hearts of all who knew her.

Those of us who were on the Cape Western regional council with Ruth in early Black Sash years will remember especially her common sense and pungent humour besides the trenchant insight and keen wit which went to the root of problems, dissolving difficulties and enlivening dreary discussion.

Ruth had a flair for hitting the nail on the head, often in a practical manner. It was she who organised a fund to keep the advice office going, should it be banned (or closed). This money later went towards the Bail Fund, for those awaiting trial.

Her energy and courage in the face of poor health and her steadfast belief in Black Sash aims was shown by her participation in the protest stand in March 1988 against the death sentence imposed on the Sharpeville Six, when she and her sister, Desirée Berman, were among the 29 who were arrested and spent the day in Caledon Square.

Although she was not able to attend many meetings it was a joy always to meet Ruth at regional and national conferences, her interest and attention undimmed.

We salute you, Ruth, and hold your husband Carl, children Peta and Gregory, and your sister Desirée in sympathetic thought. □

Bunty Aitchison
(Cape Western region)

changing experiences for a western cape court monitor

As conventional court monitoring in Cape Town has virtually ceased over the past year I found myself monitoring 'illegal gathering' cases involving demonstrating relatives and friends of political prisoners on Robben Island and elsewhere.

I am also the Black Sash representative on the liaison committee of concerned organisations who have co-ordinated their resources with the staff of Dependent's Conference in preparing Cowley House as a half-way home for released prisoners. They have been given thorough medical check-ups; optional psychological counselling; financial support for clothing, emergencies and travel arrangements to ease their way home to their families.

Our Tuesday evening meetings have long since turned into alternative events: welcoming sudden releasees at the dockside; sharing in services of thanksgiving at the chapel; demonstrating outside Somerset Hospital in sympathy with hunger-strikers and exchanging *amandlas* under their window; or talking with re-united families and sharing some of their joy and pain at welcome-home parties.

Press conferences were held out-

side Cowley House after the initial major release of forty-one prisoners on 16 and 19 April. As numbers of releasees dwindle, families are entertaining ex-prisoners until they leave for their own homes, and Cowley House remains the centre for advice and support.

However, political prisoners remain incarcerated in prisons all over the country. Black Sash members are now focusing their support on visiting prisoners in Pollsmoor, each branch adopting two prisoners. Profiles of the cases of many of these have already been highlighted in the press.

At a recent monitoring workshop we honed our skills as active monitors and instigated a media monitoring network among the branch membership to watch over the following issues: land and housing, education, women, violence and political agendas, civics and local government, police, courts and legal process, legislation, health and social welfare. The hope is that we will be able to analyse trends and offer constructive criticism where necessary.

There is an ongoing need for rural court monitoring. □
Anne Greenwell (Cape Western region)



Top: A welcoming party for released prisoners at the dockside, Cape Town; below: outside Cowley House after press conference for releasees

NEWS-STRIP



Women from rural communities at the executive meeting of the Rural Women's Movement in Johannesburg, June 1991

Gill de Vlieg

rural women's movement takes off

Rural women from communities in the Northern Cape and Transvaal have come together to form a new rural women's movement. It is open to all oppressed rural women who wish to join the struggle for women's rights. The intention is to reach all women in rural areas, and particularly women living on white farms.

The organisation aims to create forums for rural women to unite against oppression; demand that women have equal rights to land; encourage women

to be self-reliant, independent and creative; work towards women having a say in political matters at a national level and in communities; bring rural and urban women closer.

It also advocates that women should have access to literacy, adult education and skills training to improve their lives, and finally, that rural women need resources to develop areas which would improve their daily lives.

The movement has a formal consti-

tution and an executive committee who work in association with the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (Trac). They have embarked on a programme of local meetings in different areas in which the role of the rural women's movement will be discussed further and at which educative projects will be initiated. □

Trac (Black Sash Transvaal region)

Obituary: Elizabeth Rowe

Elizabeth Rowe was a sound, solid citizen, which may not sound complimentary but is intended to be. She was totally reliable, totally committed, totally sincere, a straight-from-the-shoulder no-nonsense person.

I am not sure whether or not she was a founder member, but was certainly one of very long standing, and she remained dedicated to the Black Sash until the day she died. Her interest was the advice office, and for more years than any of us can remember she worked there faithfully three days a week. She never failed to do anything she had undertaken, never absented herself for some flimsy reason, and treated her voluntary work in the advice office as a job which was her responsibility. No salary could have matched her dedication.

Over the years she acquired a vast store of knowledge about the laws affecting black people, which she passed on to those around her. She ran workshops, trained learner workers and volunteers, and the ongoing success of the Johannesburg advice office is largely due to her. Everybody in the office loved her.

But the Black Sash was not her only commitment. Just as tirelessly she worked for the Thabison Clinic in Alexander and for her church. Her husband died many years ago, and she had two sons, one here and one in Australia. To her family we extended our deepest sympathy. We will never cease to mourn and miss Elizabeth who was indeed a very special lady. □

Joyce Harris (Transvaal region)

active repression monitoring in Durban

The Natal Coastal repression monitoring group has been extending its operations by collecting more information, doing more with it, and telling more people about it. We have developed a co-operative working relationship with other monitors, Idasa, and the Legal Resources Centre. We also are improving our relations with the Inkatha Institute concerning the sharing of information.

We followed up on unrest in Driefontein near Tongaat – heightened by local police misconduct – by collecting more than 50 statements from the residents about the unrest, and then demanding an immediate investigation by the South African Police in Durban.

In late June, 13 people were arrested on 22 charges, including mur-

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der, attempted murder, abduction and arson. Three of the accused were denied bail, on our and IDASA's request, to avoid further intimidation of the community.

Photographs taken by the unrest monitor during a recent Inkatha march in Tongaat – during which marchers carried G3 rifles – were useful in exposing KwaZulu's handouts of G3s to *indunas* and chiefs throughout KwaZulu.

The Unrest Bulletin is now printed fortnightly, and distributed to more than 300 individuals and organisations. □

Lena Slachmijlder (Natal Coastal region)

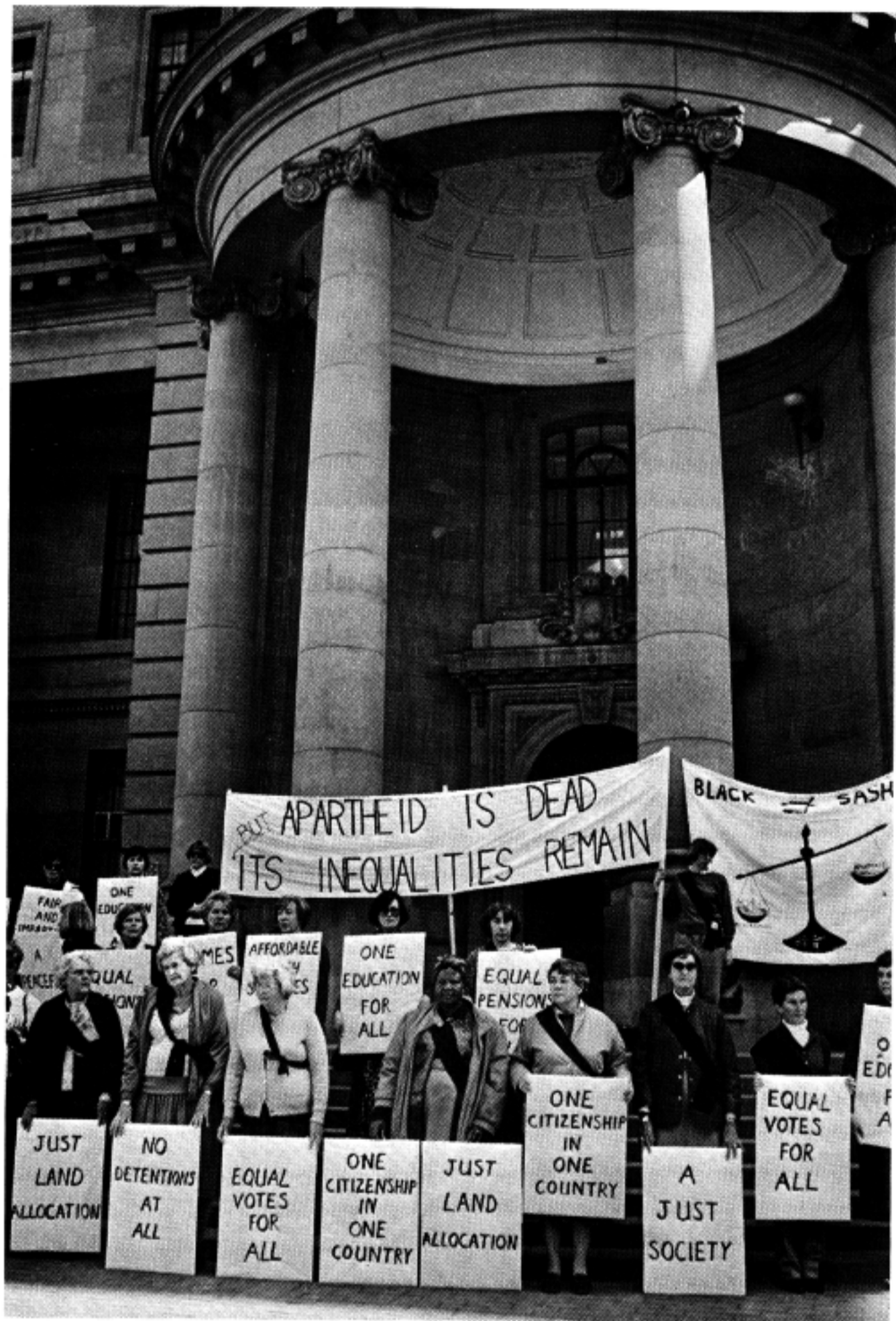
back at the Johannesburg city hall

Friday, 28 June, coincidentally the anniversary of the Black Sash's historic vigil at the Union Buildings in 1955, was the day the Transvaal region of the Black Sash reclaimed the steps of the Johannesburg city hall. This was the traditional protest ground from which they had been exiled since 1962 when all demonstrations there were prohibited.

Along with a couple of dozen new and fairly new Black Sash members stood several indomitable members of the old guard, including former national presidents Jean Sinclair and Joyce Harris.

In the week in which president De Klerk signed the bills that spelt the end of legislated apartheid – abolishing the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act – the Black Sash took the opportunity to look to the future and express its hopes that in that future *de facto* apartheid too would die.

In a statement handed out to passers-by the Black Sash welcomed the abolition of race classification, the land acts, the Group Areas Act and other apartheid laws but pointed out that apartheid was not dead as long as the current system of government under the current constitution persisted and as long as inequities in pensions, education, land allocation, housing, employment and health still



The Black Sash back on the city hall steps after 29 years during which all demonstrations on or near the steps had been banned

existed. The Internal Security Act still provided for detention without trial, freedom of expression was undermined by the state's monopoly of radio and television, and apartheid had left the country a legacy of political violence.

'The Black Sash calls upon the government and those who have benefited from apartheid to take urgent action to redress the evils that more than 40 years of apartheid have wrought.

'Apartheid will not be dead until

there is social, political and economic justice for all South Africa's citizens,' the statement read.

Although the violent response that characterised many of the city hall stands in the early days was absent, one link to the past was preserved – the arrival of policemen with a camera to photograph the silent women. And true to form, it was Jean Sinclair who challenged their presence.

Some things never change ... □
Pat Tucker (Transvaal region)

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Farewell
to
Joyce Harris



While we do have aims and objectives that guide and set the parameters to our work, the Black Sash is shaped by and really *is* its members. It is the interests, the passionately-held beliefs, the commitment and the energy of the members that make up what the Black Sash was and is. For all of our 36-year history, Joyce Harris has given so much of herself to the Black Sash, that she has become a very important part of who we were and what we are.

Joyce is a founder member of the Black Sash and has served the organisation in many capacities. For many years she has been a member of the Transvaal Regional Council, and has been Transvaal's regional chairperson, editor of SASH magazine, chairperson of the Advice Office Trust, national vice-president and our national president for four years from 1978 until 1981. In 1990 she was unanimously elected honorary national life vice-president of the Black Sash as a tribute to someone who has spent the greater part of her life working for the organisation and the principles for which it stands.

In the Black Sash we have some formidable and wonderful role-models. Joyce is one of them. She has many talents that have been important to us. Among them are her ability to analyse current events and politics clearly and incisively. She has an unswerving commitment to what she believes is right (and will always say so, even if it is unpopular). Joyce has written prolifically on behalf of the organisation with characteristic grace and style.

It has always been comforting to know that when there is a tough letter to be written to the press or a challenging issue that needs to be thought through and written about, that Joyce is there, her talents and trusty, ancient old typewriter at the ready.

For these and many other reasons, Joyce will be sorely missed by us when she and Nathan go to live in Canada later this year to be with their children and grandchildren. Thank you Joyce and Nath. Go well. □

Jenny de Tolly

Barbara Hogan gives insights into violence on the Witwatersrand

In a talk delivered to the Black Sash Transvaal, Barbara Hogan said the kind of violence people were having to cope with was of a banditry nature, similar to that associated with Renamo in Mozambique. The aim of the perpetrators appeared to be to destroy the social fabric of community life.

As secretary of the African National Congress (ANC) Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging region, she regularly faces a barrage of requests for help from those on the receiving end of violence.

Hogan said that people, wearing red headbands and attacking township residents – not necessarily ANC members though the majority of them are perceived as ANC supporters – are creating mass panic and fear in the hearts of township residents.

Attacks on communities are generally preceded by rumours and the presence of bakkies off-loading weapons

in the area. Often this is followed by an Inkatha Freedom Party 'peace rally' to which busloads of people from other areas are brought. Wild rumours then ensue and people start creating barricades while they wait in terror for the attack from this unknown force.

Groups targeted are often squatter camps or people living opposite hostels. On other occasions the attackers leave a meeting and pick on people at random. She cited the example of an old man who happened to be sitting on a chair outside his home when the attackers found him and hacked him to pieces.

Abductions are common and this has been prevalent in Tokoza where women have been abducted and taken back to the hostel.

On the increase is a form of attack which is particularly difficult to react to: massacres at taxi ranks and on trains. This is reminiscent of the Renamo method of operation.

Hogan said that attacks appeared to be carried out by 'roving bandits', peo-

ple who were obviously being moved about the area, sometimes in hired trains, while trucks and vans carried the weaponry. This would seem to indicate that the attacks were part of a sophisticated military operation.

Hogan said the reaction of the police varied from area to area and that some of those she dealt with were truly enlightened. The police were often scared of raiding a hostel, although they had been requested to do so, and some members of the police are confused about what was going on and how they should react.

Hogan said she felt the battle should not be seen as an ANC/Inkatha battle. She emphasised that the ANC had not embarked on a reactionary campaign and is not the aggressor.

She conceded that sometimes there was a dislocation between the hostel dwellers and the community and that the alliance between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the councillors was disturbing. □

*Laura Pollecutt
Transvaal region)*