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Carly F. Bower

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“LOST IN TRANSLATION?”: WOMEN’S ISSUES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR  
NATIONAL LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA (1910-1985)

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examines the struggles of South African women from the beginning of the Union of South Africa and the period of Segregation to the period of national defiance during Apartheid, throughout all of its ebbs and flows. By contextualizing women's struggle for political and gender liberation within the political struggle of black men in South Africa, this study broadens the picture of female involvement within the anti-Segregation and anti-Apartheid struggles. In formal organizations such as trade unions and the Federation of South African Women, by the force of grassroots movements and boycotts, and through the persistence of informal economic efforts, women contributed monumentally to the struggle for black liberation. Through the examination of primary sources and current historiographic debates, the study also demonstrates both the inherent presence of and explicit concern for women's issues alongside the concern for black political liberation.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AEM</b>	African Education Movement
<b>AFCWU</b>	African Food and Canning Workers' Union
<b>AMWU</b>	African Mine Workers' Union
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress; Formerly, <b>SANNC</b>
<b>ANCWL</b>	African National Congress Women's League; Formerly, <b>BWL</b>
<b>ANCYL</b>	African National Congress Youth League, Also <b>CYL</b>
<b>APLA</b>	Azanian People's Liberation Army
<b>APO</b>	African Political Organization
<b>APTC</b>	Alexandra People's Transport Committee
<b>ASWU</b>	African Sweet Workers' Union
<b>BAWU</b>	Black Allied Workers' Union
<b>BCM</b>	Black Consciousness Movement
<b>BEA</b>	Bantu Education Act
<b>BWL</b>	Bantu Women's League, Later known as <b>ANCWL</b>
<b>CA</b>	Congress Alliance
<b>CNETU</b>	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
<b>COD</b>	Congress of Democrats, Also <b>SACOD</b>
<b>COSATU</b>	Council of South African Trade Unions
<b>CPSA</b>	Communist Party of South Africa, Also <b>SACP</b>
<b>CWU</b>	Chemical Workers' Union
<b>CYL</b>	Congress Youth League, Also <b>ANCYL</b>

<b>DEU</b>	Domestic Employees' Union
<b>FCWU</b>	Food and Canning Workers' Union
<b>FSAW</b>	Federation of South African Women
<b>GAWU</b>	General and Allied Workers' Union
<b>GWU</b>	Garment Workers' Union
<b>ICU</b>	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
<b>LP</b>	Liberal Party
<b>MDC</b>	Movement for a Democracy of Content
<b>MK</b>	Umkhonto we Sizwe
<b>NACTU</b>	National Council of Trade Unions
<b>NAD</b>	Native Affairs Department
<b>NCAW</b>	National Council of African Women
<b>NEUM</b>	Non-European Unity Movement
<b>NIC</b>	Natal Indian Congress
<b>NLL</b>	National Liberation League
<b>NUSAS</b>	National Union of South African Students
<b>PAC</b>	Pan-African Congress
<b>PUTCO</b>	Public Utility Transport Corporation
<b>SAAWU</b>	South African Allied Workers' Union
<b>SACOD</b>	South African Congress of Democrats, Also <b>COD</b>
<b>SACP</b>	South African Communist Party, Also <b>CPSA</b>
<b>SACPO</b>	South African Colored Peoples' Organization
<b>SACTU</b>	South African Congress of Trade Unions

<b>SAIC</b>	South African Indian Congress
<b>SANC</b>	South African Nursing Council
<b>SANNC</b>	South African Native National Congress, Later known as <b>ANC</b>
<b>SASO</b>	South African Students' Organization
<b>SWU</b>	Sweet Workers' Union
<b>UDF</b>	United Democratic Front
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WEAU</b>	Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union
<b>WU</b>	Waitresses' Union
<b>WWI</b>	World War I
<b>WWII</b>	World War II

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
List of Abbreviations.....	iv
“Lost in Translation”: An Introduction.....	1
The Historiography of South African Women.....	2
The Thrust of the Study.....	9
Chapter 1: The Challenge of Segregation, 1910-1939.....	13
The Challenge.....	14
The Struggle.....	16
The Anti-Pass Campaign of 1913.....	17
The Bantu Women’s League.....	18
The Trade Union Movement.....	19
The Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union.....	21
The Communist Party of South Africa.....	23
Conclusion.....	25
Chapter 2: World War II, Rebuilding the ANC and Women’s Activism, 1939-1949....	30
The Challenge.....	30
The Struggle.....	33
The Informal Economy.....	33
The Alexandra Bus Boycotts.....	34
The Trade Union Movement.....	35
The Garment Workers’ Union.....	36

The Food and Canning Workers' Union.....	38
The Sweet Workers' Union.....	39
The African National Congress Women's League.....	40
Conclusion.....	41
Chapter 3: Militancy and Mass Action; The Federation of South African Women and the ANC Women's League, 1949-1960.....	46
The Challenge.....	46
The Struggle.....	50
The Informal Economy.....	50
The Alexandra Bus Boycotts: Revisited.....	51
The ANC: Programme of Action.....	53
The ANC: Defiance Campaign.....	53
The African National Congress Women's League.....	54
The Black Sash Movement.....	55
The Federation of South African Women and the "Women's Charter".....	56
The ANC "Freedom Charter".....	57
The ANC and FSAW: Bantu Education.....	58
The AEM and School Boycotts.....	59
The FSAW: Group Areas Campaign.....	60
The FSAW: The Anti-Pass Campaign and the August 9 <sup>th</sup> , 1956 Pretoria Demonstration.....	61
Pass Protests, Post-1956.....	62
Nurse Protests.....	65
Labor Unions.....	67

The Congress Alliance.....	68
Treason Trials.....	70
The Split in the ANC and Formation of the PAC.....	71
The Sharpeville Massacre and Decline of the FSAW.....	72
Conclusion.....	74
Chapter 4: Post-1960 Struggles Against Apartheid.....	81
Black Liberation’s “State of Emergency”: 1960-1970.....	81
The ANC and PAC: Underground.....	81
Migrant Labor and Forced Removals.....	83
The Breakdown of the FSAW.....	83
Women in the ANC Underground.....	84
The Resurgence: 1970’s -1980’s.....	85
The Black Consciousness Movement and the Soweto Uprising.....	85
Labor Strikes and Trade Union Activity.....	87
Women in Trade Unions and Perceptions of Feminism.....	88
The United Democratic Front and COSATU.....	89
Conclusion.....	91
“Lost in Translation”: Conclusion.....	95
The Struggle: 1910-1939.....	95
The Struggle: 1939-1949.....	96
The Struggle: 1949-1960.....	98
The Struggle: Post-1960.....	100
Overall Conclusions of the Study.....	101

References..... 105

## **“Lost in Translation?": Women's Issues in the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa, 1910 -1985**

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### *An Introduction*

The experience of women in South Africa's struggle for black liberation has been far from uniform, as scholars of the topic allow. Black women, White women, Colored women, and Indian women were all participants in the struggle: whether alone or in groups, in formal organizational efforts or in individual acts of defiance, as factory workers or as participants in the informal economy. Women as daughters and as sisters, as wives and as mothers, engaged in South Africa's fight for freedom and equality.

The focus of this study documents the particulars of women's involvement in the liberation struggles against Segregation and Apartheid in South Africa, situates that involvement within the efforts of men, and seeks to analyze what that involvement signified. From the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 to the revitalized anti-Apartheid movements of the 1970s and 80s, the strong contribution of women ran the gamut of involvement. Catering meetings and canvassing neighborhoods, burning passes and holding protests, drafting a Women's Charter and being thrown in jail: women were not only fighting to liberate people from a corrupt system but also to liberate themselves from a characterization of femininity that excluded their political voice.

The lens of gender – a more recent analytical tool within the historical perspective – illuminates a variety of understandings regarding the impetus that drove women's involvement in South African political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Debating the practical versus strategic needs of women within a given context, as well as the nature of the very language used to converse about resistance, this analysis of women's political actions alongside those of men

within the liberation struggle employs the use of gender in order to determine the nature of past and present concern for women's issues, politically and personally, within South Africa.

*The Historiography of South African Women*

The inclusion of women into the historiography of South Africa's struggle against Segregation and Apartheid and the examination of their role did not begin to take place until the very late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1986 when Joan Wallach Scott's idea of "gendering" history began to find proponents in academic circles, historians were beginning to look specifically at the influence of women in history, their voices and their silences, as a useful category for analysis.<sup>1</sup> Cherryl Walker, author of "Women and Resistance in South Africa," revealed that at the first publishing of her book in 1982, the idea of a "gendered" history was not even a known concept in the most progressive of circles.<sup>2</sup> When "Women and Resistance" first appeared, almost nothing had been published on the subject. Walker noted in her first introduction to "Women and Resistance" that the reasons why women had been excluded from history are in themselves instructive. They revealed much about the preoccupation of historians with political and constitutional rather than social history, and the unconscious bias of historians – male as well as female – towards the invisibility of women in history.<sup>3</sup> In 1982, Walker attempted to broaden the study of history to incorporate the female world as a legitimate area of research. She argued that this study would deepen the understanding of not only 50 percent of the population, but of the workings of society at any one time as well.<sup>4</sup>

Penelope Hetherington, in "Women in South Africa: The Historiography in English," revealed that most feminists would have agreed that until the 1960s, the history of women was severely neglected in national historiographies. The writing of feminist history, she maintained, is in itself a political act, as it brings to light many areas important to the inclusion of women,

much neglected in past historical boundaries of study so narrowly defined as to exclude them.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the new outbreak of feminist history in the 1970s, Hetherington quoted Deborah Gaitskell and other colleagues: “polemics flew, positions were taken, and ideological ‘interests’ were unmasked.”<sup>6</sup>

In the documentary efforts of early writing on South African women’s history, Cherryl Walker in “Women and Resistance” revealed women’s influence or lack of in political struggles. She noted the complex nature of “woman” as an analytical category and maintained that its complexity was indeed overlooked and/or swept away by societal pressure to promote the “domestic” and “supportive” role of women within political struggle.<sup>7</sup> However, while championing women’s efforts to organize within male-dominated forums, negotiate racist politics, and militantly protest oppressive legislation, Walker equated the initial politicization of women to their connection to basic “bread and butter issues.” She averred that the issues that stirred black women to political activity at this time were not primarily “women’s issues” but issues that affected the entire community. Thus Walker viewed the early work of women in politics to be important due to the role it played in informing and influencing later political activity of women, rather than being a coherent sustained effort at that particular time.<sup>8</sup> Walker’s later introduction to “Women and Resistance” tried to analyze the extent to which one could actually perceive a “feminist” consciousness within the politicization of South African women.

Julia Wells was another pioneer in the discussion and documentation of working class women’s resistance. Wells considered the specific nature of women’s anti-pass law protests and women’s interaction with established organizations such as the ANC. She determined that it was the conflict between fractions of the white ruling class that created a space to allow black women to maneuver to successfully end the application of passes to women in the Orange Free State.<sup>9</sup>

Wells argued that both women's independent and interdependent campaigns were a struggle against full proletarianization by women who had achieved a balance between their family responsibilities and generating income.<sup>10</sup> Wells' focus, like Walker's, addressed women's contribution to the political struggle and looked to the cooperation of men and women within the struggle.

Belinda Bozzoli, in her 1983 article "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," developed an examination of the prevalent modes of analysis in the study of female oppression in South Africa – taking into account studies by those such as Walker and Wells. Bozzoli argued that female oppression was not well examined. She contended that it tended to be confined to rectification studies: "to be reduced in an a-historical manner to the requirements of capitalism; or to be encapsulated within structuralist and functionalist notions of production and reproduction, which are incapable of making visible to us the specificity of gender."<sup>11</sup>

Bozzoli herself proposed a new approach, one formulated upon the notion of struggle – both Marxist and feminist. In her new analysis, Bozzoli noted that the Marxist element retained a materialist, dialectical, and historical focus, positing that social change is always based on results of opposing forces rooted in reality, coming into conflict and resolving that conflict with the ultimate result of the production of further opposing forces. The simultaneous feminist element of Bozzoli's approach, however, allowed for the incorporation of the "domestic sphere"; that is, household economy and its function as the site of labor, income, and property relations between men and women.<sup>12</sup> She acknowledged that the relevant conflicts – delineated in the Marxist element – were in fact located within the "domestic sphere" and in certain crucial cases revolved around conflicts between certain men and women.<sup>13</sup> Bozzoli further deconstructed the idea of struggle as well. She revealed within her approach that conflict represented not only the struggle

between certain men and women, but also between the “domestic sphere” and the capitalist sphere.<sup>14</sup>

Bozzoli’s later work, “The Women of Phokeng,” used black women’s own oral histories to examine anew female oppression in the context of the “domestic sphere.” “The Women of Phokeng” showed that black women were not simply the objects of the policies of white government and industrializing power-brokers, but that they were also affected by policies of their own black chiefs and elders. Bozzoli’s notion of “domestic struggle” represented one way of handling multiple and mutually intersecting contradictions, such as the concepts of black female oppression and black female resistance not being mutually exclusive to either the capitalist sphere or the domestic sphere.<sup>15</sup>

Penelope Hetherington looked into the “new” women’s history and its feminist tenor in examining many of the concerns Bozzoli articulated. Hetherington examined the tendency of South African women’s historians to frame debate in a Marxist context, rather than the Western feminist academic framework of the “patriarchy”. Taking into account cultural difference, Hetherington revealed that certain women’s preference for Marxist analysis did not, however, imply a commitment to ending the capitalist system.<sup>16</sup> Rather, she revealed a preponderance of white women academic historians developing critiques based on Marxist theory of black women as the “subjects” of history.<sup>17</sup> As Bozzoli indicated in her initial survey of historical developments in South Africa, the Marxist interpretations allowed for obscuration of gender struggles within the family – although perhaps not intentionally concealing them.

Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter in “ ‘We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward’: ANC Women’s Struggles, 1912-1982,” responded to the debate surrounding the presence of “feminist” dialogue or the lack of concern for women’s issues within South African

women's politicization. They uncovered cultural distinctions between Western women's assessment of women's struggle and South African women's understandings. Kimble and Unterhalter related South African women's assertion that their struggle was not a women's struggle, and neither was their enemy male chauvinism.<sup>18</sup> They revealed that South African women's motivation was not mere equality with their men (who at the time were as yet under the yoke of Apartheid): women wanted to maintain a disciplined political stance.<sup>19</sup> As one South African woman stated:

In our country, white racism and apartheid coupled with economic exploitation have degraded the African woman more than any male prejudices...the women have realized that the national liberation struggle is an important part of their social emancipation.<sup>20</sup>

Kimble and Unterhalter understood the Western feminist controversy with the South African women's position as more of a question of specificities of language used in discussion. Whether it was Western feminist-led or African Marxist-influenced, Penelope Hetherington also saw the historiographical debate surrounding women's politicization as semantic in nature. Hetherington demonstrated the positive trend of feminist historians to veer away from the early emphasis on workplace and protest movements and head toward the consideration of family structure and ideology, as clearly seen in Bozzoli's later work.<sup>21</sup>

South African author Nadine Gordimer brought to light the experience of Ellen Kuzwayo – in a preface to the latter's biography – as an example of someone who was not Westernized, but someone who Africanized the Western concept of “woman” and achieved a synthesis with meaning for all who experience cultural conflict.<sup>22</sup> Gordimer observed that Kuzwayo was not afraid to reveal aspects of racism not often admitted by its victims and the moral ambiguity brought about by oppression.<sup>23</sup> Kuzwayo's autobiography uncovers yet another response to the feminist historical debate: an honest and open confession of experience that implicitly calls into

question feminist theories of discussion rather than the documented actions themselves. Like the examination of women's oral history in "The Women of Phokeng," Kuzwayo's autobiography takes into account the "domestic sphere" on a personal level.

Iris Berger, in her 1991 work "Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry 1900-1980," took up the exploration of women's role in factory work. Acknowledging Bozzoli's cautionary insights regarding the complexity of the concept of "struggle,"<sup>24</sup> she investigated how involvement in industry created bonds among black and white working-class women that promoted their involvement in labor resistance and other political movements.<sup>25</sup> Berger contended that the discussion of labor history provided an important context for understanding working women in broad terms that took account of race, ethnicity, and the gendered nature of historical experience and perception.<sup>26</sup> Through "Threads of Solidarity," Berger attempted to illuminate the diversity of working-class experience and its complex relationship to the "constructions" of race, gender, and class.<sup>27</sup>

In Berger's later works, she discusses the concept of three "distinct stages" marking the dominant conceptualization of gender among working class women. Berger's stages consist of a first phase in the 1930s and early 1940s when gender was incorporated into the language of class; a second phase in the later 1940s and 1950s when the ideas of nationalism dominated gender discussion; and a final period from the mid-1970s onward when an autonomous conceptual framework developed around gender ideology.<sup>28</sup> Berger contends that understanding the concepts of class, race, and gender through the lens of a particular stage can help to clarify their complex relationships with one another.<sup>29</sup>

Nomboniso Gasa, in a very recent article, takes issue with Walker and Wells' early interpretations of the politicization of South African women. Like Bozzoli, Berger, and

Hetherington, she acknowledges the problematic lenses through which female historiography is viewed. Questioning why the militant pass-protest of 1913 occurred, Gasca examines what she defines as Walker's "easy" answer: that "women responded to issues that touched their lives directly."<sup>30</sup> She argues against both Wells' and Walker's assertions that black women conceded the political space to men, evidencing the 1913 protest as a direct challenge to that notion. Discussing the later political activity of black women, Gasca contests what she describes as Walker's deeply flawed approach: the separation of blackness and liberation struggle on the one hand and feminism on the other.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Walker and Wells, Gasca suggests women's struggles against the patriarchy were not mostly private, but were in fact very political. Gasca insists that from their first entry into the political space, black women resisted male domination, acting on their own, representing themselves directly to the Union government and even in their appeals to the empire.<sup>32</sup> Far from being submissive, the black women of the 1950s had clarity of vision within the face of different forms of patriarchal oppression.<sup>33</sup>

The conflict between interpretations of domestic struggle, female oppression, and women's resistance brings to light interesting notions. In some ways, Walker hesitated to engage with a Western "feminist" analysis, in contrast to Gasca who wonders why there need be a gulf at all between political and gender analysis. In spite of diverging ideas, Walker and Gasca both advocated the necessity of examining black and white women's political movements in the context of multiple forms of oppression. Bozzoli sought to examine sources without completely eliminating Marxist orientation but including within that focus a discussion of the "domestic sphere" in terms of a relevant conflict. Kimble and Unterhalter saw the conflict between Marxism and Feminism in the discussion of female oppression not so much as a theoretical cleavage but as one of conflicting political ideologies. In different ways, both Bozzoli and the

team of Kimble and Unterhalter saw the necessity of adjusting the way the struggle of South African women was discussed and examined.

### *The Thrust of the Study*

This study asks: who were the women involved in the Segregation and Apartheid struggles? What were their varied backgrounds and motivations, and what kept them going? What types of analyses were and are used to address the efforts of women in both the liberation movement and the struggle against patriarchal authority? Why do some scholars suggest that the liberation struggle and the feminist struggle remained separate entities, while others suggest that the politicization of women by its very nature was a multi-layered concept? Taking into account the notions that these debates bring forth by an examination of political documents, organizational letters, formal speeches, personal stories, feminist theories, and the collected studies of scholars such as Walker, Bozzoli, Berger and others, this study analyzes the sources in order to determine the involvement and motivations of women, as well as situating their struggle alongside the liberation efforts of men.

By separating the historical events into four phases, the study will address the specific challenges to women and their responses and reactions to those challenges. The first chapter examines the period of 1910-1939: the Segregation era of South Africa and the origin of black political movements and strategies. The second chapter addresses the economic and political struggles of a country at war, 1939 to 1949, and how those struggles affected black liberation movements. In the third chapter, 1949 to 1960, we encounter the growth of militancy within liberation movements and the proposed “visible” politicization of women under Apartheid. The documentary support of this chapter has been enriched by the FSAW papers of the 1950s and 60s and is the core of the study. The final chapter covers the period from 1960 to roughly the mid

1980s and examines both the repression and the resurgence of liberation movements and the continued struggle of men and women toward the end of Apartheid, how that struggle has been represented, and the new ways it continues to be examined.

Determined by the study are the ways in which women utilized their circumstances to maintain their political voices. The politicization of women of all races and backgrounds was a multi-layered concept. Family life, gender politics, and race dynamics, as well as economic factors, influenced women's reactions and interactions in the liberation struggle. This study also finds that regardless of race or background, there existed an inherent concern for gender equality in women's actions, as well as explicit concern for women's issues, spelled out in various documents and petitions within the greater struggle for race liberation. By situating women's gender and racial liberation efforts in the general struggle for liberation that included men, women's actions are themselves illuminated.

### **Introduction: Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), ix.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, xxxii.

<sup>5</sup> Penelope Hetherington, "Women in South Africa: The Historiography in English" in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1993), 242.

<sup>6</sup> Hetherington, "Women in South Africa," 248.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 3.

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- <sup>8</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 25.
- <sup>9</sup> Hetherington, "Women in South Africa," 251.
- <sup>10</sup> Julia C. Wells, "Why Women Rebel: A Comparative Study of South African Women's Resistance in Bloemfontein (1913) and Johannesburg (1958)" in *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Special Issue on Women in Southern Africa (October, 1983), 69.
- <sup>11</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies" in *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (April, 1983), 144.
- <sup>12</sup> Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," 147.
- <sup>13</sup> Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," 144.
- <sup>14</sup> The term "capitalist sphere" as Bozzoli uses it here, refers the use of male and female labor for the benefit of industrialism and all of its facets; opposing the concept of the "domestic sphere" whose labor efforts exist for the benefit of the family household. See, Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," 146.
- <sup>15</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 14.
- <sup>16</sup> Hetherington, "Women in South Africa," 243.
- <sup>17</sup> Hetherington, "Women in South Africa," 269.
- <sup>18</sup> Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, "'We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward': ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982" in *Feminist Review*, No. 12 (1982), 14.
- <sup>19</sup> Kimble and Unterhalter, "We Opened the Road," 14.
- <sup>20</sup> Kimble and Unterhalter, "We Opened the Road," 14.
- <sup>21</sup> Hetherington, "Women in South Africa," 260.
- <sup>22</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1985), xi.
- <sup>23</sup> Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*, xii.
- <sup>24</sup> Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry 1900-1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 10.

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- <sup>25</sup> Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 12.
- <sup>27</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 15.
- <sup>28</sup> Iris Berger, "Categories and Contexts: Reflections on the Politics of Identity in South Africa," in *Feminist Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), 286.
- <sup>29</sup> Berger, "Categories and Contexts," 286.
- <sup>30</sup> Nomboniso Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 144.
- <sup>31</sup> Nomboniso Gasa, "Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s," in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 214.
- <sup>32</sup> Gasa, "Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s," 215.
- <sup>33</sup> Gasa, "Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s," 224.

## **Chapter I: The Challenge of Segregation, 1910-1939**

From the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, Black South Africans, that is, all those classified as non-white by the government, including Colored and Asian South Africans, entered into a period of harsh struggle that continued into the early 1990s. The Union of South Africa, with Louis Botha as its first prime minister, was founded as a Union under which white citizens – and only white – were allowed participation in government.<sup>i</sup> The Union's commitment to segregation played out in its subsequent legislation, institutionalizing the glorification of white supremacy. Black, Colored, and Asian men, women, and children were challenged to create avenues for political, economic, and social liberties where very little to none existed. Black, Colored, and Asian women were also burdened with the additional challenge of breaking through patriarchal restrictions and prejudices regarding leadership within political and social protests and economic activity. Of this additional challenge, White women were also a part.

The Union Act Constitution, formulated in 1909 to 1910, contained four major principles. First, following the British model, it created a unitary state with parliamentary sovereignty. Within the unitary state, any party with a simple majority could pass just about any legislation it wished.<sup>ii</sup> The four colonies – the Transvaal, Natal, the Orange River Colony, and the Cape Colony – became the provinces of the Union, although the central government held supremacy over all local institutions. The central legislative, administrative, and judicial bodies would be shared between the capitals of the Cape, the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony, that is, Cape Town, Pretoria, and Bloemfontein, respectively. Second, only white males were granted the right to vote in parliamentary elections or to become members of parliament. The Cape

Colony, whose franchise laws were previously non-racial in nature, were maintained – although membership in parliament was still confined to white males. Third, judicial commissions were to divide the country into electoral divisions for the lower house of parliament at regular intervals, each division containing the same number of voters. The commissions, however, might vary the number 15 percent either direction from the average, taking into account factors such as sparsity or density of population. The ability to vary numbers gave future parties representing rural voters an advantage, as will be seen in the case of Dr. Malan’s National Party and its implementation of Apartheid. Fourth, the constitution made both English and Dutch the official languages of the country, assuring the continuation of Afrikaaner culture and identity.<sup>iii</sup>

### *The Challenge*

Segregation policies affected the rights of Africans to own land, to live or travel where they chose, and to have job security. Regarding employment, the Mines and Works Act of 1911 restricted the jobs Africans could hold in mines, reserving skilled positions for white workers. The Native Labor Registration Act of 1911 restricted where Africans *could* work, implementing a pass-system whereby whites controlled the number of African workers holding urban jobs. Under the Registration Act, pass-bearing African males could not be considered legal employees, thus excluding them from labor representation rights and legal labor organization.<sup>iv</sup> Later, the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923 restricted even the locations pass-carrying Africans could rent in order to work within urban areas. More and more, Africans were pushed into the impoverished reserves.<sup>v</sup> The Union attempted to extend the pass-system to women but was met with fierce resistance, as shall be discussed later. By 1936, the few political rights left to Africans in the Cape Province were removed under the Representation of Natives Act. Although allowed to elect

white representatives, Africans were unmistakably segregated in political, economic, and social arenas of South African society.<sup>vi</sup>

With the growth of economic opportunities for white and black men and white women, J.B.M. Hertzog, leader of the Union government during the period after World War I, introduced legislation in order to reshape the rights of the labor force in favor of both white male and white female workers.<sup>vii</sup> The experience of working women began to be determined on account of their race – in part because of Hertzog’s initiatives. By segregating the workplace, Hertzog’s legislation affected organizations such as the Garment Workers Union (GWU) and re-entrenched ideas of white supremacy among poor female Afrikaaner workers. As Walker put it:

Even though mutual poverty could blur the harsher outlines of racialism amongst those whites and blacks who were working together and often living together in rundown tenements and mixed neighborhoods, the belief in white supremacy ran deep. For many poor whites it was their last, precious claim to dignity and status.<sup>viii</sup>

Regarding land and living space, the Native Lands Amendment Act of 1913 restricted where Africans could live. It prohibited them from purchasing or leasing land outside the government-formed reserves from non-Africans.<sup>ix</sup> As well as dividing the country into segregated land-holdings, the Native Lands Act was designed to transform Africans in the white-owned rural areas into tenant and wage laborers.<sup>x</sup> By narrowing their access to a decent quality of life and fair employment opportunity, the Union government meant to reduce African existence to that of providing an endless supply of cheap labor for white employers.

Quality of life on the reserves was dismal at best. Over one-fifth of children died within their first year of life. Under-nutrition was common. African education was left up to poorly funded missionary societies with limited resources. In order to exist on even a below-subsistence level, men and women were forced to find any work possible in a society that restricted work opportunities as much as possible.<sup>xi</sup> As shall be discussed later, African reaction to work

restriction involved extralegal employment and creative responses that challenged the system: the response of black women being particularly militant.

Black South Africans were under siege on all fronts. Black women, whose lives were greatly bounded by domestic responsibilities at this time,<sup>xii</sup> were no less oppressed than men. The segregationist reality involved women in such a way that they perceived casual jobs as their primary alternative to domestic labor. Where women were able to choose, it was their concerted effort to avoid domestic work.<sup>xiii</sup> Despite their real or potential subjection to all things domestic, women nevertheless began a process of politicization that took a variety of forms.

### *The Struggle*

In 1911, white women's suffragist organizations came together to form a national body: the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU). Despite their militancy, the Union government did not seriously consider the cause of women's suffrage until Hertzog's National Party put it to use as a segregationist weapon in 1924. General Hertzog, one of the foremost initiators of segregationist legislation, pushed for the enfranchisement of women to double the white electorate in order to reduce the importance of black votes.<sup>xiv</sup> While Hertzog used the WEAU, it was not without consent. Women's suffragist organizations may have been feminist, but at the same time they were also racist.<sup>xv</sup> Therefore, black women did not go through the channels of white women's suffrage organizations in order to cultivate their political voices. Walker writes:

It was the organizations prepared to take up community issues that attracted black women into politics, and it was in the general political context of the national liberation movement against white supremacy that a truly representative women's movement took shape. In the period before the second world war, the three most important organizations to deal with women politically, within this general context, were the African National Congress [ANC], the Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA], and the trade union movement.<sup>xvi</sup>

### *The Anti-Pass Campaign of 1913*

Black women made memorable their militancy first in the anti-pass campaign of 1913. A landmark of “visible” politicization, the campaign took place in Bloemfontein, where work restrictions and pass law regulations had become so strict that every African person above the age of 16 had to carry a ‘service book’ indicating their employer and place of abode.<sup>xvii</sup> It is estimated that by 1913, women had to carry a total of 13 permits. Besides the expense of acquiring these monthly permits, the process itself of spending long hours in queues was exhausting. Women, for whom employment was already strictly regulated, could not afford permit fees regulating their “casual” labor, such as laundry services.<sup>xviii</sup> As an African Political Organization (APO) newsletter quoted the women, “We have done with pleading, we now demand.”<sup>xix</sup> The women embarked on a passive resistance campaign and marched to the mayor’s offices with signs held high and voices raised: they would carry the passes no longer. Later, when the mayor refused to meet them, they promptly burned the passes.<sup>xx</sup>

The 1913 anti-pass protest exemplifies black women’s political behavior being shaped in terms of their community of interest with black men, as well as harkening back to former cultural tradition that allowed black women more independence and authority than that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western-influenced society of South Africa.<sup>xxi</sup> The decision of black women to undertake passive resistance was a bold departure from anything previously tried, and it did not depend on organizational support from the newly established South African Native National Congress (SANNC, later known as the African National Congress [ANC]) or the APO.<sup>xxii</sup> Not surprisingly, given their independent approach, the women’s protest was met with mixed responses. John L. Dube, president of the SANNC, and other male leaders were initially

discomfited by the approach of the women, fearing that their militancy would halt the political mission of the SANNC, then in its infancy.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Ultimately, women's militancy won out and the SANNC and the APO supported the women's cause at the eleventh hour. Regarding their initial halfhearted support, the APO published a statement commending the enthusiastic response of the women while acknowledging male shame over their lack of involvement in the "heroic stand of Africa's daughters."<sup>xxiv</sup> Despite imprisonment and harsh labor sentences received on account of their actions, women protestors declared that they would never carry passes even if it meant that they would have to return to prison.<sup>xxv</sup> The legislators initially in support of pass extension eventually backed down.<sup>xxvi</sup> This "heroic stand" was a demonstration of women's ability to organize in a political context as well as a demonstration of their determination regardless of male support.<sup>xxvii</sup>

#### *The Bantu Women's League*

An outgrowth of black female political activity became more "visible" following the Bloemfontein protests. Charlotte Maxeke, a young South African teacher, led the formation of the Bantu Women's League (BWL) to act in conjunction with its male-dominated counterpart, the SANNC. Maxeke became the first president of the BWL, much to the satisfaction of the SANNC male leaders. Dr. A. B. Xuma extolled Maxeke as an admirable choice, due to her education, her Christian way of life, her standard of housekeeping, and her kind and gentle nature.<sup>xxviii</sup> Regardless of whether it was due to these specific qualities, Maxeke immediately latched onto the question of pass laws and led a delegation to Prime Minister Botha to present the women's case. No legislation was passed, but pass law enforcement was relaxed.<sup>xxix</sup> *De facto*, the women's cause was won for the time being.

Maxeke was both politically and socially conscious. As president of the BWL, she developed ties with political organizations such as the SANNC, with whom the BWL was affiliated, the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union (ICU) founded by Clements Kadalie, as well as spearheading the founding of the National Council of African Women (NCAW).<sup>xxx</sup> One scholar has described Maxeke as the "lone voice of female consciousness" who fought for the rights of women in industry,<sup>xxx1</sup> and another represents her as exceptional, although suggests that Maxeke's beliefs were typical of her middle-class position of the times.<sup>xxxii</sup> It is interesting to note that Maxeke's own speeches, regardless of her middle-class position, show her desire to unite women of all classes. As she put it:

I would suggest that there might be a conference of Native and European women, where we could get to understand each others point of view, each others difficulties and problems, and where, actuated by the real spirit of love, we might find some basis on which we could work for the common good of European and Bantu womenhood.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Maxeke's concern for women's equality, safety, and cooperation regarding gender-specific issues clearly shines through. She also came from the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church and this often informed her approaches.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The position of women in this era was at times contradictory in nature – with women straddling and weaving between different spaces.<sup>xxxv</sup>

### *The Trade Union Movement*

While the BWL was instigating women's involvement in the political dealings of the SANNC, female involvement also began to occur in the trade union movement and, to a smaller extent, in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). This involvement indicated women's heightened political sensibilities as well as the diversification of possible settings for expression of a political nature, even regarding segregation. However, the process of female politicization for South Africa's multi-ethnic

population was not a clear-cut undertaking. White and colored working-class women were the initial groups to become greatly involved in trade union activities; black women were to become involved to a greater extent at a later time. Because of the difficulties women faced in their attempts to reform industrial working conditions and their struggles as domestic workers to maintain a source of income as well as their families, many women sought to challenge the system by altogether refusing domestic labor or factory work in order to create their own economic strategies for survival.<sup>xxxvi</sup> These endeavors of women to support themselves and their families through “casual” labor efforts, especially taken up by many black women, exemplify some suggestions that black women’s struggle was against full “proletarianization.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Although white and colored workers dominated women’s union involvement in industry during this early period, black women’s stubborn reluctance to enter household work was perhaps the most distinct characteristic of protest during this early period.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Experiences of white and colored working-class women within the industrial complex created a forum for political dissent that began to challenge uniformly bad conditions of workplaces.<sup>xxxix</sup> Also, the political creativity of petty-bourgeoisie black women was revealed through the incorporation of the “household economy” in their creation of a new path in the struggle for economic survival.

By the mid-1920s, a new economic and political climate focusing on secondary production and the consumer goods industry became an important facet of the South African economy.<sup>xl</sup> The demand for workers began to draw more women into industrial jobs.<sup>xli</sup> White women dominated female representation in industrial jobs from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s, with black women left largely to the harsh demands of domestic service for employment.<sup>xlii</sup> The involvement of white and colored women within industrial unions such as the Garment Workers’ Union (GWU), the Sweet Workers’ Union (SWU), the Chemical Workers’ Union (CWU), and

the Waitresses' Union (WU), and black women within the short-lived but influential Domestic Employee's Union (DEU) – formed under the aegis of the National Liberation League (NLL) – not only changed the face of trade unionism but also changed the way women's issues would be addressed in future political efforts of organizations such as the ANC.<sup>xliii</sup>

### *The Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union*

The Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union, founded in 1919 by Clements Kadalie, a mission-educated African from Nyasaland (modern day Malawi), was formed as a response to the post-WWI disorganization of the ANC and the idea that the ANC leaders were tied to white liberal political agendas instead of liberating black workers.<sup>xliv</sup> Instead of becoming mired in politics, the ICU originally functioned as a liberation organization inspired by the likes of Marcus Garvey and the back-to-Africa movement. Because of a need for better representation of black workers, the ICU ultimately evolved into a more politically focused body: an actual "Union." However, Kadalie desired in no way to replicate what he termed:

...the stupid and futile 'Non-political' attitude of our White contemporaries...we must recognize that in neglecting to concern ourselves with current politics, in leaving the political machines to the unchallenged control of our class enemies, we are rendering a disservice to those tens of thousands of our members who are groaning under oppressive laws and who are looking to the I.C.U. for a lead.<sup>xlv</sup>

The ICU advocated for the rights of all workers, regardless of race, but also criticized the segregationist position of white trade unions. It called for an end to pass laws and the color bar, and for greater African political representation.<sup>xlvi</sup>

As the movement expanded to include workers from rural as well as urban settings, a small but significant number of women became involved in the radical ICU as branch leaders, officials, and representatives at conferences.<sup>xlvii</sup> Helen Bradford has recorded in detail the experiences of women beer brewers of Natal, deliberately recruited by the ICU *yase* (of) Natal,

in an attempt to combat waning finances and membership. Together with male dockworkers, women initiated protests against canteens competing with their trade. Bradford notes:

Typically, women marched through streets, chanted war songs, raided beer halls, assaulted male drinkers, and behaved in ‘a riotous manner, dancing, shouting and striking their sticks on the ground’. Almost everywhere, they vigorously reasserted ICU *yase* Natal-derived demands for closure of the canteens and legalization of domestic brewing.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Bradford and Berger note that the women’s involvement in the ICU, their leadership in campaigns – particularly in their periodic protests involving the protection of informal beer brewing and opposition to the founding of municipal beer halls – influenced the course of their demonstrations. Interestingly, what originally started as a protest against proletarianization and an attempt to maintain informal economic efforts also resulted in a struggle over the distribution of male wages in the household. Black women of the petty-bourgeoisie, whose lives were structured around the home and domestic labor and whose earnings could be appropriated by men, were primed to join a political struggle that dealt with the very issue of male wages. Beer hall issues both symbolized and intensified the oppression of African women.<sup>xlix</sup>

Apart from the issues revolving around beer brewing, the ICU as the main voice for black workers in the late 1920s, was only occasionally an outlet for women’s grievances.<sup>1</sup> Instead, by rallying the black under-classes to support liberal and petty-bourgeoisie demands, the ICU essentially challenged racial domination and the capitalist system.<sup>li</sup> Ultimately, the ICU’s large outreach was its downfall. Each district within each province had its own particular balance of social forces with which to contend. Except in instances where the ICU engaged with specific localized struggles – such as the Natal beer brewers – it could not sustain long-term appeal for its movement.<sup>lii</sup> The ICU began to fragment in the late 20s and early 1930s because of internal division between its leaders and the failure to meet its goals, not discounting the government’s

continued legislation in favor of the white capitalist minority. Eventually petering out, the ICU nevertheless brought political struggle to the countryside, allowing rural South Africans to also “taste freedom.”<sup>liii</sup>

### *The Communist Party of South Africa*

Because of Hertzog’s continued Segregationist efforts, by the mid-1930s organizations such as the ANC, APO, and ICU were moribund – the BWL alongside them.<sup>liv</sup> Formed in 1921, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was one of the only organizations that was expanding at the time and, although small, succeeded in attracting frustrated members of the other failing organizations. Originating among a group of white South African socialists opposing WWI, the CPSA moved on to organizing workers and had begun organizing black workers by 1924, when the Industrial Conciliation Act excluded them from registered trade unions.<sup>lv</sup> Although not all CPSA members were supportive of racial inclusion, leaders like Eddie Roux successfully argued the ideas of Sidney Bunting that blacks should be organized along side whites, bringing the CPSA in much closer contact with organizations like the ANC.<sup>lvi</sup>

Pursuing a course of multi-racial inclusion, the CPSA in 1925 began conducting night schooling in the ideologies of Communism, under the guidance of T.W. Thibedi – slowly attracting black members into the fold.<sup>lvii</sup> By the time of the disintegration of the ICU, ANC, and APO, internal division also wracked the CPSA, and the decision was made to move headquarters from Johannesburg to Cape Town. This fresh start – due largely to the work of Edwin Mofutsanyana, Jack Simons, and the incorrigible Ray Alexander – saved the organization from implosion.<sup>lviii</sup> As well as attracting men, the CPSA sought to include women in their struggle against capitalism and was the training ground of some influential female political activists.

Women like Ray Alexander, Josie Palmer, and Mary Wolton fought for the representation of the female political voice even amidst a party that at times held inconsistent views.<sup>lix</sup>

Josie Palmer or Mpama, one of the first women to join the CPSA and one of the first black women to play a significant role within it, became involved following a Potchefstroom anti-pass campaign. In a 1932 issue of the CPSA newspaper *Umsebenzi*, she urged: “The time has arrived for women to enter the political field and stand shoulder to shoulder with their men in the struggle.”<sup>lx</sup> Ray Alexander, emigrant from Latvia, was another dynamic political force. She used local issues as common political ground in order to organize women of different races. Many of Alexander’s efforts laid the groundwork for the formation of later women’s organizations, such as the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU).<sup>lxi</sup> Mary Wolton, an emigrant from Lithuania who was declared an excitable, forceful, and brilliant public speaker by CPSA leader Eddie Roux, fought passionately for the rights of male and female workers. She was viewed as one of the most dedicated members of the CPSA at the time.<sup>lxii</sup>

While The CPSA claimed dynamic membership and protested race segregation in industrial complexes,<sup>lxiii</sup> it failed to consistently do the same for sex discrimination. The CPSA, while encouraging the political work of a multi-racial group of women, still fell victim to the prominent view that women’s struggle for emancipation was as yet subordinate to the larger struggle of both blacks and workers. Yet for all its inconsistencies, the CPSA brought forth new ways of thinking about the political position of women while trying to establish connections between different racial groups. The CPSA’s vision of a multi-racial struggle against capitalism and imperialism thus infiltrated the realm of women’s organizations.<sup>lxiv</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Women's initial efforts in the forums of the BWL, the ICU, the CPSA, and the trade union movement represented the most visible contexts of politicization during the period of Segregation leading up to the Second World War. Many times black and white women found themselves straddling several political positions at once. Because established organizations like the WEAU were racist in nature and unhelpful to the cause of black female organization, black women either turned to other male-dominated organizations or formed their own. The Bantu Women's League, while not regarded by some scholars in later years as a serious political effort, connected women to the cause of the SANNC, started dialogue about gender-specific issues among female activists and became the basis for future multi-racial women-centered political efforts.

Women's involvement in industry and the trade unions was diverse and complex. Black women's rejection of full proletarianization represented their militancy and exemplified their political natures. Early female efforts in trade unionism, primarily of white and colored women, while not without racial conflict, ultimately helped to identify and thus challenge the unacceptable conditions of the workplace. Black women's efforts in the "domestic sphere" composed much of the early period's militancy against both female and capitalist oppression, alongside the "visible" political efforts of trade unions.

The ICU and CPSA brought forth a barrage of dynamic leaders and provided yet another context for female politicization. Although a number of women became involved in the ICU as leaders, the organization's main concern was to radically shift the liberation struggle away from the ANC's political-centered agenda. The ICU focused its energies on radical liberation goals

and only occasionally voiced women-specific concerns, such as those involving beer brewing. Eventually it became too divided to function and was phased out.

The CPSA did not struggle consistently against sex-discrimination but did make efforts to end racial discrimination of both men and women. The CPSA proved to successfully sustain black political liberation efforts during the stagnant period of the ANC, APO, and BWL, and to carry them into the period during the Second World War, as well as promoting the idea of multi-racial organization.

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## Chapter I: Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), 20-21.

<sup>ii</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 20.

<sup>iii</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 147-51.

<sup>iv</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 21.

<sup>v</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 22.

<sup>vi</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 23.

<sup>vii</sup> Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry 1900-1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 48.

<sup>viii</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 64.

<sup>ix</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 163.

<sup>x</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 165.

<sup>xi</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 164.

<sup>xii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 11.

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- xiii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 18.
- xiv Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 23.
- xv Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 24.
- xvi Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 25.
- xvii Nomboniso Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 134.
- xviii Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 135.
- xix Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 136.
- xx Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 136-137.
- xxi Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 32.
- xxii Julia C. Wells, "Why Women Rebel: A Comparative Study of South African Women's Resistance in Bloemfontein (1913) and Johannesburg (1958)" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Special Issue on Women in Southern Africa (October, 1983), 57.
- xxiii Frene Ginwala, "Women and the ANC: 1912-1943" in *Agenda*, No. 8 (1990), 81-82.
- xxiv Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 31.
- xxv Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, "'We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward': ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982" in *Feminist Review*, No. 12 (1982), 18.
- xxvi Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 20.
- xxvii Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 139-140.
- xxviii Kimble and Unterhalter, "We Opened the Road for You," 19.
- xxix Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 32-33.
- xxx Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 148.
- xxxi Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 39.
- xxxii Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 36.

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- xxxiii Charlotte Maxeke, "Social Conditions Among Bantu Women and Girls," in Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, eds., "Protest and Hope: 1882-1934," Vol. 1, of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 346.
- xxxiv The AME church, founded in Philadelphia in 1816, was a political mouthpiece for anti-slavery and equal rights in the United States. See: Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 149.
- xxxv Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," 148.
- xxxvi Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 42.
- xxxvii Wells, "Why Women Rebel," 69.
- xxxviii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 43.
- xxxix Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 60.
- xl Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 48.
- xli Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 65.
- xlii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 82-84.
- xliii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 118-119.
- xliv Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 176.
- xlv Clements Kadalie, "Economic and Political Program for 1928" in Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, eds., "Protest and Hope: 1882-1934," Vol. 1, of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 331.
- xlvi Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, eds., "Protest and Hope: 1882-1934," Vol. 1, of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 155-56.
- xlvii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 38.
- xlviii Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 246-7.
- xlix Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*, 249.

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- <sup>1</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 67.
- <sup>li</sup> Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*, 123.
- <sup>lii</sup> Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*, 257.
- <sup>liii</sup> Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom*, 278.
- <sup>liv</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 176.
- <sup>lv</sup> Luli Callinicos, "Labor History and Worker Education in South Africa," in *Labour History*, No. 65 (Nov., 1993), 165.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 15.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 203.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, 21.
- <sup>lix</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 48.
- <sup>lx</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 52.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 50.
- <sup>lxii</sup> Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, 19.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 55.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 55.

## **Chapter 2: World War II, Rebuilding the ANC and Women's Activism, 1939-1949**

World War II and its aftermath created new challenges and new opportunities for the men and women involved in the cause of black liberation. Although politically divided under the Smuts administration at the start of WWII, the South African government committed to raising and equipping a large military force, as well as providing the Allied cause with many raw materials for War production and meeting domestic needs for manufacturing.<sup>i</sup> The growth of industry encouraged a shift of the South African economy away from its dependence on mining and agriculture and towards manufacturing.<sup>ii</sup> While this shift created new opportunities for employment – especially of women – the sad reality of increased segregation quickly became apparent.

### ***The Challenge***

The rapid growth of industry that expanded the South African economy simultaneously resulted in impoverished conditions for black men, women, and children, and re-intensified racial conflict. The government did not provide for the increase in urban migration, nor did it relax its segregationist policies. The Factories Act of 1941, which provided racially separate accommodations and facilities for workers, even maintained segregationist policies *within* the workplace.<sup>iii</sup> Due to the myriad of legal restrictions limiting black entry and residence in the cities, blacks were forced to create their own makeshift urban communities.<sup>iv</sup> Many newly urbanized blacks were forced to live in these communities or “squatter camps” where the standard of living was at or below the poverty line.<sup>v</sup>

The new jobs available in factories were delegated to workers based on race and gender. On account of the shortage of white males for positions requiring skilled labor, the government resorted to recruiting white female workers – at much less pay – instead of hiring black men who

could potentially upset the racial divide within industries.<sup>vi</sup> Despite these racial divisions and the government's attempts to keep them out of the towns, black men and women were nevertheless drawn into the burgeoning manufacturing and service industries.<sup>vii</sup> The economy could not function without them.

When black men moved out of household work and into secondary industries, black women were in demand as domestic workers. The challenges facing these women as both full-time domestic employees and full-time caretakers of their own homes were enormous.<sup>viii</sup> For black women who did work in factories, the racial division challenging them in integrated organizations like the Garment Workers' Union or the Sweet Workers' Union was no less intense. Thus, the informal sector of the economy remained crucially important. Not without hardship, the majority of black women tenaciously clung to their informal means of producing income.

The towns and squatter camps – locations of violence and discontent – were the home base for women's informal economic ventures. Petty-bourgeoisie women's informal economic efforts like *shebeens* – centers of beer, liquor, fun, and sex<sup>ix</sup> – were challenged by government regulations, police brutality, gang violence, and inter-familial conflict. Ellen Kuzwayo remembered:

It was a common occurrence to hear a woman's shriek in the middle of the night, pleading for help whilst the sound of either a stick or *sjambok* (a rhinoceros-hide whip) rhythmically landed on her body. Then a male voice would hurl insults at the punished woman...all the time the poor woman would be weeping and wailing in an effort to explain her absence and to convince the man of her innocence. This was one of the most disturbing and frustrating features of township life in the 1940's and 1950's: the *timiti*, an event which was both an entertainment and a living for many women of the community, compelled them to participate for their survival.<sup>x</sup>

Bozzoli's interviews with the women of Phokeng shed light on their reality. A certain Naomi Setshedi related, "We were arrested many times and bailed for a certain amount. That

was the only way we could earn a living by selling beer. We were making a reasonable sum.”<sup>xi</sup>

The culture of subterfuge and defiance did not prevent the women from experiencing police arrest as painful and humiliating.<sup>xii</sup> Women also at times segregated their own identities in order to reconcile the worlds of the church and the *shebeen*, as they could not come to terms with the latter as just or innocent.<sup>xiii</sup>

Frances Baard also remembered women-specific hardships within the townships – issues where women were treated as though they were of secondary class within their own communities. Baard remembered widowed women being chased out of their homes or forced to marry old or disabled men in order to keep their homes. “They make you marry there and then, and they demand what money you have, even if it is only ten cents, to pay for the certificate. And then you have a husband and you can keep your house. That is how they used to insult us. It was too insulting.”<sup>xiv</sup>

Government legislation that meant to inhibit black opportunities in order to ensure white economic success came into even sharper focus following the Second World War. Right wing Nationalist organizations as well as the government sought to attack black and non-racial trade union efforts.<sup>xv</sup> The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act sought to cripple the CPSA, as well as its efforts regarding racial equality within the workplace. It divested many unions of experienced leaders who were involved in the CPSA, and left a great many female labor activists banned, banished, or imprisoned.<sup>xvi</sup> The Re-united National Party of Hertzog and Malan issued the Sauer Report in 1948, which sought to further the cause of white supremacy so far that it resulted in the Apartheid state. The Sauer Report as the basis for Apartheid advocated total segregation as the ideal goal while acknowledging that the eventual result would take some time.<sup>xvii</sup> Hendrik Verwoerd, then minister of Native Affairs and one of Apartheid’s most avid

initiators, sought to make clear its supposed “benefits” to all South Africans after its implementation in 1950:

To avoid the...unpleasant and dangerous future for both sections of the population, the present Government adopts the attitude that it concedes and wishes to give to others precisely what it demands for itself. It believes in the supremacy (*baaskap*) of the European in his sphere but, then, it also believes equally in the supremacy (*baaskap*) of the Bantu in his own sphere...Thus, there is no policy of oppression here, but one of creating a situation which has never existed for the Bantu; namely, that, taking into consideration their languages, traditions, history and different national communities, they may pass through a development of their own.<sup>xviii</sup>

Verwoerd’s “scientific” basis for his racist ideologies attempted to convince the public that Apartheid did not oppress but rather “liberated” black South Africans. Clearly, the supposedly “liberated” blacks disagreed.

### *The Struggle*

The growth of industry created challenges for both men and women; their responses were based on necessity, ingenuity, and defiance. Black women, specifically in their position as wives and mothers, the primary caretakers of their families, felt the tremendous weight of the new economic burden. And a burden it was, for the economic growth during the Second World War benefited only white industrialists directly. The experiences of multi-racial groups of women ranged from work in factories, work as domestic servants, and work in informal economic ventures, to involvement in trade unions, grassroots movements, and formal political organizations. A variety of contexts functioned as politicizing opportunities, and women took advantage.

### *The Informal Economy*

Within the informal economy, the majority of black women were employed in the service sector as private domestic servants. Domestic work was not only taxing physically and mentally for women who were also in charge of their own homes, but also given its private nature was

extremely difficult to organize. By 1945, women outnumbered men in domestic employment, and although many of them were mothers, none of them were able to live with their children.<sup>xix</sup> On account of the acute disruption of family life on the reserves, women were ever more tied to their independent means of making a living. Women took in laundry, brewed beer, ran *shebeens*, sold homemade clothing and foodstuffs, and operated coffee stalls.

In order to combat the heavy restrictions placed on the informal economy by the government, women developed a variety of strategies in order to continue their creative efforts. From hiding places for beer to coded calls to signify the presence of police, the brewers developed such strong loyalty to each other that it was as good as a union.<sup>xx</sup> In an interview with Bozzoli, Mrs. Mmamatlakala Moje remembered instances of betrayal as well:

While I was busy cleaning up, I saw a policeman coming straight to where I was kneeling down. He came to me and stood next to the water tap...next to me, there was an empty tin which indicated that there was beer in it. I realized later that the woman who advised me to go and clean the place had brewed *white horse* (hard liquor), which was hidden in one of the tins which were scattered around the water tap. [The policeman] was infuriated when he discovered the white horse...I told him that I knew nothing about that white horse, but he insisted that it was mine. He arrested me and I followed him to the police station.<sup>xxi</sup>

#### *The Alexandra Bus Boycotts*

Women also used boycotts to protest government legislation regarding black formal economic efforts, the urban housing shortage, and inflation. Black men and women living in the township of Alexandra, in the city of Johannesburg, depended on bus transportation for employment, and they were not prepared to cheerfully accept an increase in bus fares. Occurring at various times over the duration of WWII, the men and women of Alexandra Township boycotted the bus service, walking nine and a half miles between the township and the city center, until the bus service reverted to its prior fares.<sup>xxii</sup>

Alf Stadler reveals that the attempt of Alexandrians to boycott the transport system was yet another context in which they endeavored to control elements of their subsistence costs. Black employees involved in the boycott were not alone, but were also accompanied by petty-bourgeoisie black entrepreneurs, initially economically involved in the bus system and later pushed out by white business owners.<sup>xxiii</sup> The boycotts helped to politicize and organize the domestic servants and urban black employees of Johannesburg, although they were not lasting victories regarding transportation. The Johannesburg City Council, initially subsidizing the fare increases for three months following the bus boycott in 1944, gave way to a public utility corporation that bought out the companies in 1945. Under the auspices of yet another organization, the control of public transportation was taken out of the community in which it served.<sup>xxiv</sup>

What the boycotts did achieve, however, was to expose the injustices of urban segregation. The boycotts forced whites to take notice of black living conditions that were in such a state as to make a two-percent bus fare increase untenable. Also, the bus boycott movement was special because of its grassroots nature, as one organized by a united community – not led by a dynamic personality.<sup>xxv</sup>

#### *The Trade Union Movement*

Due to the growth in secondary industry, black trade unionism was on the rise. The Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) was formed in 1941 and by 1946 boasted 158,000 members organized into 119 unions. Because of their strength due to organization, workers struck multiple times, despite the fact that work stoppages were declared illegal during the war period.

The African Mine Workers' Union (AMWU) struck in 1946 for higher wages – succeeding in the stoppage of 100,000 gold miners from work.<sup>xxvi</sup> This strike, however, came at high cost. The government reacted with a vengeance, arresting strike leaders – including Hilda Watts Bernstein of the CPSA – driving men underground at bayonet-point, killing twelve and injuring over 1,200. The Chamber of Mines announced that union representation was beyond the understanding of “natives” in their present “state of development,” thus creating a segregationist precedent for future union activity.<sup>xxvii</sup> The vitality of the Mineworkers' Union was thus broken, and the Council of Non-European Trade Unions weakened.

Multi-racial groups of female workers were also involved in factory work, dominating the garment industry and the food and canning industries. The unions of these industries allowed them to formulate political discussion and develop organizational strategies. However, these unions were not without their own problems as we shall see, and female workers also had to deal with injustices prevalent in the industrial system.

#### *The Garment Workers' Union*

As World War Two carried on, the wartime needs allowed for white women to advance to higher paying employment in the clothing industry, thus creating a gap that black and colored women – the newest source for cheaper labor – were to enter. The growth in proletarianization among black women increased union membership. Originally formed as the Garment and Allied Workers Union in 1928, the GWU consisted of primarily white women workers, and the cohesion of races within the factory was not without incident. Initially, “class-consciousness” did emerge from inter-racial union activity, earning the GWU a reputation as somehow “different” from other unions.

Union leader Solomon “Solly” Sachs spearheaded the GWU’s early commitment to racial equality. Activist Helen Joseph, who worked closely with Sachs, maintained that he captured and held the loyalty of thousands of Afrikaner women in the clothing industry.<sup>xxviii</sup> The GWU maintained a strong stance in favor of workers’ rights to seek jobs with the highest possible wages, as well as supporting workers in their efforts to maintain safe working conditions and viable incomes. And while not all members of the GWU shared Sachs’ political orientation, the organization garnered enough support to maintain a forceful union that included women of different races.

However, becoming one of the more racially diverse unions did not exempt the GWU from racial division. Many of the white Afrikaaner workers actively resisted its policy of non-racialism.<sup>xxix</sup> Anna Scheepers, 1938 president of the GWU, stated white workers’ views on racial inclusiveness as such: “We do not object to their working in the factories but we do not want to mix with the coloured workers.”<sup>xxx</sup> Johanna Cornelius, another Afrikaaner leader in the GWU, noted “We have been brought up on the platteland where we are taught to hate the Africans and coloured people, as also Jews. The majority of the people on the platteland still have these views.”<sup>xxxi</sup> Ultimately, white Afrikaaner workers amended their initial class-conscious ideologies and responded to the legal constraints by segregating the union into separate branches.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The eventual segregation of GWU leadership and the segregation of the workplace itself, due to legislation such as the Factories Act, created a difficult environment for racial cohesion. Although the two branches experienced periodic conflicts that reflected the black organization’s dissatisfaction with the white union’s dominance, the Garment Workers’ Union did not disband

due to racial discord.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The context of female-led trade union activity continued to remain an important aspect in the political organization of both black and white women.

### *The Food and Canning Workers' Union*

Women also were prominently involved in the food and canning industry during WWII and the Post-war era. Black men and women of the east and west Cape were driven from farms during the lull in agricultural production before the War into factory work. Berger reveals that the balance of sex ratios in these areas led to the greater involvement of women in factory work as well as in political efforts. Proletarianized prior to other black workers, the men and women of the Cape generally experienced stable family lives, albeit in extremely impoverished conditions. According to the Commission on the Cape Colored Population, 1937, the absence of feelings of “difference or superiority” in the Cape that normally divided racial groups in other areas was notable.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

As the food and canning industry developed, working conditions were appalling and wages were extremely low. The machine labor in the industry required a great deal of skill and was also very dangerous. Women who lost fingers on these machines were not even compensated.<sup>xxxv</sup> Another issue was that the work was seasonal for most workers. Ray Alexander, prominent member of the CPSA and various political rights organizations, helped to form the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU) in 1941 to combat many of these issues. The policies of the FCWU toward race, gender, and community allowed black, white, and colored men and women to participate fully in union affairs.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Alexander was elected first general secretary of the FCWU in the 1930s.

Other important leaders of the FCWU – such as Liz Abrahams, Elizabeth Mafeking, and Frances Baard – rose to political prominence, later to be instrumental in organizations such as the Federation of South African Women.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Frances Baard remembered:

It was Ray who helped us start the trade union in the canning factories in Port Elizabeth. She taught us how to run the union, and we learnt administration and taking minutes, how to chair a meeting, and about shop stewards and so on, so that the union should be properly run. She was a wonderful person, Ray Alexander.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

A series of successful strikes which led to increases in pay also helped to gain support for the FCWU; demonstrating in a crucial way the material benefits to be gained from involvement.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Regarding racial issues, white women were not involved in food production itself; thus the particular problems of the GWU were not represented in the FCWU.<sup>xl</sup> However, because of government restrictions, the FCWU was required to form separate unions – the African Food and Canning Workers Union [AFCWU] and the Food and Canning Workers Union – although they, unlike the GWU, worked together as one.<sup>xli</sup> Frances Baard remembered, “We worked together all the time like we were one union. We always had our meetings and discussions together, and all our strikes we did together too.”<sup>xlii</sup> The FCWU did not allow Segregationist legislation to inhibit their political efforts. Even after the implementation of the Group Areas Act in 1950, the Port Elizabeth branch of the FCWU continually resisted segregation, resulting in much harassment from police.<sup>xliii</sup> By the time Alexander was banned in 1953, the FCWU had successfully won over workers from all communities.<sup>xliv</sup>

#### *The Sweet Workers' Union*

The Sweet Workers' Union (SWU) originated as an offshoot of the short-lived Women Workers' Union, founded by Fanny Klenerman in the mid-1920s, when that organization fragmented as a result of its failure to comply with the legal definition of “trade union” as determined by law.<sup>xlv</sup> The SWU, by 1941, was a fairly “weak and ineffective” organization

despite several years of organizing efforts. Nevertheless, the wartime cost of living increase propelled the SWU toward greater activity, resulting in a prominent strike in the autumn of 1942.<sup>xlvi</sup>

E. J. Burford, secretary of the SWU in 1942, helped to organize the workers across racial lines, thus implementing the African Sweet Workers' Union division. Burford coordinated constant communication between the two groups, organizing them simultaneously, in order to keep them on an equal footing. The SWU strike of 1942 resulted in even greater cooperation between blacks and whites, men and women, with no complaints from the white faction – as occurred in the case of the GWU. The solidarity experienced in the SWU strike allowed Burford – as revealed in an interview with Berger – to conclude: “...with proper leadership the black-white barrier could [have been] broken down and a great measure of mutual understanding reached although the gulf was enormous.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

The strategy and concerted efforts of Burford in the SWU to maintain equality across racial lines succeeded, although a segregationist tactic was employed for this maneuver. The solidarity between racial groups in the SWU was evident in the united success of the 1942 strike, although Burford admitted to things going back to their old ways post-strike. However, certain cooperative behaviors remained, and the Johannesburg branch was able to revive other branches in the Cape, eventually forming a national union.<sup>xlviii</sup>

#### *The African National Congress Women's League*

The period of time during and after World War Two also saw a rise in women's formal political efforts, beyond those of the trade unions. The Bantu Women's League and Women's Section of the ANC had previously operated as separate organizations but had an overlap of members and leaders.<sup>xlix</sup> By 1943, however, women were granted full membership into the ANC,

and the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) was formed – replacing the BWL. While separating women into a distinct and separate entity within the ANC reinforced women's distinct secondary class status within their own communities and reinforced the ideas of “women's role” and “women's work,” the ANCWL served to form a structure whereby women could be channeled into the liberation movement on footing that was theoretically equal with men.<sup>1</sup> Madie Hall Xuma, wife of Dr. Xuma of the ANC and first president of the ANCWL, straddled an ambiguous political position as a foreigner to South Africa. She was many times criticized for her aloofness and air of superiority while at the same time being widely admired and respected.<sup>li</sup>

The ANCWL did not become a truly dynamic organization under the leadership of Hall-Xuma, but by the late 1940s, alongside the populist and energetic spirit of the Congress Youth League, an energized youth movement within the ANC led by the likes of Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, and Nelson Mandela, the ANCWL emerged as a true force, representative of the broader spectrum of working-class women.<sup>lii</sup> Frances Baard remembered women's political efforts:

It was a very exciting time. A lot of our campaigns were very successful and we were fighting, fighting all the time. There was a lot of support for these campaigns; the people were very strong about what they wanted. The women too, they were very strong, very militant at that time, saying this is what we want and this and this and this. I think the women even surprised the men with how strong they were.<sup>liii</sup>

The ANCWL was not multi-racial in nature, but provided many political opportunities for black women. Ida Mntwana, second president of the ANCWL in the late 1940s, personified the revitalized spirit of the movement and later helped to form the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), which had a multi-racial focus among its tenets. The implementation of Apartheid in 1948 would become the catalyst for even greater formal and informal political resistance among women in the following decade.

## *Conclusion*

Women's efforts in trade unions, the informal economy, and formal organizations such as the ANCWL functioned as the primary sources of political opportunity and community solidarity during the 1940s. Women fought against segregationist policies and legislation as well as secondary classification in their own communities. Not always able to effectively organize across gender or racial lines, women of all races were nevertheless becoming both politicized and proletarianized in a greater way than ever before. Efforts like the bus boycotts in Alexandra exemplified the diverse nature of protest. The implementation of Apartheid in conjunction with the revitalization of the ANC under the auspices of the Congress Youth League and the ANC Women's League would serve to create a political explosion in the following decade.

In trade union activities of the 1940s, women such as Frances Baard found their political voices and leadership potential. The same was true of political organizations such as the ANCWL under Ida Mntwana. Women participated in campaigns, led meetings, and forced male-centered organizations to consider their voices. Race issues still arose in women-centered organizations such as the Garment Workers' Union, and the lack of a united front presented many challenges to women concerned with gender equality. However, efforts made toward racial unity in unions such as the Sweet Workers' Union and the Food and Canning Workers' Union exemplified an increasing level of cooperation and creativity across racial and gender lines.

Women's work in the area of domestic service proved extremely challenging, as it also did in factories. Many times the new growth of industry forced families to separate, severely disrupting any attempt at normalcy of family life. Women's informal economic efforts exhibited community solidarity in their attempts to survive despite harsh government employment restrictions. Facing police brutality, family conflict, and self-doubt, women fought to preserve

their creative efforts to support themselves and their families during the decade of the Second World War.

## Chapter 2: Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Nancy L. Clark, “Gendering Production in Wartime South Africa” in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (Oct., 2001), 1187.
- <sup>ii</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 69.
- <sup>iii</sup> Thomas Karis, “Volume 2: Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952” of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*, eds., Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 77.
- <sup>iv</sup> Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Lmted., 2004), 37.
- <sup>v</sup> Karis, “Volume 2: Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952,” 70.
- <sup>vi</sup> Clark, “Gendering Production,” 1195.
- <sup>vii</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 178.
- <sup>viii</sup> Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 162.
- <sup>ix</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 179.
- <sup>x</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1985), 30-31.
- <sup>xi</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng: Conciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991), 157.
- <sup>xii</sup> Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng*, 161.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng*, 156.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Frances Baard, *My Spirit is Not Banned* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1986), 35.

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- <sup>xv</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 114.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 154.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 41.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 124-125.
- <sup>xix</sup> Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers Under Apartheid* (London: The Women's Press, Lmted., 1989), 9.
- <sup>xx</sup> Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*, 32.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*, 158.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 76.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Alf Stadler, "The Politics of Subsistence: Community Struggles in War-Time Johannesburg," in *Working Papers in Southern African Studies, Volume 3*, ed., D.C. Hindson (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, Lmted., 1983), 57.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Stadler, "The Politics of Subsistence," 60.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2008), 67.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 38.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 180.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Helen Joseph, *Side by Side* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 31.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 170-74.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 175.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 174.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Iris Berger, "Generations of Struggle: Trade Unions and the Roots of Feminism, 1930-60" in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 204.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 176.

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- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Iris Berger, “Gender, Race, and Political Empowerment: South African Canning Workers, 1940-1960” in *Gender and Society* Vol. 4, No. 3, Special Issue: Women and Development in the Third World (Sept., 1990), 402.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Berger, “Gender, Race, and Political Empowerment,” 403.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Berger, “Gender, Race, and Political Empowerment,” 406.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 119.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Baard, *My Spirit is Not Banned*, 23.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Berger, “Gender, Race, and Political Empowerment,” 405.
- <sup>xl</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 118.
- <sup>xli</sup> Baard, *My Spirit is Not Banned*, 24.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Berger, “Gender, Race, and Political Empowerment,” 407.
- <sup>xliii</sup> Baard, *My Spirit is Not Banned*, 29.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Berger, “Gender, Race, and Political Empowerment,” 405.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 93.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Berger references the 1942 SWU strike, but mistakes the date as having occurred in 1943. See, Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 158-9.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 159-60.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 160.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Frene Ginwala, “Women and the African National Congress 1912-1943” in *Agenda* No. 8 (1990), 86.
- <sup>1</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 90.
- <sup>li</sup> Iris Berger, “An African American ‘Mother of the Nation’: Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940-1963” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Special Issue for Shula Marks (Sept., 2001), 553.
- <sup>lii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 92.
- <sup>liii</sup> Baard, *My Spirit is Not Banned*, 38.

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### **Chapter 3: Militancy and Mass Action; The Federation of South African Women and the ANC Women's League, 1949-1960**

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The implementation of Apartheid gave rise to an entirely new level of politicization on the part of women. Formal organizing grew exponentially with the formation of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and the inclusion of women as full members in the ANC. Ever-increasing restrictions upon the very livelihoods of black South Africans were met with ever-increasing protests and demonstrations from people unwilling to allow the termination of their very selves. Women were especially militant during this period, fighting against Apartheid for the protection of their families, their political rights, and themselves.

#### ***The Challenge***

Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, summarized apartheid legislation in 1950 as the only possible way to prevent a “mixed development” of races that would ultimately lead to conflict. Apartheid advocated the idea of *baaskap*, or supremacy: each race in its own sphere, separately and “equally” evolving.<sup>i</sup> Verwoerd’s questionable use of the notion of “equality” within separate spheres was not even a pretense in later legislation.

In 1950, the Prime Minister, Dr. D. F. Malan, communicated to the U.S. Ambassador that the Europeans in the Union were outnumbered four to one by the “non-Europeans” and that segregationist measures were an absolute necessity in order to assure survival of whites.<sup>ii</sup> In order to maintain such extreme segregation, the government implemented legislation such as the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, the 1950 Group Areas Act – a revamped version of the Native Land Act of 1913 – and the 1953 Bantu Education Act. In 1951, The U.S. Ambassador to South Africa reported in a dispatch to the U.S. State Department that under the “various measures for implementing White supremacy and *apartheid* (racial segregation) put forward by

the present Nationalist Government, relations between the Natives and Whites have deteriorated to the lowest level in the Union's history."<sup>iii</sup>

The Suppression of Communism Act, as already noted, sought to cripple the CPSA, as well as its efforts regarding racial equality within the workplace. It gave the government power to ban organizations and gatherings, prohibit publications, and banish persons from certain areas.<sup>iv</sup> The Suppression Act was keenly felt, divesting many unions of experienced leadership and leaving a great many female labor activist banned, banished, or imprisoned.<sup>v</sup>

The 1950 Group Areas Act, the zoning of urban areas for racial segregation, exacerbated the Native Land of 1913, which had already restricted where Africans could live. A "master plan," the Group Areas Act created urban divisions at the expense of non-white displacement, and large-scale property and financial losses.<sup>vi</sup> Thousands of people were left homeless as a result of the inability of government and municipal housing schemes to keep up with the huge demand for housing due to forced removals.<sup>vii</sup> Even vibrant communities associated with the ANC, like Sophiatown, were affected.

The removal of the inhabitants of Sophiatown exemplified the extreme nature of Apartheid's discrimination. Helen Joseph recalled:

Sophiatown was free and friendly, almost the last bastion of black freehold land in Johannesburg. Despite poverty, squalor and violence, Sophiatown was exuberant, alive. Its people were strong. It was a living community, an organism grown up in its own environment.<sup>viii</sup>

Sophiatown's communal strength represented a threat to Apartheid's proponents, and its people were "removed" despite ANC organizing, protests, and the circulation of printed leaflets proclaiming, "We Shall Not Move."<sup>ix</sup> In an interview with Bozzoli, Frances Nameng remembered: "It [Sophiatown] was a nice and cool place, with its share of misfits, but otherwise okay. The peace was disrupted when the government ordered them to move out, they bundled

them like cattle and took them to Meadowlands. It was then that they became wild.”<sup>x</sup>

Sophiatown, cleared of its black inhabitants, was renamed “Triomf” – the Afrikaans word for “Triumph.” As Joseph wondered, what triumph?<sup>xi</sup>

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 established a separate system of education for black or *Bantu* children. Verwoerd described the legislation as a system designed to “train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live...there is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labor.”<sup>xii</sup> Those to be affected by the policy saw differently. As the Federation of South African Women stated in a community missive,

“Bantu Education” is intended to keep the African in a permanently inferior position. He must learn English and Afrikaans so that he “will be able to find his way in European communities”; to follow oral or written instructions; and to carry on a simple conversation with Europeans about his work...” He must learn to be an efficient labourer and servant, but not anything more than this. All other doors will be closed.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act of 1952, of special interest to women, was a confusingly named piece of legislation. While its title proclaimed to rid Africans of passes, in truth it tightened pass law to an even greater extent. The Act sought to replace the multiple individual passes with one passbook and to include women in a “voluntary” context. The convoluted terminology of the Co-ordination of Documents Act did not escape the notice of women – particularly those of the FSAW – who had no doubt of the government’s intention to tighten influx control regulations and ultimately include women on a compulsory basis.<sup>xiv</sup>

At home or in the work place, in transit or in residence, black South African men and women continued to be curbed at every turn. The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953

legalized the unequal nature of amenities in each “sphere,” and the Native Labour Settlement of Disputes Act of 1953 declared illegal black South African union representation or striking.<sup>xv</sup> Through so much politicking and law-making, the proponents of Apartheid took Segregation policies and inflamed their directives, creating a veritable police state for the purposes of “separate equality.” The reality was gruesome:

Parents leave their homes very early in the morning, and because of poor and overcrowded transport, often come home very late at night... The mothers work as domestic servants, as wash-women, or in factories. A large number of African women in domestic service are employed to look after little white children while their own children are left without proper care... When this factor of deprivation of maternal care is added to the other factors of poverty, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, lack of medical services, it ceases to be surprising that the infantile mortality rate for Africans is admitted from conservative official sources to be “not less than 150 anywhere and in some areas as high as 600 or even 700 per 1,000 live births.”<sup>xvi</sup>

The day-to-day struggles of women were uniform only in their oppressive and challenging natures. With the rise of urban migration, women on the Reserves were burdened with increased childcare in an abject and decaying economic situation. Already overworked with childbearing and household tasks, rural women were left to maintain Reserve agriculture, even though they had little time to commit to farming. Ironically, the unending labor of rural women worked to subsidize the low wages of black urban workers, thus systematically undermining the homestead economy.<sup>xvii</sup>

In towns, women on the one hand gained more independence and authority through their involvement in the formal economy and as the economic mainstay of their families – though continually threatened by pass laws. On the other hand, matrifocal family structure was not socially sanctioned because of long held patriarchal traditions. Thus the nature of women’s *de facto* authority remained ambiguous and confused.<sup>xviii</sup>

### *The Struggle*

In an interview with Bozzoli, Nthana Mokele remembered: “At that time we were being taken to Strydom police station singing different songs in different trucks... We sang, ‘Unzima lomthwalo uwis amadod’ [It’s a heavy load that we carry, it even topples men]. It was like a wedding celebration.”<sup>xix</sup>

Women’s responses to the ever-increasing restrictions of Apartheid were manifested in a variety of contexts, just as in prior periods of segregation. Efforts in the informal economy continued amid dire poverty, regardless of arrests and police brutality. Women’s opposition to pass laws continued in the towns, and female Union organizers continued to struggle for manageable hours, safety, and equality in the workplace. Women’s formal organizational efforts resulted in the formation of the African National Congress Women’s League and the multi-racial Federation of South African Women, which joined the efforts of the ANC as well as creating women-centered initiatives, attempting to redress the wrongs of Apartheid through protests, petitions, and passive resistance.

### *The Informal Economy*

Black women’s informal economic efforts during the beginning of Apartheid continued to be harassed by police just as they were under segregation. Many of these efforts were deemed illegal, and petty traders or coffee cart owners were often harassed for not carrying the proper licenses. In 1955 some hawkers were even arrested for not having wheels on their refreshment carts. Due to intense economic restriction and power abuse, tensions were not only high between women and the authorities, but between women themselves.

In the context of beer and liquor brewing, neighborhood conflicts transpired between highly successful “Skokian queens”<sup>xx</sup> and more family-oriented home beer brewers. However,

the increasing pressure upon informal businesses also generated a spirit of collective action among the women involved. The intense protesting against government-run municipal beer halls exemplified women's concerted efforts to maintain viable extralegal sources of income.

In 1959, Durban, Natal saw some of the most militant protests involving beer brewing. At Cato Manor, the home of the majority of Durban's African population, the municipal government attempted to shut down illegal stills, due to the threat of a typhoid epidemic. This blow to an important means of their livelihood enraged the local brewers and *shebeen* queens. On June 17, they stormed the nearest municipal beer hall in protest, chasing out customers and destroying beer.<sup>xxi</sup> Observers recalled the particular manner in which rural black women showed their dissatisfaction. Using traditional forms of sexual insult, many women arrived at the beer halls with their breasts exposed, pulled up their skirts when confronted with police, and on one occasion even removed their panties and filled them with beer.<sup>xxii</sup> As Bozzoli notes, many of the beer brewers were not only protesting the destruction of their own stills, but also the existence of the municipal beer halls, the proceeds from which were to fund inferior black housing.<sup>xxiii</sup>

#### *The Alexandra Bus Boycotts: Revisited*

The periodic bus boycotts in Alexandra in the early 1940s – discussed earlier – continued into the 1950s with the climactic boycott of 1957. A demonstration of mass mobilization, the 1957 Alexandra bus boycott's initiative was two-fold. First, the boycotters took issue with the stagnation of the wages of African workers on the Witwatersrand – no increase to match the increase in cost of living. Second, as the government subsidized Public Utility Transport Corporation's (PUTCO) costs increased and dividends shrank, it applied for either an increase in subsidy or an increase in fares: a one-penny fare raise was approved. Representatives from various Alexandrian organizations – the Alexandra Vigilance Committee, the ANC, the

Movement for a Democracy of Content (MDC), the Workers' League and others – met the first week of January 1957 to figure out what was to be done. As a result of the meeting, the Alexandra People's Transport Committee (APTC) was formed, to bring together all of the organizations under the auspices of the bus boycott. While many of these organizations did not agree on each other's tactical measures – e.g., the MDC, a Trotskyist movement, thought the ANC was too inclined to compromise – the boycott cemented a mass movement of great strength that was to last for three months.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The 1957 boycott also generated an increase in collective action among women on the Reserves. In order to provide a viable family income, many rural women took in laundry from the towns, depending on the bus system for transportation. These laundresses could not sustain the penny increase in bus fare for transporting their bundles and were willing to collaborate and picket, boycott, or even use force if necessary to maintain their informal sources of income.<sup>xxv</sup> The militancy of Alexandra's citizens, especially its women, exemplified the burgeoning strength of black protest movements of the decade.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The boycott came to an end because of a variety of factors. First, the police began raiding Alexandra in February, making several thousand arrests. Second, the government under Verwoerd was threatening to bring Alexandra “under very strict control.” Realizing that the boycott was non-sustainable for any great length of time, ANC leaders in the APTC decided to accept the municipality's offer of a coupon system and a proposed pay increase. The MDC opposed this action, and the APTC split apart. The boycott ended suddenly but left a lasting impression upon Apartheid officials – Alexandra was to be “removed” as Sophiatown had been.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### *The ANC: Programme of Action*

As discussed, a variety of forces inspired women's formal organizational efforts and political goals of the 1950s. Many of the strongest motivators for female formal organization came from groups that were initially male-centered, such as the ANC. The ANC initiated an intense period of protest in 1949, initiated by their Youth League, in a document called the Programme of Action. It was this effort that strove to rejuvenate the struggling organization and combat the new challenges posed by Apartheid. Through extra-legal measures such as boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience, the Programme of Action sought to inflame mass action towards national liberation.<sup>xxviii</sup> The government reacted by instituting *more* repressive legislation, such as the Suppression of Communism Act that banned many leaders.<sup>xxix</sup>

### *The ANC: Defiance Campaign*

The Congress' Defiance Campaign of 1952 was the first campaign launched on the principles spelled out by the 1949 Programme of Action, and made complete the organization's movement from moderation to militancy.<sup>xxx</sup> Carried out with the assistance of the South African Indian Congress, the Campaign organized volunteers to break the laws of segregation and invite arrest.<sup>xxxi</sup> The politicizing impact of women's prior anti-pass protests helped to inspire confidence and encourage their whole-hearted entry into the Defiance Campaign. The Campaign served to animate women's organizations such as the ANCWL into greater militancy. In many protests, over half of the defiers were women. Florence Matomela, then ANCWL president, was one of the thirty-five leaders arrested and charged under the Suppression of Communism Act.<sup>xxxii</sup> Helen Joseph, another leader in the ANCWL, noted that some 8,000 men and women defied the unjust laws and went singing to gaol.

Originally the sentences for protesters were light, but as the Defiance Campaign grew it prompted new government legislation with a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment or a fine of £300 for defiers, and a maximum of five years' imprisonment or a fine of £500 for those inciting others to protest. In spite of government's response, the Defiance Campaign was not a failure. The Campaign had in fact strengthened the resolve of oppressed men and women to continue to struggle for freedom and justice.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It was a remarkable success in its demonstrating to whites and the rest of South Africans the power of African leadership.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### *The African National Congress Women's League*

Because of the large scale organization of people by the ANC during the 1950s and the growth of militancy due to the Defiance Campaign, the ANCWL gained more momentum than ever before. It contained numerous branches and was involved with many other women's liberation organizations in helping to form the multi-racial Federation of South African Women in 1954.<sup>xxxv</sup> Frances Baard, local organizer in the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU); Florence Matomela, provincial president of the ANCWL; and Ray Alexander of the now disbanded CPSA organized a meeting in Port Elizabeth where discussion would demonstrate that local concerns had clearly taken on a national dimension and needed a political body fueled for that purpose.<sup>xxxvi</sup> A circular promoting the inaugural conference in 1954 proclaimed:

The time has come for women of all races to put an end to laws that deny us equal rights with our husbands over our children... We women, like men, want to be free to move about in the country of our birth, to live where we like, to buy land freely. We want an end to the migrant labour system. We want our own homes, the right to stay in them and not suffer mass removals, the right to live with our families near our places of work. We claim for ourselves and our daughters, as well as for men, the right to education and employment in all occupations and professions. While our main struggle is with men against racialism and the colour bar, to make our national struggle more effective, we ask that men support us in our fight for equality.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In many ways the ANCWL became the parent organization to the FSAW, sharing its leaders, members, and goals. During the 1950s, most women's protests, campaigns, and initiatives were spearheaded by a combination of organizations – the ANCWL and FSAW being the most prominent. When at times there was conflict between organizations, it was more often than not due to intervention of the male-dominated leadership of the ANC.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

### *The Black Sash Movement*

The Women's Defense of the Constitution League, more commonly known as the "Black Sash," was formed in 1955 to protest the government's enforcement of the Separate Representation of Voters' Act and treacherous display of power politics.<sup>xxxix</sup> Consisting only of white women, the Black Sash were called such on account of their silent protests of the destruction of the Constitution, in which all members adorned themselves with a black sash. Helen Suzman, member of the Progressive Party and active opponent of Apartheid, thought the Black Sash was an extremely active and useful organization. The Black Sash assisted and advised many victims of Apartheid, while maintaining its aspect of vigilant protest.<sup>xl</sup> While many members of the Congress Alliance – particularly white members – were inspired by this example of white solidarity, the Black Sash failed to further project their demonstrations of solidarity into a multi-racial liberation organization.

The Black Sash did not become directly involved in organizations it considered dubious, radical, or subversive, such as the Congress Alliance. While these organizations were willing to work with the Black Sash, the Black Sash was essentially a conservative organization and maintained a stance apart from the others. Although the Black Sash would later shift to a more liberal ideology and concern itself with black politics to a greater extent in the late 1970s and 1980s,<sup>xli</sup> its efforts during the 1950s were centered on white politics, white public opinion, and

white solutions. Where the Black Sash was unwilling to proceed, as far as multi-racial female cooperation was concerned, the Federation of South African Women willingly moved forward with great strides.<sup>xlii</sup>

*The Federation of South African Women and the “Women’s Charter”*

The Federation of South African Women (FSAW) was important not only as a women-centered liberation organization but also as a multi-racial organization. It was a link between the multiple liberation organizations of the 1950s. Organizing conferences, protests, and petitions, the FSAW worked with the ANCWL, the Black Sash, the SAIC, the SACTU, and the SACPO, as well as with the ANC proper and the ANC Youth League. The FSAW’s statement of goals, the Women’s Charter, was presented by Dora Tamana and Ray Alexander at the inaugural conference in April 1954 and unanimously adopted. It strove for women to obtain the following:

- 1) The right to vote and to be elected to all State bodies, without restriction or discrimination.
- 2) The right to full opportunities for employment with equal pay and possibilities of promotion in all spheres of work.
- 3) Equal rights with men in relation to property, marriage and children, and for the removal of all laws and customs that deny women such equal rights.
- 4) For the development of every child through free compulsory education for all; for the protection of mother and child through maternity homes, welfare clinics, crèches and nursery schools, in countryside and towns; through proper homes for all; and through the provision of water, light, transport, sanitation and other amenities of modern civilization.
- 5) For the removal of all laws that restrict free movement, that prevent or hinder the right of free association and activity in democratic organizations, and the right to participate in the work of those organizations.
- 6) To build and strengthen women’s sections in the National liberatory movements, the organization of women in trade unions, and through the peoples’ varied organizations.
- 7) To co-operate with all other organizations that have similar aims in South Africa as well as throughout the world.
- 8) To strive for permanent peace throughout the world.<sup>xliii</sup>

The militancy inspired by the Federation was palpable. General discussion of the state of women's issues in South Africa at the inaugural conference established early on the hurdles these women faced. Dora Tamana spoke to the poverty issue due to the imposition of passes. She noted that women must unite to get their own government. Lillian Ngoyi presented the issue of multi-faceted oppression. She thought that more women would have been delegates if it weren't for the husbands who kept many wives away. Husbands talked of democracy, Ngoyi reiterated, but did not practice it. Hetty du Preez spoke of the disadvantages of black working women and how employers took advantage of Apartheid legislation that disallowed multi-racial trade unions. Florence Matomela declared that the women's gathering would bring tears to the eyes of Dr. Malan because he did not want unity of South African women. Hetty McLeod affirmed that the spirit of all delegates "gives us the courage and determination to go forward side by side with our men to win freedom in our lifetime."<sup>xliv</sup> Because of that spirit of militancy and courage, the FSAW was able to address legislation such as the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Education Act, and the threat of passes for women.

#### *The ANC "Freedom Charter"*

The ANC also developed a document that spelled out its liberation goals, making known its message to the world. The ANC's "Freedom Charter," as it was called, took much of its language from the FSAW "Women's Charter." It became the manifesto of the ANC and consequently of the Congress Alliance (CA). Its message was one that empowered the African people, advocating equal rights regardless of race, color, or sex. Its tenets stated:

- The people shall govern
- All national groups shall have equal rights
- The people shall share in the country's wealth
- The land shall be shared among those who work it
- All shall be equal before the law
- All shall enjoy equal human rights

- There shall be work and security
- The doors of learning and of culture shall be opened
- There shall be houses, security, and comfort
- There shall be peace and friendship

And concluding these statements was the avowal: “These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty.”<sup>xlv</sup>

After the adoption of this document by the ANC, the FSAW submitted a pamphlet – to be discussed at the first “Congress of the People” in Pretoria, 1955 – entitled, “What Women Demand.” This initiative was a detailed exposition on the ideas already contained in the FSAW’s “Women’s Charter.” It focused on health care, education, housing, social services and food, as well as the emancipation of women – essentially an elaboration on aims not fully delineated to the FSAW’s satisfaction in the “Freedom Charter.” The CA received the demand for full equality of women with men – political, legal, economic, and marital – as an effort that was controversial at best. Although the “Freedom Charter” had stated its advocacy of equal rights regardless of race, color, or sex, sex discrimination was overshadowed by the concerns surrounding racial discrimination. The FSAW did not have the time or resources to push the cause of women’s emancipation however, as most of its energies would continue to fuel the pass campaign. The relationship between the FSAW and the CA was nevertheless one riddled with complexity and contradiction.<sup>xlvi</sup>

#### *The ANC and FSAW: Bantu Education*

One of the initial objectives of the Federation was that of improving Bantu Education, which it began to address enthusiastically. Concerned about informing African parents, the FSAW sent out a circular spelling out the true nature of Verwoerd’s legislation and their petitions for change. “True education should develop a child’s personality and ability to the utmost and open up the culture and knowledge of the world. ‘Bantu Education’ is intended to

keep the African in a permanently inferior position.”<sup>xlvii</sup> The FSAW sought to maintain full, free, compulsory education for every African child, not education fit for mere servitude and labor. As the FSAW urged in another circular, “Let the world speak out in horror at the vicious and unprincipled acts of this race-mad government.”<sup>xlviii</sup>

### *The AEM and School Boycotts*

The ANC initiated a boycott of government schools, rejecting the “sugar coated poison of Bantu Education.”<sup>xlix</sup> Initiating the African Education Movement (AEM) to provide education for African children taken out of Bantu Schools, the ANC and FSAW helped to form “Cultural Clubs” – a new medium for Bantu Education that was technically legal. As stated in *Counter Attack*,<sup>1</sup> the bulletin of the South African Congress of Democrats, the African Education Movement aimed:

- To bring the news of the AEM, the Clubs and private schools to those who are opposed to Bantu Education.
- To counter the insidious propaganda of the Bantu School Boards, Information officers, the N.A.D. and the Stewards whose aim is to Whitewash Bantu Education and deceive their critics at home and abroad.
- To bring the truth about Bantu Education to employees at Government Schools & members of School Boards, whose co-operation with the Native Affairs Department in carrying out the Act, makes Bantu Education possible.
- To influence teachers who are subjected to the long house of the double session; diluted syllabuses and unacceptable theories of inequality; to witch hunting by prying School Board officials and Government Inspectors & conditions which teachers would not tolerate anywhere.<sup>li</sup>

Because the Bantu Education Act proclaimed it a crime to teach or provide formal education unless sanctioned by the Minister of Native Affairs, the Cultural Clubs could not enjoy the use of blackboards, books, or slates. Attempts were made to organize all available women of suitable educational background willing to assist in running clubs, as well as older children and students, in order to formalize methods of instruction.<sup>lii</sup> Members of the FSAW such as Helen Joseph were instrumental in devising creative ways to teach. Songs, story-telling, arithmetic by

“look-and-see,” and activity games were part of the day-to-day strategies Cultural Club leaders used to maintain an edifying environment for African children.<sup>liii</sup>

The boycott did not prove viable in the long term for a variety of reasons. As well as initiating police harassment and intimidation of AEM leaders, Joseph noted that the desperate need for formal education induced the eventual dissipation of the boycott in 1956.<sup>liv</sup> Nevertheless, the AEM did not disband, and the struggle against Bantu Education continued. Cultural Clubs were maintained to provide alternative instruction either before or after school hours, with the view of reducing or even eliminating the effects of the Bantu Education system.<sup>lv</sup>

#### *The FSAW: Group Areas Campaign*

The campaign against the Group Areas Act was another issue close to the heart of the FSAW and the ANCWL. Neighborhoods and communities that became woven together over hundreds of years were torn apart by the government’s “whitening” program. The Western Areas’ Removal Scheme under this Act centered on the removal of blacks from Sophiatown on the Rand – a stronghold of the ANC. The Western Areas Protest Committee was formed to combat the proposed “slum clearance,” but despite Congress’s efforts, 2,000 armed police and army reinforcements *did* enforce removal.<sup>lvi</sup>

The lack of leadership shown by the ANC in the effort to prevent the forced removal of people from Sophiatown to Meadowlands<sup>lvii</sup> had a politicizing effect on women, who saw their lives threatened and their homes disrupted. Confronted with the reality of Apartheid legislation, women who had not been involved in politics before could no longer ignore the issues arriving at their doorsteps. As a result of the defeat of the ANC, many more women joined the ANCWL and ultimately the FSAW in order to fight for their very livelihoods.<sup>lviii</sup>

*The FSAW: The Anti-Pass Campaign and the  
August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Pretoria Demonstration*

Women's struggle against pass law amendments continued to be one of the single most important factors uniting women, regardless of class or race. From 1913 onward, pass laws restricted where blacks could live, work, and travel – an extremely challenging situation in which to maintain any sort of economic independence or merely to support one's livelihood. Stringent enough for black men, the threat of women's inclusion into pass law legislation efforts was a step too far, a step that blacks met with resistance from the outset. The reenergized ANC with the help of the FSAW in the 1950s sought to end pass law inclusion anew. In the Fall of 1955, the government asked housewives to send their domestic servants to be "registered." The liberation organizations quickly saw through the deceptive process into the government's real intention to issue passes for women. The FSAW requested through proper channels permission for a public meeting the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 1955 regarding "registration," and was refused on the premise that if held it would likely result in public disturbance and provoke feelings of hostility between different races.<sup>lix</sup> The demonstration was held anyway. Black and white women from all over the Transvaal region overcame numerous difficulties, many imposed intentionally by the government regarding the deterrence of travel on railway systems, to demonstrate in Pretoria and joined together to peacefully protest the imposition of passes. Helen Joseph proclaimed it an overwhelming success, due to the support of the peoples' organizations, demonstrating that unity is strength.<sup>lx</sup>

Pass protests continued and, in 1956, heightened with the infamous August 9<sup>th</sup> "Women's Day" Pretoria demonstration. Thousands of women signed petitions that stated:

Raids, arrests, loss of pay, long hours at the pass office, weeks in the cells awaiting trial, forced farm labour – this is what the pass laws have brought to African men. Punishment and misery – not for a crime, but for the lack of a pass. We African women

know all too well the effect of this law upon our homes, our children. We, who are not African women, know how our sisters suffer...whether you call it a reference book, an identity book, or by any other disguising name, to us it is a PASS.<sup>lxi</sup>

Over one hundred thousand signed petitions spelling out the consequences of passes for women – broken homes, uncared for and helpless children, humiliation and degradation of young women at the hands of police, and lack of mobility – were brought to be presented to Prime Minister Strijdom, who had agreed to meet the protesters.<sup>lxii</sup> Women of all races marched through the Union buildings in Pretoria singing a new Zulu freedom song, “Strijdom uthitta abafazi, uthinti imbokotho”: “Strijdom you’ve tampered with the women, you’ve knocked against a rock.”<sup>lxiii</sup> Strijdom never appeared, and the petitions were left in his office. Nevertheless, the protest was deemed a huge success for the multi-racial women’s liberation efforts. August 9<sup>th</sup> was proclaimed “Women’s Day” and later became an annual day of celebration.

#### *Pass Protests, Post-1956*

Women’s protests against pass laws continued throughout the decade, in both rural and urban settings. Women involved in labor unions, women working as domestic servants, and women working on farms all united in the struggle against passes. Records from 1957 and 1958 indicate massive female involvement as follows:

January 1957: In Pietermaritzburg, one hundred women of all races, affiliated with the ANCWL, the Congress of Democrats (COD), the South African Colored Peoples’ Organization (SACPO), the Liberal Party, and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), presented eight hundred signed protests to the Native Commissioner.

February 1957: In Venterspost, NAD officials attempted to issue passes to the pupils of Boitsoho Secondary School. Even upon the principal’s urging to accept the passes, the students

refused to do so without their parents' consent. In Stanger, after a number of nurses were arrested for not having permits to reside there, one hundred women demonstrated at the police station, prompting police action. In Randfontein, hundreds of women came from the farms two days before an appointed pass registration date and refused to register.

May 1957: In Linokhana (Zeerust district), rural women demonstrated and resisted the passes. The demonstrators promptly burned any passes that were taken by women. Thirteen women were charged. In Balfour, women who had been threatened with negative consequences and penalties should they refuse passes, would not attend a NAD meeting set up to enforce passes. Instead nine women were arrested for attempting to contact their FSAW leader, and women protesters assembling at the Superintendent's offices were driven away by police charge. In Johannesburg, 20,000 men and women from the Western Areas protested to the Mayor at City Hall against passes and permits.

June 1957: In the Transkei, one thousand women of all races – organized by FSAW – demonstrated amidst police interruption. They continued on to Parliament, where they interviewed the Native's Representatives at the House of Assembly. In Randjiesfontein, farm women refused to take passes from the Native Commissioner. In the Pietersburg district, women in the reserves not only refused to accept passes but also threw stones at and chased away NAD officials. In the Rustenberg reserves, men also got involved, holding a special meeting to object to passes. In Queenstown, women refused passes. In Uitenhague, women burned passes which had been taken earlier by women, and ashes were collected as evidence.

July 1957: In Standerton, only 37 women accepted passes – the rest demonstrated. More than 1,000 women were arrested when they refused to disperse. Men also asked to be arrested alongside the women. At the following trials, 113 women were given a suspended sentence and

914 were discharged. In Pietersburg, 3,000 women marched to the pass unit and refused to take passes. In Brakpan, 2,000 protested against passes and permits in front of the Town Hall, shouting, “We want the Mayor!” In Balfour, women burnt passbooks and 900 women marched in procession to the magistrate’s court. Four spokeswomen were arrested.<sup>lxiv</sup>

August 1957: A union-wide protest to the Native Commissioners commemorating the first anniversary of the 1956 Pretoria protest occurred in such cities as Lichtenburg, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, Capetown, Kimberly, Winburg, Johannesburg, Pretoria, the West Rand, Germiston, Alexandra Township, Springs, Benoni, Uitenhage, Port Alfred. The statement presented to the Native Commissioner in Pretoria stated:

We say to you that theses are inhuman, intolerable burdens upon our men and upon us. AS WIVES AND MOTHERS WE CONDEMN THE PASS LAWS AND ALL THAT THEY IMPLY... We say here for you and all South Africa to know, that we women will continue to oppose the pass laws... WE SHALL NOT REST UNTIL WE HAVE WON FOR OUR CHILDREN THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND SECURITY.<sup>lxv</sup> [Emphasis original.]

September 1957: In Zeerust, thirty-five women were arrested after demonstrating – 235 women demanded to be arrested as well. In Nongoma, a deputation of women from the ANC was sent to Chief Cyprian na Dinizulu, urging the continued opposition to passes for women. In Carltonville, one thousand women demonstrated to the Native Commissioner who threatened that women would be denied their jobs if they refused passes; women were arrested for lack of permits, later released on bail, but nevertheless refused to sign admission statements. In Nelsphuit, women continued to refuse passes. In Walkerstroom, police assaulted women who refused passes. In Stanger, on the 27<sup>th</sup> – the Natal “Day of Protest” – women led by Mrs. Albert Luthuli protested to the Native Commissioner. One the same day in Durban, a number of women protested to their Native Commissioner as well.

October 1957: In Nyanga at the Cape, more than 400 women demonstrated to the location superintendent against brutal police pass-and-permit raids. In Nelspruit, women intent on demonstrating to the native commissioner were met instead by the magistrate. The women threw stones at the magistrate's car and were later arrested. The angry crowd marched to the police office and was attacked with batons and whips. The following day, workers refused to arrive for work and terror raids throughout Nelspruit followed.

November 1957: In Lichtenburg, nine women began twelve months of imprisonment because of their inability to pay £100 fine; three of the women were over eighty, three over seventy, and three over sixty years. In Zeerust, twelve schoolgirls were arrested for burning passes, with no opportunity for legal defense. In New Brighton, four hundred women marched in protest of passes and police raids to the Native Commissioner. In Vryburg, police with "knobkerries" (short sticks with knobbed heads) and batons assaulted women demonstrating against pass units. In KgoKpole, not one woman took a pass and the unit had to leave emptyhanded.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Women were on fire: demonstrating, passively resisting, and being arrested in droves. The government was growing ever fearful of this burgeoning female power. As women emerged as a stronger and stronger force, the machinery of the state was increasingly turned against them.<sup>lxvii</sup> The conflict of the pass protests also brought out the tensions between formal liberation organizations, such as those between the FSAW and the CA, as shall be discussed.

#### *Nurse Protests*

The Nursing Act of 1957 legislated the forced registration of black nurses. Black nurses, now placed in second-class positions, were deprived of a share in the decisions of the Nursing Association. The South African Nursing Council (SANCC), by the power of the Nursing Act, was

permitted to prescribe different uniforms, qualifications, and conditions for registration for nurses of different groups. The SANC replaced its multi-racial branches of the Association, replacing them with segregated “white,” “colored,” and “native” branches.<sup>lxviii</sup>

The FSAW criticized the Nursing Act as a law promulgating the lowering of educational and training standards, with either non-white patients distrusting their non-white nurses or receiving indifferent care from newly arrogant and inefficient white nurses. In either case, the FSAW claimed, “The South African public will [now] depend on nursing services by nurses who have received inferior and distorted training, and whose attitude towards their patients will be sour and unprofessional.”<sup>lxix</sup> Nurses at numerous locations – including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth – refused to comply with the tenets of the Bill but instead compiled and passed resolutions that attacked its principles.

The FSAW, fully in support of the nurses’ protest, saw the Nursing Act not only as an attempt to check a profession in which black women exerted considerable sway, but also as an additional attempt to introduce passes. This move by the government was the “thin edge of the wedge” for the pass units in cities.<sup>lxx</sup> On March 22, 1958, a highly advertised demonstration of nurses and supporters at Baragwanath Hospital, Johannesburg, was all but prevented by an “unprecedented and outrageous” showing of police force. Helen Joseph described the scene: “It was all very peaceful and polite and it made the hordes of policemen look silly and superfluous...yet the women had been very serious and very dignified and they had succeeded.”<sup>lxxi</sup> While the demonstration itself was a failure, the nursing campaign as a whole, as Joseph pointed out, succeeded in preventing nurse registration. Shortly after the demonstration, the SANC announced that identity numbers for black nurses would not be enforced. The success

proved to be merely a temporary respite, however, and by August 1958 a similar measure requiring nurse registration was re-introduced.<sup>lxxii</sup>

### *Labor Unions*

Women's involvement in labor unions during the climax of formal liberation efforts was both instrumental in the development of the liberation efforts themselves and also as an important context for female political expression. By taking a stand against sexism and racism in the workplace, women from various racial groups developed yet another space to set forth women-centered issues as well as those pertaining to general liberation. The Food and Canning Workers' Union and the African Food and Canning Workers' Union (AFCWU) boasted a majority of women in their membership and leadership. All of the general secretaries or acting secretaries of the FCWU were women (Ray Alexander, Becky Lan, and Liz Abrahams.) Many shop stewards and branch secretaries were also women, such as Frances Baard and Mary Mafeking. Mafeking also served as a secretary of the Paarl branch of the AFCWU, and later as its vice president and president.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

The FCWU, as already noted, continually resisted segregation of its membership, thus suffering police harassment. The FCWU with its continued stand throughout the 50s against rent increases, the restriction of voting rights, and the implementation of passes for women, as well as its committed non-racialism, was naturally well connected to organizations such as the ANCWL and FSAW. When the South African Trades and Labor Council – with whom the FCWU was affiliated – gave into pressure and became segregated in 1953, the FCWU withdrew membership and joined instead the South African Council of Trade Unions (SACTU) because of its commitment to the struggle against race discrimination in the trade union movement. The government, threatened by the force of multi-racial female politicization, cracked down even

harder on union efforts, declaring in 1959 food canning an “essential service,” thus making strikes in the industry illegal.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Regardless of government pressures, the FCWU and the AFCWU continued to maintain the involvement of women in its anti-Apartheid struggles. Betty du Toit, a trade union activist, noted:

The women trade unionists were so courageous. The government and the employers thought they could be stopped by halting the work of individual women. But the movement was never one of individuals. The spirit of these individual women inspired us whether they were with us or silenced. The government simply does not comprehend the power of the desire for freedom and equality. That power can never be destroyed.<sup>lxxv</sup>

### *The Congress Alliance*

The Congress Alliance (CA) had been formed in 1955 during the period of the ANC’s Defiance Campaigns, as a conglomeration of black and white liberation organizations, political parties, and unions. Consisting of the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Colored Peoples’ Organization, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, and the South African Congress of Democrats, the CA stood for multi-racial communication between organizations and shared liberation goals.<sup>lxxvi</sup> While not all organizations fully favored the multi-racial platform of the CA, namely the ANC, doubtfulness regarding its objectives usually centered around fear of white control, rather than objection to multi-racialism. Women’s involvement within the CA was multi-faceted.

The strength of the FSAW’s struggles against passes for women, their militancy in the Defiance campaign protests, and their efforts toward multi-racial liberation within formal and informal contexts did not escape the attention of the CA. While claiming to herald a new era of multi-racial cooperation, the CA was only as motivated as its most influential member: the ANC. The hegemony of the ANC within the Alliance informed not only its goals but also its attitude towards women’s efforts in the cause of liberation.

The CA's response to women's efforts during the 1950s was more of a passive than active one. Women were not criticized so much as they were not properly supported in female-centered liberation issues. Helen Joseph noted in an article responding to lack of male support within the CA for anti-pass campaigns:

This struggle against the pass laws is not a matter for African women alone, not a matter for the African people alone. It is part and parcel of the struggle for liberation...It is at this moment the most important facet of the struggle for liberation and it pervades the work of all the Congresses. It does not matter greatly in what locality the work is done or by whom.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The tenacity of female leadership did not fail to make an impact on the male-dominated leadership of the CA – although the impact was not always met with acceptance.

Within the CA, the ANC in particular had a history of conflict with the FSAW, regarding its role in the struggle for liberation. A large source of tension was the FSAW's very existence as a challenge to prejudices against women's political autonomy and adulthood – prejudices rooted in the ANC and CA – that threatened the hegemony of the ANC.<sup>lxxviii</sup> While outwardly praising the efforts of women in the FSAW and the ANCWL, the leaders of the CA (i.e., the leaders of the ANC) were critical of women's militancy and were anxious to reassert their authority.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Regarding the anti-pass campaigns and the massive arrests of women happening in the late 1950s, some scholars assert the importance of sexual politics in CA decisions to curb female “enthusiasm” for the cause. Given the sex-typed division of labor, the absence of wives and mothers who had been imprisoned from household responsibilities was keenly felt by fathers and husbands. In this specific aspect of the struggle, i.e., the act of juggling household duties with either participation in the informal economy, trade unions, and/or women's liberation movements, women protesters felt themselves ahead of men. Women simply wondered when the ANC would deliver their equivalent of the female-led activity. Instead of meeting the energy of

women's militant behavior, the ANC sought to control it by bailing arrested protesters and discouraging demonstrations that might lead to arrests, in order to give the efforts "proper direction."<sup>lxxx</sup>

The FSAW was committed to the emancipation of women from their subordinate position in society. However, the cause of black liberation was always implicitly of the forefront. And because of the primacy of liberation efforts such as the anti-pass campaigns, the FSAW had little time available to advocate a general understanding of women's subordinate position in society. Thus, in practice, the FSAW as an organization was less critical of male hegemony in leadership than its feminist rhetoric in publications such as "What Women Demand" might suggest.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Also, as Joseph concludes, without the support of the CA, the FSAW could not have survived as a unitary organization.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Therefore, regarding efforts such as the anti-pass campaigns, the FSAW was forced to accept the position of the ANC regarding the enthusiasm of female protesters. In spite of various power struggles within the CA, the FSAW was truly an educative force, helping to break down the barriers of traditional gender roles within formal liberation organizations.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

### *Treason Trials*

The militancy and excitement exhibited by the organizations forming the CA were to experience a serious blow after the ANC adopted the Freedom Charter on June 26, 1955. In December of 1956, 156 front-rank leaders were rounded up and detained in a nation-wide police coup. In what was to continue for 4 ½ years as the infamous "Treason Trials," the detained were forced into time-consuming and expensive litigation, thus draining the CA of their time and energy on political struggles.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Ultimately, only 30 of the 156 arrested were indicted on charges of “high treason,” to which they pled “not guilty.” Helen Joseph remembered:

Like all of us, I was angry, deeply angry, about the whole trial and what it had done to our lives. I was, all the same, immensely proud to be included in the front-line thirty, even though I did not know why I had been selected for this honour. I was proud to be sitting with them, close to them in so many ways, sharing their ordeal with them.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

The government accused the members of a conspiracy to overthrow the state by violence; they were traitors pursuing the cause of Communism. By March of 1961, the prosecution ultimately failed to prove that the ANC had intended, as a matter of policy, to achieve a new state by violent means.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> The thirty were vindicated – their solidarity had not been broken. However, the inactivity of those involved in the trial had taken its toll; the struggle for unity continued, as division became certain with the defection of the PAC.

#### *The Split in the ANC and Formation of the PAC*

Besides internal conflict regarding gender roles in politics, the ubiquitous pressures – such as the preoccupation of many leaders with the Treason Trial – and restrictions of the Apartheid government continued to frustrate the efforts of various liberation organizations. The varied approaches to the struggle were also the cause of conflict within the organizations themselves. While leaders such as Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and the members of groups such as the FSAW and the FCWU sought to reconcile races in the struggle for black liberation, others did not see racial unity as positive.

Robert Sobukwe, a language instructor at the University of the Witwatersrand, led a faction of the ANC away from racial unity. Sobukwe believed that whites might become genuine Africans but as they still benefited from the Apartheid regime, he maintained that they could not truly empathize with the African cause.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Sobukwe broke away from the ANC entirely and along with his Africanist followers<sup>lxxxviii</sup> founded the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in April of

1959. Tired of the “over-cautious” strategy of the ANC, the PAC attempted to address issues with more active militancy.

The Africanists were convinced that they represented more authentically the attitude of the masses. While both the ANC and PAC advocated the creation of a democratic society where merit instead of race would determine status and advancement, the Africanists alone advocated the complete replacement of minority rule with African government.<sup>lxxxix</sup> As stated by Sobukwe at the PAC’s inaugural conference,

For the lasting peace of Afrika and the solution of the economic, social and political problems of the continent, there needs must be a democratic principle. That means that White supremacy, under whatever guise it manifests itself, must be destroyed...Against multi-racialism we have this objection, that the history of South Africa has fostered group prejudices and antagonisms, and if we have to maintain the same group exclusiveness, parading under the term of multi-racialism, we shall be transporting to the new Afrika these very antagonisms and conflicts.<sup>xc</sup>

The ANC and PAC each viewed the other as too utopian and unrealistic in its ideologies. As the PAC saw it, the efforts of the ANC had failed to achieve freedom for the people of South Africa; therefore the PAC would associate themselves with the continent-wide Pan-Africanist movement, advocated by leaders such as Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, in order to stay “in step” with the continent.<sup>xcii</sup> The reaction of the PAC to the cautious strategy of the ANC would result in disaster, bringing the fifty-odd years of ANC struggle to naught, as demonstrated by the incident in Sharpeville.<sup>xcii</sup>

#### *The Sharpeville Massacre and Decline of the FSAW*

The ANC planned for an escalation of its anti-pass demonstrations across the country on March 31, 1960. However, the PAC pre-empted the ANC’s plan and launched a counter demonstration early on March 21, without the ANC’s support. As a massive show of civil disobedience, demonstrators were to gather around their local police stations without pass books,

ready to be arrested. At the police station in Sharpeville, the demonstrators remained peaceful while the police did not. Police opened fire on the crowd of unarmed demonstrators, killing sixty-seven people and injuring 186, most of whom were shot in the back.<sup>xciii</sup> Helen Joseph noted, “The rash action of the PAC had cost us – and them – very dearly and brought tragedy to many homes.”<sup>xciv</sup> While news of this act of direct police brutality spread quickly over the globe and provoked international condemnation, the result of the massacre had a very different effect within South Africa.

Although the aggressors were not the demonstrators, the Sharpeville demonstration nevertheless triggered the inevitable eradication of the national liberation movements that Apartheid legislators had been attempting to do away with for some time. The ANC and the PAC were banned as lawful political movements. Army reserves were mobilized during this “state of emergency,” and arrested 98 Whites, 90 Indians, 36 Coloreds, and 11,279 Blacks. The police jailed another 6,800 people, PAC leaders among them.

A week after the Sharpeville demonstration, Philip Kgosana, a twenty-three-year-old university student, led an organized procession of an estimated fifteen thousand to thirty thousand people in Cape Town through the city to Parliament. Once at the city center, police assured Kgosana that the minister of Justice would receive him, as long as Kgosana persuaded the demonstrators to go peacefully home. Kgosana did so, and was arrested later that evening.<sup>xcv</sup> The relentless combination of arrests, beatings, and bannings worked to break up the campaigns of liberation movements, leaving many organizations in states of confusion and abandonment.

Hilda Watts Bernstein declared, “The law had become an instrument of political oppression.”<sup>xcvi</sup> The banning of the ANC /ANCWL was a severe blow to the FSAW, as many of its leaders, including Helen Joseph and Lillian Ngoyi, were affiliated with both organizations.

The FSAW nevertheless managed to rally its resources for the short term and carry on through until the mid-1960s.<sup>xcvii</sup> In the long run, the Sharpeville massacre spelled out the finale of the strong militant phase of the ANC, women's movements, and the whole of the Congress Alliance.

### *Conclusion*

The militancy of women in formal liberation efforts during the 1950s reached new heights with the formation of the FSAW and the expansion of the ANCWL. Women such as Lillian Ngoyi, Betty du Toit, Helen Joseph, Frances Baard, Liz Abrahams, and others led efforts within formal women's organizations, as well as within trade unions. Women's struggles in the informal economy and within grassroots movements continued to challenge restrictive legislation such as the Bantu Education Act, the Group Areas Act, the "Abolition" of Passes Act, and the Nursing Act, and to politicize women of all backgrounds.

The strength of the female response to the ANC's call for civil disobedience and passive resistance to Apartheid legislation was not always positively viewed – even within black liberation organizations themselves. Although the ANC's Freedom Charter was dramatically similar to the FSAW Women's Charter, conflict over the women's militancy nevertheless played out in conflict between the ANC, the ANCWL, and the FSAW. The result was the stated acknowledgement of the ANC as the parent organizations to the women's sections. However, regardless of the ANC's hegemony, the continued struggle of women against sexism, racism, and classism – within both women-specific organizations and male-led organizations – worked to politicize women to a greater extent than ever before.

The split of the ANC and PAC prior to the Sharpeville massacre spelled the end of the climactic militant phase of women's movements within formal political organizations. The efforts of Apartheid's proponents clamped down harder than ever, breaking up concerted efforts

on the parts of both men and women towards the cause of black liberation. Many of the multi-racial goals and women-specific issues of some members of the Congress Alliance, and specifically the FSAW, were lost in the ensuing conflict following the Sharpeville massacre and the breakup of many formal liberation organizations. The heyday of civil disobedience and mass rallies of the 1950s were replaced by more assertive self-defense the following decades.

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### Chapter 3: Endnotes

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- <sup>ii</sup> United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, 1816.
- <sup>iii</sup> United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951: The Near East and Africa* Volume V (1951), 1460.
- <sup>iv</sup> “African National Congress Handbook,” 1959, Microfile Reel 4, “The Federation of South African Women Papers,” Center for Research Libraries, Chicago.
- <sup>v</sup> Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 154.
- <sup>vi</sup> “African National Congress Handbook,” 1959, Microfile Reel 4, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- <sup>vii</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 176.
- <sup>viii</sup> Helen Joseph, *Side by Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1986), 38.
- <sup>ix</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 39.
- <sup>x</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng: Conciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991), 168.
- <sup>xi</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 39.
- <sup>xii</sup> Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, eds., “Change and Violence 1953-1964,” Vol.

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- xiii “What Every Parent Should Know About ‘Bantu Education,’ ” undated, Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- xiv “Women in Chains,” undated, Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- xv Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 48.
- xvi “General Material on Bantu Education,” undated, Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- xvii Luli Callinicos, “Testimonies and Transitions: Women Negotiating the Rural and Urban in the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century,” in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 168.
- xviii Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 146-49.
- xix Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng*, 192.
- xx “Skokian Queens” were professional beer and liquor brewers and sellers who catered to customers in their own homes. For a more in depth description of “Skokian Queen” and “Shebeen Queen,” see Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1985), 33.35
- xxi Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 231.
- xxii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 165.
- xxiii Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*, 267.
- xxiv Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 143-46.
- xxv Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 164-66.
- xxvi Bonner and Nieftagodien, *Alexandra*, 146.
- xxvii Booner and Nieftagodien, *Alexandra*, 148.
- xxviii Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, “ ‘We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward’: ANC Women’s Struggles, 1912-1982,” in *Feminist Review* No. 12 (1982),

- <sup>xxix</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 54.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, eds., “Change and Violence 1935-1952,” Vol. 2, of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 403.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Kimble and Unterhalter, “We Opened the Road for You,” 22.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 131-32.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 36-37.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Karis and Carter, “Change and Violence 1935-1952,” 427.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Kimble and Unterhalter, “We Opened the Road for You,” 24.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 135.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> “Circular Promoting the Conference to Promote Women’s Rights,” March, 1954, Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 240.
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- <sup>xl</sup> Helen Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms: A South African Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 33.
- <sup>xli</sup> Beata Lipman, *We Make Freedom: Women in South Africa* (London: Pandora Press, 1984), 133-34.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 174-75.
- <sup>xliii</sup> “Charter for Women’s Rights,” April, 1954, Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- <sup>xliv</sup> “Discussion on the Position of Women in South Africa,” April, 1954, Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
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- xlvi “General Material on Bantu Education,” undated, Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- xlvi “Letter of the Federation of South African Women, Transvaal Region,” undated, Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- xlvi “The Answer to Bantu Education,” in *Counter Attack* (Aug., 1955), Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- <sup>1</sup> *Counter Attack* was the veritable “voice” of many resistance movements during the 1950’s.
- li “The Answer to Bantu Education,” in *Counter Attack* (Aug., 1955), Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- lii “Draft Proposals on Bantu Education,” undated, Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- liii Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 178.
- liv Joseph, *Side by Side*, 53.
- lv “Executive Report Presented at the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the African National Congress – Transvaal, Held at Eastern Native Township on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1959,” Microfile Reel 4, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- lvi Joseph, *Side by Side*, 39.
- lvii Meadowlands was a government built “homeland” that would later become Soweto. See, Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*, 168.
- lviii Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 177-78.
- lix “Correspondence between FSAW and City Council of Pretoria,” October, 1955; Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- lx “Correspondence between FSAW and South African Coloured Peoples’ Organization,” November, 1955; Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
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- lxii Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and Their Tears: Conditions and Resistance of Women in Apartheid South Africa* (Kent: A.G. Bishop & Sons Ltd., 1978), 46-47.
- lxiii “Strijdom... You Have Struck a Rock,” undated pamphlet, Microfile Reel 1, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
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- lxvi “Resistance of Women to Passes,” 1957-58, Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
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- lxix “Communication of FSAW regarding passes,” 1958, Microfile Reel 2, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”
- lxx Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 214.
- lxxi Joseph, *Side by Side*, 64-5.
- lxxii Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 215.
- lxxiii Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 218.
- lxxiv Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*, 205-8.
- lxxv Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears* (London: International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), 78.
- lxxvi Joseph, *Side by Side*, 41.
- lxxvii Editorial Response by Helen Joseph in *Counter Attack*, 1959, Microfile Reel 3, “The Federation of South African Women Papers.”

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- <sup>lxxviii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 259.
- <sup>lxxix</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 197.
- <sup>lxxx</sup> Kimble and Unterhalter, “We Opened the Road for You,” 27-28.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 265.
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 20.
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 258-63.
- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> Karis and Carter, “Change and Violence, 1953-1964,” 275.
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 75.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 100-01.
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 210.
- <sup>lxxxviii</sup> The Africanist faction within the ANC had emerged in 1955, and were highly critical of what they considered the “over cautious” strategies of the ANC. See, Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 210.
- <sup>lxxxix</sup> Karis and Carter, “Change and Violence, 1953-1964,” 315-17.
- <sup>xc</sup> “Opening Address,” by Robert Sobukwe, in Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter, eds., “Change and Violence, 1953-1964,” Vol. 3, of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 513-16.
- <sup>xcii</sup> Karis and Carter, “Change and Violence, 1953-1964,” 322-23.
- <sup>xcii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 267.
- <sup>xciii</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 210.
- <sup>xciv</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 81.
- <sup>xcv</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 210.
- <sup>xcvi</sup> Hilda Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours: The Story of the Rivonia Trial* (London: SA Writers, 1989.), 15.
- <sup>xcvii</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 267-68.

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## Chapter 4: Post-1960 Struggles Against Apartheid

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### *Black Liberation's "State of Emergency": 1960-1970*

A *de facto* state of emergency against anti-Apartheid struggles was instituted during the 1960s as the harshness of legislation continued to match the ruthlessness of police and security forces. Countless men and women suffered prolonged solitary confinement, indefinite detention without trial, torture, and many years of imprisonment.<sup>i</sup> The Unlawful Organizations Act of 1960 instituted the banning of the ANC and PAC and inaugurated legislation that sought to eradicate any legal opposition to the Apartheid government. Later acts such as the Sabotage Act (1962), the General Laws Amendment Act (1966), and the Terrorism Act (1967) gave the government power to ban organizations, prohibit them from assembling, and prevent them from receiving external funding. Continuing into the 1970s, the Internal Security Act (1976) allowed for the imprisonment of individuals indefinitely without trial, allowed for the withholding of prisoners' identities from the general public, and allowed the government to restrict prisoners' access to anyone save government officials.<sup>ii</sup>

### *The ANC and PAC: Underground*

Although Chief Albert Luthuli had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961 for his leadership of the ANC, an important transition occurred when the 1960 "Unlawful Organizations" legislation forced both the ANC and PAC underground. No longer was non-violence the standard. The ANC and PAC found themselves unable to continue the liberation effort without self-defense of some kind, and armed "military" wings of each organization were formed. Umkhonto we Sizwe or "The Spear of the Nation" (MK) was formed as an offshoot from the ANC, and Poqo (meaning "Pure") was also formed as counterpart to the PAC.<sup>iii</sup>

As already noted, the ANC and PAC employed different approaches and methods as liberation organizations. The same held true of their respective military wings. MK, led by Nelson Mandela of the ANC and Joe Slovo of the CPSA, planned disciplined acts of sabotage on specific government targets, taking care to avoid unnecessary loss of life. In contrast, Poqo undertook much more dangerous and indiscriminate acts of sabotage, making no effort to avoid loss of life. As stated in a December 1961 leaflet promoting the formation of Poqo, “The white people shall suffer, the black people will rule. Freedom comes after bloodshed.”<sup>iv</sup> The planned attacks of MK against the government and the terrorist-like killings of Poqo combined to spur Verwoerd’s government to even stricter legislation against rebel organizations.

In 1962, Nelson Mandela left South Africa for military training in Algeria. Upon his return in August of the same year, Mandela was imprisoned for inciting disturbances and leaving the country without a “valid” passport. The government gave Mandela a two-year sentence. Committed to squashing all potential rebellions, Verwoerd succeeded in at least temporarily breaking the forces of MK and Poqo.<sup>v</sup>

Seventeen more MK leaders were arrested in the summer of 1963 and were summoned to the infamous Rivonia trial. This trial determined the sentence of Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, and twelve others associated with the ANC and MK, who were arrested on charges under the Sabotage Act. Nelson Mandela, brought from jail to join the prisoners at the Rivonia trial declared:

The African National Congress is struggling for the right to live... During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if need be it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.<sup>vi</sup>

All were found guilty, except one white person, and eight sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Migrant Labor and Forced Removals*

The system of migrant labor and passes that applied to men and worked to separate families since the beginning of the Segregation era – known as “Influx Control” – fully incorporated women by 1964. A total ban was placed on further entry of women into urban areas outside the Bantustans without a visitor’s permit. Forced resettlement of blacks to the Bantustans destroyed communities, effecting the suffering, alienation, degradation, and humiliation of black society.<sup>viii</sup> A 1967 general government circular from the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development stated:

It is accepted Government Policy that the Bantu are only temporarily resident in the European areas of the Republic, for as long as they offer their labour there. As soon as they become, for some reason or another no longer fit for work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of the national unit where they fit in ethnically if they were not born and bred in the homeland.<sup>ix</sup>

As for black women, hardship abounded in both rural and urban areas. Even as the cheapest source of labor, a mere twenty percent of women were fortunate enough to find paid work, work that instigated the separation of families. Patricia Thuso, a domestic worker in Johannesburg, spoke to the plight of thousands: “We work to feed them, but we do not know our children.”<sup>x</sup>

### *The Breakdown of the FSAW*

It was also during this time that the Federation of South African Women gradually ceased to function. The sheer number of arrests and police crackdowns during this decade of repression decimated the membership of women’s resistance groups and forced out those who were able to leave South Africa entirely. However, even amidst the exodus of many former resisters, not all succumbed to the harsh and politically repressive climate. Helen Joseph remembers: “Frances Baard and Florence Matomela were the outstanding leaders of women in the Eastern Cape, a

formidable part of fearless women. They endured years of political persecution, bans, detentions, solitary confinement and imprisonment, but nothing could break their spirit.”<sup>xi</sup>

### *Women in the ANC Underground*

Resistance to the oppression in all areas of life against Apartheid continued in many ways during the “state of emergency” of liberation movements although, as Helen Joseph noted, the effort was not feasible for many people. Both men and women rebuilt the ANC and MK slowly, underground. The past ideas of non-violent resistance were cast aside, and a renewed guerrilla force was built to destroy Apartheid.

Women such as Winnie Mandela, Joyce Sikakhane, Shantie Naidoo, and Albertina Sisulu helped to rebuild the guerrilla movement in the Soweto area, which would eventually contribute to the uprising of 1976.<sup>xii</sup> Women’s activities – drilling, handling weapons, topography – were the same as men. The ambiguities that existed in women’s roles were related to the varied responses of male compatriots and commanders. Once again, women were found occupying multi-faceted roles within a given power structure. Even as minorities in the guerrilla struggle holding ambiguous positions, black women nevertheless contributed to the “heroic” or “(s)heroic” project that was the underground guerrilla force.<sup>xiii</sup>

Liberation organizations during the 1960s were weakened from all angles due to the government’s all-out efforts to entirely eradicate black political activism. By forcing some organizations underground and completely stamping out others, the government did not create a well-ordered world of white supremacy as set forth by the architects of apartheid but, in fact, created a chaotic wreck of human waste.<sup>xiv</sup> The unfeasibility of Apartheid’s restrictions regarding Bantu education would prove to be a source of such frustration to blacks that it would conversely

initiate a positive resurgence of energy and animation within men and women's liberation efforts in the 1970s, both under- and above-ground.

### *The Resurgence: 1970-1980's*

The 1970s and 80s saw a resurgence of energy in men and women's liberation movements, especially those instigated by university students. While the Apartheid government under Prime Minister John Vorster<sup>xv</sup> continued to try its hardest to implement its agenda of separate development with the formation of "independent" homelands,<sup>xvi</sup> African students – both male and female – started to emerge from the fear-based mentality brought about by the severe turn of Apartheid in the early 60s. Trade unions became stronger and strikes more effective. Formal organizations such as the ANC became re-energized with the force of new momentum originating from student efforts, especially the Soweto uprising of 1976.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *The Black Consciousness Movement and the Soweto Uprising*

The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), originally formed in 1924 to support the non-violent fight for multi-racial education, primarily consisted of white resistance to Apartheid. In 1969, Steve Biko, a black student leader, formed a splinter faction of NUSAS, the South African Students Organization (SASO), under the Black Consciousness ideology. The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was a call to black self-reliance and self-assertion. Steve Biko argued that the product of "300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration and derision" – could only be erased by "a very strong grass-roots build-up of black consciousness, such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim."<sup>xviii</sup> The goal of the BCM was not to propose reverse racism, nor was it an initiative to drive whites out of South Africa. Rather, the BCM strove to re-determine black/white interaction and co-existence.

The BCM and SASO were also ideologically connected to the struggles of neighboring Angola and Mozambique. In 1974, the organizations conducted rallies in celebration of those countries' respective overthrows of colonial power. In turn, the neighboring southern African countries were invested in the overthrow of Apartheid in South Africa, with the new Marxist governments of Angola and Mozambique developing diplomatic relations with the ANC and MK.<sup>xix</sup>

The exiled ANC underground force was wary of Biko and the BCM due to its PAC undertones. The ANC had little to do with the movement's growth, although Winnie Mandela actively supported the movement after her bans expired in 1975. She stated, "We know what we want – our aspirations are dear to us. We are not *asking* for majority rule; it is our right, we shall have it at any cost."<sup>xx</sup> Biko, however, did not encourage factional rivalries, as they only took energy away from the cause. His viewpoint expressed, "There's no more PAC, there's no more ANC, there's just the struggle."<sup>xxi</sup>

Ultimately it was the government's insistence on teaching Afrikaans in South African schools that was the breaking point for Biko and the Movement. In June of 1976 the students of Soweto went on strike, along with 10,000 blacks marching in support. Helen Joseph remembered, "The children had organized themselves...No one had listened to them. Now they expected no one to listen to them."<sup>xxii</sup> The Soweto strike turned bloody when the police fired on the crowd and children rioted. The strikes and riots spread to the Cape, with the year-end fatalities somewhere between five hundred and one thousand.<sup>xxiii</sup> The Minister of Justice blustered in parliament, Joseph remembered, "The white man is stronger than you think...the black man must not push us around."<sup>xxiv</sup> This was the response of the government to the

students' demand for equal education. The force of the Soweto uprising represented the renewal of black resistance and worked to erode the three-decade confidence of the National Party.

### *Labor Strikes and Trade Union Activity*

Due to the ever-increasing legislation prohibiting African representation, workers, both men and women, had no effective access to industry-wide labor organization. This system eventually began to break down in the early 1970s, in part due to an economic recession and the high fluctuation of the market, as well as the resurgence in student organizing. Frustrated, industrial workers in Durban staged a prolonged series of illegal strikes in January 1973, beginning at a brickworks employing two thousand people. The strike at the brickworks gained a wage increase for the workers, as well as generating a wave of successive strikes throughout Durban. The workers engaged in "wildcat" strikes, in contrast to the system of drawn out negotiation used in the post-WWII period. This had allowed workers under heavy scrutiny by police to organize before preventative measures were put into place. In July of the same year, the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Amendment Act granted blacks direct legal rights in wage negotiations.<sup>xxv</sup> By 1979, black unions could register legally, for the first time, like their White, Indian, and Colored counterparts.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Student activity in the 1976 Soweto uprising and the BCM brought about a new wave of activism throughout the unions, resulting in the formation of additional unions, such as the Black Allied Workers' Union (BAWU). Lack of unity was still an issue, however, and black trade unions' ideological divisions were at times their downfalls. The goals of the proponents of non-racialism, such as those of SACTU's leadership, did not mesh well with the more extremist ideologies of the followers of the BCM. In 1979 the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU) was formed as a result of this divide. Because SAAWU was blatantly political, non-

racial in principle, and led entirely by blacks, the government, in accordance with the ideology of “separate development,” focused on its repression. Therefore, as a result of internal union conflicts and continuous government suppression, many union activists were banned and imprisoned.<sup>xxvii</sup> The black trade union movement as whole, however, continued to be influential – despite its division – in the fight against apartheid.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### *Women in Trade Unions and Perceptions of Feminism*

Trade unions during the nadir of black resistance and afterwards continued to present opportunities for politicization of men as well as women. Spurred on to even greater militancy and organization after the Soweto uprisings, women’s collaboration in trade union activity involved the push for gender as well as racial equality for workers. Regarding gender equality specifically, Rita Ndzanga – organizing secretary and treasurer of the General and Allied Workers’ Union (GAWU) during the early 80s – maintained:

I can think of no country where the trade unions haven’t taken a leading role in a liberation struggle. I also believe that the day comes women must be full and equal – the struggle for one is a struggle for both. Discrimination because of sex must go as surely as discrimination because of colour...<sup>xxix</sup>

Beata Lipman, spoke to the omnipresent struggle of black organizations in her recorded experiences in 1980s South Africa acknowledged:

If they [blacks] are seen to become too much in control of their own destiny, there are two further embargoes that may be undertaken against them...their permission to remain in an urban area (where most factories are placed) can be revoked because no black, no matter which piece of paper she or he may possess under the urban areas legislation, will ever be a citizen there with rights to stay; and the union could, still, in spite of growth and “progress,” be banned. That is, if police raids, arrests, beating up and the more usual forms of political interrogation have still not had the desired effect.<sup>xxx</sup>

Emma Mashinini, general secretary during the early 1980s of the Commercial, Catering, and Allied Workers’ Union, an all-black union which shared office space with its “white” counterpart, the National Union of Distributive Workers, focused attention on the disabilities

suffered by black women workers, not as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities to fight for equal rights. According to Mashinini, “We women are still minors in law, especially black women – but although other may see me like that, it’s not the way I see it.”<sup>xxxii</sup> Mary Ntseke, involved in GAWU also at this time, noted:

There are women who are supposed to be in the battlefields, as I am – you notice that these women’s voices are not heard because in some cases, they are not in a position to explain themselves, the way they should... with so many years of experience in the trade union movement I don’t have that problem.<sup>xxxii</sup>

While women of all races within unions recognized the discrepancy between their rights and men’s, it was viewed differently across the board. Some women claimed to see the struggles they faced in the context of workers as opportunities to strengthen the burgeoning power of female militants – an invigorating challenge. Others saw the absence of women’s voices as a real and important concern: an example of the hegemony of the male voice. The struggle against gender domination was an integral part of the struggle against racial domination.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Dora Tamana, one of the founders of the FSAW in the early 1980s, exhorted women to move forward in the struggle:

You who have no work – speak! You who have no homes – speak! You who have no schools – speak! You who have to run like chickens from the vulture – speak! We must free ourselves! Men and women must share housework. Men and women must work together in the home and in the world...I opened the door for you – you must go forward!<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### *The United Democratic Front and COSATU*

Due to student-led protests, formal liberation organizations such as the CPSA, the ANC, and MK, and the PAC became re-energized even in the context of underground operation. By strikes and boycotts, non-violent protests and bloody demonstrations, incidents of deliberate sabotage and violent clashes between township residents and police, residents of nearly every

city and homeland in South Africa fought against the Apartheid regime.<sup>xxxv</sup> While many of these groups had turned to violence, another force continued to proclaim non-violent opposition.

In August 1983, a thousand delegates of all races, representing 575 organizations – including women’s organizations, trade unions, and community groups – formed the United Democratic Front (UDF), under the leadership of Rev. Allan Boesak. The UDF adopted the ANC Freedom Charter and strove to utilize all facets available to coordinate internal non-violent opposition to Apartheid. The UDF, ultimately banned by Botha’s government in 1985, looked to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to uphold its principles.

COSATU was formed due to the work of independent trade union campaigns and summits over a period of four years. COSATU’s official launch was in Durban, November of 1985, where thirty-three independent trade unions attended its inaugural meeting. COSATU, like the UDF, aimed to achieve a non-racial and democratic society, as well as instigating greater militant action on the part of the ANC and employers.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

COSATU also recognized the importance of women and held a Women’s Congress in April of 1988. At this congress, three hundred women formulated a list of demands – similar to those previously listed in the FSAW Women’s Charter – that would ensure COSATU’s participation in the education of its membership concerning equal relationships. Equality would be stressed not only at work and in politics, but also at home in the domestic sphere. As well as instituting these demands, women were encouraged to take a front seat in the movement, with COSATU establishing Women’s Forums.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Thus, COSATU established a stronger anti-apartheid stance by including elements of gender liberation in its tenets. The Apartheid government under P.W. Botha was forced to begin reconsidering its policies.

## *Conclusion*

During the 1960s, anti-Apartheid liberation movements faced serious difficulties. Intensified government action against liberation measures and the continued incarceration of liberation leaders created a *de facto* state of emergency for anti-Apartheid activists. Forced underground, both the ANC and PAC formed guerrilla military wings that began to convert the prior non-violent methods of black opposition to methods that incorporated sabotage. MK and Poqo, the guerrilla offshoots of the ANC and PAC, respectively, employed different tactics. While MK was more discriminate in its targets, Poqo did not make the same efforts to avoid loss of life. In the 1963 Rivonia Trial, eight of the leaders of MK were sentenced to life imprisonment. Many women were involved in the slow rebuilding of MK, their efforts contributing to the Soweto uprising of 1976.

Women's continued hardships were exacerbated by their full incorporation into the government's policy of "Influx Control" in 1964. The ban of female travel into urban areas outside of the Bantustans without a visitors permit further inhibited women in their struggle to find employment. The FSAW also broke down during this time, as it was unable to sustain its efforts due to the removal of so many of its members by police action.

The resurgence of energy in liberation movements during the 1970s and 80s was due in part to the efforts of NUSAS and the BCM. While members of the ANC were wary of BCM leader Steve Biko and his PAC-like rhetoric, organizational factions did not inhibit the BCM's outreach. The students of Soweto rose up in an inspiring way that worked to break down the confidence of the National Party. Students were also involved in labor union efforts, both influencing the black trade union movement and helping to create new organizations such as the non-racial SAAWU. Women continued to help and collaborate in the efforts and initiatives of

trade unions and pushed for gender equality as well as racial equality. COSATU in particular noted the importance of women and initiated a conference whereby women's demands could be heard.

The fight against the Apartheid regime continued throughout the 1980s. On account of much harsh struggle, Apartheid was ultimately repealed, culminating in democratic elections in 1994. While this study does not deal with the post-1985 phase, its examination of the periods of harshest struggle before the repeal of Apartheid are important to the investigation of how those struggles are currently and how they have been analyzed and understood to date.

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#### **Chapter 4: Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London: International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), 98.

<sup>ii</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 199.

<sup>iii</sup> Poqo would later become known as "The Azanian People's Liberation Army" (APLA). See, Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 272-73.

<sup>iv</sup> Tom Lodge, "The Paarl Insurrection: A South African Uprising," in *African Studies Review* Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec., 1982), 107.

<sup>v</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 211.

<sup>vi</sup> Nelson Mandela during Rivonia Trial, in Helen Joseph, *Side by Side* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 157.

<sup>vii</sup> The eight sentenced to life imprisonment were: Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Ahmed Kathrada, Denis Goldberg, and Andrew Mlangeni.

<sup>viii</sup> Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears*, 17, 21.

<sup>ix</sup> Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears*, 14.

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- <sup>x</sup> Beata Lipman, *We Make Freedom: Women in South Africa* (Boston: Pandora Press, 1984), 6.
- <sup>xi</sup> Helen Joseph, *Side by Side* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 162.
- <sup>xii</sup> Raymond Suttner, "Women in the ANC-led Underground," in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 236.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Suttner, "Women in the ANC-led Underground," 238-40.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, Lmted., 2004), 62.
- <sup>xv</sup> Prime Minister Verwoerd was assassinated in 1966, and succeeded by B.J. Vorster. See, Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 189.
- <sup>xvi</sup> South Africa's "independent" homelands were formed in conjunction with Vorster's continuation of Verwoerd's "separate development" initiative. The following homelands were granted "independence": Transkei in 1976; Bophuthatswana in 1977; Venda in 1979; and Ciskei in 1981. See, South African History Online [SAHO], "Homelands", SAHO Project, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/places/villages/northWest/bophuthatswana.htm> (accessed, August, 2010).
- <sup>xvii</sup> David Hirschmann, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa," in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March, 1990), 1-3.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, eds., "Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979," Vol. 5 of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 100.
- <sup>xix</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 71-80.
- <sup>xx</sup> Lipman, *We Make Freedom*, 136.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Karis and Gerhart, "Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979," 111.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 177.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 270-71.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 178.

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- <sup>xxv</sup> Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 71-72.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Lipman, *We Make Freedom*, 76.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Karis and Gerhart, “Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979,” 198.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Jeremy Baskin, “Labour in South Africa’s Transition to Democracy: Concentration in a Third World Setting” in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-97*, eds. Glenn Adler and Eddie Webster (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 43-44.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Lipman, *We Make Freedom*, 81.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Lipman, *We Make Freedom*, 78.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Lipman, *We Make Freedom*, 85.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Lipman, *We Make Freedom*, 86.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears*, 80.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears*, 110.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 228-29.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> David Walton, “‘Asilamali!’: The Tradition of Independent Labor in South Africa (1919-1994),” (M.A. thesis, Eastern Michigan University, 2008), chapter 5.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Walton, ‘Asilamali!’, chapter 5.

## **“Lost in Translation?”: Conclusion**

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This study asked: who were the women involved in the struggle? What were their varied backgrounds and motivations, and what kept them going? What types of analyses were and are used to address the efforts of women in both the liberation movement and the struggle against patriarchal authority? Why do some scholars suggest that the liberation struggle and the feminist struggle remained separate entities, while others suggest that the politicization of women by its very nature was a multi-layered concept?

### *The Struggle: 1910-1939*

The first chapter focused on the anti-Segregationist struggles of men and women from the formation of the Union of South Africa to the start of the Second World War. Segregationist policies that were instituted and supported from the very inception of the Union were challenged by a variety of groups and initiatives. Organizations such as the SANNC, the CPSA, the ICU, and trade unions were formed during this period to fight against racial discrimination, capitalism, economic restrictions, and unacceptable industrial working conditions and procedures, respectively.

Women were active in all of these organizations as well as the BWL, which was formed under the aegis of the SANNC. Women’s activity in the BWL and participation in the anti-pass campaigns prefigured what would eventually become the quintessential effort toward multi-racial cooperation in efforts of the FSAW. The “visible” anti-segregationist political activity of women in formal organizations was accompanied by strategies employed by the informal sector women to maintain economic control in a variety of settings.

White and colored women struggled in industrial settings to reform working conditions and discriminatory hiring, albeit amidst racial conflict. Black women’s efforts *against*

proletarianization also represented a militant struggle against segregation. The participation of the ICU in the defense of women's informal economic efforts – such as beer brewing – politicized women in rural areas to a greater extent and created a sense of solidarity against the segregated industrial complex.

This chapter revealed the actions of women during this period to be as variegated as their backgrounds. Women of all races were shown to be straddling several positions at once. Fighting against proletarianization, as well as fighting to create a sustainable proletarian existence amidst a segregated environment, exemplified the multiplicity of militant responses to Segregationist legislation. As Bozzoli addressed in her early work, the “domestic sphere” functioned as the site of conflict in the struggle for economic control – especially during this early period – as well as the site of conflict for the beginnings of the politicized gender struggle.<sup>i</sup>

The zeal of women in the fight against passes represented concern for women-centered issues, as well as a struggle to maintain economic control. Women working in leadership capacities in the BWL and CPSA challenged male-dominated organizations and perceptions of women's roles. While women were attracted to the “bread and butter” concerns employed by formal liberation efforts to gain support, as both Walker and the team of Kimble and Unterhalter suggest,<sup>ii</sup> the variety of responses that occurred speaks ultimately to the shifting nature of women's positions and roles in the liberation struggle that Gasca discloses.<sup>iii</sup>

### *The Struggle: 1939-1949*

The second chapter captured South Africa's industrial growth during WWII and the subsequent increase in politicization on the part of black men and women in the decade prior to Apartheid. Formal de-segregationist political struggles were best seen in the work of trade unions, as the influence of the ANC, the APO and go-to liberation organizations of the like had

fallen off during the end of the previous decade. And necessary the unions proved to be, as the surge of women into the workforce during WWII helped to broaden the racial divide, with white employers pitting white women against black men and women for jobs.

While women of different races were involved in trade union activity, the trade unions themselves were not without racial conflict. The activities of the GWU exemplified the difficulties of trade union cohesion under Segregation. Not all trade unions were completely divided, however, and the efforts of the FCWU and the SWU proved that multi-racial cohesion could occur, even in a racially stratified environment. Some women emerged as leaders within the trade unions, such as Frances Baard; their political experience later would benefit the FSAW.

Grassroots efforts, that is, those not led by a dynamic personality, sprang up during this period. The Alexandra bus boycotts were the prime example of this type of communal struggle to control some element of subsistence costs and to expose the injustices of urban Segregation. Also, women's efforts in the informal economy – *shebeens*, food stalls, beer brewing, to name a few – continued to challenge the same segregationist legislation that attempted to channel all political and economic power to whites.

The formation of the ANCWL allowed for a growth of politicization among black women, although its “secondary” status alongside the ANC proper re-emphasized the patriarchal ideals of “women’s role” and “women’s work.” By the late forties, however, women’s enthusiasm within the organization began to challenge male perception regarding the nature of female militancy. The beginnings of multi-racial organization within the ANCWL as well trade unions laid out the basis for future multi-racial organizing, as well as women-centered liberation efforts.

Ultimately, this chapter brought to light the existence of female militancy for political

and economic efforts, both formal and informal. The continued struggle to organize and impart change even within segregated trade unions or to maintain a semblance of economic control through petty-bourgeois enterprises, spoke to women's concerted efforts against Segregationist legislation as well as to their competence as leaders. While the examination of the struggle against Segregation during World War Two finds women's efforts to be the spark that would help to ignite a later inferno of resistance, they also reveal, as Berger contends,<sup>iv</sup> a distinct challenge to the patriarchal ideology of the ANC and an inherent concern for women's issues. Here also, Bozzoli's notion of the importance of domestic conflict throughout the period of anti-Segregation struggles reveals the multi-layered nature of female resistance.<sup>v</sup>

#### *The Struggle: 1949-1960*

The third chapter unites the core tenets of the study: the struggle for female emancipation within the struggle for black liberation and multi-racial cooperation in the fight against Apartheid. With the implementation of Apartheid legislation during the 1950s, black liberation efforts of both men and women became stronger than ever before. Through male leadership, the revitalization of the ANC through the CYL movement created new energy with which to respond to the new repressive force of Apartheid. From female leadership, the formation of the FSAW promoted the multi-racial nature of the struggle and sought to promote women-centered concerns alongside general liberation goals.

Women's responses were multiple and powerful. The documentation of the "Women's Charter" revealed the concern for and the power behind the female liberation effort in conjunction with black liberation, alongside the ANC's "Freedom Charter," which emphasized mainly racial liberation. Women's militancy – alone or with men – in the anti-pass campaigns, the struggle against the BEA for better education, and the fight against forced removals due to

the Group Areas Act alarmed Verwoerd and the Apartheid administration. White women, colored women, black women, and Indian women came together against oppressive legislation in terms of both race and gender.

Protest after protest across the country exemplified the universality of women's concerns regarding race, gender, and class liberation, as well as the heightening of politicization across the divides of race and gender. The call for civil disobedience from the newly invigorated ANC was met with such strength from women activists that it caused conflict within the organization itself, the tension perhaps also due to the conflict over sex-patterned division of labor. Women's responses were called into question, and leadership in the ANCWL and FSAW was eventually brought under the hegemony of the male-led ANC. The narrative of this chapter merited from full access to FSAW papers from the 1950s and 60s. Due to this resource, it was possible to document the nearly day-to-day patterns of decline and re-growth in the struggle in greater detail than previously done.

By the end of the decade, the ANC was rife with internal conflict regarding its "Africanist" faction: the debate regarding the multi-racial tenor of the Congress Alliance and the racial nature of the black liberation struggle. Robert Sobukwe's defection from the ANC and formation of the PAC culminated in disaster with the Sharpeville massacre. The slew of arrests and banning of many organizations that followed all but halted the progress of black liberation.

This third chapter revealed the concerted efforts of multi-racial groups of women struggling to achieve economic freedoms, proper education, better working conditions, respect as leaders, and political voices. Although inter-organizational conflict resulted in the hegemony of the ANC over the women-led organizations, women's efforts toward racial liberation were not cowed in the least. Through grassroots efforts and trade union activity, women continued to

challenge the force of Apartheid, as well as patriarchal hegemony. However, the division of the ANC and PAC and the Sharpeville massacre ultimately spelled out the end of the period of climactic militancy in female-led *and* male-led organizations, due to the resulting impact of banned leaders and the outlawing of organizations.

### *The Struggle: Post-1960*

The fourth and final chapter of the study recounted the struggles of political activists and resistance groups throughout the final stages of Apartheid. The ANC, FSAW, and organizations of the like, found themselves in a veritable “state of emergency,” due to the continued harshness of legislation which banned the ANC and PAC as lawful organizations. As non-violent tactics were no longer considered sustainable, the ANC and PAC established underground military wings, MK and Poqo, respectively, that attempted to retain power through sabotage. Women were involved in these underground efforts, occupying multi-faceted roles in the guerrilla struggle.

The formation of the BCM during the 1970s resulted in a resurgence of energy in men and women’s liberation efforts; the Soweto student uprising exemplifying the general reanimation of the liberation struggle. Later, throughout the late 70s into the early 80s, amidst efforts of self-defense and sabotage that supported segregated resistance, some organizations continued to emphasize non-violent approach and multi-racial unity. The UDF and COSATU emphasized the importance of non-violent militancy and racial harmony, calling to task both employers and the ANC. COSATU also sought to take advantage of women power and employed the use of Women’s forums and a Women’s Congress to include gender liberation as part of its organizational goals.

This final chapter revealed the division of the liberation struggle even amidst its revitalization, in terms of both race and gender. Women's struggles in particular, whether in politics, sabotage, or union affairs, demonstrated the truly multi-racial nature of the fight for black liberation as well as gender equality. While the question of what constituted gender equality was understood differently across the board, women nevertheless recognized the discrepancy between men and women's political rights and sought to maintain their political voices side by side with men. Berger's use of "distinct stages"<sup>vi</sup> in discussion of gender conceptualization among South African women applies to this study only so far. Although certain general patterns emerge that evidence the linear progression of formal political groups becoming effective forums for initiating gender equality, the implementation of "women-specific efforts" itself was not fully linear in nature. Rather, the struggles ebbed and flowed throughout the various periods, regardless of the context in which they were addressed.

#### *Overall Conclusions of the Study*

Throughout the study, women were seen striving for economic control, racial equality, and women's liberation in a stratified society. Women's resistance to pass laws exemplified well their fight to maintain an aspect of economic control,<sup>vii</sup> as well as demonstrating ability and a willingness to organize in multi-racial groups.<sup>viii</sup> Women's resistance to Segregationist and Apartheid legislation and their militant participation in formal liberation groups, whether male- or female-centered, demonstrated their desire to achieve racial equality.<sup>ix</sup>

Regarding the struggle for female equality in South Africa, the scholarly community understands neither the motivations behind nor the execution of the struggle uniformly. What does stand out in this re-examination of primary sources is the multi-faceted nature of women's involvement in the struggle for gender equality, especially during the decade of the 1950s. Some

women, a mix of black and white leaders and members of formal liberation organizations such as the FSAW and the ANCWL, clearly stated their promotion of female equality in the contexts of economic relations, organizational leadership and participation, and family structure.<sup>x</sup> As stated in a circular promoting the FSAW inaugural conference in 1954, “While our main struggle is with men against racialism and the colour bar, to make our national struggle more effective, we ask that men support us in our fight for equality.”<sup>xi</sup>

Other women, such as rural black women who protested the regulation of beer brewing, beer hall ownership<sup>xii</sup> and the imposition of passes to curtail economic freedoms,<sup>xiii</sup> supported the cause of gender equality *de facto*, the struggle to maintain female economic control inherently supporting female liberation efforts. Whether or not the particular struggles were recognized as struggles over women’s issues *per se*, the cause of gender equality was nevertheless inherently supported.

What can be taken from the re-examination of the primary sources is the notion that the politicization of women of all races and backgrounds was truly a multi-layered concept. The dynamics of family, economy, gender, and race influenced the reaction and response of and interaction between women regarding the struggles for both racial and female liberation. This study finds South African women, regardless of race or class, to have been supportive of gender equality and female liberation during the period of Segregation and the period of Apartheid. While the support of these women was not always externally obvious, black, white, and colored women’s militancy in a variety of causes and initiatives demonstrated their drive to maintain social and economic control in a stratified society, thus inherent gender equality. Whether or not women’s emancipation, as a liberation goal concurrent with the destruction of Apartheid, was continually stated *as such*, this study finds it to have inherently occurred.

By situating women's multi-faceted efforts for racial and female liberation within the context of the greater struggle including men, the actions themselves become illuminated, allowing rhetoric to be less important. While many historians tend to focus on either "Women's history" or "General history," this study places the two histories in conversation with each other. By acknowledging men's roles and efforts and placing them into context with the often-overlooked efforts of women, this study finds women's efforts to have been not only crucially important to the anti-Apartheid struggle, but also even more impressive than those of men, at times.<sup>xiv</sup>

South African women, inherently and explicitly, fought for their rights as women and as a discriminated majority. Acting within multi-racial women's groups, within male-centered liberation organizations, and on their own, black, white, and colored women attempted to maintain social and economic control in the segregated society of South Africa. As the 1956 Pretoria demonstrators maintained in their protest of Strijdom's legislation, "You have tampered with women, you have struck a rock!"<sup>xv</sup>

### **Conclusion: Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," in *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (April, 1983), 144.

<sup>ii</sup> Judy Kimble and Elain Unterhalter, "'We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward': ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982" in *Feminist Review*, No 12 (1982), 14.

<sup>iii</sup> Nomboniso Gasa, "Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies, and Women's Voices in the 1950's" in *Women in South African History*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 215.

<sup>iv</sup> Iris Berger, "Generations of Struggle: Trade Unions and the Roots of Feminism, 1930-60" in *Women in South African History* ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 204.

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- <sup>v</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, *The Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 14.
- <sup>vi</sup> Iris Berger, "Categories and Contexts: Reflections on the Politics of Identity in South Africa," in *Feminist Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), 286.
- <sup>vii</sup> Nomboniso Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols," in *Women in South African History*, ed., Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 135.
- <sup>viii</sup> "The Demand of the Women of South Africa for the Withdrawal of Pass for Women and the Repeal of the Pass Laws," August, 1956; Microfile Reel 1, "The Federation of South African Women Papers," Center for Research Libraries, Chicago.
- <sup>ix</sup> Helen Joseph, *Side by Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 20.
- <sup>x</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 260-65.
- <sup>xi</sup> "Circular Promoting the Conference to Promote Women's Rights," March, 1954, Microfile Reel 1, "The Federation of South African Women Papers."
- <sup>xii</sup> Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry 1900-1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 165.
- <sup>xiii</sup> "Resistance of Women to Passes," 1957-58, Microfile Reel 2, "The Federation of South African Women Papers."
- <sup>xiv</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 196.
- <sup>xv</sup> "Pamphlet Promoting the Struggle of Women Against Pass Laws: 'Strijdom... You Have Struck a Rock!,' " undated, Microfile Reel 1, "The Federation of South African Women Papers."

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